



It Takes a Village: Making Cincinnati a Better Place for All Youth

Youth Gap Analysis
Final Report and
Recommendations

Prepared for the Youth
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Intro

Supportive families and schools are both fundamental to the development of youth in Cincinnati. We must do what we can to support parents, extended families, and schools to support young people. Supporting a young person and preparing them to be an autonomous, productive adult is not an easy task, even with the financial resources to do so. Programs and activities have grown up over the years to supplement what people perceive to be incompetent parents and low performing schools. Many of these programs are helpful and necessary, but we should not avoid the hard work of supporting families that need extra support, particularly those in poverty and those dealing with addiction and mental health issues.

We started the previous phase of this study by saying “It’s time to wake the village.” This is a reference to the African adage that it takes a village to raise a child. John McKnight has recently published a piece on the way that communities have been taken out of the business of raising children. Children have noticed. In our interviews and focus groups young people talked about not feeling connected, not knowing any other adults in their neighborhoods, and not really making use of the places in communities (rec centers, libraries, churches) that we think provide support for them. Young people need the support of stable, positive, present adults in

their lives and they are often not getting that support. This need is true for youth from all backgrounds. But in many cases, they are not going to ask for it – teenagers are much more likely to tell us “I got this” or “I can handle it,” even if it’s not always true. They may talk to adults that are paying attention, but this is not likely. We all need to look around to see the young people in our midst and reach out.

Robert Putnam tells us in his recent book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, that solid, supportive mentorships matter to young people. Young people tell us that their aunts and uncles, older siblings, grandparents, and peers provide them support. But there are young people who do not have that kind of network, and for them the world is a pretty scary place. Communities who want to support their young people need to be intentional. They need to get young people involved in what they are planning and trying to do for youth, and they need to create more spaces, places, and people who can pay attention to them and provide positive support and accountability. There are too few counselors in schools and too few support staff in community places that are interested in serving teenagers. We have under funded programs and under delivered for our young people for too long. We need to be proactive and make these young people our priority.

Looking Back: Phase II Highlights



The Youth Gap Analysis Phase II Report identified the intersectional relationship between place, family, and race and youth outcomes and suggested where interventions or additional support might be needed to make children and youth in Cincinnati even stronger.

Based on survey results from Phase II and what we heard in a deeper dive with Phase III interviews, we know the following:

- We know that mentorship is linked with several positive outcomes, including academic enrichment through tutoring, participation in advanced placement classes, career development, and programs to help youth find employment, and encouraging adults. **In Phase III, most youth and parents didn't use the term "mentor," but they did identify the importance of consistent adults and older siblings that provided positive support and encouragement, and advice on how to confront challenges.**
- We know that youth benefit from out-of-school activities and employment programs but have trouble accessing them. **In Phase III, youth did not report having trouble accessing out-of-school activities. Youth did report feeling they had a lack of time in the day. This is consistent with youth and parent survey responses in Phase II of youth being too busy to participate and parents reporting that their child was already involved. For those attending charter schools, after school programming in the school was not usually an option but there were opportunities in other locations for tutoring, sports, or other activities. If youth did not participate in programming, it was often due to limitations created by family schedules or because youth had to watch younger siblings.**
- We know that youth living in very low-income neighborhoods, youth living with grandparents and dads, homeless youth, and African-American youth often face the greatest challenges, yet still show signs of resiliency and believe they will graduate from high school and be successful adults. **This is consistent with what we heard in Phase III. Nearly all of the youth we talked to believed that they would graduate from high school and go on to graduate from college and be successful. Young people describe success in varying ways, but most young people focused their definition of success on money and happiness.**

- But we also know that unemployment and poverty rates in Cincinnati track closely with the income and racial composition of Cincinnati's neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with a higher proportion of low-income and African-American residents also have higher rates of unemployment and poverty.
- We know that "children born to parents in the lowest fifth of the income scale are very likely (42%) to stay there as adults" (Annie E. Casey Foundation). Youth have positive expectations of their future, yet they are working against great odds to achieve them.

Key Take-Aways

The questions moving into the third and final phase of the Youth Gap Analysis were:

- 1) How might we support youth in Cincinnati who believe they will be successful, despite all the challenges they face, to actually become successful adults?
- 2) How might the Cincinnati community (of parents, partners, and youth) come together to support a brighter future for our youth?
- 3) How might youth have a meaningful voice at the tables that influence their future?

The interviews and focus groups in Phase III support the Phase II survey responses from youth, parents, and partners in terms of how to support youth success. In Phase II, we heard from youth that they wanted improved educational opportunities, workforce development, increased safety, and exposure to developmental opportunities. In Phase II, parents emphasized improved access to quality schools, improved access to after-school and summer programming, direct efforts to increase safety, and opportunities for engagement and involvement by youth. In Phase II, partners talked about creating systems that support youth and their parents better, ensuring all youth have access to quality of education, mentorship and engagement of youth by the community, access to career readiness and employment training, programs that are connected to communities (place-based), and programs that are comprehensive and work together.

Families are the first and best support for youth

Supportive parents are a youth's first and best teachers, advocates, safety net, and defense against the world. Extended family members can play a very important role in a youth's life, are often providing supplemental support for absent parents. Siblings in particular can be a critical part of the support system for youth; older siblings are role models, advocates and friends, and younger siblings provide

a built-in responsibility. Youth learn how to be responsible, demonstrate their assets, and feel proud when they are contributing to support of their families. Youth with younger siblings also took pride in being able to role model and provide support for their younger siblings. Parents that receive support to be their best can have a positive impact on their children.

Stability is important

Stability is important, and stability isn't always financial. Parents and young people who have constants in their lives, whether through family, consistent living environments, or other supports are much better off than their peers who don't have consistency.

Low-income families can provide opportunities for their children

Income does not exclusively determine access to opportunities for youth. A lot of lower income families are getting youth connected with quality opportunities. For example, a working mom making a little over minimum wage can access resources to support her children that provide them with additional opportunities. When parents/caretakers have a high level of motivation and invest the time and dedicated effort, their children get connected. Money is not an unsurmountable barrier to opportunity. When parents pay attention and are committed to bettering their children and themselves, their children benefit from access to opportunities. We have to give those families credit.

Getting (and keeping) children connected at school is critical

School extracurricular activities are a key way that youth get connected to a friend group, identify their skills and talents, demonstrate proficiency, find things that interest them, and stay productively engaged. They play an important part in development and building self-esteem. Teaching is a big job and quality teachers are instrumental to success in school and out. Teachers and other school staff are important role models for students, and sometimes a single conversation with a caring teacher can make all the difference. Teachers need support and the time to connect with students – they may be the first to identify issues, and could be the best “first responders” when there are challenges. One of the best ways to connect with students is in school. Expecting youth and their parents to find programs and supports at out-of-school locations can be a real challenge.

Youth want to be connected to the world around them more intentionally

Youth need to see what their future life could look like (jobs, careers, hobbies, interests, passions, role models). 9th and 10th graders need to be pressed to start thinking about getting exposed to college and career planning. They need a realistic understanding of what it takes to get into college or into a job early enough to make good choices. Youth want to be exposed to new and different things. They want to get outside of their own comfort zone and world view. Youth feel like they cannot dream it if they haven't seen it. Finding places and people who will help young people uncover their skills and talents is important. Having a part-time job can be a productive connection for young people and provides them with income that can help to support them and their families, but in our interviews we found it did not usually result in a new mentor-mentee relationship with their boss or other co-workers.

Community does not play the role we think it does in the lives of most youth

Youth and their parents feel racial tension in some neighborhoods. Most youth do not feel connected or supported by their community or neighbors. When youth feel their neighborhoods are unsafe (which is a fair amount of the time) they retreat into their homes and disconnect.

Youth do not use community resources (recreation centers, libraries, etc.) as often as they could or should. Finding ways to make recreation centers, libraries, and other community resources more relevant and useful for young people (between the ages of 12 and 19) is important. Activities and programs in these spaces are more tailored to younger children. Church is important to youth when it is important to their family. The role of faith communities in supporting families could be helpful.

To support a young person you have to be paying attention to them and really know them

Mentors can play an important role in a young person's life, but it is not a part-time or short-term responsibility. Being one more person who leaves a young person in need is not helpful. Youth don't often ask for help when they need it, so to be there for youth in a time of crisis you have to be able to recognize it without them telling you something is wrong. More people in communities and families could play a stronger role in the lives of youth around them. Youth are looking for positive people, positive energy, and positive opportunities. Most young people want to avoid drama.

Youth need better and much more access to mental health services

Youth from low income families are not accessing formal mental health services as often as other families, whether from lack of financial resources to do so or knowledge of what resources are available. Youth from middle income families who need mental health services often struggle to afford what they need. There is a role for school guidance counselors and school disciplinary staff to go beyond what they are currently doing and they need more resources and people in school buildings to adequately serve this function. Lots of youth are on lots of medication for mental health and behavioral issues. For youth's social and emotional well-being to be supported more intentionally, there needs to be much more oversight and personal attention and talk therapy alongside treatment with medication. Stigma surrounding mental health also prevents families from accessing resources. Cincinnati as a whole has made strides in reducing stigma for mental health issues, but there is still a significant amount of work to do to reduce stigma around treatment for both youth and adults.

Young people need to be productively engaged in the summer

Summer jobs and experiences are a great way to expose young people to more options and choices for careers and hobbies. Summer experiences are an opportunity for youth to demonstrate what they are good at and to develop a sense of accomplishment. Youth who are not productively engaged in the summer are bored and more likely to get into trouble.

Common Factors that Support Youth and Families

There are a set of factors that help position well-supported youth and families apart from their peers, regardless of their socio-economic status, race, or family structure. The business of raising and supporting young people is no easy task, but when young people are supported in one or more of these areas, the family and young person establish a stronger network of support and are more likely to be connected with quality, productive out-of-school activities and programming. Although this is not an exhaustive list, the following four factors were the most prominent when talking to the 33 parents (and guardians) interviewed as a part of Phase III. Cincinnati parents and guardians also shared invaluable lessons that they hope their children will learn from them.

Supportive families value education

Families from diverse backgrounds recognized the disparities in access to quality education in Cincinnati. Higher income families, who placed value on quality education, were able to use financial resources to pay for higher quality schools. While lower and middle income families expressed less financial flexibility to access higher quality schools for their children, there were families in the lower income brackets that placed higher value on education and that made a clear difference. This manifested in several different ways, including finding resources to access higher quality education opportunities but also simply upholding the value of investing in one's education. At least three lower income families we interviewed had accessed scholarships for their children to attend private schools at an affordable cost, and other families were encouraging their child to prepare for entrance exams that would allow them to access what they perceived as a better public school option. Several other families had a distinct focus and value on education that they had instilled in their child. This was shown by more intentional involvement at their kids school, developing relationships with their kids teachers, helping their child with homework, and monitoring grades.

Lessons from Parents:

- *Education is key and vital to success, and not that you have to get a PhD or go to school all your life, but be a lifelong learner.*
- *Follow through with your plans and goals. Success doesn't come without hard work.*

Supportive families access quality enrichment opportunities for their kids

Parents and guardians who had the ability and inclination to access opportunities for their kids, no matter what income, are better supported. Parents and guardians who are intentional about researching and accessing quality extra-curricular and summer opportunities are providing invaluable developmental opportunities to their kids. This is particularly crucial during the summer month when youth are out of school.

Lessons from Parents:

- *Don't just exist; be of service to others.*
- *Participate in things that are outside of your comfort zone.*

Supportive families make life-skills development a priority

The development of manners, proper social media use, self-respect, interpersonal skills and responsibility are skills that make youth stand out among their peers. Families, across income levels, who managed to make life-skills development in their children a priority, are providing their children with development opportunities that are critical to their development socially. The development of life-skills increases a young persons ability to access opportunities that they are interested in, take ownership of their future plans, and navigate the day-to-day challenges of being a teenager.

Lessons from Parents:

- *Your life is not what you see in front of you, it is only a stepping stone to the bigger picture. Prepare yourself to be a productive adult, being a teenager doesn't last forever.*
- *You have to work hard to be successful. Ask questions first and fight only if you absolutely have to. There are different approaches to how you approach challenges.*
- *It's not where you live, it's how you live.*

Supportive families have built a network of support for their children

Family support was a central support for youth and parents. For youth and parents who do not have a family structure that provides support or who do not live near extended family, the ability to create a support network is critical. Parents and youth, from all incomes, who had identified people that their children could rely on and that they could rely on as a parent created an invaluable safety net for their family. Due to the diversity of family structures, this support network looked different for each family and included players that had varying different relationships to the family.

Lessons from Parents:

- *You are always going to need someone or something. It is important that in every situation you try to have good relationships with people. That is one of the concepts that is hard for teenagers.*
- *Be honest and communicate with people, you will learn from that. Setbacks will happen but it is important to look forward and move forward.*
- *Understand the effort it takes to take care of other people.*

It Takes a Village:

Recommendations to Make Cincinnati a Better Place for All Youth

This report includes 11 recommendations. The recommendations build on the feedback and findings from the previous phases (including local and national data trends, best practices research, 1,655 youth surveys, 380 parent surveys, and 43, partner surveys) and adds a deeper layer of understanding of Cincinnati youth and families through 41 interviews with youth, 33 interviews with the family of those youth, and 6 focus groups.

In summary, these recommendations will **increase social and emotional support and development** for youth so that they are productively engaged in every area of their lives; **connect them to their community and with opportunities**; and **increase social networks and support for parents and caretakers** of youth so that they can collectively provide better support for young people. We believe these changes can help make Cincinnati a better place for all youth.



**SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
FOR YOUTH**



**PARENT AND
CAREGIVER NETWORKS
AND SUPPORT**



**CONNECT THEM TO
OPPORTUNITIES IN
THEIR COMMUNITIES**

“...The environment that [where] we learn obviously has a lot to do with who we become. Lives can be altered by just one encouraging person. The small things do matter.”

- Phase II anonymous youth survey

11 Recommendations

to Make Cincinnati a Better Place for All Youth by focusing on people, places, and community

#1 Incorporate social and emotional competence into school curriculum and in programs and community settings outside of the school day

#2 Support at-risk teen group counseling that emphasizes self-awareness and responsible behavior

#3 Create community based support groups for parents

#4 Implement the protective factors framework at individual, family (and close social connections), and community levels

#5 Expand teen programming and activities at Cincinnati recreation centers by involving youth in decision making

#6 Create a youth-friendly business campaign

#7 Expand speed mentoring

#8 Support college and career exploration

#9 Train providers working with youth on basic mental health awareness

#10 Engage teens in using social media for good

#11 Create a community-based mentoring initiative

Summary of Phase III Interviews and Focus Groups

Youth Interviews	Family Interviews	Focus Groups
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41

33

6

Demographics

5th and 6th graders: 1
 7th graders: 9
 8th graders: 3
 9th graders: 9
 10th graders: 8
 11th graders: 8
 12th graders: 3

Youth interviewed were representative of the following family structures: mom and dad, mom only, one grandparent only, and dad only

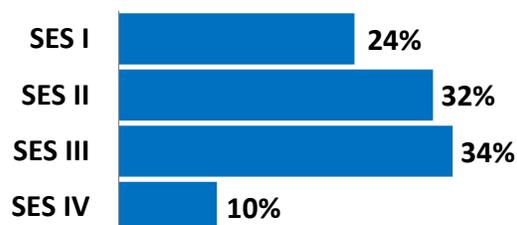
More than 80 youth participated in 6 focus groups. Focus groups were held at the following locations and groups: Youth Summit, Shroder High School, Cincinnati Recreation Commission Teen Council, Avondale, Lighthouse Youth Services, Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

The socio-economic status of an interviewed families' neighborhood was used as a proxy for family income.

Looking at the extremes, SES I neighborhoods are often thought of as problem areas while SES IV neighborhoods are those where most of the families can provide for their own housing, social, education, and health needs through private resources. SES II neighborhoods are statistically a step up from the problems faced in SES I neighborhoods. SES III neighborhoods can be thought of as middle class enclaves bordering SES II or I neighborhoods.

SES of Youth Interviewed:

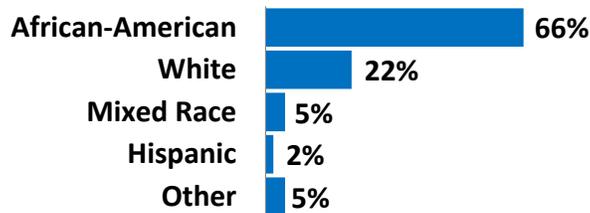


- SES I: High Problem (very low-income): 10
- SES II: Second Stage Neighborhoods (lower-income): 13
- SES III: Where Front Yards Begin (middle-income): 14
- SES IV: The Upper Quartile (upper-income): 4

Race

Of the interviewed youth, 27 were African-American (66%). This is consistent with racial demographic makeup of survey respondents from Phase II and with overall racial demographic patterns in the city of Cincinnati for youth aged 10 to 17. Nine youth interviewed were White, two self-identified with more than one race, one was Hispanic, and two self-identified as “other.”

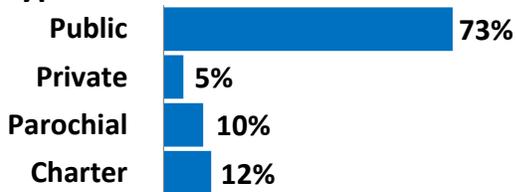
Race of Youth Interviewed:



School Type

Youth interviewed attended all types of schools including public (30), private (2), parochial (4), and charter (5). Most of the youth interviewed attended Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), which is consistent with overall student enrollment for children living in Cincinnati. The enrollment in the 2015-16 school year at CPS was 33,999. The total number of youth between the ages of 5 and 19 in Cincinnati was 2015 was 55,815. (*U.S. Census 2011 - 2015 American Community Survey*)

School Type of Youth Interviewed:





Education Issue Brief

While many young people take advantage of educational opportunities to improve their life and career outlooks, the sad truth is that far too many of our youth are suffering from limited educational attainment, particularly in urban areas like Cincinnati. Educational administrators, teachers and staff, as well as their community and government partners, are working to support youth to address the detrimental symptoms of poor educational outcomes. If the educational system does not effectively cope with the underlying problems facing our young people, students will continue to struggle in college, have fewer job opportunities, and trail behind students from many industrialized nations. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How is Cincinnati doing in terms of educating our youth?

Cincinnati had a total population of 65,309 under 18 years old in 2015 (*U.S. Census 2011 - 2015 American Community Survey*). Youth made up just over 21% of Cincinnati's population in 2015.

Most of Cincinnati's youth attend Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). In 2015, there were 10,805 students in public schools in 9th - 12th grades. There were 2,417 students in private schools in 9th - 12th grades. There were roughly 2,500 per grade in the 6th - 8th grades at CPS.

More than 1 in 5 CPS students is not graduating in 4-years

In Cincinnati Public Schools, the 4-year graduation rate for the class of 2015 was 73% (up from 64% for the class of 2011). While CPS graduation rates have improved, more than 1 in 5 CPS students are not graduating from high school in 4-years.

Absenteeism and poverty present challenges for student achievement

CPS has a chronic absenteeism rate of 30.7% and 82% of the student body is economically disadvantaged. These are two factors that correlate with limited academic achievement.

Changing state tests

Beginning in 2018, Ohio's graduation requirements will include curriculum and three options to show readiness for college or career. Students will have to meet one of the three requirements: 1) Earn a cumulative passing score of 18 points on end-of-course state tests, 2) earn an industry-recognized credential or group of credentials, or 3) earn a remediation-free score in English language arts and mathematics on a nationally recognized college admission exam, like the ACT. 17% of 2014 and 2015 graduates received a remediation-free ACT score.

Optimism does not match outcomes

Youth we surveyed and interviewed valued education and its ability to contribute to their success in life, and they were incredibly optimistic about their educational future. With the exception of one or two

youth, all the youth we interviewed thought they would go to college.

This optimism does not match the education outcomes that most youth experience. According to CPS' 2015-2016 report card for the district, only 16% of 8th graders were proficient in math. Assuming roughly 2,500 8th graders in CPS, that means 2,100 8th graders across the city are not proficient in 8th grade math.

From *College Success Starts in Math Class*, Forbes (5/8/15):

Research shows that not all students receive the same math education. The classic Adelman study shows that public schools with predominantly minority demographics have significantly lower math standards, fewer classes, and fewer advancement opportunities compared to schools with predominantly white and higher economic class demographics. This is immensely detrimental to our children's growth because, as the Adelman study concludes, "the highest level of mathematics reached in high school continues to be a key marker in precollegiate momentum, with the tipping point of momentum toward a bachelor's degree now firmly above Algebra 2."

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis included case studies borrowed from the "Broad Foundation's framework which are evidence-driven and reviewed methods that aid in the success of large urban school districts." These include the following (see 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book):

- **Assessment of student performance** (including assessment report, subgroup assessment report, and data analysis)

In order to continue making improvements, school districts must collect data on student academic performance, and report the

findings for analysis. Assessment of student performance within a district must be comprehensive and relevant to the curriculum. Routine assessment and analysis of data can indicate areas of study where students are excelling, and ones where students may need additional help. Areas that need improvement are identified by the district, which then determines how to utilize their resources toward those areas. By collecting comprehensive data, students who are having difficulties can be identified and matched with the service they need, such as a tutor

or mentor. Along with student assessments, it is necessary to instruct educators on how to interpret the data and strategize plans for success.

- **Instruction** (district mission statement, instructional model, curriculum plan, district-mandated instructional programs, curriculum-based lesson plans)

A school district must be committed to educating students with relevant and modern materials. This includes aspects such as textbooks, educational videos and computer programs, classroom technology, and classroom activities. School districts should make it a standard to use evidence-based materials and practices for instruction, and educators must be trained on the use of new classroom technology and equipment. The district's operational framework must be functional throughout all schools, and be supportive of educators.

- **Professional development for educators** (including district professional development plan, professional development programs framework, staff development schedule)

To provide exemplary educational instruction, teachers and staff must continue their own learning. Content of professional development is determined by an analysis of achievement-related data and is designed to improve teaching and learning to meet district and school goals. In addition to professional development, the district must have a system for supporting and evaluating the effectiveness of professional development.

- **Parent-teacher collaboration**

Parent-teacher collaboration is necessary for a child to receive their best possible education. Collaboration can occur in many forms such as

conferences, educational sessions for parents and families, and materials sent home with students. Parent involvement can serve a variety of needs. Traditional parent-teacher conferences serve to build rapport and address any needs a student may have. They can also allow educators to identify students with a home life that is unsupportive of healthy development. After-school educational sessions for parents and families can be offered, and might cover a topic like nutritional packed lunches for students, or provide information on a communicable disease or lice outbreak.

- **Partnerships and community outreach**

Establishing relationships with community leaders and organizations can broaden the range of services offered to students and their families. Cooperating with organizations makes it possible for schools to serve as community learning centers, provide educational sessions for families and the community, and create opportunities for improved student achievement. Many community colleges partner with their neighboring school district to offer dual-enrollment programs to high school students. Community health organization partners may offer seminars on topics related to the community, organize blood drives and health screenings, and provide students with educational materials on health-related topics.

- **Community Learning Centers** (including tutoring and mentoring, community engagement)

Community Learning Centers (CLCs) utilize school facilities as a hub where students, families, and the community can find opportunities for continued learning. CLCs offer mentoring programs, recreational activities, adult education, and more.

- **Strategic planning**

Each school district must have a strategic plan of action for seeing that its goals are met. This entails outlining specific goals and

milestones, evaluating the effectiveness of existing practices and policies, and making modifications where they are needed. Like a district's policies, a comprehensive plan must be evaluated for its effectiveness.

What did we hear from surveys?

- Youth indicated the importance of having quality accessible education in Cincinnati.
- Education was recognized as an important indicator of future success.
- Youth were optimistic: Across race, family structures, and socioeconomic status.
- More than 85% of youth thought they would graduate from high school.
- Very low-income parents want more education: 1 in 3 very low-income parents did not graduate from high school but they were more than twice as likely to see themselves pursuing higher education.
- Lower and middle income youth are missing the most school days: Nearly 15% of very low-income, low income, and middle income youth missed more than 10 days of school in one year.

“The most important thing we can do I think is really making them realize how important education is and to keep our young people from getting in with wrong crowds and focusing on their school work and career. And those that are stuck in bad situations need to be in a better environment away from unhealthy environments.”

- Phase II anonymous youth survey

What did we hear from interviews?

- Across the board, youth and families reported that education is key and vital to success.
- Some youth reported that they knew they were capable of more, but didn't want to try hard or push themselves to do more. For example, some youth reported that they knew they were smart and could take more difficult classes, but they chose to take the less challenging class.
- Youth could use more help with choosing a high school that fits best.
- Parent-teacher communication needs to happen early and often (for example, when a teacher notices a change in youth behavior and before a bad grade). Teachers need to listen to the parent's voice. Parents want to hear from teachers when things are going right, as well as when there are challenges.

“..everybody has different ambitions, and I know that there’s people in school who you know they are like hey you have got to live in the now. And right now I am just going to go and skip school because that’s what I feel like doing. And I feel like I am more like looking into the future like oh if I do this now it will benefit me in the long run. But I don’t think a lot of kids think about that.”

*- - Phase III youth interview with 10th grade CPS
White Northside resident*

- Youth talked a lot about sports, mostly connected to their schools. Some youth talked about sports as their “ticket” to college.

- Youth have high expectations for themselves, including attending college. Virtually all of the children we talked to from all backgrounds thought they would attend college, but it is clear some need more support in accessing college preparatory resources, like completing the FAFSA, that they are not getting. Several of the youth we talked to would be the first in their immediate family to go to college.

- Youth often don’t see the link between school and the real world. Youth are taught to remember stuff, but they report that memorizing information isn’t necessarily helping them learn, and they don’t see the information as useful when they get older.

Education Findings

Getting (and keeping) youth connected at school is critical

Outside of family and close networks of friends, school is where most young people are plugged in. School extracurricular activities provide opportunities for youth to get connected to a friend group, identify their skills and talents, demonstrate proficiency, find things that interest them, and stay productively engaged.

These activities and connections play an important part in social and emotional development and building self-esteem.

Teachers can have a special impact on students by supporting social and emotional development and connecting with families

Quality teachers are instrumental to supporting youth success and families in school and out. Teachers are important role models for students and an important pillar of support for youth. Sometimes a single conversation with a caring teacher can make

all the difference. Teachers need support and the time to connect and build trusting relationships with students and their parents— they may be the first to identify issues, and could be the best “first responders” when there are challenges.

The best way to connect with students is in school. Expecting youth and their parents to find programs and supports at out-of-school locations can be a real challenge.

By supporting social and emotional development in and out of school, we can provide our youth a better opportunity to learn and be successful academically, and in life.

Education Recommendations

#1 Incorporate social and emotional competence into school curriculum and in programs and community settings outside of the school day

Description:

By incorporating social and emotional development into school curriculum, schools can provide opportunities for youth to develop the fundamental skills they need to be successful in school and life. “Getting along with peers and being able to follow the rules of the classroom helps the child feel part of the school community and hence, more eager to be involved in school learning activities.” Social and emotional lessons “not only make it easier for children to succeed in school, but also help children succeed in the real world because these skills help them to initiate and maintain friendships and work well with others.” The same social and emotional support provided by teachers in school can also be reinforced by programs and community activities outside of the school day. (Source: *Transitions to School: What Helps Children Succeed? — Essentials For Success In Preschool And Beyond*: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/education/pallen.aspx>)

What we heard in interviews:

Several youth reported observing unruly behavior in classrooms that made learning difficult. Most youth did not feel that life skills training and social and emotional training was present in their school.

Primary objective:

Improve the ability of youth to engage in the classroom and with programs and activities

Secondary objectives:

Improve school attendance

Decrease high-risk behaviors (delinquency, substance abuse, and school dropout)

Establish and strengthen feelings of connection and attachment to school

Improve youths’ skills, attitudes, and behaviors

Resources:

Transitions to School: What Helps Children Succeed? — Essentials For Success In Preschool And Beyond: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/education/pallen.aspx>

How Social and Emotional Learning Improves School Climate and Achievement: <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/SEL.html>

Proposed partners:

Schools

Program and service providers

Community members and associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC’s churches, libraries, etc.)

Education Recommendations (cont.)

#2 Support at-risk teen group counseling that emphasizes self-awareness and responsible behavior

Description:

Group counseling for teens when other interventions have failed.

What we heard in interviews:

Some youth expressed difficulty with sharing emotions and interpersonal communication with their peers and adults. Oftentimes students having problems in school are preoccupied with concerns outside of school that have a huge impact on their lives (poverty, violence, racism). If those concerns are not addressed, they cannot devote attention to learning.

Primary objective:

Increase academic performance and attendance

Secondary objectives:

Provide opportunities for youth to develop peer relationships, social skills, and increase positive social interactions

Increase the number of youth receiving support through counseling

Provide an opportunity for youth to get support from peers

Empower youth to inform and drive agendas for activities and programs that effect them

Resources:

“Empowerment Groups for Academic Success: An Innovative Approach to Prevent High School Failure for At-Risk, Urban African” by Fred Bemak, Rita Chi-Ying Chung and Linda A. Siroskey-Sabdo

Proposed partners:

Youth

Schools

Program and service providers

Community members and associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC’s churches, libraries, etc.)

Mental health professionals

Poverty & Homelessness

Issue Brief



There are different factors contributing to whether a family will be living in poverty. Education, race, and age can all affect a person's employment options and family income, thus influencing how a child's basic needs will be met. Housing, food, medical care, and education are heavily affected by inadequate household income. With a limited budget, families may not be able to provide nutritional food, books, toys, quality childcare, and other essential items for a child's positive physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The insecurity that comes with this situation also creates other family problems, including parental stress and depression, raising the risks of substance abuse and domestic violence. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How is Cincinnati doing in terms of poverty and homelessness?

Nearly half of Cincinnati's children are living in poverty: an estimated 46% of children under 18 years old in Cincinnati are living below the poverty level. This is up from 41% in 2010 and larger than any other age group in 2015 (estimated poverty rate is 26% for 18 years and over, 28% for 18 to 64 years, and 15% for 65 years and over).

The source for all data in this section is the U.S. Census 2011 - 2015 American Community Survey, unless otherwise noted.

Family type and poverty

Of all families living in poverty, more than three in four (77%) were led by a single mom (female-headed household). Just under half of all families led by a mom (46%) were living in poverty. 10% of all families living in poverty were led by a single dad.

More than half of children under 18 (52%) lived in a household that received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or food

stamps/SNAP. That means an estimated 33,807 children in Cincinnati were receiving some kind of public assistance. Nearly four out of five (79%) of those children lived in a family led by a single mom (female-headed household).

There were just under 1,000 grandparents that were responsible for their own grandchildren living with them that are living in poverty (966; making up 20% of all families where grandchildren lived with grandparents).

Race and poverty

There were an estimated 13,705 African-American children under 18 years old living in poverty (60% of all African-American children). There were an estimated 5,597 White children under 18 years old living in poverty (24% of all White children).

Child homelessness

There were 8,271 homeless people in Cincinnati and Hamilton County in 2013. Out of them almost 2,500 were children.

In 2013 there were 308 youths, age 18 to 20, and 610 young adults, age 21 to 25, on the streets and in shelters. Of these youths/young adults, 82 percent were presented as single persons and 18 percent were presented as households along with 275 of their children.

The average length of program participation by these youth/young adults was 50 days each. Outcome indicators show 46 percent obtaining permanent housing and 22 percent increasing their income by program exit.

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis included information on how to count homeless youth and strategies to help them (see 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book):

- **Youth homeless survey**

The collaboration between not-for-profit, educational, and government institutions can strategically leverage resources and expertise to more fully understand the scope of a city's youth homelessness problem. This kind of collaborative effort can gather comprehensive data related to homeless youth, and provides an effective model to minimize the issue.

- **Segmented categorization of homeless youth**

To better understand and customize services to homeless youth in Cincinnati, regional plans have segmented the youth into several different typologies. These segments include areas such as family relationships, reasons for homelessness, prevalence of abuse or neglect, mental health status, and age.

Furthermore, researchers affiliated with the Homeless Research Institute at the National Alliance to End Homelessness found that segmentation strategies that focused on youth behavior offered better insight on how to deliver and allocate services to young people. According to the researchers, while many past strategies offer insights into the needs of youth, focusing on one segmentation variable may lead service providers to misallocate their resources.

This is due to the fact that the majority of the homeless population has a wide variety of different experiences, personal histories, and paths to homelessness. The segmentation according to behavior may be more effective than other methodologies. This new direction suggests that interpersonal factors may outweigh economic facts when categorizing homeless youth.

▪ Integration of early childhood data

Many communities have failed to realize the potential benefits of leveraging early childhood data to combat poverty. Several states, including Connecticut, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and South Carolina, have made significant strides in connecting databases through data warehouses and integrated systems between state funded or subsidized initiatives related to the education, child care, and health of youth.

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative, a consortium of national organizations, works to help states effectively construct, integrate, and access early childhood data systems. While their initial focus was education, the organization works to encourage data linkage to other services. The Early Childhood Data Collaborative argues that systems should work to include program costs and that integrated data systems should assist in answering the following questions:

- Are children, birth through age 5, on track to succeed when they enter school and beyond?

- Which children have access to high-quality early care and education programs?
- Is the quality of programs improving?
- What are the characteristics of effective programs?
- How prepared is the early care and education workforce to provide effective education and care for all children?
- What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early care and education workforce?

The surveys should also have questions pertaining to the following six categories: 1) program / provider supply; 2) enrollment, participant demographics, and demand; 3) early childhood workforce; 4) program quality; 5) outcomes for children and families; and 6) costs and financing.

What did we hear from surveys?

- 1 in 3 youth from low-income families reported working to financially support their family (they were three times more likely to work than upper income youth).
- Nearly 1 in 4 very low-income parents reported that their family had been homeless.
- Youth and partners identified the instability and uncertainty associated with poverty as an important issue to youth in Cincinnati (72% of partners said poverty/mobility was the biggest gap for youth).

“My mom needs a good job so she can provide for our family. I will have to work soon to help my mom pay for food and stuff.”

- Phase II anonymous youth survey

- 52% of youth in the lowest SES reported that they had moved at least five times in their life.
- Youth in the lowest SES were twice as likely as those in the highest SES to have been physically hurt by someone they knew.

What did we hear from interviews?

- Youth talked a lot about money. Some of the talk about money was being able to have a lot of material stuff (like houses and cars). Youth also talked about money being the way to get opportunities. For example, money could allow you to go to college and be successful. Youth that came from higher income families did not talk about money as a priority.
- Youth in Cincinnati are often segregated by race and class. Several parents noted that the gap between youth from different backgrounds needs to be bridged so that youth can see that they are more alike than they are different, so that they can see a different way of life, and so that youth can be open to new experiences.
- Youth with stable families who have enough money to have options and choices are living completely different lives than youth whose families are struggling with poverty and addiction. Supports to families in poverty and to adults battling addiction provide a great benefit to their teenage children.
- Homeless youth and families are among the most vulnerable in our community.

Poverty & Homelessness Findings

Families may need help connecting with resources

Supporting families' access and navigation of the network of supportive resources & supporting appropriate referrals is crucial to supporting families in poverty: Cincinnati has a comprehensive network of non-profits & government agencies that support parents and families in poverty. For some families, navigating the network of support is a daunting and unmanageable feat. These families need support and individual assistance identifying resources that are most applicable to their specific set of needs. Grandparent households, homeless families, and single mother households were confronted with the most challenges accessing resources for their families and children.

Overwhelmingly, families did not identify a need for additional programs. Parents and guardians who have managed to access resources to meet their basic needs and create some level of stability for their families are better able to get youth connected with quality opportunities. In many cases this was related to the parent having built a successful support network (whether through family or otherwise) that refers them to programs and opportunities, while helping them overcome reoccurring barriers. Parents who demonstrated a strong level of commitment to self-improvement (whether getting their GED, associate degree, or whatever that meant for the individual) were able to pass that motivation onto their teenager.

Both families and youth need support

Youth and their families have unique needs and need individualized and intergenerational support. A stronger network of referrals between agencies working with families is a good first step. Meeting youth and family where they are and connecting them with what they need to not only survive, but to thrive, is crucial to the success of at-risk youth and their families.

Support for parents provides invaluable support to youth. Families need to be able to access the support they need to in turn be able to support young people. Support groups can create a network for parents, grandparents, and guardians in schools and communities. These informal networks can help families access the information and knowledge they need to be successful from people they know and trust, and let them know that they are not alone in whatever they are going through. Parents need to be strong and motivated to provide the support their children need. A strong, motivated parent also sets a great example for their children.

Poverty and Homelessness Recommendations

#3 Create community based support groups for parents

Description:

Identify existing programs that support youth and create opportunities to engage parents who could provide peer-to-peer support for one another. Start with Community Learning Centers in schools and work with Community Resource Coordinators to identify parents who can connect and recruit other parents.

What we heard in interviews:

It really does take a village to raise our youth. Parents that feel successful depend on networks of support for a range of needs like getting youth to and from school, finding programs and resources for them and their children, learning about school options, finding a doctor, sharing recipes, etc.

Primary objective:

Create a network of support for families so that they can better support their children

Secondary objectives:

Parents build trusting relationships

Empower parents to use their assets and network to support their children

Increase personal development of parents

Parents increase their connection with other community members, and then get more involved in community efforts

Improve parent's perception of safety in their community

Increase parent's overall perception of their community

Resources:

Family Independence Initiative: <https://www.fii.org/>

Creating Opportunities for Families: A Two-Generation Approach: <http://www.aecf.org/resources/creating-opportunity-for-families/>

Proposed partners:

Schools: Community Learning Centers

Community members & associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)

Program and service providers

Parents and families

Poverty and Homelessness Recommendations (cont.)

#4 Implement the protective factors framework at individual, family (and close social connections), and community levels

Description:

Protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that, when present, mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities and increase the health and well-being of children and families. Protective factors help parents to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.

What we heard in interviews:

Protective factors were helping teens that faced a number of challenges be successful. For example, a child that is moving schools but has developed conflict resolution techniques, has supportive relationships with caregivers, and their basic needs met will likely fair better than a student without those protective factors that promote resiliency.

Primary objective:

Increase protective factors that promote resiliency

Secondary objectives:

Increase commitment to school

Increased connectedness to family and adults

Involvement in social activities

Increased social skills and skills for realistic planning

Decrease high-risk behaviors (delinquency, substance abuse, and school dropout)

Empower parents to use their assets and network to support their children

Resources:

<http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/files/2014/01/Promising-Futures-Infographic-FINAL.jpg>

<http://www.ctfalliance.org/onlinetraining.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

<http://www.whatmakesyourfamilystrong.org/index.html>

Proposed partners:

Schools

Community members & associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)

Program and service providers

Parents and families



Crime & Safety Issue Brief

Young people are connected to crime as both the victims and the perpetrators of criminal acts. Criminal activity destabilizes a young person's development and influences the formation of their personality, principles, and beliefs. Exposure to crime can also affect the ability of youth to function within the framework of society. In order to better integrate the perpetrators and victims of crime into society, long-term interventions are necessary. The prevention of criminal activity involves addressing the socio-economic factors that are associated with crime, revitalizing the environments where crime occurs, and rehabilitating criminals. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How does crime impact Cincinnati's children?

The source for all data in this section is the 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book, unless otherwise noted.

Youth Crime

Youth violence, which can range from assault to homicide, is a pressing public safety and health concern. Low-income youth, minority youth, and youth from unstable families are the most at-risk to engage in criminal activities. High incidence rates of crime can be viewed as an indicator of the ability of

young people to overcome barriers in life, such as unfavorable socio-economic factors or peer pressure.

- There were 9,214 counts/arrests against youth in Cincinnati in 2013. Theft under \$300 accounted for more than 500 of those charges.
- Of the 27 homicide arrests in 2013 (aggravated murder and murder), 7 were youth 21 or younger. These arrests account for almost 26 percent of homicide arrests.

- In Cincinnati, young people between the ages of 15 and 17 represent about 14 percent of the total population of people 5 to 21 years old, but accounted for 39 percent of total arrests of young people in Cincinnati in 2013.

Youth victims

From birth, research shows that young people are oftentimes exposed to violence, either as a direct victim or as a witness. Over the course of their childhood, many young people are exposed to a wide variety of crimes, including child abuse, sexual abuse, and robbery. Young people, in particular those from

minority communities, usually have restricted access to competent, age-appropriate services.

- In 2013, there were roughly 6,000 crimes against youth 21 and under in Cincinnati.
- CUF has the highest percentage of crimes against youth 21 and under, at 90 percent. The second highest number is Roll Hill at 42 percent.
- With the exception of CUF, in comparison to most Cincinnati neighborhoods, Roll Hill, Millvale, and English Woods have a higher than average percent of crimes committed against youth 21 and under.

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis recommended that government, nonprofit organizations and society as a whole focus on prevention strategies to combat all kinds of violent behavior. Phase I included information on three prevention techniques. These include the following (see *2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book*):

▪ Mentoring

Mentoring programs encourage healthy development of young people through the support of a positive mentor/mentee relationship. The mentor works with the child to overcome risk factors (e.g. family issues, poor academic performance) and aid progression through community involvement, positive reinforcement, healthy attitudes, and positive socialization. Ideally, the relationship is long term and characterized by an adult sharing their experiences.

Mentor programs have become increasingly popular over the last two decades due to research indicating that participants in

mentoring programs are less inclined to drop out of or skip school, abuse drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, or engage in violence. Since the development of mentor programs, over 5,000 mentor plans have been implemented nationwide and have provided guidance to over three million youths.

▪ School-based bullying prevention

For years, bullying has been a primary concern for school districts and educators. Awareness of the issue has brought about an increase in anti-bullying campaigns and programs within schools. Programs seek to decrease instances of bullying, both on and off school grounds, as well as encourage students to support their peers when witnessing acts of bullying.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, bullying is a form of youth violence, and can be physical, verbal, or psychological, where one person excludes or singles out another for abuse.

Bullying is distinctive from other acts of aggression because it involves a real or perceived power difference between the bully and the victim, involves repeated instances of aggression, and is related to behaviors that are intended to induce fear, emotional damage, or physical harm. Ending the trend of bullying is vital, as aggressive behavior from children can continue from childhood into adulthood. Uncontrolled behavior can lead to juvenile delinquency and interactions with the justice system.

School-based bullying prevention efforts include increased awareness, school exclusion, interventions for bullies, conflict resolution, and curricular approaches.

▪ **Targeted policing and truancy interventions**

Targeted policing initiatives focus on selecting neighborhoods with high concentrations of crime. Geographical areas are typically selected for targeted law enforcement when they have high crime rates that can be predicted for an extended period of time. Targeted areas are often in urban settings where crime is generally more prevalent. By identifying neighborhoods that need the most law enforcement, police departments can utilize resources more efficiently. Crime incidents are oftentimes unevenly distributed throughout regions, and targeted tactics hope to reduce total crime rates by focusing on hot spots. Targeted areas vary in size and demographics and can range from a few city blocks or buildings, to larger groups of streets.

To reduce crime among youth, police departments work with educators to prevent truancy. Truancy prevention programs aim to reduce absenteeism in the hopes of improving academic performance and graduation rates, as well as reduce crime. Programs can be directed broadly toward groups of school-aged children or targeted toward individuals with habitual truancy.

Truancy is related to the following environmental and social aspects:

School factors – Violence or bullying, lack of record-keeping, ineffective policies, and poor communication between school officials and families.

Home and community factors – Peer pressure, financial or medical needs, teen pregnancy and parenthood, absence of educational goals and support.

Individual factors – Poor self-esteem, poor performance in school, mental health problems, and relationships with peers.

What did we hear from surveys?

- Crime was the area that showed the biggest divergence between youth in the lowest SES and those in the highest SES. Youth in the lowest SES felt considerably less safe in their neighborhood than did youth in the highest SES: More than two in five youth in the lowest SES did not feel safe in their neighborhood while less than one in ten (81%) youth in the highest SES did not feel safe in their neighborhood.
- 73% of very low income youth had a family member who was, or had been, in jail, compared with 37% of upper-income youth.
- African-American youth were three times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts, 17% and 6% respectively.
- Youth identified violence, crime, gun control, teens dying, and police relations as issues that are important to them.

“I feel like my community is unsafe and needs something for the kids to get off the street and get active like with sports or singing or something and not selling drugs or shooting people because they just feel like it.”

- Phase II anonymous youth survey

What did we hear from interviews?

“I feel like we can’t do nothing fun, like all the parties there is shootings at parties and events, like all the events that everybody just wants to come together and have fun.”

- Phase III youth interview with 12th grade CPS African-American Westwood resident

- Youth that reported feeling unsafe said that they don’t go outside. Feeling unsafe was more commonly reported by low-income and African American youth. Several youth reported that there are few places where they feel safe outside of school or home.
- There are few places outside of home or school that are open to a teenager where they can hang out with friends for a few hours. Youth need places to go that are free with little to no programming so kids could be free what they want to do (with some supervision). They need a way to release energy. Recreation centers might be one such location.

- Some young people think adults see them as nuisances and up to no good. This places a stigma on young people and a perception of involvement in violence or illegal activities. Young people of color were more likely to report this than their white peers.
- Parents are intentional when describing where they chose to live with their families. Not all parents or youth talked about being connected to their neighborhoods. However, most parents describe some level of choice and intentionality in choosing a place that they felt was safe (described as “quiet” in many cases) and allowed them to easily access the resources and amenities they needed.
- Parents who felt safe in Cincinnati talked about it as a small town that didn’t face a lot of issues that larger cities face. They also said Cincinnati had small town values.

Crime & Safety Findings

Youth need places where they feel safe

Youth want places where they feel safe and where they can engage productively with other youth. Some young people are identifying these “places” in existing recreation centers, libraries, and schools. Some youth do not have a place that they are connected to outside of school or home. We need to work with public places (like recreation centers) to create safe places where youth can be with other youth in an unstructured environment. Because of safety concerns and perceived negative activities, youth do not have productive places where they can be creative and be themselves. Youth who disengage or simply stay home because of this gap are missing valuable developmental opportunities.

Youth need community support

Community does not play the role we think it does in the lives of most youth. For those youth and families who are connected to community, there is a significant difference in the ability to get connected with resources and supports. Adults can play a more active role in youth lives through small gestures that show they are paying attention and care. It could be as simple as saying hello to a teen at the bus stop.

Crime & Safety Recommendations

#5 Expand teen programming and activities at Cincinnati recreation centers by involving youth in decision making

Description:

Partner with Recreation Department Teen Council to identify strategies to enhance teen offerings at Recreation Center. Work directly with teens to develop a better understand of what types of programming and activities youth would like to see in Recreation Centers and understand what is currently working and not working.

What we heard in interviews:

Youth and parents said they would like to see more places for youth that were safe with activities and programming that is age appropriate.

Primary objective:

Provide teens with desirable programming and activity options

Secondary objectives:

Opportunities to develop social skills with other teens

Encourage teens to stay out of trouble by providing safe, desirable alternatives

Provide an avenue for teens to guide development of programming and activities intended for them

Youth are better connected with their community, through the rec center

Empower youth to inform and drive agendas for activities and programs that effect them

Provide opportunities for youth to develop peer relationships, social skills, and increase positive social interactions

Resources:

<http://youth.gov/>

Proposed partners:

Youth

Recreation centers

(1st priority is rec centers that serve youth in the 9 neighborhoods with the most youth: Westwood, West Price Hill, East Price Hill, College Hill, Avondale, Mt. Airy, Hyde Park, Mt. Washington, Winton Hills)

Cincinnati Police Department

Churches

Crime & Safety Recommendations (cont.)

#6 Create a youth-friendly business campaign

Description:

Partner with neighborhood business associations and operators of public spaces (i.e. parks, public squares, entertainment districts) to identify places where young people are welcome. Design a method of identifying these places as “youth-friendly” for youth to know that they are welcome.

What we heard in interviews:

Youth and parents said they would like to see more places where youth were welcomed. Youth reported that they often feel adults are expecting the worst from them, and that adults have low expectations of them. This further limits young people’s ability to find places to spend their time outside of home and school.

Primary objective:

Provide teens with spaces where they feel welcome and have an opportunity to connect with peers

Secondary objectives:

Provide opportunities for youth to develop peer relationships, social skills, and increase positive social interactions

Increase the public understanding that youth want “safe places” in our city

Create opportunities for positive interactions between youth and adults

Encourage teens to stay out of trouble by providing safe, desirable alternatives

Youth are better connected to a community

Resources:

Spirit of Youth, Youth Friendly Businesses: <https://www.spiritofyouth.org/programs/youth-friendly-business/>

Youth-friendly businesses: <http://youthfriendlybusiness.org/>

Proposed partners:

Neighborhood business associations and business districts

Business owners located near high schools

Cincinnati Police Department and neighborhood Officers

Youth



Workforce Development Issue Brief

Many young people already have a family of their own, which feeds into the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The realities of today's economy have impacted the employability of young people. Lower level jobs that had once gone to high school students are now going to people with more experience or qualification and to high school and college graduates. Young people, especially those who dropped out of high school, are at a higher risk of not being ready for more advanced employment opportunities, which can cause them to enter a cycle of low-paying jobs with few prospects. Besides the financial consequences to the individual, local businesses are left with an ineffective pipeline for future employees. Young people also suffer when their parents are unemployed, namely because parents cannot financially support their child's basic needs. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How is Cincinnati doing in terms of workforce development?

The source for all data in this section is the 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book, unless otherwise noted.

Teens not in school and not working (16-19 years old)

Obtaining secure employment is one of the most important steps during the transition from youth into

self-sufficient adulthood. Teens not attending college that are unemployed or under-employed are more at risk than their peers. Research shows that males who are neither attending college nor working are more likely to engage in criminal activities, while females are more at risk of becoming dependent on welfare. When these young adults eventually find a job; they are more likely to receive low wages and struggle with being self-sufficient.

- In Cincinnati, six percent of youth are between the ages of 16 and 19, three percent of which are in the labor force, but not enrolled in school or employed. Including teens not in the labor force, 11 percent of youth ages 16 to 19 are disconnected from school and employment. The estimated total number of Cincinnati youth who are unemployed and not enrolled in school, but in the labor force, is slightly over 600. Adding teens who are not in the labor force raises the estimate to over 1,900.
- Cincinnati matches the county, state, and nation in relation to the percentage of its population that is between the ages of 16 and 19 (six percent), as well as the percentage of those youth who are in the labor force, but not in school or employed (three percent). The inclusion of those teens not in the labor force raises Cincinnati's percentage (11 percent) above the national, state, and county average.
- Local unemployed youth percentages are similar to county, state, and national numbers.

Youth not attending school

Education is fundamental to the success of the individual and to the success of their community. Education does not only teach young people about math, grammar, or prepare them for their future profession, but also improves self-esteem and encourages better choices. There are many factors that can explain why so many young people are unable to attend school, including having to work to support a family and the cost of school transportation, uniforms, and books.

- About 54 percent of young adults ages 18 to 24 are enrolled in college in Cincinnati. Roughly 20,000 young people between 18 and 24 are not currently accessing education.
- Cincinnati has significantly higher rates of enrollment in post-secondary education among 18 to 24 year olds than the county, state, and nation.

Youth unemployment rate

Employment can provide a wide range of benefits to youth, from teaching responsibility to developing management skills. Teens who work can also achieve financial independence and be able to save for post-secondary education. Unemployed high school students are more likely to drop out of school than their employed peers. While youth unemployment affects all teens, the consequences of being unemployed are more significant for minority teens and for those from more economically disadvantaged populations.

- In Cincinnati, 12 percent of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are unemployed. The total number of 16 to 24 year old unemployed individuals is roughly 6,000 people.

Single-parent female head of household unemployment rate

The growth in the number of single-parent young mothers is a leading factor in the increase of child poverty rates. Children in single-parent households are more at risk of being in poverty than children in families with two working parents. Single-parent households tend to have lower earning potentials, which affect their ability to access services like health and education. Research also indicates that children in single-parent families are more likely to drop out of school and have trouble keeping jobs as young adults. The following indicator identifies the number and incidence rate of families that are led by single-mothers, as well as their employment status.

- 56 percent of Cincinnati families are led by single-mothers, 18 percent of which are unemployed.
- At 18 percent, Cincinnati’s single mother unemployment rate is seven percent higher than the national average.

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis included core characteristics for programs serving youth as they transition into adulthood and the workforce. (see 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

In order to provide an effective and accountable program, partnerships should work together to identify the needs of students and employers, plan curricula that will meet those needs, and record and evaluate program results to track progress and success. Partnering organizations through their programs can provide mentoring, support groups, college access support, and job skills development that will help high school students cope with their challenges and build the skill set necessary to succeed in life. Schools and organizations should work together to guarantee that these essential six conditions to help youth succeed are in place:

- **A supportive community**

School districts should provide an environment that is supportive, safe, and free of judgment. Adults must be supportive of students in order for them to feel valued and confident about their place in the community. By surpassing stereotypes and judgments, a community can afford its youth the opportunities and services they need to be successful. Creating a supportive environment requires changing negative mindsets and biases, and promoting diversity and differences.

- **Strong relationships**

Having a caring and stable relationship with an adult adds positive support and structure to a youth’s life. Both positive mentor and parent relationships can empower youth and improve

relationships with peers. These relationships aid students in identifying and meeting goals, and can increase opportunities for positive social and recreational interaction.

- **Meaningful learning opportunities**

Curriculum should be meaningful and challenging in a way that allows students to receive feedback from instructors, and try again where they don’t succeed. Course objectives must be made clear to students to indicate the purpose of coursework, maintain interest, and provide effective learning experiences. Students’ individualized needs and goals must be addressed, as well as the objectives of a school or district. Students should be exposed to a variety of courses and career options, and guided through the career planning process.

- **Explicit attention to mindsets and learning strategies**

Youth must be valued as individuals for their effort and growth, rather than ability. Positive enforcement and feedback aid in developing attitudes that are conducive to academic progress, and can motivate youth to achieve their goals. Learning strategies should provide opportunities to practice the skills needed to meet goals, and develop professional self. Opportunities for learning should relate to the goals, beliefs, and strengths of a student. Reflection and self-awareness are aids in taking steps toward meeting long-term goals.

- **Targeted interventions**

Individual or group interventions can be useful in helping youth understand and cope with trauma, personal matters, and environmental issues. Addressing basic needs such as housing, health care, food, and crises may be necessary and requires a supportive system within schools. Efforts should be made to ease transitions and retain normalcy. Policies should be modern and supportive of student growth.

- **Student ownership**

Students are ultimately responsible for their own growth, and should be empowered with opportunities to learn skills and better themselves. A multitude of choices should be available regarding areas of study and experience. Classroom instruction should be meaningful and engaging, and allow students to gain experience that is applicable to real life. The skills learned within schools provide opportunities for growth, service, and meaningful contribution in society.

Partnerships for youth development face a variety of obstacles that can prevent them from being fully effective. Barriers to partnership programs include issues with funding, data systems, accountability, schedules, student-to-teacher ratios, and program longevity. Jobs For The Future recommends the following to overcome these barriers:

- **Align funding streams that support a seamless range of resources**

Public funding should encourage collaborative and integrated methods in youth development programs, and incentivize community organizations to partner with schools. In-school and out-of-school activities can be integrated using funds for after-school programs. States should allow for flexibility in the use of ADA funding and professional development funds to pull from the resources of stakeholders.

- **Accountability systems that place a high priority on what matters**

Schools should be held accountable to a wider variety of metrics, beyond academic achievement. College and career readiness skills should also be measured.

- **Better data flow between systems**

School districts and partners need to share data on students to coordinate services to student needs. Data sharing also allows for long-term measurement of progress. Monitoring school data enables early intervention for struggling students, but metrics need to go beyond traditional measurements of absences and course failure.

- **Systemic supports for the range of adults working with youth**

Public funds for shared professional development should be reserved for school and community partnerships. Staff from both sides can share their expertise in working with youth, fostering a culture of positive youth development.

- **Connective tissue that brings stakeholders into sustainable, long-term partnerships**

In order to maintain partnerships in the long-term, a central organization can serve as the pillar to coordinate stakeholders, manage resources and communications, and serve as a liaison for the community at large.

What did we hear from surveys?

- 94% of African American youth believed they would be successful as an adult, the highest of any race category. Across socio-economic statuses (SES), youth were all very optimistic about their futures: 91% of youth believed they would be successful as an adult.
- 27% or fewer of youth across SES categories use programs in their community to help them find employment.
- Only 1 in 2 parents who did not graduate from high school believed their child will graduate from college or technical school.
- Youth in the lowest SES were more likely to use programs to find work and develop skills, but less likely to believe they would get an advanced education beyond high school at a college or technical school.
- Across SES categories, an average of only 27% of youth reported participating in career development, co-op programs, or apprenticeships.

What did we hear from interviews?

- When asked how youth would define success, money and happiness were the two most popular responses.
- As parents grow themselves (and seek out new opportunities for learning and bettering themselves), they can pass those lessons learned on to their kids.
- Youth often connect career ambitions with something they are good at or care about.
- Youth want exposure to opportunities beyond STEM. Parents wanted more diverse training opportunities that might be an alternative to college, including trade schools.
- Youth need opportunities and experiences to discover what they are good at and what they are passionate about. This can shape what they do as a profession.
- Youth reported that extracurricular activities and jobs kept them out of trouble by keeping them busy.

“I feel like if schools in Cincinnati would have more like activities available or more clubs and different things, more students would be able to express themselves more and figure out who they are while they are in high school. Instead of having to figure themselves out when they are grown and stuff like that.”

- Phase III youth interview with 12th grade CPS African-American Westwood resident

Workforce Development Findings

Youth want to be more connected

Youth want to be connected to the world around them more intentionally. They need to be exposed to tangible options for what their future could look like (jobs, careers, hobbies, interests, passions, role models). We are doing young people a disservice if we do not provide them with opportunities to identify their strengths and interests.

Youth need exposure to opportunities

9th and 10th graders need to be pressed to start thinking about college and career planning. They need a realistic understanding of what it takes to get into college or into a career pathway early enough to make good choices.

Youth want to be exposed to new and different things. They want to get outside of their comfort zone and world view. They feel like they cannot dream it if they haven't seen it. Finding places and people who will help young people uncover their skills and talents is important. Having a part-time job can be a productive connection for young people, but we heard very little about bosses that acted as mentors. Some teens reported that they valued retail or service sector jobs as a way to make money, they also provided an example of a job that would not want to hold as an adult; they provided motivation for them to explore other career pathways.

Youth should be productively engaged during the summer

Summer jobs, programs, and experiences are a great way to expose young people to more options and choices for careers and hobbies. There are programs available to youth in our city we need to find ways of getting more young people connected with existing programs. Young people want opportunities to work but can also be provided other structured activities, which they understand helps them explore their strengths and interests. Summer experiences are an opportunity for youth to demonstrate what they are good at and to develop a sense of accomplishment. Youth who are not productively engaged in the summer are bored and more likely to get into trouble.

Workforce Development Recommendations

#7 Expand speed mentoring

Description:

Partner with the United Way to connect African American professionals with students for speed mentoring days at local high schools.

Speed mentoring is designed to facilitate a series of short, focused conversations between volunteer mentors/professionals and high school students in order to: provide a positive experience, inspire, and provoke introspection among students about life after high school and college; raise awareness of the benefits of mentoring and United Way's support of education; and facilitate the creation of mentoring relationships. (Source: <http://hughesstem.cps-k12.org/news/whats-new/need-speed-speed-mentoring>)

What we heard in interviews:

Personal exposure to career pathway options is critical for youth to know what options might be available to them. Youth need opportunities to explore what opportunities there are for jobs and careers.

Primary objective:

Provide opportunities for youth to explore career pathways and opportunities in a tangible way

Secondary objectives:

Provide youth with positive role models

Provide youth with a realistic understanding of the steps required for different career pathways

Expand opportunities for mentorship that require relatively low commitment from mentors (but still provide benefits to mentees)

Provide youth with a realistic understanding of the steps required for different career pathways

Resources:

A Mentor's Guide to Speed Mentoring: http://www.uccs.edu/Documents/alumni/mentor_guide.pdf

Speed Mentoring Prepares Students for the Next Step: <http://www.uwgc.org/news-events/blog/2017/03/29/speed-mentoring-prepares-students-for-the-next-step>

Proposed partners:

Youth

African American professionals

Schools

Community members and associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)

Recreation centers

Workforce Development Recommendations (cont.)

#8 Support college and career exploration

Description:

Develop a tool kit that can help teens explore college and career options that could be used by community partners (like recreation centers and libraries) and could also be used by families. This would provide complementary support to the college and career exploration work already underway in our schools.

What we heard in interviews:

Youth need more opportunities to explore a range of education and career pathways. Most every youth we interviewed believed that college (4-years) was necessary to get a good job that would lead to a steady paycheck, wealth, and happiness. We know that college is not the appropriate answer for every youth, but they need better ways to explore what they are good at, and how that might match up with a potential career path. They also need more opportunities to learn about the expanse of available careers, and what skills and education those careers require.

Primary objective:

Provide additional opportunities for youth to explore career pathways and opportunities in community settings

Secondary objectives:

Increase relationship between youth development and community resources (make the community resources more relevant)

Create opportunities for positive interactions between youth and adults

Resources:

Career Exploration and Skill Development: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-employment/career-exploration-and-skill-development>

Career Exploration for Teens: A Parent Guide to Starting the Career Conversation: <http://www.insidejobs.com/career-exploration-for-teens.pdf>

Proposed partners:

Recreation centers

Libraries

Parents and families

Community members and associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)



Health Issue Brief

For young people, a healthy lifestyle from birth enhances the possibility of a good quality of life as an adult. Good health is fundamental to childhood development. While many children may be healthy and require minimal care, factors like poverty, lack of health insurance, preventive care and child abuse put a child's health at risk. If health problems are not identified and treated, they can impact a child's cognitive, physical, and mental development. Poor health during this period of time can also influence other critical aspects of life, such as school readiness and attendance, and can have long-lasting effects on the future of young people. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How is Cincinnati doing in terms of childhood health?

The source for all data in this section is the 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book, unless otherwise noted.

Children without health insurance

All children need health care, whether for preventive care, sporadic illnesses, or chronic conditions. Due to the high cost of insurance, family income is a major determining factor as to whether or not a child

will have health insurance. Children without health insurance may be unable to have a regular healthcare provider and receive the care they need. Uninsured children are most likely to have their conditions treated only under extreme circumstances, putting them at greater risk. Health insurance not only protects the child's health, but also protects the family against financial problems when the child has chronic diseases or unexpected health problems. One solution is to assist eligible children to enroll in

public programs like Medicaid, although not all needy children are eligible for this program.

- 6 percent of youth under 18 in Cincinnati are uninsured.
- The rate of males under 18 without health insurance is higher than females. In Cincinnati, more than half of uninsured youth are males.
- About seven percent of African American youth in Cincinnati don't have health insurance compared to about four percent for non-Hispanic whites. Asian and Hispanic youth have the highest incidence rate of uninsured coverage in Cincinnati at 19 percent and 16 percent respectively.

Children with asthma

School-aged children with asthma are absent more often in comparison to their healthy peers. Indeed, asthma is one of the leading causes of school absence due to illness, accounting for more missed school days than any other chronic illnesses. Excessive non-attendance or multiple short absences disrupts learning and negatively affects school performance. Asthma also has a negative impact on a child's social life. The condition can be a deciding factor on the participation of extra-curricular activities and collective encounters, thus reducing critically important developmental opportunities.

- 13 percent of CPS students have been diagnosed and/or treated for asthma.
- Roughly 4,300 students were diagnosed and/or treated for asthma in CPS during the second semester of the 2012-13 school year.
- At 26 percent, Winton Hills Academy had the highest incidence rate of asthma among students in 2013.

- Schools with low-income students totaling 95 percent or higher account for at least 13 percent of the total student population with asthma.

Children with one or more emotional or behavioral conditions

Public schools are charged to provide instructional curricula that promote the educational success of all students. Young people with emotional or behavioral conditions have a wide range of challenges in school, from being able to cope with their surroundings and others, to the demands of class curriculum. Promoting the educational success of students with emotional/behavioral disorders can be a particularly challenging assignment due to the necessity for a comprehensive and cohesive program to effectively meet their needs.

- In 2012-13, nine percent of CPS students had an identified diagnosed emotional or behavioral condition.
- Nearly 1 in 10 CPS students were diagnosed or treated for emotional or behavioral conditions at school in the 2012-13 school year.
- In 2012-13, Hyde Park School and Walnut Hills High School had the lowest percentage of students with emotional or behavioral conditions, at two percent each. Covedale School had the highest rate, at 22 percent.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Childhood obesity can affect children regardless of gender, race, ethnic group, or age. This problem is considered a nationwide epidemic that needs to be addressed. Research shows that about 31 percent of young people between the ages of 2 and 19 are diagnosed as overweight. BMI measures body fat based on height and weight. Though it does

not directly assess body fat percentages, BMI is correlated to body fat and serves as an easy indicator of overweight or obese youth. Overweight and obese individuals have an increased risk for medical concerns such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary disease, stroke, sleep apnea, and more.

About 98 percent of CPS students were screened for BMI. The results show that three percent were underweight, 61 percent were normal, and 34 percent were overweight or obese. Two percent of students were not screened (refused, were absent, etc.).

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis presented case studies on tobacco use prevention, HIV, STDs, and teen pregnancy, and obesity (*2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book*):

▪ Tobacco use prevention

According to the CDC, roughly all tobacco use starts during youth or as a young adult. Research shows that every day more than 3,800 teens under 18 years old try their first cigarette. Seventy five percent of these teens will become adult smokers, and one third of these adults will die approximately 13 years younger than their non-smoker peers. Indeed, the 2013 YRBSS of high school students shows that over 40 percent of the participating students have tried cigarette smoking at least once, and 22 percent used cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, or cigars on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey.

For many years, school districts, local, state, and national governments have worked to create prevention strategies that range from law enforcement to individual efforts:

- *Create a world where seeing people smoke or use other tobacco products is the exception, not the norm;*
- *Take steps that make it harder for youth to use tobacco, such as raising cigarette prices and enforcing laws that prohibit the sale of tobacco to children;*

- *Further limit tobacco marketing that is likely to be seen by young people;*
- *Limit youth exposure to smoking in movies and other media;*
- *Educate young people and help them make healthy choices;*
- *Set an example — encourage young people to avoid tobacco use by quitting.*

High schools throughout the country have worked to improve tobacco prevention by providing a better health education, more family and community involvement, healthier school environments and more comprehensive health services. The 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study indicates that high schools have taken steps to address each of those areas by:

- *Requiring students to receive instruction on health topics as part of a specific course*
- *Prohibiting all tobacco use or advertising in all locations*
- *Providing tobacco-use prevention services at school*
- *Having a school health council that addresses tobacco prevention/usage in one-on-one or small-group sessions*
- *Providing tobacco-use prevention services to students through arrangements with providers not located on school property*

- *Involved students’ families and community members in the development, communication, and implementation of policies or activities related to tobacco-use prevention*
- *Participating in a youth empowerment or advocacy program related to tobacco-use prevention*

▪ **HIV, STDs, and teen pregnancy**

Unsafe sexual behaviors can increase the chances of unwanted pregnancy and contracting HIV and STDs. Results of the 2013 YRBSS indicate that almost half of high school students have engaged in sexual activities with over 40 percent of sexually active students not using contraceptives.

Research shows that effective prevention programs can decrease sexual risk behaviors among students, including “delaying first sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sex partners, decreasing the number of times students have unprotected sex, and increasing condom use,” therefore reducing the risks of unintentional pregnancy and contracting HIV or other STDs.

Although in many communities prevention programs exist, they may not address the problem as needed. Usually, these programs are disjointed, sporadic, short-term, and problem-oriented, lacking a more in-depth approach that educates children and young adults in all stages of their lives and focuses not only on HIV and STDs, but also educates youth about contraceptive methods. Additionally, programs should expand beyond the school system, providing youth who are not in school with the same information their peers receive.

Community-wide youth development programs, when focusing on HIV, STDs, and teen pregnancy prevention, can be more effective in reaching at-risk youth, such as:

- *Homeless youth*
- *Low-income youth*
- *Youth living in foster care and group homes*
- *Youth in the juvenile justice system*
- *Youth with alcohol and other drug addictions*
- *Youth living in residential treatment facilities*
- *School drop-outs*
- *LGBTQ youth*

▪ **Obesity**

With the obesity epidemic, proper nutrition amongst youth is more important than ever. Behaviors that indicate risk in diet include both consuming too much or too little of varying substances. Risky behaviors may include not eating fruit and green vegetables, or consumption of soda. Overweight and obese body mass indexes are considered risks, in addition to consumption of substances designed to help lose weight or prevent weight gain.

According to the CDC, the nutritional and physical activity behaviors of youth are influenced by their families, communities, and schools. Schools play a crucial role in promoting a healthy lifestyle for students by establishing a safe and supportive environment with policies and practices that support healthy behaviors. Schools can provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. To reduce rates of obesity among students,

schools can take actions such as prohibiting the sales of soda and sugary beverages on school grounds, providing nutritional health education to students and families, or requiring physical education for all students.

Schools should focus on promoting students' healthy lifestyle by improving their health education, offering physical education and physical activity programs, having a healthier school environment, and better nutrition services. The 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study indicates that high schools have taken steps to address each of those areas by:

- Requiring students to receive instruction on health topics as part of a specific course*
- Teaching nutrition and dietary behavior topics in a required health education course*

- Not allowing students to purchase foods or beverages high in fat, sodium, or added sugars during school lunch periods*
- Offering a choice between 2 or more different fruits or types of 100% fruit juice each day for lunch*
- Required daily physical education or its equivalent for students in all grades in the school for the entire year*
- Not selling any fried foods as part of school lunch*
- Offering lettuce, vegetable, or bean salads a la carte*

What did we hear from surveys?

- Upper-income youth are more likely than very low-income youth to eat fruits and vegetables everyday (22% more likely) and visit the doctor and dentist for check-ups (19% and 20% more likely, respectively).
- Mental health was identified as an important issues by both youth and partners.
- Youth also identified pregnancy, sex education and smoking as important health issues.
- Bullying was a concern for many youth, both in school and online.
- 38% of youth living with grandparents and 50% of homeless youth reported that someone in their life had physically hurt them.

“Bullying is really important to me as a youth in Cincinnati. Bullying really hurts people. People are affected by bullying every day. Some kids even go as far as to hurt themselves because of bullying. So I would say that the main issue I’m worried about is bullying.”

- Phase II anonymous youth survey

What did we hear from interviews?

- Youth wanted more sex education.
- The majority of families reported having access to some level of care for their physical health needs. Parents from lower and middle income families were concerned about accessing quality and reliable mental health resources. Many parents expressed that mental health and counseling services in schools are ineffective and unreliable.
- We heard conflicted opinions about the power of peer pressure. Some felt pressure from their friend or peers to fit in or buy certain things or act or be a certain way. Parents referred to kids being “saturated” by what they see on social media and viewed social media as “toxic.” Others said pointedly that some used peer pressure as an excuse, and that everyone is responsible for their actions. Youth need the skills to be able to respond effectively to peer pressure.

Health Findings

Youth need better access to mental health services

Youth from low-income families are not accessing formal mental health services as often as other families, whether from lack of financial resources to do so or knowledge of what resources are available. Youth from middle-income families who need mental health services often struggle to afford what they need. There is a role for school guidance counselors and school disciplinary staff to play beyond what they are currently doing and they need more resources and people in school buildings to adequately serve this function. Youth are on medication for mental health and behavioral issues. For youth's social and emotional wellbeing to be supported more intentionally, there needs to be much more oversight and personal attention and talk therapy alongside treatment with drugs.

Cincinnati as a whole has made strides in reducing stigma for mental health issues, but there is still a significant amount of work to do to reduce stigma around treatment for both youth and adults.

Mental health needs to be a priority

Partners, parents, and services providers who are working with youth need to be equipped with the tools to recognize and address mental health needs in young people. Access to quality mental health services for families at every income level should be supported.

Social media has an impact on teen health and wellness

Social media is the way that teens often communicate and connect with one another, but it also can play a role in the wellbeing of teens. Platforms like Facebook can increase the focus on looks and other judgments from peers, having an especially negative impact on teen girls.

It's tough to be a teenager. Hormones kick in, peer pressures escalate and academic expectations loom large. Kids become more aware of their environment in the teen years — down the block and online. The whole mix of changes can increase stress, anxiety and the risk of depression among all teens, research has long shown. But a recent study published in the journal Pediatrics suggests many more teenage girls in the U.S. may be experiencing major depressive episodes at this age than boys. And the numbers of teens affected took a particularly big jump after 2011, the scientists note, suggesting that the increasing dependence on social media by this age group may be exacerbating the problem. (Source: <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/02/13/514353285/depression-strikes-todays-teen-girls-especially-hard>)

Parents and providers need to be educated on how to monitor existing social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, and how their use is impacting their children.

Health Recommendations

#9 Train providers working with youth on basic mental health awareness

Description:

Train people working with young people about the mental health needs of young people. Utilize existing resource including Mental Health First Aid, NAMI Southwest Ohio, and GLSEN Greater Cincinnati. Increase awareness about how many teens are affected by mental health issues and how these issues effect different populations of at-risk youth.

What we heard in interviews:

Mental health was discussed directly and indirectly in youth and parent interviews. Caring adults can be early actors in ensuring mental health problems are treated early and that potential negative impacts are minimized.

Primary objective:

Provide professionals and individuals working with youth with the tools to recognize mental health issues in young people and families and the knowledge to connect the families with available resources

Secondary objectives:

Increase the link between families that need mental health services and accessible services

Increase awareness of mental health

Reduce the stigma around mental health issues and treatment

Treat the causes of symptoms, instead of just the symptoms that may be impacting learning and youth development

Resources:

Mental Health First Aid: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Southwest Ohio: <https://namiswoh.org/>

Proposed partners:

Mental health professionals

Churches

Youth

Parents and families

Program and service providers

Schools

Health Recommendations (cont.)

#10 Engage teens in using social media for good

Description:

Create opportunities for youth to increase the social media presence of organizations and programming that is directed at youth. Saturate existing platforms with positive content and leverage it to reach out to parents and youth.

What we heard in interviews:

Social media is often filled with negativity and drama, but teens feel that they must use it because its how they stay connected with friends.

Primary objective:

Empower youth in creating positive messaging targeted at their peers

Secondary objectives:

Demonstrate the potential positive impacts of social media

Make social media messages from organizations more relevant to youth

Resources:

Barriers to Wellness: Voices and Views from Young People in Five Cities: <http://gradnation.americaspromise.org/report/barriers-wellness>

Proposed partners:

Youth

Schools

Churches

Recreation centers



Developmental Opportunities

Issue Brief

When our young population succeeds, our community at large benefits from their success. In order to accomplish this goal, our community has to provide youth with possibilities like developmental programs and initiatives that allow our youth to build on their strengths. The programs provided at schools, agencies, and churches give youth opportunities to gain meaningful life skills and core capabilities, allowing them to play a more important role in our community. Youth development initiatives benefit young people inside their homes, their schools, and their neighborhoods. (2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

How is Cincinnati doing in terms of developmental opportunities for children?

The source for all data in this section is the 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book, unless otherwise noted.

Community Learning Centers

Community Learning Centers (CLCs) provide services for students and families that relate to health and nutrition, after-school activities, career readiness and college guidance, youth development, arts education, mentoring, and more. CLCs utilize existing school

and community facilities to meet the specific needs of the community and the students in it. Facility hours are extended to use the space after school, on weekends, and during summers. These facilities serve as hubs for the community, and provide services that promote academic success and a healthy community.

17,898 students used CLCs services in the 2012-13 academic year. Students targeted to receive individualized, intensive services totaled 3,290. In both cases, African American students composed more than 70 percent of the total.

Roughly 16,000 students received health and wellness support provided by CLCs, and their partners, including Growing Well and other community-based clinics. Other services provided are tutoring, mentoring, and after school programs.

Tutoring

Tutoring often helps students improve their academic success, as well as develop skills for life outside of school. Programs are typically sponsored by school systems or by not-for-profit organizations, and deal primarily with academic concerns. Students who are identified as having one or more areas that need to be addressed are referred to a tutoring program that typically lasts less than 12 months. Potential positive outcomes of tutoring include improvements in attitude, motivation and participation, increases in school attendance and study hours outside of school, and improvements in academic achievements.

- Roughly 7,550 students received tutoring during the 2012-13 school year. Of the total, 2,293 were targeted students.
- More than 75 percent of targeted CLC students with math or reading priority factors received tutoring.

Mentoring enrollment

Mentoring programs help students improve their academic success, but also focus on a variety of life skills. Students are referred to a program due to risk factors such as high rates of absenteeism, insufficient social competency, or high-risk behaviors. Participants are matched with an older peer or adult mentor who meets with the youth regularly for a period of around 11 months. Positive outcomes include increased study and improved academic achievement, improvements in attitude, behavior,

and school attendance, and improvements in emotional health and wellbeing. Additionally, participants of mentoring programs are likely to set higher goals and standards for their own achievements than non-participating peers.

- More than 6,000 students were served in mentoring programs at Community Learning Centers in the 2012-13 academic year.
- Targeted students receiving mentoring totaled roughly 1,350 during the same period of time.

Cincinnati Recreation Commission

The Cincinnati Recreation Commission is an important service provider for youth in Cincinnati. With a variety of activities, including recreational and educational programs, the Recreation Centers offer services for preschoolers, youth, teens, adults, and seniors. This measure will look at the programs designed specifically for children, youth, and teens. In 2013, there were 23 centers (plus two city divisions) spread throughout the City of Cincinnati, serving neighborhoods inside and outside the city limits.

- The Recreation Centers reported having more than 16,000 members in 2013, over half of them were teens/young people.
- Of the 23 Recreation Center locations and two other centers serving Cincinnati in 2013, Mount Washington had the highest number of teen/youth memberships (894), followed by College Hill (850), Evanston (687), and McKie (661).

What do the case studies tell us?

Phase I of the Youth Gap Analysis included the keys to quality youth development, research on parent satisfaction with out-of-school time programs, and summer programs. (see 2014 Cincinnati Youth Gap Analysis Data Book)

Families, schools, communities, and youth programs together play an important role in providing children with the fundamentals for a positive and thriving lifestyle as an adult. After school, summer vacation and other programs, for example, have the ability to supply youth with opportunities for recreation, achievement, learning, growth, and volunteerism.

▪ **Keys to quality youth development**

Young people are more impacted by developmental opportunities when initiatives target the most important elements of healthy development. When experiences reinforce the most fundamental elements of growing up, young people are more likely to engage in learning experiences.

To assist program administrators and developmental professionals with implementing the aforementioned elements of effective initiatives, the following strategies and considerations are recommended:

- **Youth feel physically and emotionally safe:** *When young people feel physically and emotionally safe, they can learn better and increase participation. Programs should ensure young people: are physically and emotionally safe; partner with adults to establish behavioral guidelines and consequences for unacceptable behavior; understand conflict resolution practices and how abusive behavior like bullying or name calling will be addressed; are respected by adults and youth in the program; perceive adults as consistent;*

experience structure and flexibility; can readily access the program regarding hours of operation, location, financial burden, and transportation.

- **Youth experience belonging and ownership:** *When young people feel as though they are included, they can have more significant roles as participants and leaders. Programs should ensure young people: actively engage in program planning and implementation; feel as though they are valued; have a sense of belonging and inclusion.*
- **Youth develop self-worth through meaningful contribution:** *When young people feel as though their contributions are accepted, acknowledged and valued, they are more likely to actively engage in initiatives. Programs should ensure young people: contribute as individuals to the group experience; partner with adults to build programs; are challenged; are credited for their contributions; perceive that their contributions are valued by others.*
- **Youth discover self:** *When young people are encouraged to try new things, they cultivate their interests and abilities, learn independence, and actively control their lives. Programs should ensure young people: feel like there are opportunities to be exceptional and unique; are challenged to try and learn new things; apply learned life skills to their everyday lives; discover new things about themselves.*
- **Youth develop quality relationships with peers and adults:** *When young people develop considerate and trusting*

relationships, program participants and program administrators learn from one another and respect each other. Programs should ensure young people interact with adults as equals in program planning, implementation and evaluation; work with adults to learn and have fun; are given the opportunity to meet and learn about one another; are encouraged to continue friendships with youth and adults.

- **Youth discuss conflicting values and form their own:** *When young people feel secure enough to speak with youth and adults about values and topics that are significant to them, they feel as though they are respected. Programs should ensure young people: are given the opportunity to freely to express their values and beliefs; form their own unique values and beliefs; are understanding of and respectful of the beliefs of others.*
- **Youth feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery:** *When young people experience success after taking part in tailored learning experiences and age appropriate developmental activities, youth can set goals and celebrate their accomplishments. Programs should ensure young people: identify their own goals for programs they partake in; are accountable for successfully attaining their own unique goals; master skills through practice and hands-on experiences that build knowledge; receive feedback on and reflect about their accomplishments; are publicly recognized for achieving their goals; share successes with their peers.*
- **Youth expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible:** *When young people are given the opportunity to experience new things and enjoy life, successes and failures offer chances for*

growth. Programs should ensure young people: laugh and enjoy themselves through experiences, hobbies and interests; succeed and are acknowledged for successes; define goals and work toward achieving them; consider life plans and the future; are not afraid to take healthy risks.

- **Mother satisfaction with out-of-school time programs**

Research has shown that out-of-school-time (OST) programs positively affect young people. When compared to students who do not participate in OST programs, enrollees exhibit higher performance in school, more socialization, and lower dropout rates. Multiple factors influence whether or not a young person will participate in a program, namely their family income, race, parent employment status, and neighborhood. Further research shows that parental satisfaction is also a factor determining participation. When parents are not satisfied with programs, youth participation may decrease significantly.

In order to increase signups and participation, program employees should seek to understand the community context that surrounds a service location. A study found that mothers who lived in residential areas were more likely to have higher satisfaction with OST programs, possibly due to a neighborhood's safety or school setting that is more conducive to participation.

Furthermore, minority and low-income mothers in this same study indicated a perceived lack of affordable and high quality youth programs. Non-Hispanic white and low-income mothers also exhibited lower satisfaction with programs in general, when adjusted for OST opportunities. In combination, the aforementioned perceptions may help explain lower youth participation rates among these segments.

- **Summer programs**

In the past years, research has shown that children may lose knowledge and skills during school vacation. While students from all demographics and socio-economic status might lower their mathematics proficiency, low-income students will have a significant loss in reading skills, while their more affluent peers may gain during the same period of time. Summer programs can work as an effective

way of minimizing the gap created by vacation, when children are not at school. Studies have shown that children participating in this kind of program can gain in many different ways. Students can learn subjects they could not understand during the past semester, stop their summer learning loss, and even gain knowledge they would not have otherwise.

What did we hear from surveys?

- The majority of youth reported having opportunities to get involved in extra-curricular activities.
- Youth Living with grandparents were the least likely of any demographic group to report that they had opportunities to get involved in activities; only 65% said they had opportunity.
- Fewer than 44% of youth overall report having a mentor or coach in their community. Nearly 1 in 3 parents of 6th-12th graders said mentoring was missing or needed in their school or community.
- Youth with a mentor or coach were more likely to know encouraging adults in their neighborhood, use programs to help them find employment, and report that their neighborhood had a lot of things to do for fun.
- Issues surrounding resources available to participate in activities, activities offered in schools, and a need for steering youth away from unhealthy behavior were related themes.

***“Encourage them.
Most people [adults]
don’t do enough to
encourage us. Most
just give up and just
add to the mess.”***

*- Phase II anonymous
youth survey*

What did we hear from interviews?

- Youth value experiences. They learn by doing, both in the classroom and outside. They don't want to be told what to do or not do; they want to experience it themselves and learn from it.
- Youth want to be encouraged, to be pushed, to be motivated. Youth want role models. Adults need to listen to youth about what they want.
- Youth and parents both said that you can't give up on hope and that you have to have something to dream about, something to aspire to, and something to push yourself towards.
- Youth demonstrated varying abilities to set and achieve goals for themselves. While some youth set a goal and had identified the steps necessary to achieve it, others had a goal in mind but could not work through how to get there. For example, one student wanted to play basketball but his grades weren't good enough to play year after year. He had a goal set (playing basketball) but didn't have a game-plan for how to bring up his grades which would allow him to play.
- Youth need more opportunities like those presented at the youth summit – opportunities where teens can talk peer to peer and open up (and not shut others out) and share their story.
- Youth are tied to their phones. They are constantly connected and available to their friends and social media via their phones. Most youth recognize that their phones can be a distraction but don't know how to unplug. Families talked about creative ways to limit the use of social media and phones in general.
- Youth face a lot of pressure and have to prioritize all that they do in a day. They reported being stressed out and tired. They talked about making choices about what they can do, understanding that everything they want to do they won't have time for. Youth talked about how things that they absolutely had to do, like take care of younger siblings, took precedence over things that were optional, like having fun. Some youth said they needed better tools to manager their time. Family schedules can keep youth from getting the extra help they need.
- Youth find support from a number of different sources. The most common sources of support were family and friends. Youth valued the support from people that encourage them to do better; that motivate them; that show pride in them; and that are there for them. Both youth and parents reported that they knew of youth that did not have a person that cared for them on a regular, consistent basis, and this was a bad thing.
- Youth go to different people for different kinds of advice. For example, they might go to their mom with questions about school but their cousin to talk about relationships.
- Youth talked a lot about the support provided by family, especially by older siblings. They looked up to siblings because of their success. Siblings were sometimes the only consistent provider of support for youth. Youth observed the failures of siblings, and wanted to learn from their mistakes and do better.
- Youth are asking for support on developing healthy, positive relationships, and dealing with the pressures of social media and elsewhere to "be in a relationship" when they don't want to be.
- Life skills training is crucial for young people from all backgrounds. This has been removed from the curriculum in most schools and is something kids and parents/caretakers are keenly aware of.

- There aren't many program supports for older high school students. There are more programs for younger youth. By the time youth are older, they are expected to take initiative and do things on their own.
- Parents and youth did not talk much about missing programs or services, but did report that it took a lot of effort and time to find the resources that were the best fit for youth.
- Youth have role models that they know personally or that they see in the media that have experienced success in something that they are interested in.

Developmental Opportunities Findings

Mentoring is crucial

Only a handful of youth we interviewed are formally connected to mentors. Youth want to be listened to, supported, and motivated. Community-based mentoring encourages adults to connect with youth they already know in a more meaningful way. The adult could be a neighbor or a church member or coach. This type of mentoring program could help to create strong local connections between youth and adult community members and could help to get youth more involved in the places where they live and connect more youth with much needed mentorship.

Social skills and soft skills training and support is crucial for young people, and needs to be integrated into existing programming

Life skills development is no longer a priority in schools, especially in schools with high percentages of at-risk youth. The development of social and emotional skills is critical for success in any field that youth may enter as adults. Social skills, soft skills, and life skills training and development should be integrated into existing programs and taught to anyone working with youth (service providers, teachers, counselors, etc.) so that they have the knowledge and skills they need to help teach youth time management, self-esteem and goal setting, and how to build and maintain healthy relationships. These skills are foundational for youth to thrive, and are particularly crucial start in the 6th to 8th grade years. Youth with strong social and soft skills are better positioned to navigate developmental opportunities and career exploration and development. The training should provide youth with life skills that compliment their academic training and set them up to be successful, well-rounded adults.

Developmental Opportunities Recommendations

#11 Create a community-based mentoring initiative

Description:

Develop a community-based mentoring approach that encourages adults to connect with youth they already know in a more meaningful way. The adult could be a neighbor or a church member or a coach.

What we heard in interviews:

One key factor of youth success was having a constant, supportive adult figure in their life. Not all youth have this type of support through their family. Teens want to be able to talk with someone that understands where they are coming from; someone that they can relate to.

Primary objective:

Identify a supportive adult in a young person's community who can provide ongoing mentoring and support, and who can relate to that youth

Secondary objectives:

Create strong local connections between youth and community members

Help to get youth more involved in the places where they live

Provide opportunities for youth to develop peer relationships, social skills, and increase positive social interactions

Create meaningful relationships for both the youth and adult built on trust and accountability

Youth are better connected with their community

Resources:

Successful Relationships and Programs: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/mentoring/best-practices-mentoring-relationships-and-programs>

Proposed partners:

Community members & associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)

Parents & families

Recreation centers

Schools

Youth

Appendix

Recommendations by Partners

The Youth Gap Analysis Phase III Report includes 11 recommendations. Below, recommendations are listed by proposed partners.

African American professionals

7

Business owners located near high schools

6

Churches

9 10

Cincinnati Police Department and neighborhood Officers

5 6

Community members and associations (teen councils, community councils, LSDMC's churches, libraries, etc.)

1 2 3 4 7 8 11

Libraries

8

Mental health professionals

2 9

Neighborhood business associations and business districts

6

Parents and families

3 4 8 9 11

Program and service providers

1 2 3 4 9

Recreation centers

5 7 8 10 11

Schools

1 2 3 4 7 8 9
10 11

Youth

2 5 6 7 9 10 11

Recommendations by Domains

The Youth Gap Analysis Phase III Report includes 11 recommendations. Below, recommendations are listed by the six study domains.



EDUCATION

1 2



PROVERTY & HOMELESSNESS

3 4



CRIME

5 6



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

7 8



HEALTH

9 10



DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES

11

Detailed Key Insights

What youth value:

- When asked how youth would **define success**, money and happiness were the two most popular responses.
- Youth value experiences. They **learn by doing**, both in the classroom and outside. They don't want to be told what to do or not do; they want to experience it themselves and learn from it.
- Youth valued places and activities that allowed them to **focus**. For example, the library was a place youth knew they could go to get things done. Doing homework outside of school allowed youth to focus without distractions.
- Youth talked a lot about **money**. Some of the talk about money was being able to have a lot of material stuff (like houses and cars). Youth also talked about money being the way to get opportunities. For example, money could allow you to go to college and be successful. Youth that came from higher income families did not talk about money as a priority.
- Youth want to be **encouraged**, to be pushed, to be motivated. Youth want role models.
- Every youth is **unique**. Priorities for youth are different, but include grades, friendships, and sports.
- Across the board, youth and families reported that **education is key** and vital to success.
- **Adults need to listen to youth** about what they want.
- Youth and parents both said that you **can't give up on hope** and that you have to have something to dream about, something to aspire to, and something to push yourself towards.
- Youth reported that extracurricular activities and **jobs kept them out of trouble** by keeping them busy.

- Youth demonstrated varying abilities to **set and achieve goals** for themselves. While some youth set a goal and had identified the steps necessary to achieve it, others had a goal in mind but could not work through how to get there. For example, one student wanted to play basketball but his grades weren't good enough to play year after year. He had a goal set (playing basketball) but didn't have a game-plan for how to bring up his grades which would allow him to play.

Community (and places):

- Youth that reported feeling unsafe said that they **don't go outside**. Several youth reported that there are **few places where they feel safe**.
- Youth in Cincinnati are often **segregated by race and class**. One parent noted that the gap between youth needs to be bridged so that youth can see that they are more alike than they are different, so that they can see a different way of life, and so that youth can be open to new experiences.
- Youth need more opportunities like those presented at the youth summit – **places where teens can talk peer to peer** and open up (and not shut others out) and share their story.
- There are **few places outside of home or school that are open to a teenager** where they can hang out with friends for a few hours. Youth need places to go that are free with little to no programming so kids could be free what they want to do (with some supervision). They need a way to release energy. Recreation centers might be one such location.
- Parents are intentional when describing where they chose to live with their families. Not all parents or youth talked about being connected to their neighborhoods. However, most parents describe some level of choice and intentionality in choosing a place that they felt was **safe** (described as “quiet” in many cases) and allowed them to travel to the resources they needed.
- Parents who felt safe in Cincinnati talked about it as a **small town** that didn't face a lot of issues that larger cities face. They also said Cincinnati had small town values.
- For most kids, Metro would be their last choice for **transportation** (outside of getting to and from school). Some families have laid out clear regulations on when kids can and cannot take the bus and where they need to get off to be able to walk to their destination safely.

Peer influences:

- Youth are tied to their phones. They are **constantly connected and available to their friends and social media** via their phones. Most youth recognize that their phones can be a distraction but don't know how to unplug. Families talked about creative ways to limit the use of social media and phones in general.
- We heard conflicted opinions about the power of **peer pressure**. Some felt pressure from their friends or peers to fit in or buy certain things or act or be a certain way. Parents referred to kids being "saturated" by what they see on social media and viewed social media as "toxic." Others said pointedly that some used peer pressure as an excuse, and that everyone is responsible for their actions. Youth need the skills to be able to respond effectively to peer pressure.
- Youth talked about being able to **recognize negative** and unhealthy relationships.

How youth think about themselves:

- Most youth reported that they felt like they could **be themselves**.
- Some youth talked about **changing themselves** to suit different environments.
- Youth share a lot on **social media**.
- Youth wanted teachers to use techniques that worked best for each student, recognizing that they **all learn differently**.
- Youth face a lot of **pressure** and have to **prioritize** all that they do in a day. They reported being stressed out and tired. They talked about making choices about what they can do, understanding that everything they want to do they won't have time for. Youth talked about how things that they absolutely had to do, like take care of younger siblings, took precedence over things that were optional, like having fun. Some youth said they needed better tools to manager their time. Family schedules can keep youth from getting the extra help they need.

Support for youth:

- Youth have an **“I got this”** mentality. They think they can deal with whatever they face and they don’t need help or outside support. Some youth recognize that they should ask for help, but they find it hard to ask for help. Some youth may have lots of people that they talk to, but no one that they would share personal thoughts with.
- Youth go to different people for different kinds of **advice**. For example, they might go to their mom with questions about school but their cousin to talk about relationships.
- When youth think about **where to get information**, they think they can get it online and don’t think they need a library. But libraries are seen as quiet places where they can focus and get things done. They are also places where youth can meet to work together.
- Youth find **support** from a number of different sources. The most common sources of support were family and friends. Youth valued the support from people that encourage them to do better; that **motivate** them; that show **pride** in them; and that are there for them. Both youth and parents reported that they knew of youth that did not have a person that cared for them on a regular, consistent basis, and this was a bad thing.
- Youth talked a lot about the support provided by family, especially by **older siblings**. They looked up to siblings because of their success. Siblings were sometimes the only consistent provider of support for youth. Youth observed the failures of siblings, and wanted to learn from their mistakes and do better.
- Youth wanted adults not just to talk about them or around them, but **wanted adults to be proactive in their lives and get involved**. For example, one teen said if you see a youth doing homework, stop and ask if they need help. Another valued the initiative a teacher took in sitting down to talk about a difficult time.
- Youth wanted more **sex education**.
- Youth are asking for support on developing healthy, **positive relationships**, and dealing with the pressures of social media and elsewhere to “be in a relationship” when they don’t want to be.
- Some youth reported that they knew they were capable of more, but **didn’t want to try hard** or push themselves to do more. For example, some youth reported that they knew they were smart and could take more difficult classes, but they chose to take the less challenging class.

- Youth that have been surrounded by **negativity** don't know how to respond well to positivity.
- Youth want adults to have **high expectations**, but also for those expectations to be **realistic**. Youth should be challenged, but not challenged so much that they give up.
- There **aren't many program supports for older high school students**. There are more programs for younger youth. By the time youth are older, they are expected to take initiative and do things on their own.
- Youth could use more help with **choosing a high school** that fits best.
- Youth find it challenging when part of their support network has a **different vision of success** than they do.
- Youth think that **adults underestimate them**. They don't see that they are trying to improve.
- **Life skills training is crucial** for young people from all backgrounds. This has removed from the curriculum in most schools and is something kids and parents/caretakers are keenly aware of.
- As **parents grow themselves** (and seek out new opportunities for learning and bettering themselves), they can **pass those lessons learned on** to their kids.
- **Youth respond to the bad or good examples** that parents set.
- Families talked about their children needing **emotional support**. Having appropriate emotional support can help reduce the depth of mental health needs.
- The majority of **LGBTQ youth** we interviewed had identified support through family or peers, but some did not express having the support they needed. Some students who did not identify as LGBTQ expressed a desire for more information about LGBTQ students and better support for LGBTQ students.

Support for families:

- **Parents, especially single moms and dads, need support.** Some of the most successful single moms we talked to had a web of family and friend support that made the logistics of the day manageable, but there was little time left to think about themselves, and their growth.
- **Grandparents face unique challenges** in raising grandchildren. They may have difficulty connecting with resources, managing energy levels, and dealing with their own children that are facing challenges.
- **Parent-teacher communication** needs to happen early and often (for example, when a teacher notices a change in youth behavior and before a bad grade). Teachers need to listen to the parent's voice.
- Parents talked about the importance of structure on the development of youth. They also talked about the negative consequences of families not having structure or **consistency**.
- Parents and youth did not talk much about missing programs or services, but did report that it took **a lot of effort and time to find the resources** that were the best fit for youth.
- Youth with stable families who have enough money to have options and choices are living completely different lives than youth whose families are struggling with poverty and addiction. **Supports to families in poverty and to addicted adults** provide a great benefit to their teenage children.

How youth think about their future:

- Youth have **role models** that they know personally or that they see in the media that have experienced success in something that they are interested in.
- Almost all of the youth we talked to wanted to go to **college**. Several of the youth we talked to would be the first in their immediate family to go to college.
- Youth and parents both talked about wanting teens to **do better than their parents**. And they often want to have a life better than their current situation. Parents wanted youth to learn from their mistakes. For example, some parents that started a family early wanted their kids to wait longer to start a family.

- Youth are overwhelmingly **optimistic** even if they face real challenges: “Where you come from isn’t where you are going to go.” Youth need to feel like there are opportunities for them.
- Youth often **don’t see the link between school and the real world**. Youth are taught to remember stuff, but they report that memorizing information isn’t necessarily helping them learn, and they don’t see the information as useful when they get older.
- Adults can expect a lot from youth, but some youth felt that **adults aren’t preparing them for the world**. Youth aren’t taught the basics you need to know to be an adult.
- Youth need **opportunities and experiences** to discover what they are good at and what they are passionate about. This can shape what they do as a profession.
- Youth often connect **career ambitions** with something they are good at or care about.
- Youth have high expectations for themselves, including attending college. Virtually all of the children we talked to from all backgrounds thought they would attend college, but it is clear **some need more support in accessing college preparatory resources**, like completing the FAFSA, that they are not getting.
- Youth want exposure to opportunities beyond STEM. Parents wanted more diverse **training opportunities** that might be an **alternative to college**, including trade schools.
- Parents and youth **worry about what opportunities will be available** to them even after they graduate from college.
- Youth talked a lot about sports, mostly connected to their schools. Some youth talked about **sports as their “ticket” to college**.