

Christopher Gilson

From: charles.schoenfeld@adamsknight.com
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 10:35 AM
To: 119K
Subject: Testimony submitted via 119Kcommission.org

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Testimony submitted via 119Kcommission.org

Message from: David Howes

Organization: Project Imo

Title: Education Director

Email: david@projectimo.org

City/State: Willimantic, CT

Areas of Interest: Absenteeism, Education, Poverty, Workforce

Groups of Interest: Youth Ages 14-17, Youth Ages 18-26, At-Risk, Moderately Disconnected

Subject: Connecting Communities to Youth

Message:

In Northeastern Connecticut, the issue of youth disconnection looms large, casting a shadow over the prospects of our future generations. This problem manifests in various forms, from chronic absenteeism to low credit attainment, all of which serve as glaring indicators of a system failing to engage and support its youth adequately.

According to data from the Boston Consulting Group (2023), attendance rates and credit attainment are pivotal factors in identifying high school students at risk of disconnection. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of the total school days, signals a deeper issue, encompassing excused and unexcused absences, disciplinary actions, and mental health wellness days (Portal.CT.Gov, 2023). Additionally, the four-year graduation rate serves as a stark reminder of the magnitude of the problem, reflecting the percentage of students who manage to navigate the educational system successfully.

In 2022, a staggering one in five 14- to 26-year-olds in Connecticut found themselves categorized as either at-risk or disconnected (Boston Consulting Group, 2023). "At-risk" youth, as defined by the Boston Consulting Group (2023), are those teetering on the edge of disconnection, grappling with academic hurdles, absenteeism, and behavioral issues. On the other hand, "disconnected" youth refers to those who are not engaged in constructive activities or on the path towards gainful employment.

To address this pressing issue, we must turn to solutions grounded in student-centered practices that are supported by

community engagement. The foundation of any effective intervention lies in fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. This entails nurturing robust adult-youth relationships, which serve as the bedrock of trust and engagement. Only when youth feel safe, supported, and understood can they embark on a journey of self-discovery and academic growth, and we must understand that this environment must extend beyond the school walls to work in 2024.

Furthermore, our efforts must be firmly rooted in student-centered approaches, where learners feel a sense of belonging and agency in their educational journey. This involves providing ample opportunities for students to explore their interests, cultivate their identities, and build their confidence and self-efficacy. By placing students at the forefront of their learning experience, we empower them to take ownership of their education, thus mitigating the risk of disconnection. These approaches are accelerated and actualized when the community is integrated in their learning experience.

However, implementing such solutions is no easy feat. It requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including both the schools and community partners. Schools cannot solve this massive problem alone. Community organizations must partner with schools to provide the resources, experiences and expertise needed to reengage and empower young people.

In conclusion, addressing youth disconnection in Northeastern Connecticut demands a multifaceted approach that prioritizes community engagement in support of student-centered practices. By fostering a community-wide culture of safety, support, and empowerment, we can pave the way for a brighter future for our youth, ensuring that no young person is left behind.

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