



National Youth Listening Tour 2010

Listening to Youth Voices: Summary of Findings

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2011

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Communications and Outreach

U.S. Department of Education

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I. Introduction

President Obama's 2020 College Completion Goal

Six million more Americans need to graduate from a one-, two- or four-year postsecondary education program by 2020 as, over the next decade, more than half of new jobs will require more than a high school degree. Meeting this goal is essential for the long-term prosperity of today's students—and for the health and competitiveness of America's economy. That is why President Obama is committed to increasing the number of students who graduate high school and go to college and earn 2-year or 4-year degrees. And it is why the president has set a goal for the country to once again become the world leader in college completion by 2020.

The president has a comprehensive agenda to support reform in pre-K–12 education and to make college affordable for all students. Through *Race to the Top*, 46 states have comprehensive plans to reform their schools and are raising their standards, improving the quality of their teachers, and creating data systems that track student success. All states are working to turn around their lowest-performing schools through an unprecedented investment in America's struggling schools. The president's proposal to replace *No Child Left Behind* will maintain the momentum for these important reforms.

To make college more affordable, the president has made the largest increase in federal financial aid since the *G.I. Bill* helped World War II veterans pay for college. He has reformed the student loan system so that it invests in students rather than pay subsidies to banks. The changes will provide \$40 billion in Pell Grants to help low-income students pay for college. The student loan reforms also will provide income-based repayment options for graduates who work in public service. These investments will open the door to millions of students who otherwise could not afford to pay for college. In addition, the Obama administration is making it easier than ever to apply for federal student aid. Under the leadership of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the U.S. Department of Education has reduced the number of questions on the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* and has made it easier for applicants to transfer their financial information. In two years alone, the number of FAFSA applicants has increased by 35 percent.

The president's education agenda provides the resources for reform to states, school districts, and institutions of higher education. But if students are going to achieve his ambitious goal of leading the world in college completion, it is critical for policymakers to listen to what students have to say about their own education. Youths are experts on their educational experiences and have plenty to contribute to the policy discussion.

Purpose of This Report

From July through November of 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) convened a series of listening sessions with youths across the nation regarding the President's 2020 College Completion Goal. The National Youth Listening Tour (NYLT) met with over 40 youth-serving institutions and over 1,800 middle and high school youths across 13 cities. Youths were asked about the challenges they faced and solutions they envisioned from their communities, families and schools pertaining to the president's goal.

The purpose of the following summary is to relate back to the youths and partner organizations involved in the NYLT the key themes and issues raised during the tour. Additionally, at the Voices in Action: National Youth Summit, on Feb. 26, 2011, the summary will be the starting point for further dialogue among youths participating in the summit. This event will provide further opportunities for youths to respond to these and other issues that they find pertinent and to learn about ED policies that address these issues.

Even though the youths raised varying issues across the tour stops, during each discussion they continually emphasized the importance of education to their futures. They recognized that a quality education is the key to a successful life, and that teachers, parents, and community members all play vital and supportive roles in their journeys. The youths participating in the NYLT courageously offered their honest feelings and experiences. In gratitude, the following summary attempts to communicate that, at the very least, *“we hear you.”*

Content of This Report

The following summary details the most predominant themes of concern that young people expressed during the tour. The themes for the entire tour are examined first, followed by the themes discussed at each tour stop. When available, quotes from youths during the tour are included to help illustrate the themes. The methodology used to determine the top themes follows, and last, an acknowledgements section is included to thank all of the community partners involved in the tour.

Figure 1: National Youth Listening Tour Stops, July–November 2010



Table 1: NYLT Participating Cities and Partnering Youth Organizations

Participating Cities	Youth Organizations
Albuquerque, N.M.	Elev8, New Mexico Youth Alliance, SWOP
Boston, Mass.	Boston Student Advisory Council, Youth on Board- BPS, Young People's Project, Sociedad Latina, YOUNG Coalition, Hyde Square Taskforce, Boston Area Youth Organizing Project
Chicago, Ill.	VOYCES, Elev8, Mivka Youth Challenge, Young People's Project
Jackson, Miss.	Young People's Project, Children's Defense Fund, Mayor's Youth Initiative, United Way
Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif.	Californians for Justice, Inner City Struggle, Community Coalition, UCLA Youth Research Group
Memphis, Tenn.	Memphis Public Schools, Envoy Project
National	Urban League, LULAC
Newark, N.J.	Mayor's Office, Abbott Leadership Institute, Youth Media Symposium, Youth Court
Oakland, San Francisco, and Richmond, Calif.	Coleman Youth Advocates, Californians for Justice, Youth Together, Safe Passages
Philadelphia, Pa.	Youth United for Change, Philadelphia Student Union, Philadelphia Youth Commission, Asian Students that Led Boycott
Seattle and Tacoma, Wash.	Flossin Media, Nature Consortium, Youth Media Seattle, State Office of Public Instruction

II. Top Tour Themes

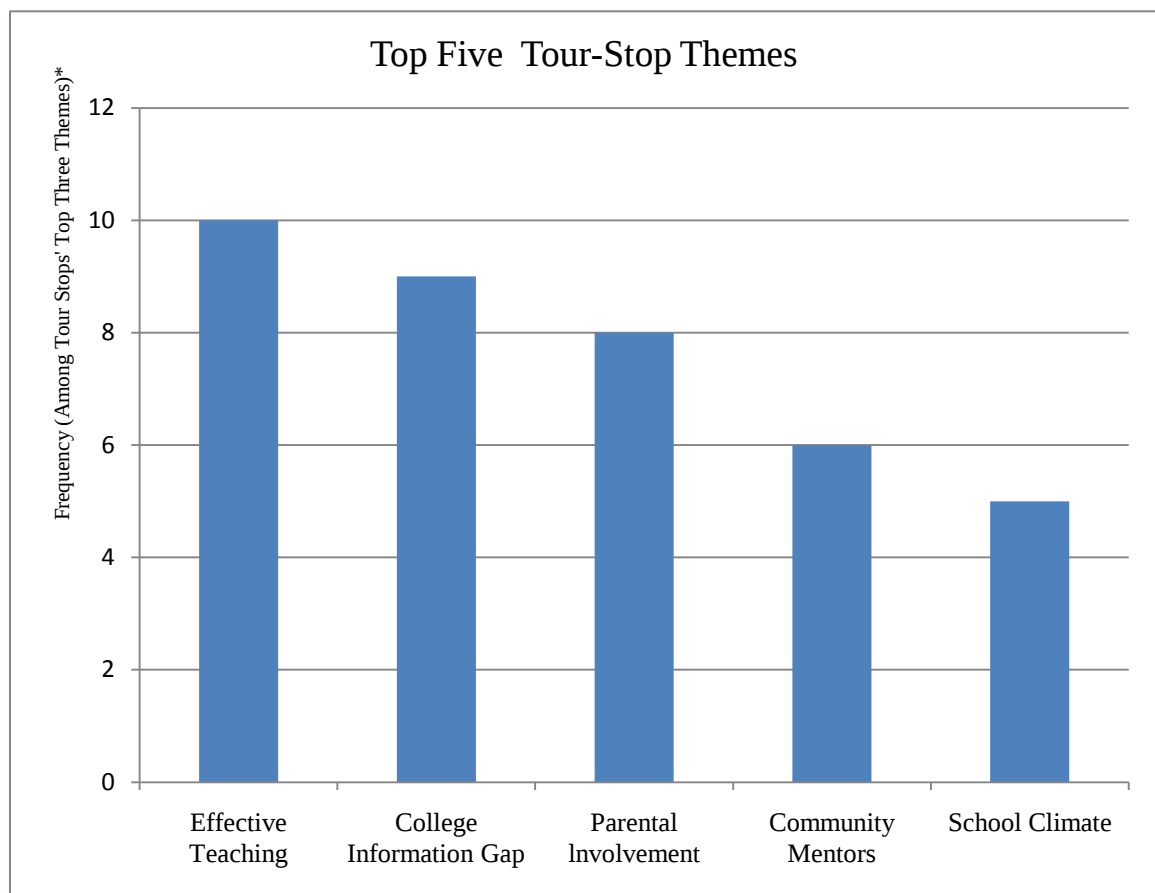
The top five key themes overall and the top themes from the categories of school, family, and community are listed below. National themes were drawn from a pool of top themes from each tour stop, including the top three issues raised for school, family, and community in each city. Figure 2 illustrates the relative frequency of the leading five themes across all tour stops. Figures 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the frequency with which leading themes occurred across all tour stops in the categories of school, family, and community, respectively.

A. Top Five Themes: Overall

1. **Effective Teaching:** During the listening tour, students expressed concern about the effectiveness of teaching. They expressed their desire for both high-quality instruction and for more motivation and encouragement from teachers. Students also stressed their need for teachers "who care" and whom they "can trust." Students would like to see less negativity in the classroom. Participating youths stressed that they feel teachers need more support, including more training, more mentoring by master teachers, and more teachers' aides. Students felt that teachers should provide support by not teaching to the test, caring for students, offering one-on-one attention, providing information on tutoring help, and by taking time to explain assignments. Students also expressed that administrators should take time to hire good teachers. Youths noted that teachers at inner-city schools often are the least experienced and that high turnover rates make it difficult for youths to form relationships with teachers. Students expressed that lasting relationships with teachers are a critical part of creating stability in their lives.
2. **College Information Gaps:** Students expressed that information about the college application, financial aid, and SAT/ACT processes is hard to find for both students and their parents. They stressed that the dissemination of college information and communicating the importance of college should begin in earlier grades. Some parents, youths reported, do not understand the college process because they did not go to college. To address this issue, students think that schools should offer parents workshops about college application and financial aid processes.
3. **Parental Involvement:** Youths felt strongly about the importance of parental involvement. Students stressed that motivation from their parents is essential and that parents should talk to their children about school, read with their children, help them with homework, attend teacher meetings and practice positive reinforcement. A positive environment at home is important to youths. Students suggested that schools should provide workshops for parents to learn strategies for getting involved in their children's education. Some students expressed that they received minimal support at home.

4. **Community Mentors:** Youths emphasized that a stable relationship with a mentoring adult over the course of their high school career is important for school success. Mentors that share students' cultural backgrounds are especially helpful, students said. Youths stressed that students without supportive families benefit the most from having mentors in their lives.
5. **School Climate and Discipline:** Youths emphasized that some schools are too focused on security and discipline, which creates an unwelcoming and hostile school environment. Zero tolerance policies add to the harsh school climate, according to students. Youths stressed that schools should focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Figure 2: Top Themes Across Tour Stops for All Categories, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions

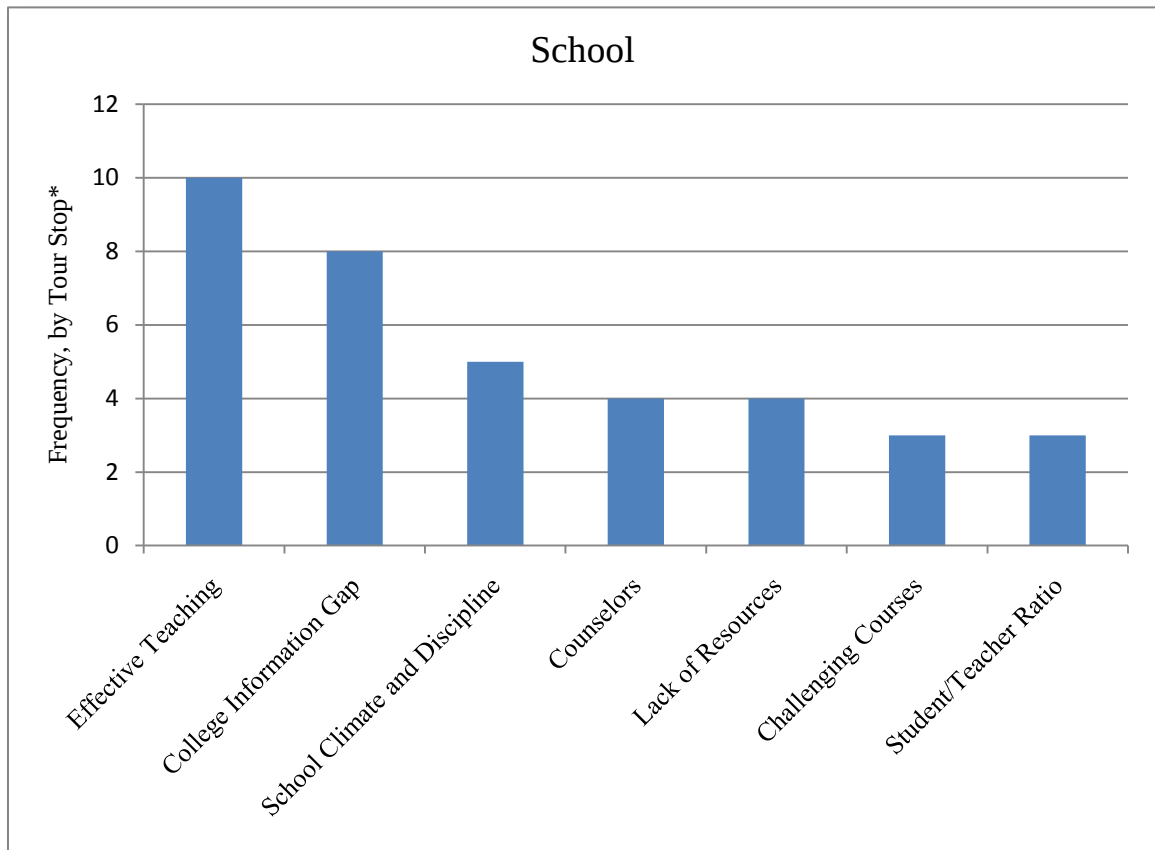


*The top themes are the five most frequently occurring themes from among the 84 top tour-stop themes. The top 84 theme pool includes the top three themes for each issue category (school, family, community) for all 11 tour stops. The discussion structure at the tour stops varied and not all discussions included every category, causing the overall theme pool to shrink. The pool of top themes is detailed by tour stop in Part III.

B. Top Themes: School

1. **Effective Teaching:** Students are concerned about effectiveness of teaching (See Part A, Number 1).
2. **College Information Gaps:** Students expressed that information about the college application, financial aid, and SAT/ACT processes is hard to find (See Part A, Number 2).
3. **School Climate and Discipline:** Youths emphasized that some school environments are too focused around security and discipline (See Part A, Number 5).
4. **Counselors:** Youths stressed that there are too few counselors per school, and student meetings with them are too infrequent.
5. **Lack of Resources:** Students expressed that the schools experience a serious lack of resources, including books, computers, or money for stimulating activities such as field trips. Some school buildings also fall into disrepair and languish in poor condition, according to students.
6. **Challenging Courses:** Students expressed a desire for more challenging curricula and more engaging classes. Students want more classes that prepare them for college, including SAT/ACT preparation classes.
7. **Teacher:Student Ratio:** Students stressed that there were too few teachers, creating large, inefficient classes.

Figure 3: Top Themes Across Tour Stops: School Category, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions

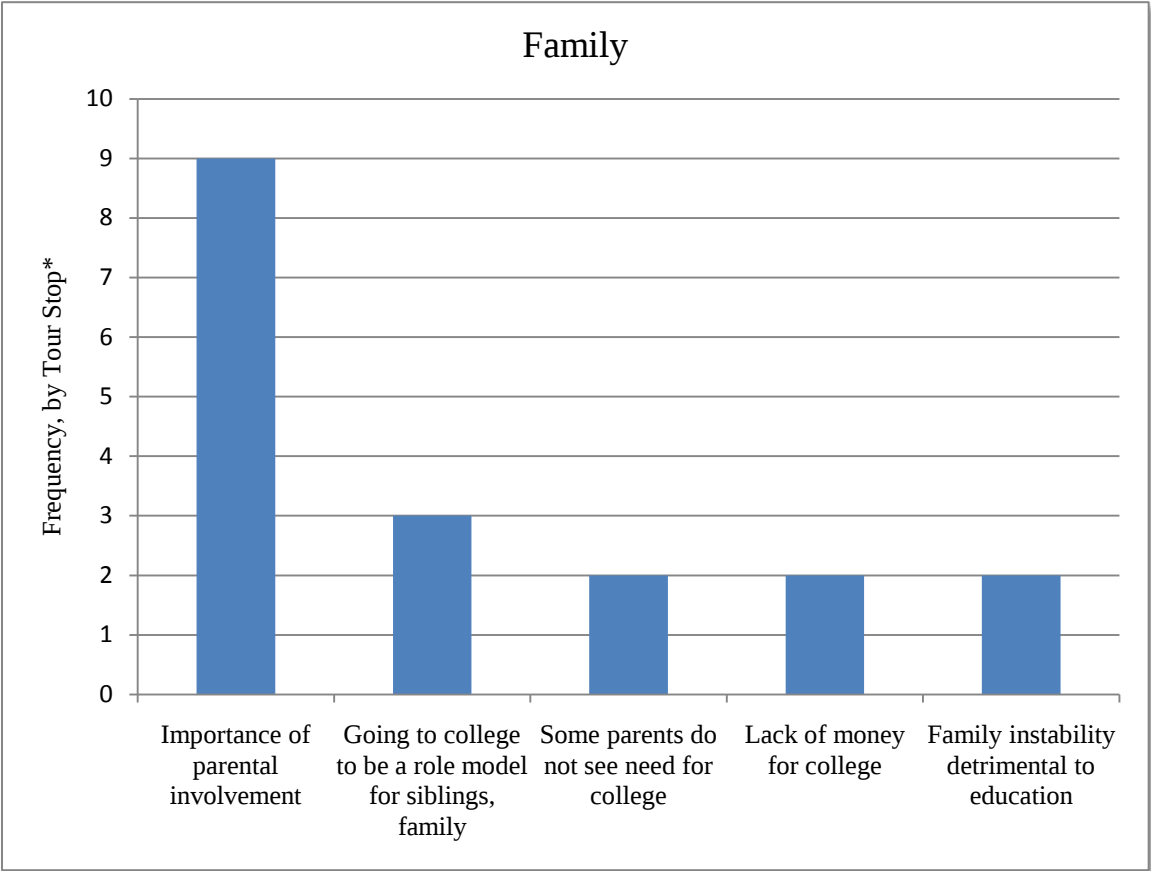


*Frequency among 11 tour stops' top three school-related themes (Teacher quality was a top-three theme about school for 9 out of 11 tour stops.)

C. Top Themes: Family

1. **Parental Involvement:** Youths felt strongly about the importance of parent involvement (See Part A, Number 3).
2. **Being a Role Model:** Students said they are motivated to go to college so that they can be a role model for their siblings, families, and peers. They are also motivated by seeing their own parents return to school.
3. **Importance of College:** Youths conveyed that some parents do not see a need for college and do not support their children going to college. Youths stressed that schools should communicate the importance of college to parents.
4. **Money for College:** Students expressed that the lack of money for college acts as a barrier to college completion. Students reported that their families have limited income to support college attendance and that family struggles with money are a major barrier to success in school generally.
5. **Family Instability:** Students expressed that instability in the home caused by issues such as divorce, incarceration, young parenting, drug use, job loss, homelessness, and pregnancy adversely affected some students' school life.

Figure 4: Top Themes Across Tour Stops: Family Category, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions

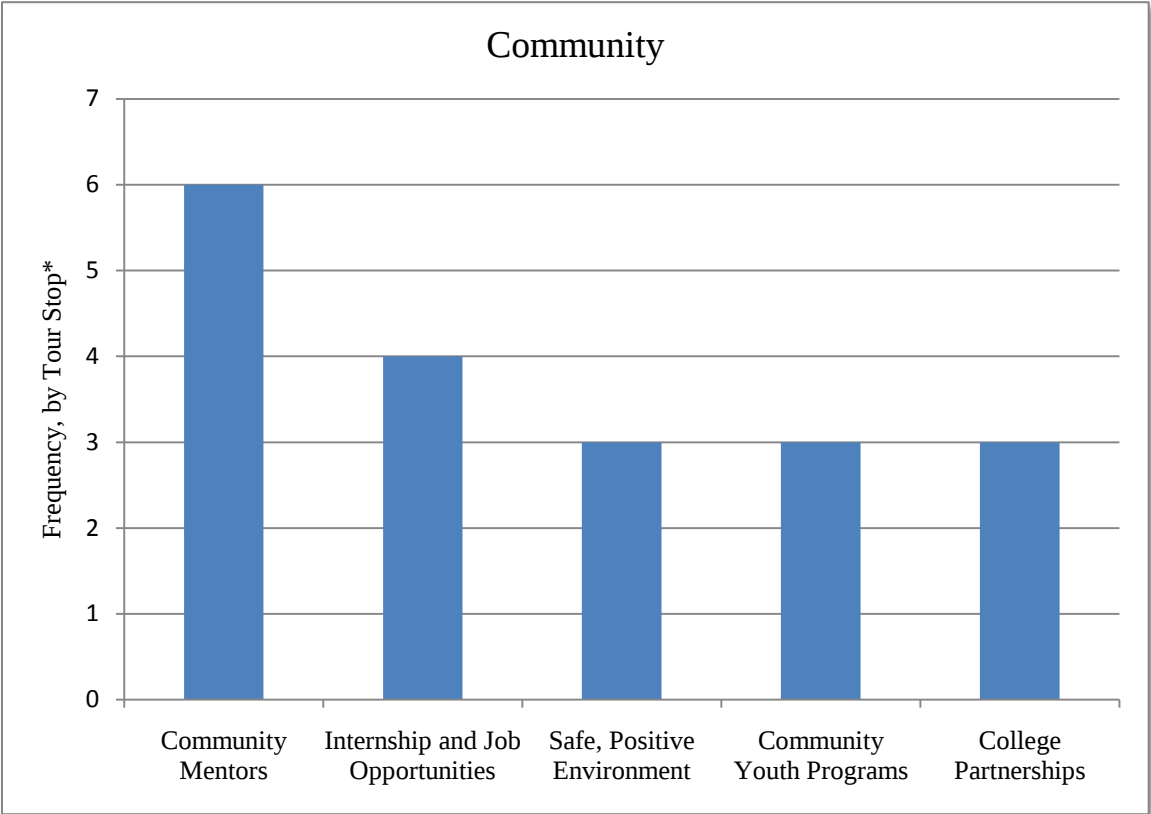


*Frequency among 11 tour stops' top three family-related themes (Parent involvement was a top-three theme about family for 8 out of 10 tour stops.)

D. Top Themes: Community

1. **Community Mentors:** Youths said they believe that a stable relationship with a mentoring adult over the course of high school is important for school success (See Part A, Number 4).
2. **Internship and Job Opportunities:** Students indicated that increased internship opportunities in the community would help youths gain work experience and exposure to diverse careers. Students would like more help from community partners to find job experiences through work-study, to strengthen their résumés, and to find internships.
3. **Safe, Positive Environment:** Students said that they are motivated to go to college as a way to escape poverty, gangs, and dependence on government assistance. Students emphasized the importance of having a clean, safe, positive environment to live in. They said that gangs and violence in their communities have a detrimental effect on their school lives.
4. **Community Youth Programs:** Students expressed that community programs need to reach out to students to give them more information about what is available. Students shared that community partners can provide extracurricular programs for them by fundraising and writing grants. Students stressed that community programs will help youths stay away from gangs and drugs.
5. **College Partnerships:** Youths said that colleges and high schools should form partnerships to allow for student visits, classes on campus, and other joint activities.

Figure 5: Top Themes Across Tour Stops: Community Category, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*Frequency among 11 tour stops' top three community-related themes (Mentoring was a top-three theme about school for 8 out of 10 tour stops.)

III. Key Themes by Tour Stop

A. Chicago

Overview

- 75 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were VOYCES, Elev8, Mivka Youth Challenge, and the Young People's Project.
- Figure 6 illustrates the frequency with which students at the Chicago tour stop remarked on each of the leading themes.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Chicago said they are concerned about the quality of teaching. They would like more motivation and encouragement from teachers.
 - *"Students need more encouragement, teachers give up on students and they need to set a higher bar."*
 - *"Teachers with seniority might not always be motivating. Newer teachers with more motivation were let go, so now there are more classes that are not motivating."*
- Students in Chicago expressed that college application and financial aid information is hard to find for both students and their parents.
 - *"More workshops to help with applying for college."*
 - *"Have school staff who can help parents understand the process—a college outreach resource person."*
- Students wanted to see more challenging curricula; many students said classes are "boring."
 - *"College prep classes are not challenging."*
 - *"Curriculum should be more rigorous."*

2. Key Themes: Family

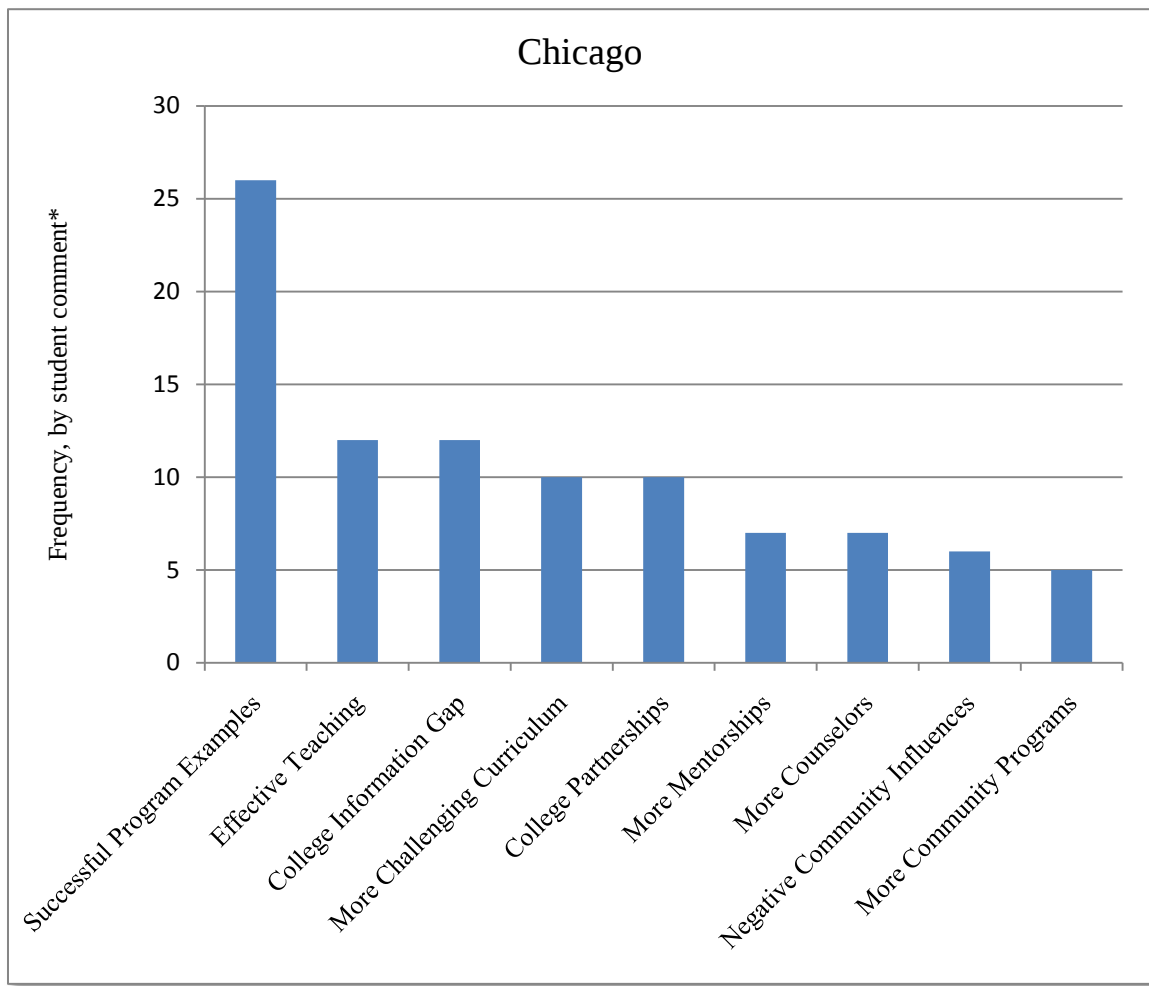
- Chicago students were asked about their motivations to go to college. Several students expressed that being able to provide for their future families and to contribute to their communities were major motivations for them to go to college.

- *“(Going to college to get) money in order to help people who need it.”*
- *“(Going to college) to be able to provide and take care of my family.”*
- *“Motivated . . . to become a positive role model and be educated to help (my) community.”*
- Students expressed that they found minimal support at home.
 - *“Don’t really get support—graduating high school is good enough (for them).”*
 - *“They gave up on me when I was having troubles in 9th grade and got kicked out.”*
- It was emphasized that students sometimes drop out due to pressure from their families to contribute to the family monetarily.
 - *“(I get) negative support—they just want me to work.”*

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students pointed to several successful college preparation and dropout prevention programs in their communities that work: AVID, APNC, VOYCE, KOCO, Upward Bound.
 - *“There was no support in high school, I dropped out two times but am back getting my GED and going to college because of VOYCE.”*
 - *“KOCO builds leadership opportunities, provides role models, and youth empowerment.”*
- Students said that they are motivated to go to college as a way to escape poverty, gangs, and dependence on welfare.
 - *“(Going to college for) independence and escape.”*
 - *“(Going to college to) get away from the violence.”*
- Students expressed that community programs need to reach out to students to give them more information about what is available.
 - *“Organizations should reach out to more schools.”*

Figure 6: Top Themes by Tour Stop: Chicago, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*Figure reads: Students mentioned successful program examples 26 times and the importance of quality teaching 12 times in the roundtable discussions in Chicago.

B. Boston

Overview

- 150 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Boston Student Advisory Council, Youth on Board- BPS, Young People's Project, Sociedad Latina, YOUNG Coalition, Hyde Square Taskforce, and the Boston Area Youth Organizing Project.
- Figure 7 illustrates the frequency with which students at the Boston tour stop remarked on each of the leading themes.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Boston said they want more rigorous curricula and college preparation in high school. They want to take college courses in high school, and would like more SAT preparation courses, consistent meetings with college advisors, and reduced turnover in advisors. They would like college preparation and information dissemination to start as early as middle school and would like schools to follow up through college.
 - *"Students are pushed toward passing tests but not given college readiness skills."*
 - *"Need to be challenged academically instead of being given busy work."*
 - *"Why can't all high schools offer college classes?"*
- Students stressed that there exists an information gap regarding the college process in their schools. Boston youths stressed that the steps for college and financial aid applications are hard to discover for both students and parents. Students would like more information on general help for themselves and their families. Students wanted to improve communications between the school and the parents and make meetings more flexible for working parents.
 - *"Keep students aware of deadlines, due dates. Let students know what they need to do to apply to and enter college."*
 - *"Adults need to help students understand the steps to college."*
 - *"If we succeed everyone takes credit—if we fail no one is responsible."*
- Building relationships with teachers and advisors over the entire high school career is important to Boston students. Youths reported that they need motivation and guidance from a consistent figure, which is made difficult by the high turnover rates for teachers

and advisors. Some youths reported that they relate best to teachers that share a cultural background.

- *“Teachers should mentor students—push the next generation to do better.”*

2. Key Themes: Family

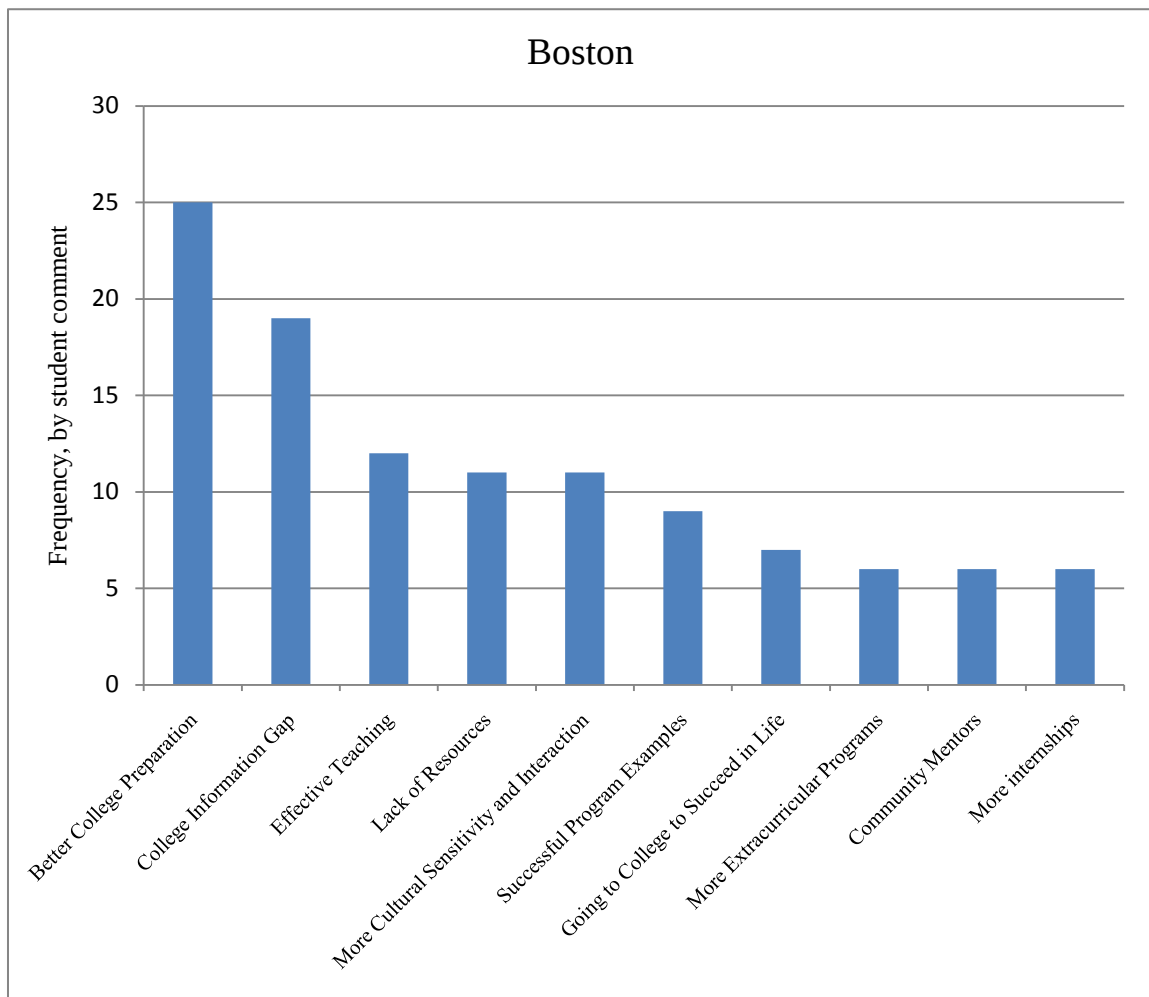
- Students said they are motivated to go to college so that they can be a role model for their siblings, family, and peers.
 - *“I’ll be the first to go to college and people will look up to me—I’ll be a role model in my family”*
 - *“I want to be a role model for my siblings, make my family proud.”*
- Students would like to see families get more involved in their children’s education.
 - *“Teachers can talk to my family more, more family involvement.”*
 - *“(Schools should have) more parent nights to help parents understand the college process.”*

3. Key Themes: Community

- Boston students said they believe that cultural groups should engage with one another in school. They stressed that cultural exposure helps to break stereotypes. Sensitivity to sexual orientation is important to them as well. Also, Boston students said that the curriculum should reflect students’ cultures and they relate more to culturally diverse teachers.
 - *“Let everybody know that you shouldn’t be ashamed of who you are.”*
 - *“Sometimes students’ cultures aren’t represented.”*
 - *“Some students are not sensitive to other cultures and races.”*
- Local colleges have outreach programs that Boston students feel are helpful, such as Upward Bound and Bottom Line.
 - *“Upward Bound helps prepare after school.”*
- Students in Boston would like more involvement of community mentors with students, especially those who share a culture with the youths.
 - *“(Should have) a mentor program for young men of color by men of color.”*

- Students would like to see more internship opportunities in their communities.
 - *“Schools must publicize internships and volunteer opportunities.”*

Figure 7: Top Themes by Tour Stop: Boston, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*Figure reads: Boston students mentioned better college preparation 25 times in the roundtable discussions.”

C. Los Angeles and Long Beach

Overview

- 150 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Californians for Justice, Inner City Struggle, Community Coalition, and UCLA Youth Research Group.
- Figure 8 illustrates the frequency with which students at the Los Angeles and Long Beach tour stops remarked on each of the leading themes.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Los Angeles said they are very interested in the effectiveness of the teaching they receive. Students stressed that they need motivated teachers who encourage their students. They said they need teachers "who care" and whom they "trust." Many teachers, students felt, focus too much on discipline. High turnover rates exacerbate the problem, students reported.
 - *"There need to be teachers to motivate you to not give up, not just who know how to teach their subject."*
 - *"Teachers play a major role in our success."*
 - *"Principal and other teachers (are) all very dedicated—it makes the students not want to disappoint them."*
 - *"There's a lack of help—teachers don't have enough time."*
 - *"Sometimes it feels like teachers are there for a paycheck."*
 - *"Teachers get laid off, and it is not fair because it is the good teachers."*
- Students in Los Angeles expressed that their schools experience a serious lack of resources, including books, computers, and money for enriching activities such as field trips.
 - *"History class doesn't have enough books, had to take books from another school. (We) had handouts that students had to buy themselves."*
 - *"Sometimes there are classes with homework assigned from textbooks but you can't get homework done because they don't have enough textbooks."*
- Students in Los Angeles said that their schools' environments are centered on security, which can make schools feel like "prisons." Some schools have bars on the windows,

barbed wire, and numerous police officers. Zero tolerance policies add to the harsh school environment, according to Los Angeles students.

- *"We need counselors, not cops."*
- *"We're treated like criminals."*
- *"Police shouldn't be there—Breaking a school rule isn't breaking a law"*

2. Key Themes: Family

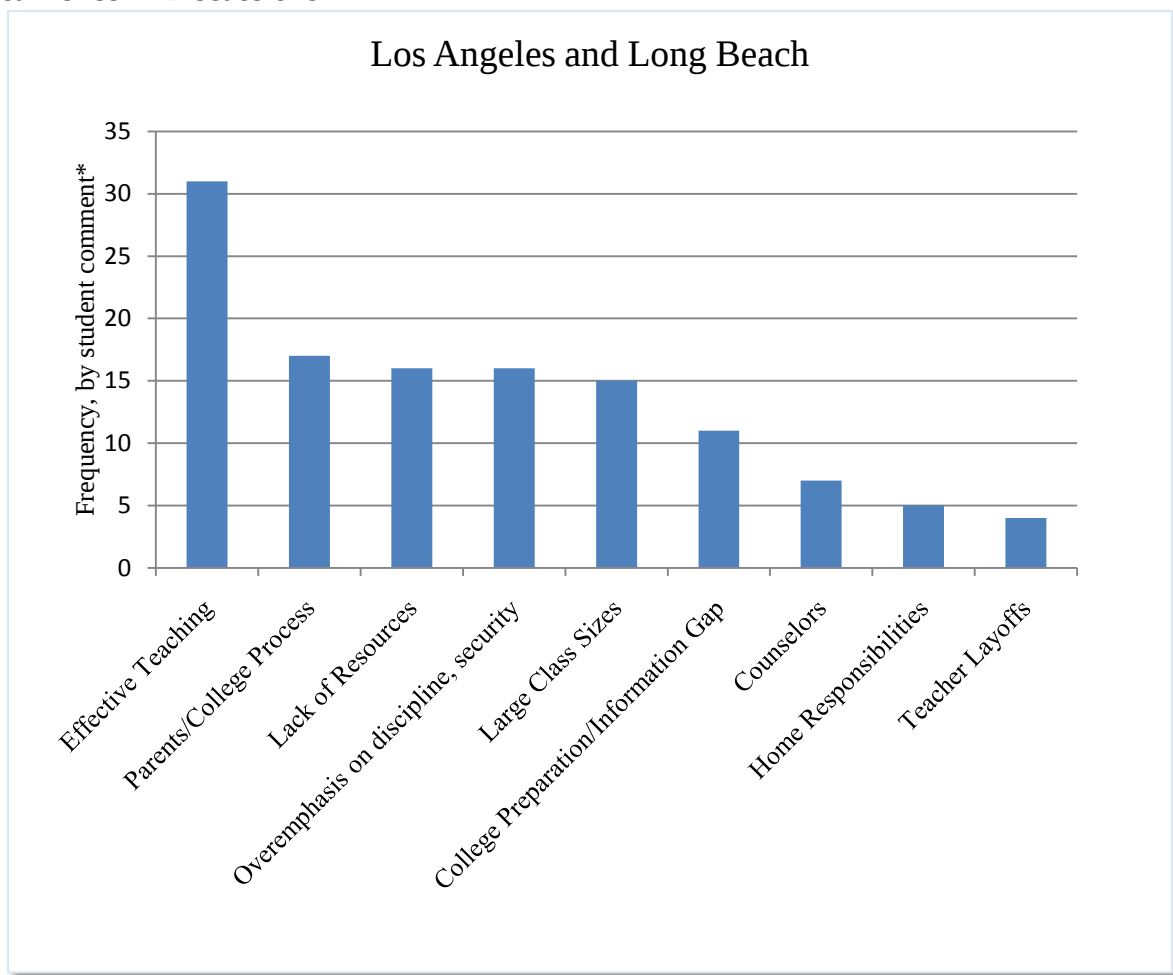
- Students in Los Angeles said that their parents do not understand the college process, because some of them did not go to college. Some parents do not see the need for college. Students said schools should communicate more with the parents about the process and why it is important and that parents in turn should get more involved in their children's education. Students think schools should offer workshops on the college process for parents.
 - *"Work is instilled in them . . . it's difficult for them to understand the need for college."*
 - *"I need my parents to understand why we are doing this, and why (I am) studying late."*
- Students stressed that it is hard to balance the demands of school and home life. Many students have responsibilities at home, including taking care of their siblings. Students also may have long work hours that take away time from their schoolwork.
 - *"(I) have to work, pick up (my) parents' responsibilities, it is hard to do extra-curricular activities to be competitive for college."*
- Students expressed that they are motivated to go to college to make their family proud, and sometimes to be the first in their family to go to college. They said they feel pride in themselves for their achievements and for being on the road to college.
 - *"Proud I'm the first one in my family headed to college."*
 - *"Proud of myself, I'm the first to graduate after four dropout brothers and sisters."*

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students in Los Angeles emphasized that schools in wealthier communities receive more resources than schools in their communities.

- *“Westchester High School textbooks are a month late, some schools get books right away, but not black and brown schools.”*
- *“Our school looks different from Beverly Hills.”*
- Students would like more help finding résumé assistance, internships, and jobs in their community.
 - *“(We) need more programs outside of school connected to careers—more diverse internships and apprentice opportunities like in nursing and engineering.”*
- Students say that undocumented students face more barriers to college.
 - *“Undocumented students find it difficult for programs that require I.D.”*

Figure 8: Top Themes by Tour Stop: Los Angeles and Long Beach, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*Figure reads: Los Angeles and Long Beach students mentioned high-quality, engaging teaching 31 times in the roundtable discussions.

D. Urban League Summit

Overview

- 400 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Urban League and the League of United Latin American Citizens.
- Figure 9 illustrates the frequency with which students at the Urban League Summit remarked on each of the leading themes.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students at the Urban League Summit said that they need more motivating teachers who are able to give more individualized attention. They would also like to see less negativity in the classroom and believe that teachers who care are important. They said that teachers' interest wanes over the school year. Students said they feel that teachers need more training and more support, such as senior teacher mentors and teachers' aides.
 - *"Teachers should be more experienced."*
 - *"Teachers need more support—mentors, and teachers' aides."*
 - *"Teachers can be trained better."*
- Students at the Urban League Summit stressed that a barrier for students to attending college is a lack of access to college preparation, such as rigorous courses, SAT preparation, information about the college application and FAFSA process, college visits and college fairs.
 - *"Schools should be better at getting information out."*
 - *"We should have more college fairs and college visits."*
- Students emphasized that schools need more motivating counselors who also collaborate with teachers. They also argue that they need more counselors per school.
 - *"You have to seek out help from guidance counselors."*
 - *"Guidance counselors and teachers should collaborate more."*

2. Key Themes: Family

- The students at the Urban League Summit felt strongly about the importance of parental involvement. Students reported that parental motivation is key to college success and that

parents should focus on talking about school, reading as a family, helping with homework, attending teacher meetings and practicing positive reinforcement. Online access to grades would facilitate improved parental involvement, according to youths at the Urban League Summit.

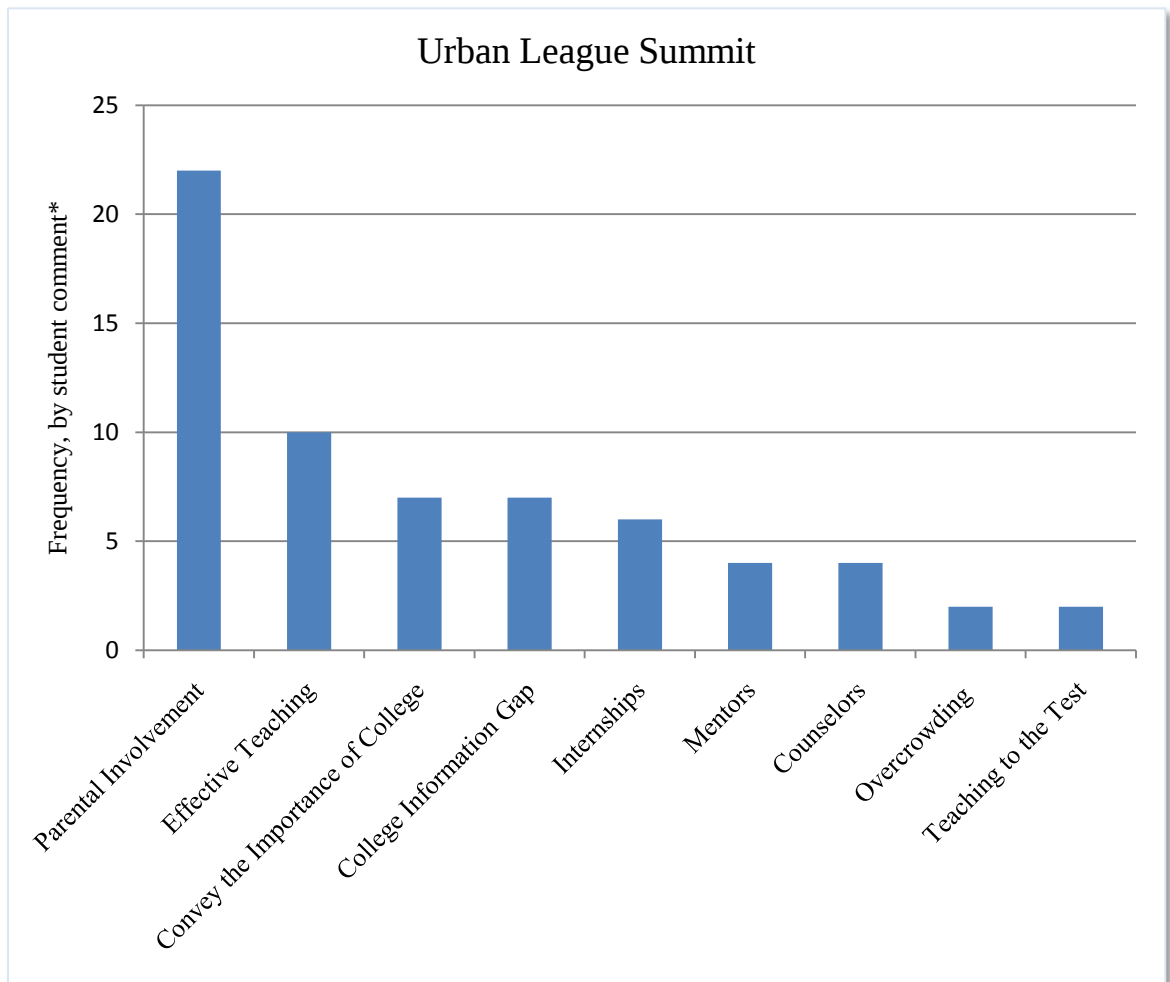
- *“Parents should ask how their (children’s) work is.”*
- *“Parents should be more involved in school—stay “on top” of students so they don’t slack off.”*
- Students expressed that parents and students need to better understand the importance of college. They argued that schools should communicate the importance of college from a young age. Students said that a parent returning to school provides a good example for his or her child.
 - *“Family members that have degrees is a plus.”*
- Students emphasized that problems at home can affect their success at school.
 - *“Home problems and issues may take away from school work and students might not be comfortable talking with their parents.”*
 - *“Better home environment is necessary for kids.”*

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students at the Urban League Summit emphasized that exposure to different careers through work-study programs and internships play an important role in developing their work skills.
 - *“Teachers need to provide more career prep.”*
 - *“Schools need to diversify career awareness.”*
- Students said that mentors from the community should help students, especially those students without supportive families.
 - *“(Communities should have) mentoring provided to schools through partnerships and affiliation.”*

- Students expressed that community service, service learning, and leadership opportunities for students are important and should be increased.
 - *“(Communities should have) more student leadership programs.”*

Figure 9: Top Themes by Tour Stop: Urban League Summit in Washington, D.C., by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*Exhibit reads: Students at the Urban League Summit mentioned parental involvement 22 times in the roundtable discussions.

E. Albuquerque

Overview

- 100 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Elev8, New Mexico Youth Alliance, and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP).
- Figure 10 illustrates the frequency with which students at the Albuquerque tour stop remarked on each of the leading themes.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Albuquerque emphasized that the most pressing barrier to college completion that they face is the lack of information about college at school and at home. They expressed that information about the application process, including college forms, scholarships, financial aid, and ACT/SAT testing, is missing from their school experiences.
- Students in Albuquerque said they believe that teachers should offer more support. They stressed that teachers should provide support by not teaching to the test, caring for students, offering one-on-one attention, providing information on tutoring help, and taking time to explain class work and homework assignments. Students also expressed that school administrators should take time to hire good teachers.
- Students said that an additional barrier to going to college can be a lack of confidence that some students feel in their abilities. Albuquerque students said that some schools do not properly prepare students for the transition to college, which causes students to hesitate to apply.

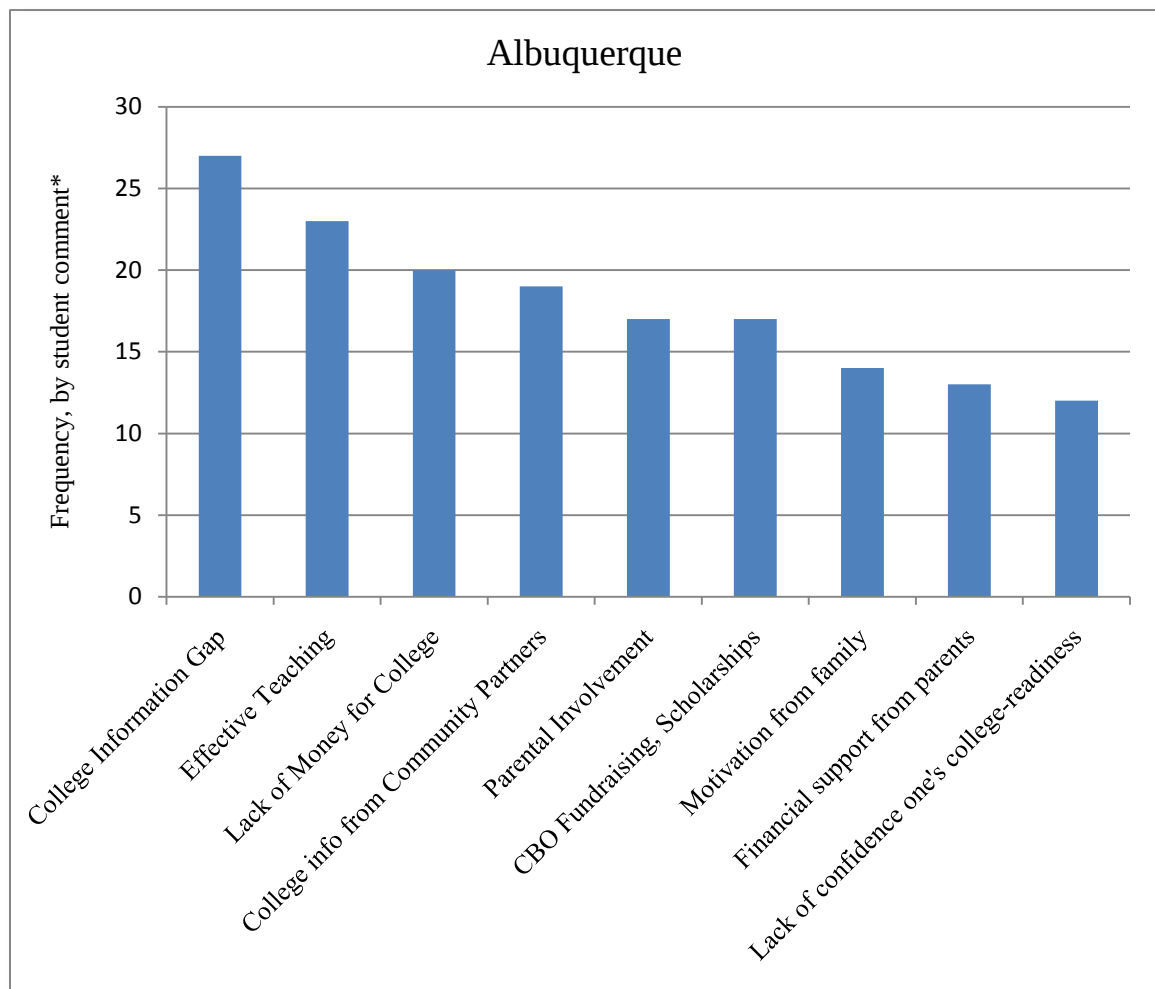
2. Key Themes: Family

- Students in Albuquerque expressed that a barrier they face getting to college is a lack of money. Students have limited family income to support college attendance, whether for two- or four-year colleges or in- or out-of-state colleges.
- Students emphasized the importance of parental involvement, which includes parents providing homework help and teaching studying techniques. Students suggested schools provide homework-help workshops for parents to learn the importance of homework time and strategies for helping with homework.
- Youths stressed that parents need to motivate and encourage their children and to make education a high priority.

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students in Albuquerque expressed that community partners should provide college information within trusted community settings like libraries and community centers. The information provided should address the college application process, scholarships, financial aid, ACT/SAT preparation materials, one-on-one support, information for parents, and information on college for students who do not have citizenship.
- Students in Albuquerque said that community-based organizations should utilize relationships with businesses to fundraise for college scholarships.
- Youths proposed that community partners provide extracurricular programs by fundraising and writing grants. These activities should be interesting to youths and include their input.

Figure 10: Top Themes by Tour Stop: Albuquerque, by Frequency of Occurrence in Discussions



*For example, students mentioned the college information gap 27 times in the roundtable notes.

F. Seattle and Tacoma

Overview

- 500 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Flossin Media, Nature Consortium, Youth Media Seattle, and the State Office of Public Instruction.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Seattle and Tacoma expressed that effective teaching is important to them. They would like to see better teacher-student relationships, including better classroom management. They said that teachers need to be more open, students need more encouragement in schools, and that teachers should meet one-on-one with students. Seattle and Tacoma students said that teachers should check in with students at least once a month.
- Students in Seattle and Tacoma emphasized that discipline is an issue. Peer pressure to do drugs and join gangs is strong, but students said that schools should focus more on rehabilitation in schools instead of punishment. It feels like schools are more interested in kicking students out when what they need is treatment, students said. Students added that when students disrupt classes they are often just bored and need work that is more challenging.
- The students also said that college preparation, including conveying the importance of college, should start early on, as soon as elementary school.

2. Key Themes: Family

- Seattle and Tacoma students also emphasized that parental involvement is very important.
 - *"Parents need to check up on their kids to see how they are doing."*
 - *"Parents need to help us with our homework. They need to be home. If not, they need to provide us with a tutor."*
 - *"Parents need to stay in the game and do their job, and be a part of our lives."*
- Seattle and Tacoma youths also expressed that a positive home environment is very important for their well-being.
 - *"Parents need to not talk down to students, like "You are going to grow up to be nothing!"*

- *“Parents need to stop comparisons, they say, “I used to do this,” well I am not you.”*
- *“Parents need to tell us ‘I love you.’”*

3. *Key Themes: Community*

- Seattle and Tacoma students emphasized the importance of having a clean, safe, and positive environment to live in. They said that gangs and violence in their communities have a detrimental effect on students’ school lives.
- Students expressed that the community should provide more youth clubs, sports, and community center activities for youths to help combat the effects of gangs and violence.
- Students also stressed that mentors from the community can play critical roles in helping students achieve and go on to college.

G. Memphis

Overview

- 75 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Memphis Public Schools and the Envoy Project.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Memphis expressed that schools need more teachers to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio.
- They also said that bullying is problematic in many of the schools.
- Students proposed implementing numerous improvements in their schools, including better cafeteria food, more hands-on learning, and field trips.

2. Key Themes: Family

- Students in Memphis emphasized that the lack of resources and financial struggles in the homes of students were barriers to school success.
- Students also stressed that having a family that supported their education, through positive reinforcement and involvement in their schooling, was critical to student success.
- Students expressed that instability in the home caused by issues such as divorce, incarceration, and young parenting adversely affected some students' school life.

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students in Memphis stressed that the media portrayed their schools in a negative light, which created a barrier to success.
- Students expressed their concern about negative influences in the community, including the prevalence of gangs and drugs.
- Memphis students thought that mentors from the community were valuable assets for students to overcome barriers to college success.

H. Oakland, San Francisco, and Richmond

Overview

- 100 participating youths
- Sponsoring organizations were Coleman Youth Advocates, Californians for Justice, Youth Together, and Safe Passages.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in these Bay Area cities expressed concern about cutbacks at their schools, which have resulted in a lack of electives, textbooks, teachers, and counselors. There are not always enough books for everyone to take home. When there are textbooks, they seem outdated.
- Students in the Bay Area also stressed the importance of culturally relevant curricula and home-language-appropriate school documents.
- Students were concerned that counselors focus too much on discipline in the schools, even while bullying has become detrimental to school climate. Students expressed that they are not finding help to ensure they have the appropriate classes to graduate.

I. Newark

Overview

- 100 participating youths
- Sponsoring partners were the City of Newark, Abbott Leadership Institute, the YEES Center/TEEM Gateway, the Newark Youth Court, Education Reform Now, the NJ All Stars Project and TEAM Charter Schools.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Newark stressed that there are too few teachers and that classes are too large. Teacher cuts, they said, have led to larger class sizes. Students emphasized that schools need more certified teachers who care and are skilled at classroom management. They offered that better teacher evaluations might help. Newark youths said that some teachers teach to the test and do not push students past the point of passing the test. They added that teachers' aides might help alleviate some of these issues.
 - *"Classrooms are too large; too many teachers have been cut."*
 - *"Boundaries aren't set and teachers do not enforce learning."*
- Students in Newark said that funding cuts have reduced resources available in schools, including textbooks and science materials. The buildings fall into disrepair and languish in poor condition, they said.
 - *"There's an issue with school cleanliness."*
 - *"Fix broken things in schools – immediately!"*
- They also were concerned about the lack of guidance regarding the college process and lack of ACT tutoring programs.
 - *"(Should have) college fairs to show choices and path, direction."*

2. Key Themes: Family

- Newark youths stressed that issues at home and outside of school affect school performance; drug use, lack of support, pregnancy, job loss, homelessness, gangs, and the need to financially support one's family push students out of school.

- *“Children look for attention. It starts from the home, then community then school. If attention isn’t found, they drop out.”*
- *“Negative friends, drugs, and gangs are bad influences and students need to separate themselves.”*
- Newark students said that language barriers exist for some families and that they need culture-friendly information for families to understand the importance of college.
 - *“(Need) multicultural . . . and bilingual info sessions for parents.”*
 - *“(Need) ESL classes for parents.”*
- Newark youths indicated that more communication between schools and parents would contribute to student success, and that parents should more actively engage in their schooling.
 - *“Schools need to call the parents more.”*

3. Key Themes: Community

- Newark youths stressed the importance of volunteer opportunities in the community for students and the value of service learning.
 - *“Have students volunteer after school within afterschool programs.”*
- The students also emphasized that colleges should reach out to schools to bring students on tours, assist with college preparation and applications, and even to host classes on campus.
 - *“Develop more partnerships with colleges and have college prep classes on college campus.”*

J. Philadelphia

Overview

- 30 participating youths
- Sponsoring partners were Youth United for Change, Philadelphia Student Union, and the Philadelphia Youth Commission.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Philadelphia stressed that violence is an issue in their schools but that current zero tolerance policies do not help. The policies encourage too many suspensions and create a detrimental, discipline-centered school climate.
 - *“(Suspensions) push you out of school.”*
 - *“It hurts – it is like they are pushing you out of school and not addressing the issues or helping.”*
- Philadelphia youth indicated that teachers in inner-city schools often are the least experienced. High turnover rates make it difficult to form relationships with teachers, which is a critical part of creating stability in students’ lives. Youths in Philadelphia said that some students take advantage of new teachers. They also stressed that teachers should be open-minded, try to relate to students, and be willing to stay after school. Philadelphia youths noted that once new teachers have developed enough skills, they tend to leave for schools in the suburbs.
 - *“The neighborhood schools are said to be training ground for new teachers.”*
- Students stressed that there are too few counselors in the schools.

K. Jackson

Overview

- 30 participating youths
- Sponsoring partners were Young People's Project, Children's Defense Fund, Mayor's Youth Initiative, and United Way of Jackson.

1. Key Themes: School

- Students in Jackson, Miss., emphasized the importance of quality teaching. Students stressed that some teachers do not take the time to provide extra help, and sometimes stereotype students. They would like to see more home visits by teachers, better classroom management, and more teachers "who care" about their students.
- Youths in Jackson also expressed the need for more extracurricular programs, including remedial math, test preparation, and tutoring.
- Youth in Jackson emphasized that school environments that center on "unfair rules" do not promote learning, and that an emphasis on "school spirit" would help attenuate these problems.

2. Key Themes: Family

- Jackson youths stated that positive enforcement, encouragement, and motivation from their families were very important concepts, in addition to creating a more harmonious family life and environment at home. Students in Jackson impressed that they want to see more family engagement in school activities and homework; they propose family study time, studying together, and parents checking their children's work.
- Students in Jackson stressed that when parents go back to school they provide a good example for their child.
- Some students in Jackson stated that they were motivated to go to college to "be better than their parents."

3. Key Themes: Community

- Students in Jackson reported that adult role models who mentor and encourage them to achieve are key components to college success. Youths also stated that dropouts should be encouraged to return to school by adult role models, not "talked about harshly."

- Students stressed the need for more libraries, gyms, and recreation centers in their Jackson communities.
- Students also emphasized the importance of community opportunities, such as jobs and service projects.

IV. Methodology

The summary of findings uses notes from 11 of the NYLT stops (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In no way is the summary a scientific study, nor is it a representative survey of our nation's youths. The summary attempts to reflect themes that rose to the surface at each tour stop and to report the themes that were most common across the stops. Tour stop notes varied in form from city to city; some notes are students' individually written ideas and some have been compiled by facilitators of student discussions. All of the notes represent the observations, thoughts, and solutions expressed by the youths participating in the NYLT.

The NYLT notes were analyzed and themes for each tour stop were defined. References to each theme in the notes were added up. The three themes with the most references in each of the categories of school, family, and community are summarized in this report for each of the 11 tour stops. Last, the top themes for each tour stop were pooled and used to determine the most common themes across tour stops.

Limitations

The variation in note taking across tour stops resulted in a varied amount of detail in students' individual comments and observations. Some tour stops, notably Seattle-Tacoma, Memphis, Oakland, Newark, Philadelphia, and Jackson, produced notes that did not allow for the ranking of student comments by frequency. For this reason, these cities do not have their themes' rank order represented graphically. Additionally, due to variance in note format, not all themes highlighted in this summary have corresponding quotes from youths.

Let it be noted that youths participating in the Urban League Summit came from across the country, and so the themes from it do not represent a particular geography. Additionally, the tour stops overrepresented youths from urban school districts, and so any evaluation of student feedback should be placed in this context. As ED continues the dialogue with the youths of America, we hope to diversify the feedback pool to include more students from rural, suburban, and other geographies.

Additional youth roundtables were held in Camden, N.J.; Chester, Pa.; and Baltimore, Md. Even though these discussions provided valuable feedback, the format of the roundtables did not lend themselves to being included in this summary.

V. Acknowledgements

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Communications and Outreach would like to thank the following organizations for their assistance in arranging the NYLT stops and for their continuing dedication to improving the lives of our nation’s youths.

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Coleman Youth Advocates
Community Coalition (Los Angeles)\
Council of Youth Research
Elev8 (Boston)
Elev8 (New Mexico)
Elev8 (Oakland)
Envoy Project
Flossin Media
Hyde Square Taskforce
Inner City Struggle
LULAC (National)
Mayor’s Youth Initiative (Jackson, Ms.)
Memphis Public Schools
Mivka Youth Challenge
Nature Consortium (Seattle)
New Lens
New Mexico Youth Alliance
Newark, New Jersey Mayor’s Office
Philadelphia Student Union
Philadelphia Youth Commission
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Wide Angle Media
YOUNG Coalition
Young People’s Project
Youth Court (Newark)
Youth Media Seattle
Youth Media Symposium
Youth on Board, Boston Public Schools
Youth Together
Youth United for Change

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