

THE SILENT EPIDEMIC

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS



CIVIC ENTERPRISES, LLC
WITH PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES
FOR THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THESE VOICES



UNIQUE IN THREE RESPECTS:

- Shares the **perspectives of high school dropouts** from across the country -- who they are, why they dropped out and what might have helped them graduate.
- Provides strong indications that the **problem is solvable**. We believe the vast majority of young people who drop out can go on to graduate if given the appropriate help.
- Provides **policy pathways** grounded in reality of what would help them.

ONE DROPOUT'S VOICE: JYNELL HARRIS

“I was one of the lucky ones. I graduated while others didn't. It shouldn't be about luck. All kids need a fair chance from the very beginning. It's not just about graduating, although that is an important goal, it is about graduating ready and giving kids what they need from the very beginning—support, compassion, and commitment”

National Summit on America's Silent Epidemic

MAY 2007

SILENT EPIDEMIC: BY THE NUMBERS

- Each year, almost **ONE THIRD** of all public high school students -- 1.2 million -- fail to graduate with their class. That's one student every 29 seconds.
- **ABOUT HALF** of African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans in public schools fail to graduate.
- There are nearly **2,000 HIGH SCHOOLS** with low graduation rates, concentrated in about 50 large cities and in 15 primarily southern and south western states.

DROPPING OUT: DRAMATIC CONSEQUENCES

- Dropouts more likely than High School Graduates to be:
 - UNEMPLOYED
 - LIVING IN POVERTY
 - RECEIVING WELFARE
 - IN PRISON
 - ON DEATH ROW
 - UNHEALTHY
 - HAVE CHILDREN WHO DROP OUT
 - ABSENT FROM CIVIC LIVES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES
- High school dropouts on average earn about **\$1 MILLION LESS** over their lifetimes than those who graduated from college.
- Dropouts are **FOUR TIMES LESS LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER** and, **TWICE LESS LIKELY TO VOTE** than college graduates, and represent **ONLY 3 PERCENT OF ACTIVELY ENGAGED CITIZENS** in America today

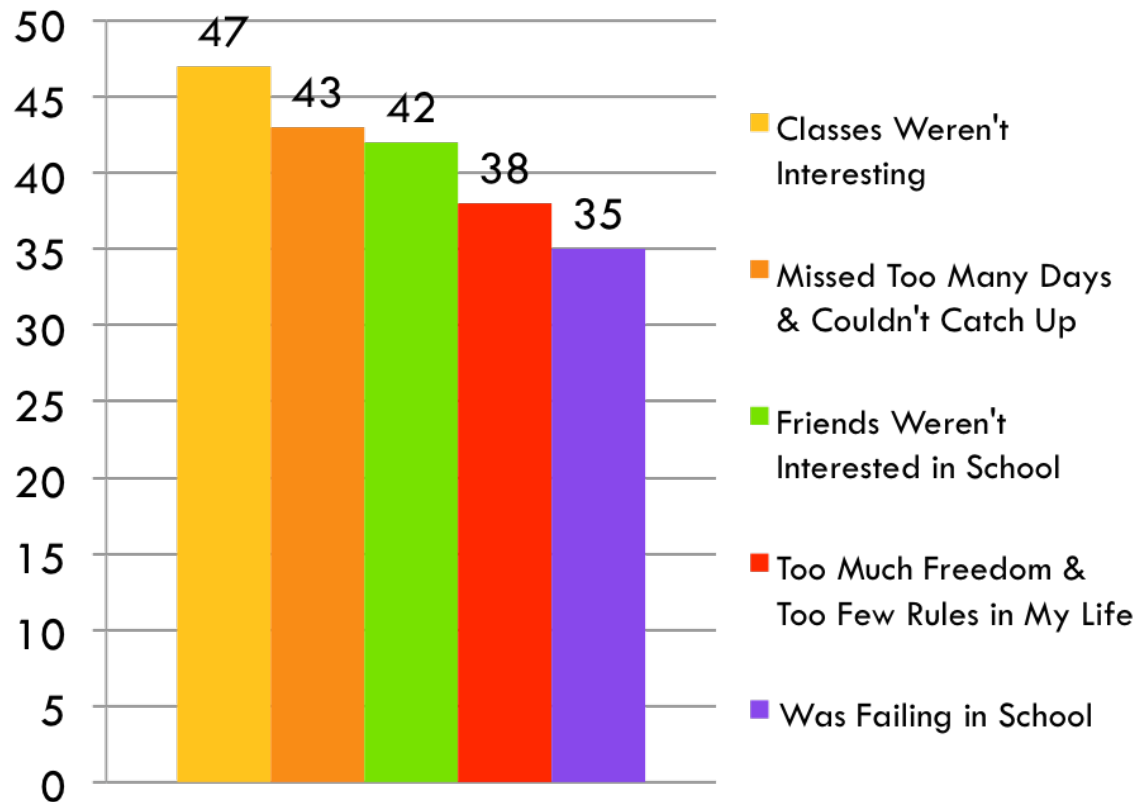
WHO THEY ARE: STUDENTS IN EVERY SCHOOL



- Big dreams, **ambition** to graduate, some college
- 88% had **passing grades**, with 62 percent having Cs and above
- 58% dropped out with just two years or less to complete high school
- 66% would have worked **harder if expectations were higher**
- 70% were **confident** they could have graduated
- 81% recognized graduating was **vital to their success**

REASONS FOR LEAVING SCHOOL:

TOP FIVE FACTORS DROPOUTS IDENTIFY



KEY FINDINGS: WHAT STUDENT VOICES TEACH

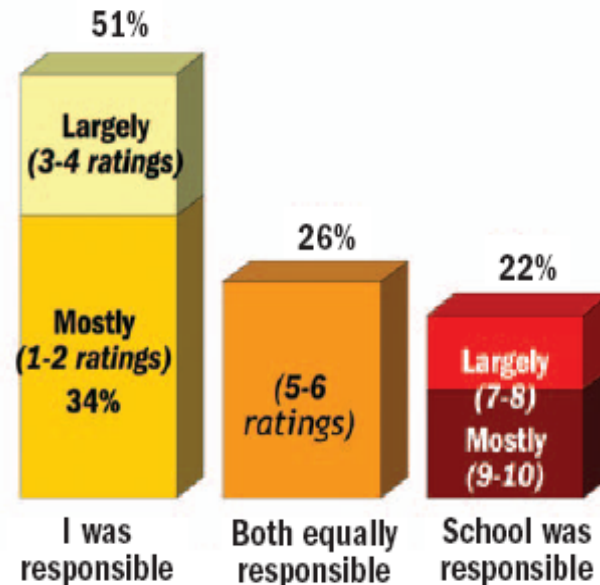
- ❑ Early alarm bells can identify with nearly **70 PERCENT CERTAINTY** a student in the third grade who will go on to drop out from high school – attendance is a key predictor.
- ❑ Students want **STRONG ADULT-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS** -- one-on-one attention and parents more engaged in schools.
- ❑ Only 47 percent of dropouts said they or their parents were even **CONTACTED BY THE SCHOOL** when they were absent; less than half after they dropped out.

DROPOUTS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF DECISION

Young People Accept Responsibility For Not Graduating

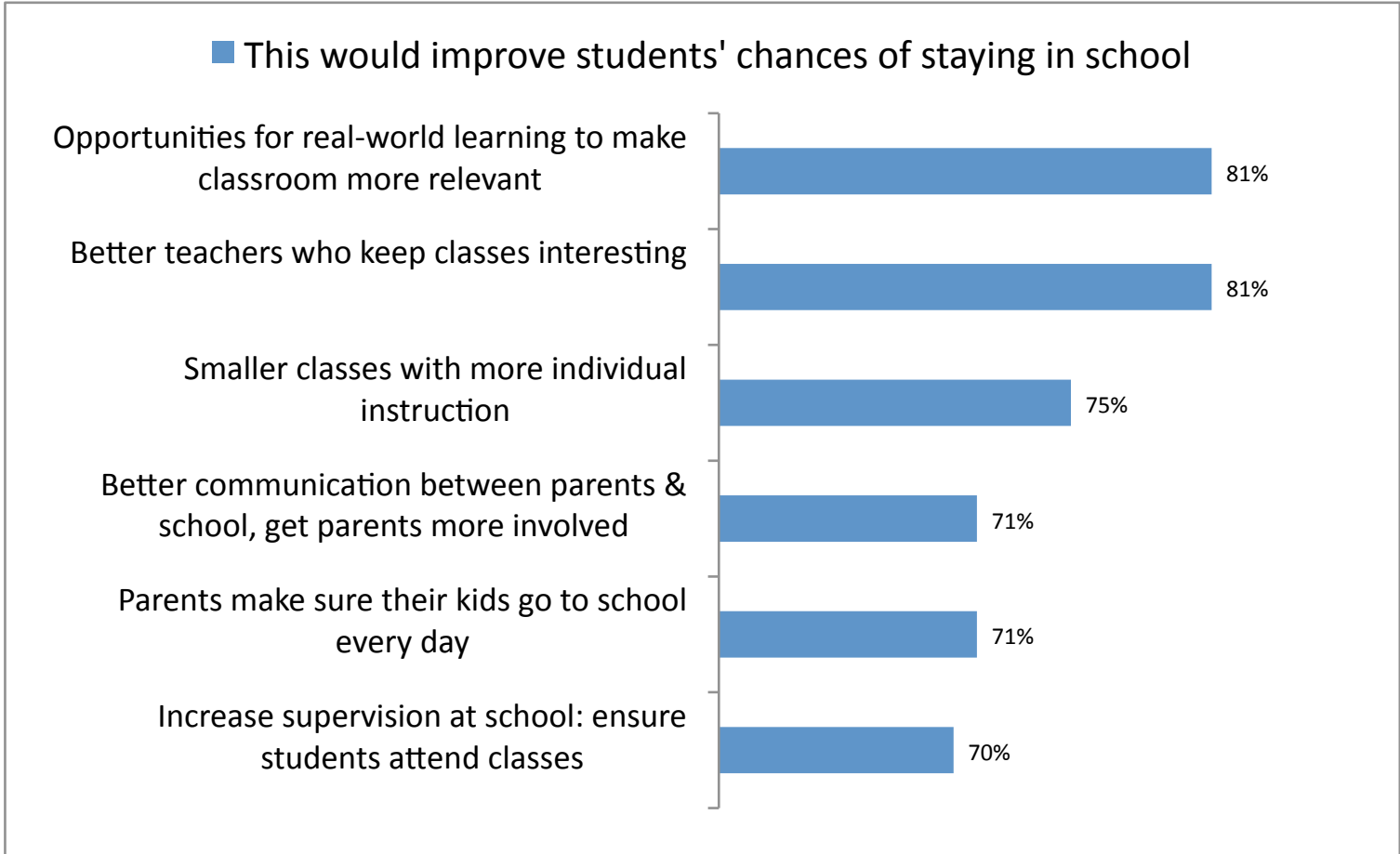
Who was responsible for your leaving school: mostly the school, mostly you, or both?*

* Ratings on ten-point scale: 10 = I did everything I could to stay in school/the school failed me; 1 = I alone was responsible/school did everything it could to keep me there



Mean Ratings	
All dropouts	4.4
Afr. Americans	4.9
Whites	4.0
Hispanics	4.0
City	4.3
Suburbs	4.9
Small town/ rural	4.1

DROPOUTS SPEAK: IMPROVING STUDENT'S CHANCES



POLICY PATHWAYS: IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



- ❑ Offer **DIFFERENT** schools/classroom experiences for different students, with a challenging and engaging curriculum
- ❑ Create **EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS**
- ❑ Engage parents in school by having them work with their children on **INDIVIDUALIZED GRADUATION PLANS**
- ❑ Mobilize **ADULT ADVOCATES**
- ❑ Utilize **SERVICE LEARNING** to engage students in academic areas where they're struggling

POLICY PATHWAYS: IN STATES

EXAMINE COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE REQUIREMENTS UNDER STATE LAWS

- Majority of states allow you to drop out at **16 or 17**
- The compulsory school age has been raised to 18 years of age in **20 states** -- from California, to Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Rhode Island.
- 22 states attempted to raise the compulsory school age during the 2007 legislative session, **3 of which passed**. Legislation is pending or has been re-introduced in many states currently.
- While raising the compulsory school age has been a proven deterrent, the underlying reasons students drop out **must be addressed**.

“When more than one million students a year drop out of high school, it’s more than a problem, it’s a catastrophe. Our economic and national security are at risk when we fail to educate the leaders and the workforce of the future. It’s time for a national ‘call to arms’ because we cannot afford to let nearly one-third of our kids fail.”

GENERAL COLIN POWELL