



Summit Partners: Austin Independent School District's Office of Dropout Prevention/Reduction, America's Promise Alliance, Austin Community College, Austin Voices for Education & Youth, Communities In Schools, Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce, Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Austin Independent School District -April 12, 2008 Teen Success Summit *FINAL REPORT*

The Teen Success Summit held on April 12th at Travis High School was an overwhelming success. There were over 700 participants (students, parents/guardians, business, and community stakeholders attended) approximately 85% of the participants were students, 10% parents, and 5% business /community stakeholders.

The event format consisted of the following types of discussion groups:

1. Student developed and facilitated workshops (Spoken Word, Theater Skits, Mural Artworks, Small Group Facilitation, Video Production, Youth Organizing, Youth Merchandising). The goal of student workshops was to encourage youth to take ownership in seeking solutions to the dropout crises.
2. Parent Groups- focused on how to discuss difficult topics and ways to create positive interactions between parents and their middle and high school aged children. The goal of the parent workshops was to help parents/guardians realize how important their words and actions are in helping students graduate from high school and pursuing post secondary options.
3. Business /Community Member Group- Lead by representatives from the Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of this discussion was to take the first steps in developing a collaborative plan of action to increase student school attendance and identify supports to benefit both youth and employers. The goal was to seek employer commitment to monitor school attendance, work hours, and offer incentives for good school attendance.
4. Austin Community College Certification programs, Austin Fire Department, & AISD College Readiness presentations were also offered to students and parents.

Workshop Outcome Summary:

1. Overall summit survey results from students, parents, and business participants were positive, with all parties indicating a desire to continue the conversation coupled with action. For example, in response to concerns expressed at the Summit by a large contingent of parents with students at the same high school, the workshop facilitator immediately held a follow up meeting with parents and school staff at the applicable high school.
2. Student, Parent, and Business representatives in separate workshops identified the following common areas of concern: Teen Parenting, Drugs, Gang Activity, and Teacher/ School staff negative relationships with students. Common recommendations included: Gang Prevention programs, Teacher training in relationship building and cultural sensitivity, Better Sex Education Programs



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Root Causes for Students Dropping Out

Root causes for students dropping out of school as identified by the students, parents, and the businesses representatives attending the Summit are as follows:

- **Relationships, Attitudes, Emotions, and Mindsets** - A significant number of the causes involved feelings and how people treat one another.
- **Learning Experience** - Students expressed need to have a meaningful and interesting learning experience for their future.
- **Students Working** - Supporting their families.

Stated root causes for dropouts that are **relationship, attitude, emotion, and mindset** based include:

- Teen parenting and pregnancy
- Drugs
- Gang activity
- Teacher/ staff/student negative relationships and fear
- Racism
- Disrespect
- Discrimination
- Not feeling accepted or worthy
- Feel unwanted
- Discouragement
- Poor behavior in the classroom – out of control
- Need friends, gangs, no connections in school
- Need a voice in the school – to be heard
- Negative peer pressure

Stated root causes for dropouts based upon their **learning experience** include:

- Students not being prepared for – college and work
- Feel no real learning and that there are better things to do
- School does not relate to real life
- Not being taught life skills-how to pay bills
- Not being taught how relates to life
- Need ability to earn money - internships
- Need more programs that are not boring
- Teachers and students talk more about their lives
- Interactive teaching

Stated root causes for dropouts because **students work** include:

- Supporting their families
- Some are old enough to work and do not need school



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Community-Based Action

In addition to identifying root causes, there were favorable comments by the participants regarding activities that are associated with Community-Based Action including:

From Synopsis of Students -We are put in a society that has set us up for failure, we have to change it

- We need more conferences like this, have a summit during the week at every school
- We need support from friends and family, people who love you

From Synopsis of Parents - Do more of these sessions and require parents to attend

- Learned the good & the bad that the school district has, but we can solve this with more family, community, and AISD staff support
- Need to have this summit every semester, in the beginning of the semester would be better- need to hold the session in the evenings so all parents can come
- Need to have teams of parents at each school to brainstorm ways to address the dropout issue
- Need to have more resources be involved

From Business Group – How can community members come together like we have today- to brainstorm the project? *Community members can get together every other week to discuss implementation of the project and if those who are on the implementation committee are committed to the projects' success it will work.*

From Parents Session 1 - Will the project help the schools and community continue to find innovative ways to increase graduation rate? *Yes, but only with good planning and follow through*

From Parents Session 2 - Will the project help the schools and community continue to find innovative ways to increase graduation rate? *If more people got involved and improved in most of its problems, students will most likely stay in school.*

From Student Video Group - How can people from the neighborhood or school or school district help plan the project, get it started, and sustain it? *People from the neighborhood or school can help out together at events to inform people with facts and try to help them be more interested in school and what it has to offer. I can be sustained by forming groups. Maybe support groups to help people when school seems to be getting extra difficult.*

Potential Projects from Business Breakout Sessions – Condensed

1. Internships - professional level careers
2. Community programs -students working together with the school, community, and business owners - a sense of unity
3. Professional sports organizations allow students to see administrative office functions of a team
4. Students that work are afraid to say they're having any problems academically because they know that it may result in them having less hours a week
5. Communication system - school, parents, and the employer - to know how the student is currently performing (Example was Goodwill program - guidance counselor and a staff person work together to know how the students are performing and if the student's grades drop, they are no longer eligible to work)



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6. Preferred employer program - a pact - they are willing to work with the school district to ensure student are successful in class (For example, companies would be given special recruiting privileges in reaching out to students)
7. Area businesses and sports team develop incentive programs for the working students
8. Ensure that students are only working till a certain time on the weekday (for example no later than 10 pm) and they only work a limited number of hours every week
9. Court system has students who are coming before the judge, enter a work to repay program
10. Coalition of businesses - partner together - help working student's who are contributing to their family

Lessons Learned:

- Seek to identify technological methods of determining anticipated numbers of summit participants
- Identify a larger, centrally located facility/ school to host this type of Summit
- Increase the numbers of Youth Facilitators & Adult Volunteers
- Logistical lessons- (better signage, increased registration tables, summit volunteers need to wear specific identifiers/ badges, tee-shirts)

Next Steps:

- Share the Summit final report with AISD Senior staff and Principals no later than May 30th
- Post the Summit final report on the Austin Independent School District web-site by June 13th
- Mail a copy of the summit report to targeted community stakeholders and summit participants (e.g., AT & T Foundation representatives) in June
- Schedule a meeting with applicable school staff, and external stakeholders to discuss and respond to student/parent common areas of concern (e.g., Gangs, Drugs, Teacher/Student Relationships).
- Review with applicable stakeholders consideration of the implementation of Summit participant recommendations (June/July)
- Continue efforts to promote school-employer partnership in monitoring and promoting student school attendance and high school graduation