

**Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force  
Youth Discussion Meeting Notes**

**Wednesday, August 8th, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
Providence, RI**

*This meeting was attended by 13 youth from Young Voices, College Visions, and Making Connections Youth Leadership Institute. Some of the youth were also involved in the Providence District-Wide Student Government, AS220/Broad Street Studio, New Urban Arts, Youth in Action, and other local youth organizations.*

***Discussion Questions:***

**1. What are the major challenges that you and your peers face in achieving success in college and the workforce?**

- ♦ Schools don't have enough resources, especially financial aid, to give lower-income students the chance to go to college.
- ♦ Lack of collaboration within the community—more awareness is needed. People have more power than the government and need to come together to create change related to school and the workforce.
- ♦ There are low requirements to get into college but tough standards when you get there. It's also difficult to get into good schools. The high schools in Providence don't prepare students for college level work.
- ♦ Students don't know where to go for help with scholarships, admission process, SATs, etc.
- ♦ Guidance counselors make mistakes (for example not sending in applications by the due date, discouraging students from applying to schools that they might get into, etc.).
- ♦ There are not enough guidance counselors. College information from guidance counselors is not adequate because there are too many students assigned to each counselor, but students believe that guidance counselors should be the ones to help.
- ♦ Lack of resources for students to pay for college.
- ♦ Lack of information, and many students don't know how to advocate for themselves.

**2. What are some concrete things that can be done that would help you and your friends to succeed?**

- ♦ More places like College Visions to offer guidance and support.
- ♦ More guidance counselors.
- ♦ More programs that offer assistance with college access.

- ♦ Providence schools are not improving fast enough—administration needs to know students personally for real change to happen. Intimidation and self-esteem issues are major problems.
- ♦ Teachers can guide students if there are not enough guidance counselors. Alternative school models like MET can better connect with students one-on-one.
- ♦ Providence—suspensions for skipping detention—reinforces habit of missing school.
- ♦ More Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings at the high school level.
- ♦ Making a stronger curriculum.
- ♦ Need more resources.
- ♦ Need effective teachers—need a chance to be educated.
- ♦ More hands-on and experiential learning.

**3. The Poverty, Work and Opportunity Task Force is already considering a broad range of strategies that could help youth and their families, but unfortunately the City can't do everything. Because of this, we would like your feedback on which of these youth-focused strategies would be the most important thing that the city (or the state) could do. [At the end of the discussion, youth were asked to vote on one or two issues that are the most important.]**

**a. Expand career exploration and development opportunities in after-school programs for high school youth. (2 votes)**

- ♦ Less trouble.
- ♦ More education.
- ♦ Depends if paid internships are available—if they cannot be paid internships, then they need to take place during school so students can work for money after school.
- ♦ AS220/Broad Street Studio—skills in arts, writing, and photography—good career fields.

**b. Expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) and career-related coursework in the Providence Public schools. (4 votes)**

- ♦ Hands-on or experiential learning.
- ♦ Knowing about Davies would be helpful as would internships being a part of school.
- ♦ More students would use it if more were offered.
- ♦ CTE allows you to study what you want to know.

- ♦ CTE allows students to focus their education, like having college and high school combined—students can have a major.
  - ♦ CTE is good preparation for work and college.
- c. Increase graduation rates and skills of high school graduates through: intensive interventions for students who are falling behind, making the curriculum more relevant and enhancing the connections between school and work, creating more alternative school opportunities, having an early college and dual enrollment program.**
- ♦ You have to make sure you have skills, even if teachers are willing to let you slide with a signature [i.e. some teachers pass students who do not do quality work].
  - ♦ Many students fall through the cracks—focus on youth first, not just numbers.
- d. Expand access to financial aid for college for low-income students. (7 votes)**
- e. Expand access to out-of-school programs that help youth increase their literacy levels and connect to jobs and college (like YouthBuild and Year Up).**
- ♦ So many students graduate with low literary levels.
- f. Reduce teen pregnancy through effective educational programs.**
- ♦ Everybody knows how not to get pregnant.
  - ♦ The ways in which sexual education is defined is a problem. Middle school girls have classes where they learn how to take care of babies and not how to prevent them.
  - ♦ Students taking “babies” home that cry doesn’t work to show students how hard being a parent is. Teen mothers could come in and speak to students to show them what it is really like.
  - ♦ It’s a choice to be a teen parent. Programs will not help, because students who have babies as teenagers feel that they don’t have much to look forward to.
  - ♦ Education and prevention that currently exists does not match youth conversations about sex.
  - ♦ There are some adult role models, but not many, and they often don’t tell you what it’s really like.
  - ♦ Many people don’t know how much babies cost. The financial perspective is important, as is knowing that having kids will take time away from your ability to get an education.
  - ♦ Reliance on help from the government is also a factor. Some students see this as a way to get aid but really it is a liability. Research in *Education Week* shows that parents spend \$1 million from birth to age 18 on each child in an average family.

- ♦ Most people weigh out options—people know what they are doing when they have a baby. It’s a choice they make.
- ♦ Support programs for youth about mentoring and education so youth “get it.” Lecturing does not work.
- ♦ Some people’s logic is totally illogical—they make bad choices that they think are good ones.
- ♦ Youth are very sexual—any teen pregnancy prevention program needs to acknowledge this.

**g. Improve access to intensive support programs for teens who are already parents.**

- ♦ It’s important to start right away providing supports. This is needed ASAP.
- ♦ Teens aren’t ready to take care of a child, they can barely take care of themselves.
- ♦ Education on money/financial education and on how to get back to school is very important.
- ♦ There are some teen parent support groups and awareness of programs.

**h. Institute a requirement that all Providence high school students participate in a proven effective financial education course before graduation. (4 votes)**

- ♦ Need for this!
- ♦ One of the most important things!
- ♦ It would be good to combine information about college loans with financial literacy classes.

**i. Missing issues.**

- ♦ Students know they will drop out before they are even teens—need to invest in young children (third graders know whether they like school or not).
- ♦ Students are not going to college with the proper skills. More access to dual enrollment programs is needed [many youth were nodding in agreement]. By trying out college classes when they are in high school, more students will see what else they need to do to prepare for when they are really in college. (3 votes)
- ♦ Increasing the availability of night school would make a big difference as well, especially for teen parents.