



Youth-Defined DETAILED Solutions/Recommendations to 7 Dominant Core Barriers to Achievement

Note: All of the following need to be understood in terms of a spectrum of needs among individual students as well as their cultures.

- * These themes were represented in all the Focus Groups
 - + These themes were represented in the majority of the Focus Groups
Appeared in March focus groups only
- (I) Internal motivation
(E) External motivation

I. Personal

Core Barrier 1: Negative Peer Influence

Solution: Enable teens to make strong personal choices

Goals: To create a system that fosters and supports youth initiative and accountability, personal responsibility, and stronger personal choices with an understanding of the long-term consequences, positive peer and youth-adult relationships.

Recommendation A: Create Advisory Forums (adapted and improved from CHS) for personal and systemic resources and support for a personalized and academically rigorous learning environment

- Forum Group Sessions to address personal issues:
 - a. Personal responsibilities, including decision making in education choices
 - b. Peer relationships
 - c. Adult to teen relationships
 - d. Drug & alcohol prevention
 - e. Stereotyping
 - f. Provide access to more counseling and social work resources
 - g. Train and require school personnel to identify struggling students and link with support resources
- Provide access to quality/Best Practices* school and community Mentoring and Tutoring Resources (*continuity of same Tutor & curriculum integrated tutoring)
 - a. Adult to teen
 - b. Peer to peer

- (Put in School Section??) Career/College Day with diverse speakers and set up like a MAP to learn of steps in the process and of resources
- Forums Bridge to Community Resources for:
 - volunteering/tutoring/mentoring/jobs/transportation access/etc. to equalize opportunities
- Personal Achievement Action Plan for Success: any form of periodic student planning (such as the EDP) needs to include goals for personal needs, academic needs, and extracurricular needs – including all options for student with long term education impact of student choices reflected, short term action plan for achieving goals and timely follow-through for review and adjustment (no less than beginning and end of each semester). Copies of plan and review should be sent to student’s teachers, counselor and parent(s).
- Assist in making all personal and academic resources accessible to students, interfacing with in- and out-of school resources, breaking down systemic barriers where ceremonial and making access more instrumental for students
- Role of Forum Advisor = Student’s Advocate and Ally

The above Recommendation addresses the following Youth-Defined Solutions to Core Barriers to Achievement from Focus Groups:

1. Minimize negative peer pressure

- Seek support & encouragement from peers, teachers, counselors, etc...
- Rise above the negative response of “acting white”
- Using outlets to get away/ reduce stress
- Being around motivated people (accelerated classes)
- Be nice to everyone
- Know who you are and be true to yourself. Know what feels right for yourself
- There should be more emphasis on joining a club
- Drug prevention/intervention program
- Mentoring Projects
- Develop existing and needed programs in school, community and everywhere possible that:
 - a. Reconnect the history of African-Americans to youth
 - b. Help youth find different motivations
 - c. Help youth become critical thinkers
 - d. Have successful diverse peer and adult role models
 - e. Help youth disconnect being successful with being white
 - f. Give academic support for athletes
 - g. Encourage relationships to be built in classes
 - h. Give youth a place to study after school.

2. Minimize external competition pressures

- Strive for self-improvement
- Living up to your potential
- Try your hardest to get your priorities in order
- Draw upon success from siblings or other role-models

Recommendation B: Provide accessible systemic support for increasing three-way (& four-way) communication between school personnel working with students and each student's parents or guardians (& community personnel where student is involved) for the purpose of supporting student choices for progress and success.

- Create ways for Advisory Forums to have 3-way (teacher-parent-student) communication to support student (i.e. general information to facilitate support resources for student would include knowing if student has computer and internet access at home).
- Online info-sharing of student progress between teachers, Forum Advisor, Counselor, Parent and Student
 - Include personal, academic and extracurricular updates related to Personal Action Plan for Success
 - Include grades (quantitative)
 - Add comments (qualitative)
- **Relationship building: (how ? doing what more than there is? BIG ISSUE is time, accessibility, familiarity & approachability in big system. Many parents are intimidated by big school and numbers of teachers just like their students? FORUM ADVISOR and parent link to FORUM – so Forum activities inviting parents? More? ?**
- Expectations should be raised, not lowered: DITTO – how? Link to Forum Advisor?

The above Recommendation addresses the following Youth-Defined Solutions to Core Barriers to Achievement from Focus Groups:

1. Minimize Social distractions

- Taking school seriously and focusing on graduation
- Set example for others – don't be a statistic / work hard
- Have your priorities straight (school/athletics/extracurricular/work)
- Don't allow romances, pranks, fights to distract you
- Avoid letting someone down

2. Stretch Student Expectations of Self

- *Parents advice / support / rewards (Getting into college)
- Learning process measured by effort as opposed to grades
- Believing in yourself
- Healthy competition
- Be smart and know drugs/alcohol bring you down
- Don't worry about what other people think
- Let it push you further; prove them wrong
- Parents, students and teachers have to care and take mutual ownership of education
- Expectations should be a raised, not lowered

3. Minimize Teasing for achievement

- Presence of goals / deadlines / priorities

Core Barrier 2: Stereotyping / lack of cultural understanding

Solution: Help teens develop understanding, respect, and appreciation for diversity

Recommendation C: Work with formal & informal student leadership in existing infrastructures to increase skills and knowledge for cultural understanding and minimizing stereotyping through peer to peer training and role-modeling

- Provide District-wide Leadership Training, facilitated through the Youth Senate, utilizing strong resources from corresponding student organizations at each school
- Provide to club leaders who, with some support, can train their members
- A series of workshops to break down stereotyping and increase cultural understanding
- Revamp/update and expand the Peer Facilitator programs in order to increase effectiveness

Recommendation D: Adapt and conduct Courageous Conversations/dialogue forums with teens

- Adapt adult format for and with teens and implement at each school
- Regular (bi-weekly) Dialogue on teen identified issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, economic background to increase cultural understanding and decrease stereotyping
- Include students from a diversity of student groups mixed up in bi-weekly sessions

Recommendation E: Increase participation in extracurricular activities among a diverse student population

- Conduct Club & Program Fair in the Fall (from Key Club to COE)
 - Have all clubs in one room to encourage diverse interaction
 - Allows students to recruit from a more diverse group
 - Conducted during Advisory Forums to maximize participation (and/or credit points allowance)

The above recommendations (Plans C & D & E) address the following youth-Defined Solutions to Core Barriers to Achievement:

1. Minimizing Stereotyping and maximizing Cultural Understanding

- *Parents, ethnic groups promote cultural understanding and positive intra-group relations/interactions to increase tolerance and comfort with each other
- Focus on your priorities, self-efficacy, and self-determination to break stereotypes
- Participate in diverse groups and educate others
- Respectfully confront people and talk with them
- Ignore stereotypes (racial, income, gender, peer grouping—wearing black, with bad grades); perceive yourself as an individual, not as a member of groups (to avoid) conflicting stereotypes.
- Clubs need to recruit kids from all walks of life
- Develop an advisory group of teachers, students and community reps (i.e.- action teams)
- Have more Challenge Days (Some say NO!!)
- Develop a sort of advisory group for high and middle school students to learn team building

II. School

Core Barrier 1: Lack of encouragement and support from teachers, counselors, administrators, ALL STAFF, (contract limitations and limited time during school)

Solution: Provide students with the needed encouragement and support resources from staff to be academically successful

Recommendation A: Increase mutually positive relationships between students and staff

- **See Personal-A-1:** Create Advisory Forums (adapted from CHS) and increase access to personal and systemic resources with support, including quality* defined Tutoring & Mentoring Resources; and bi-annual Personal Achievement Action Plan for Success, ensuring that each semester plan builds in and interfaces with support and resources needed
- **Cautionary Note:** Forum should not feel like a class; and Forum Advisor & Counselor need effective communication system for tracking students AND communicating with student and parent(s)
- Encourage & train teachers to periodically use icebreakers and surveys in the beginning of school or classes to foster interaction and engagement in knowing one another
- Teachers need time off from curriculum duties to spend with students to get to know them
- More Challenge Days (teachers and students together)
- Include relationship-building as a requirement in staff contracts

Recommendation B: Increase teacher accessibility

- Students need teachers to spend more time after school
- Place to do homework & get more help from teachers after school
- A different model of scheduling is needed that connects school staff with the students – i.e., block scheduling

Recommendation C: Increase administrator engagement with students

- Administrators can take cues from Dr. Williams & Dr. Edmunson as role-models for friendly accessibility (BBQ's, hallways, events, open door policy, personal notes of encouragement, etc.)
- Make it easier for students to make announcements and hang fliers
- Assign two more skilled counselors per Class
 - To improve teacher-counselor-student-parent communications and
 - Help training issues for new school
 - Use Role-model counselors with different skill sets for coaching other counselors
- Forum Advisor regularly checks on student's progress, including access to resources and success planning with student, and communicates to counselor, and student, teachers, parents, as appropriate for encouragement and support – enabling counselors to spend more time doing academic coaching
- Regular e-group email updates from counselors, principals and Forum Advisors to students and parents

Recommendation D: Increase teacher engagement with students

- Teachers need to consistently offer more constructive feedback to students
- Teacher, with help from college students, providing drop-in help after school/at school
- Offer service-learning credit
- Make classes and curriculum more interesting and fun
- Teachers fully explain content to students and students feel welcome to ask questions
- Teachers who push you don't let you fail; maybe give you a low grade, but then support you afterwards to keep pushing for success (so we learn to safely take risks and succeed)

Recommendation E: Teachers and counselors need to convey realistic expectations

- More consistency in same course curriculum implementation with mandatory department Meetings/trainings for teachers who teach same course to seek parallel difficulty levels and list differences where appropriate
- Course listing info needs to include:
 - How same courses are implemented differently by different teachers
 - Average number of hours of homework
 - How often tests are
 - Enough info to make good/wise decision for content as well as workload
- Announce tests X days in advance
- Have grading system distributed and displayed in writing each semester

Recommendation F: Reduce teacher favoritism

- Enforce equity policies or change them

Recommendation G: Classroom environments where all students feel wanted and included

- More dialogue
- More teachers with relaxed teaching styles as well as consistent, sometimes even strict policies
- Teacher training for inclusionary methods
- Cultural competency (teachers and students working together to learn about each other, their unique differences and commonalities, more sensitivity)
- Courageous conversations either facilitated by trained teachers or rotating resource persons among classrooms trained to facilitate
- Upperclassmen should help lower classmen adjust (i.e., year or semester of mentoring underclassmen as part of service-learning class credit? A peer mentoring class?)

Recommendation H: Teachers and coaches set positive climate conducive to positive peer support and relationship-building across differences, and encouragement for success

- Use icebreakers
- Expand academic achievement peer mentoring programs by and for African American males (ex. PAC @ Pioneer, MAC @ Huron) to include more students and the programs are less "exclusive"

- Scholar-Athlete award/recognitions, Breakfast of Champions, with a defined GPA the student gets a free pass to sports events
- Give money rewards and scholarships such as a \$1000.00 scholar-athlete award; news announcements, certificates, money scholarships
- Public recognition for success for many things (not just athletes)

Recommendation I: Welcoming classrooms/teachers engaged in student learning

- Activities and icebreakers to warm up the class
- Teachers need to balance roles, being friend and authority
- When calling on students for answers, and student gets answer wrong, teacher takes time to explain correct answer (and how it's wrong)
- Staff training for developing relationships between staff and students, and students with peers

Recommendation J: Increase regular communications with counselors and accessibility to information resources

- More information and counselor training for referring students to mental health resources
- More one-on-one attention from counselors
- Counselors and Forum Advisors need to be checking on all students' progress
- Have a minimum of two more counselors per Class in large schools
- Increase ability to assign same counselor to each student for duration of high school
- *Organize counselor resources*
 - Have a central information center
 - Advertise/announce things more often, longer, more effectively
 - Make going to career center mandatory
 - Have students go one day to COE, and have Intro Sessions freshman & sophomore years
 - Job and career fairs
 - More informed staff that understands and is responsible for sharing information with students

Core Barrier 2: Lack of understanding & sensitivity for cultural factors (religion, gender, ethnicity, race, income, youth culture, etc.)

Solution: Increase daily reflection of understanding & sensitivity for cultural factors (religion, gender, ethnicity, race, income, youth culture, etc.)

Recommendation A: Alleviate stereotyping and discrimination

- Look sharply at hiring positions
- Train and require use of more diverse teaching styles
- Draw lessons and inspiration from patterns that defy stereotypes

- Support programs by and for African American males (ex. PAC @ Pioneer, MAC @ Huron)
- Increase number of teachers with diverse cultural and linguistic background
- Staff must refrain from stereotyping students into categories (ex.. troublemaker, lazy, clown,jock)
- Student actions speak louder than talk about stereotypes; staff needs to encourage and support positive student peer role models (without favoritism)
- Have a program for African American females (ex. girl power), and for all females
- Build strength in existing programs
- Also see Personal section

Recommendation B: Increase staff understanding and respect for all students

- More professional development on cultural differences for all staff, ...???
- Bonding time
- Make it easier to talk to principals, i.e., monthly/bi-monthly Town Halls to give teens opportunity to talk with administrators and student body
- Administrators make effort to get to know students by participating in student activities
- ***Judgment based on sibling precedence***
- Teachers need to have high expectations of all students
- Staff must value each student individually, not based on siblings

Recommendation C: Increase reflection of staff respect and appreciation for youth culture

- **Increase equitable representation and inclusion of students for their input in policies**
 - Use Youth Senate Youth On Board resource/referral pool (students register/staff select reps)
 - More dialogueMore communication with students
 - More informed staff that understands and takes time to share information with students
 - Make policy and procedure information more available and seek student opinions and representation in decision-making
 - Make policy info packets available in classes, Advisory Forums, Town Hall Meetings, counselors, etc.
 - Seek and incorporate more student perspective
 - Poll student opinions, i.e. on school spending priorities (needed for resources) and when useful, let students vote
 - Make it easier to make announcements and/or fliers
 - More places for fliers
- **Students must be fully informed and have significant involvement in own education choices (with fully informed parents)**
 - “Free speech” centers, website bulletins
 - **More “leisure” books as well as recently published textbooks --- MOVE TO LIBRARY – schools?**
 - More access to college visits
 - The student needs to be owner of Personal Achievement Action Plan

- Counselors and Forum Advisors are central to fostering student ownership of education choices
- Teachers must provide classroom based options and engage students in choices

Recommendation D: Increase teachers' competency to aid immigrant students in facing social and language challenges

- More adult and peer support for immigrant students
- Schools need to be more accepting (hall monitors not so scary)
- Teachers, Forum Advisors, Counselors need more professional development to understand and help immigrant students (i.e. more teacher encouragement, friendliness, and offering time)
- Provide orientations for immigrant families (to become familiar with resources and steps to Access)

Recommendation E: Increase receptivity of all staff to all students and acceptance of dissenting opinions

- Professional Development for more social/cultural awareness of staff to all students
- Professional Development for value and ways to include dissenting opinions

Core Barrier 3: Lack of structure and firm standards (counter-productive/ ineffective policies)

Solution: Simplify and enforce policies and procedures for structure and firm standards

Recommendation A: Strengthen external structures and enforce rules with consistency (skip and tardiness policies, cheating, suspension)

- Simplify or enforce tardy policies or change them (i.e. get rid of Red Passes, just let students in and mark them tardy)
- Less school bureaucracy:
- Make information about rules more accessible and clear
- Easier access to administrative approval for such things as club activities, posters, etc.
- Teachers need to enforce policies
- Accountability should be expected from the community concerning reporting skipping Students

Recommendation B: Decentralize and Personalize Large Schools into Small Learning Communities

- Offer smaller classes and/or more desks in large classes
- Make study areas available, including for study halls and after school
- Longer lunch period
- Schools should start later or offer different schedules (i.e. early, late, and/or block scheduling)

- Provide longer passing time
- Language Immersion programs
- Structure for smaller schools within the larger schools without grouping students in ‘ tracks’

Recommendation C: Increase teacher accountability; district holds all staff accountable to approved principles and recommendations in this document

- More regular teacher evaluations by administrators, teaching peers, and students on academic teaching, use of diverse teaching/learning methods, cultural competency, positive teacher/student relationships, fostering positive student-peer relationships, engaging students in education choices, and other principles in this document
- Without dispensing of different teaching styles, provide more consistency of expectations among teachers teaching the same course

III. Community

Core Barrier 1: Lack of information about and access to community resources and opportunities

Solution: Provide students with the needed resources to be successful, responsible and knowledgeable civically engaged young citizens

Recommendation A: Provide more access to and subsidy for transportation with additional routes, including

- Make clear after school policies re: bus passes
- School District talks with AATA
- Bus money or passes especially for low-income kids and for those staying after school
- Better city bus system (more frequency after school and weekends, more extended routes directly to all libraries and routes to Pittsfield and Scio Township)
- School buses available for Stone students
- More parking downtown and/or donation of reduced parking for teens working or volunteering
- More and cheaper student parking passes (HHS)
- Low cost driver's education training through school/stipend, scholarship for driver's ed
- More bike trails

Recommendation B: Secure more community youth program funding and accessibility, including

- More business financial support for more youth programs
- Money to help kids use resources who don't have it (from the City and businesses)
- More financial support from the City and businesses for tutoring, mentoring, volunteer service, leadership and civic engagement opportunities, and teen risk prevention programs that implement "Best Practices".
- More scholarships for people who need them for community based fee programs

Recommendation C: Make more information about civic opportunities available and make resources more accessible with hands-on experiences and service-learning interfaced with academic studies and career planning, including

- Make school and community based programs more visible and accessible through Advisory Forum's and a Community Involvement Fair (perhaps with the Club Fair?)
- Long term volunteer projects as well as short ones
- Create ways the longer term volunteer projects can fulfill class/course requirements

- More financial support from the business community programs to extend their resources
- Start an outreach service for students who are interested in pursuing human service careers in social work, counseling or psychology **(?? with the goal of including all students in school, as well as to refer student to counselor/social worker/school psychologist??)**

Recommendation D: Make contemporary library resources more available and accessible, including:

- Start a 'Borrow a Laptop' program
- Partner with 'Wireless Washtenaw' program
- EVERY student should have daily access to the internet for school work – at school and at home.

Recommendation E: Restructure student schooldays to free up more time for jobs or participation in other community opportunities.

- Use block scheduling to make it easier for jobs and community involvement
- Avoid irrelevant or overloading assignments
- Coordinate test days & large assignments by department so more evened out over each week and/or quarter
- Encourage students to choose extracurricular activities & prioritize based on most interest and/or peers they want to be around and learn from

Recommendation F: Create a dynamic centralized system with strong in and back out information flow for jobs, including:

- COE Offices at schools:
 - Make more accessible, better hours, more inviting atmosphere
 - Good, well kept bulletin board for job & volunteer and internship opportunities (like Youth On Board) that are good job training, with contact info, etc.
 - More navigational website, and papers with web directions
 - More streamlined information, up-to-date
- Job hotline
- Job Fair to get introduced to resources, opportunities and the process – can be put together like a MAP
- Job applications FOR teenagers
- Employers can inform schools about jobs (short/long term, weekend and flexible weekdays), schools can prepare students for jobs. Employers can buy ad space in school newspapers, ad fees could help fund the program; and put ads in a teen section in AA News
- Some jobs are clearly career related and should be promoted as such and tied into academic side in school, somehow
- Monthly Job Days! Businesses looking for employees can come to school for an hour at lunch to recruit

Recommendation G: Create a dynamic centralized system with strong in and back out information flow for tutoring and mentoring resources that feeds in and out of advisory forums, including:

- Homework help Hotline
- More tutoring and mentoring places that implement “Best Practices”
- Require programs to have stronger professionally trained tutors and mentors
- Information from teachers for tutoring and back to teachers
- More help with English, SAT, and ACT to take the unknown and fear out of the process, like a “map” with purpose to equalize opportunities:
 - Packets district-wide so every one gets same info laying out what should be done for H.S. (also online with notes to parents when packets are given to students)
 - Packets of Info be student directed AND parent directed
 - Packets should include academic & extra curricular information, scheduling choices, etc., including tie-in to when “personal academic planning” is done and what parents need to do (see School Recommendations)
 - Make SAT & ACT tutoring resources available to ALL students; make class available
- Packets of ‘MAPPING HIGH SCHOOL’ Information Sessions & meetings with Freshmen and again with sophomores at beginning of year
 - Packets should be distributed by students at student-led Info sessions
 - Packets & Information Delivery need to be student centered for choices: ‘Choices in Academics,’ ‘Schedule Choices,’ ‘Extra Curricular Choices,’ etc.
- Subsidized to reduce costs for limited income families
- More accessibility to better (trained and there over time) tutors at better times
- More communication between school (Advisory Forum adult) and community resources, especially tutors

Recommendation H: Increase teen seats on advisory committees that make decisions on matters that concern them.

- Increase Teen placement on school and community boards or advisory bodies of organizations such as business associations, Chamber of Commerce Committees, Transportation Task Forces, City and School District Planning & Policy Committees
- City Council and its Citizen Advisory Committees involvement with teens – Use Youth Senate and Youth on Board as resources for a youth advisory group and teens serving on citizen advisory committees
- Youth On Board (YOB) program can expand its referral system for organizations and teens, YOB mentoring support to adults serving as mentors and teen leadership training and teen peer to peer support system

Recommendation I: Increase all forms of accessible and low cost information flow for students and parents, including:

- Monthly community newsletter
- E-groups that students as well as parents can sign up for
- A couple of TV screens (business donated) positioned with announcements running continuously
- Public TV for high school students – free
- All above policies and methods need to be introduced and implemented in middle schools in a manner consistent both with middle school student needs and with the program as implemented in the high schools.

Core Barrier 2: Stereotyping by adults (stores, police, media, others)

Solution: Increase cultural competency awareness in the community to reduce stereotyping.

Recommendation A: Increase dialogue regarding stereotypes and cultural issues within the community.

- Cultural Competency Summit for all adults interacting with students.
- Community awareness campaign concerning acceptance and stereotyping.
- Frequent open discussions to understand other ethnic groups' history.
- Have media be more responsive, encouraging, and open-minded.