



America's Promise High School Dropout Prevention Summit

LEAD Youth Engagement Handbook

Developed for the America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Initiative
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Dear Summit Planning Team,

As you may know, in March 2006, a report produced for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation declared that high dropout rates are a “silent epidemic” afflicting our schools, our communities, and our country. Each year, almost one-third of public high school students—and nearly one half of all blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans—fail to graduate from public high school with their class. Some experts are predicting that the dropout problem will increase substantially over the next 15 years unless significant improvements are made.

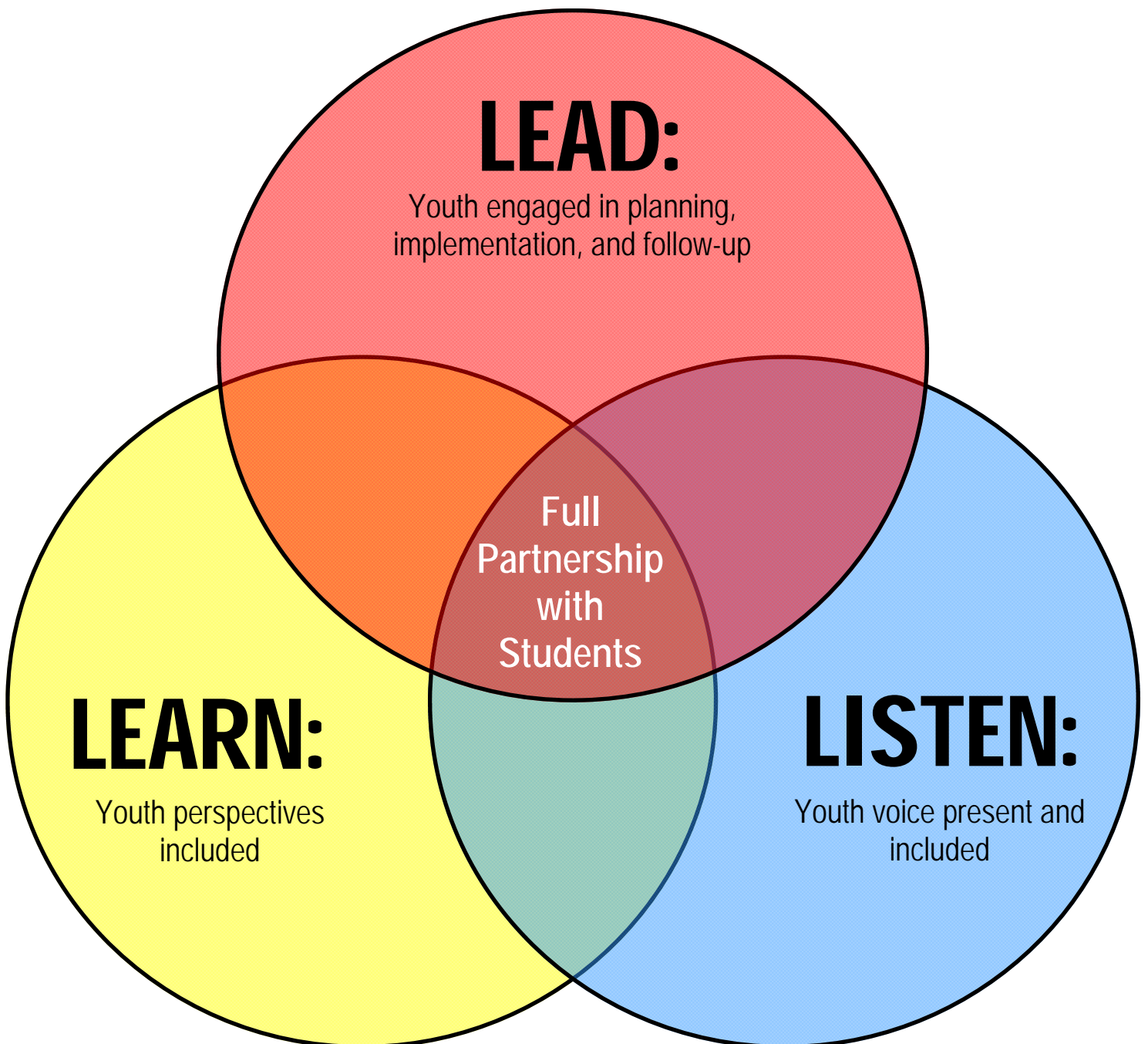
In most states, the status of our high schools is poor enough that turning the tide cannot be accomplished through piecemeal, incremental approaches. Progress can only be made through “big tent” partnerships that understand how to address problems with our schools at individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels. Individual students need motivation and support to stay in school; relationships between students and adults within school buildings need to be strengthened, and schools need to become places that students see as safe, relevant, and the very best path to a healthy, productive future.

A key stakeholder to addressing the dropout crisis is young people themselves. No one knows this issue as closely or with the same perspective as the young people. No other member of our schools or of our community knows the daily experience of starting at home, going to school, spending the day in a classroom, spending after-school hours in the community and returning home every single day. The youth are our sole experts on what it is like to be a student.

For this reason, we are pleased to offer you this series of strategies and tools to help you engage student perspectives in the planning and execution of your dropout summit. The materials are organized in three sections: 1. Learn, 2. Listen, and 3. Lead. Each section provides descriptions and sample references and tools to engage the students in your community. The tools in each section can be utilized independently of each other but will offer the most depth of student perspective if used together.

We look forward to continuing to work together to help solve our nation’s “silent epidemic”.

Our Youth Engagement Framework



LEAD

Goal: to engage students as full partners with adults in planning and executing your dropout summit.

Lead Strategy #1: Summit Student Advisory Board

Description: A Summit Student Advisory Board (SSAB) should be composed of a representative cross section of your schools and community. A manageable board should be in the range of 12-15 students and could be recruited initially to help plan the adult summit and/or Full or Split-day Student Summits (described in Lead Strategy #2 and #3). The SSAB could coordinate any/all other strategies discussed in the Listen and/or Learn. The board would need to work in partnership with the adult planning team and be given significant responsibilities around planning and implementation (as opposed to merely being given tasks to do). Additionally, the SSAB should have a very visible presence on the day of the summit as leaders and facilitators of the day. In order to ensure a diversity of students and voice on the board, adult partners will have to work with the students on effective communication tools (not everyone has internet access, or even a phone for that matter) and transportation plans. There should be clear and focused adult leadership in support of the SSAB to ensure mutual accountability.

Pre-Summit Work

1. At least six weeks prior to the summit, identify a group of students through schools or community partners whose life and/or experiences would be relevant to the dropout crisis and who would be willing to partner with adults to address the issue. Students need to understand the level of time and work commitment involved in becoming a member of the SSAB. A community-based organization could also be recruited as an intermediary for this work.
2. Organize the group and provide some initial training for students and adults working together around youth/adult partnerships and about the shared focus of their work on the dropout issue. This work should deepen the students' and adults' understanding of the issue and therefore provide some direction in the planning of the summit.
3. If possible, SSAB members should receive a leadership or transportation stipend for their time and commitment.
4. Plan the summit in partnership with the SSAB and define shared roles for facilitation and coordination of all aspects of the summit event.

Summit Event

1. Co-facilitate the summit with the SSAB and ensure their presence in leading all full sessions and breakout sessions along with adults.
2. See Listen strategies.

Summit Follow-up

1. The SSAB could co-lead and organize post-summit efforts in the Learn strategies.
2. Each summit location should consider the ongoing roles that a Student Advisory Board could play in action planning around your community's dropout crisis and consider constituting it as a working advisory board even after the summit.

Lead Strategy #2: Split-day Youth Summit

Description: A Split-day Youth Summit is a half-day, student focused mini-summit that runs concurrently with a morning session of a full-day adult summit. The morning would consist of students discussing and analyzing the dropout issue from their perspectives and then organizing their ideas and sharing them in an afternoon session of the adult summit. The tone and content of the youth discussion and breakouts should mirror the tone and content of adult sessions. For example, if the adults are not making posters or creating slam poetry to convey their ideas then neither should the students. The SSAB described in Lead Strategy #1 should facilitate this mini-summit with support from adults. Together, they should develop talking points based on the morning discussions as well as lead the afternoon report-out during the adult summit.

Pre-Summit Work

1. See Lead Strategy #1.
2. See Learn and Listen strategies.
3. Develop informational and marketing materials that describe the purpose of the summit and the importance of getting student voice.
4. Disseminate marketing and registration materials through schools and community-based groups and utilize local leadership and leverage to ensure that students from all public schools are present.
5. Assess registration numbers and begin direct and targeted recruiting to fill school, racial, ethnic or other gaps in registered participants.
6. Plan the Split-day summit agenda and identify youth and adult facilitators for the agenda.

Summit Event

1. Co-facilitate with a Youth Advisory Board the Split-day summit with an emphasis on the same content and considerations that will be discussed in the adult summit.
2. Using a tool like the Wagon Wheel Facilitation Tool or other information gathering tools, collect the insights of youth participants.
3. Work with a team of youth and adults over a lunch break between summits to prepare the presentation/report out from the student summit to the adult summit.
4. Present student report out as core to the adult summit.

Summit Follow-up

1. Incorporate the recommendations from the student summit in ongoing planning and analysis.

Lead Strategy #3: Full-Day Youth Summit

Description: The Full-Day Youth Summit is a wholly separate summit that is ideally held prior to the adult summit. A Full-day Student Summit will allow students not only to offer the insights and preliminary analysis that happen during a split-day summit, but will also provide students enough additional time to develop specific recommendations for action. This level of youth engagement will provide valuable, specific information that will take the conversations at the adult summit to a deeper, more relevant level.

Pre-Summit Work

1. See Lead Strategy #1.
2. See Learn and Listen strategies.
3. Develop informational and marketing materials that describe the purpose of the summit and the importance of getting student voice.
4. Disseminate marketing and registration materials through schools and community-based groups and utilize local leadership and leverage to ensure that students from all public schools are present.
5. Assess registration numbers and begin direct and targeted recruiting to fill school, racial, ethnic or other gaps in registered participants.
6. Plan the Full-day Summit agenda and identify youth and adult facilitators for the agenda.

Summit Event

1. Facilitate (preferably with a Youth Advisory Board) the full-day summit with an emphasis on the same content and considerations that will be relevant to the adult summit.
2. Using a tool like the Wagon Wheel or other information gathering tools, collect the insights of youth participants.
3. Work with student participants to analyze the content from the morning sessions and organize them into concrete recommendations for addressing the dropout crisis.

Summit Follow-up

1. Incorporate the student recommendations in the adult summit planning and implementation especially considering the Listen and Lead strategies as part of the adult summit.
2. Incorporate the recommendations from the student summit in ongoing planning and analysis.
3. The Student Advisory Board could be developed for ongoing student leadership in planning efforts.
4. See Learn strategies.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Wagon Wheel Description
2. Proposed Wagon Wheel Questions
3. Sample Split-day Youth Summit Agenda
4. Sample Full-day Youth Summit Agenda

ATTACHMENTS: LEAD

Wagon Wheels Brainstorm

Facilitation Notes

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with National School Reform Faculty.

www.nsrffharmony.org

Purposes

- To stimulate lots of generative thinking in a very short time.
- To stimulate powerful thinking between people who might not know each other.
- To create a “vivid image bank” of a new idea in action to inform the planning process.
- To develop a sense of team with a common purpose.

Set up

- Four chairs back to back at the hub of the wheel and four chairs on the outer circle facing the chairs at the hub.
- Facilitator selects 4 ideas to explore.

Directions

Have participants bring paper and pen and fill in the seats in the wheel(s).

Ask them to take notes of both their own ideas as well as their partner's.

The people on the outside of the wheel will be moving one seat to the right at each rotation; people at the hub remain in their seats.

Explain that they will be working on one topic with each partner for approximately 5 minutes — i.e. they will work with 4 different partners during the activity.

For each topic have the participants reach a common understanding of what the topic means and then brainstorm what it would look like in action.

At the end of each rotation, ask each participant sitting on the outside of the wheel to rotate one seat to the right. After they settle down, give them the next topic and ask them to reach a common understanding before brainstorming.

Going Deeper

Have participants pick their favorite ideas for each topic and write them down on post-its. Make sure they label the top of each post-it.

Put large flip chart sheets with the topic title on the top around the room and have participants post their favorite ideas on the appropriate sheet.

Create focus groups to further explore a specific topic and to plan how to put the powerful ideas into action.

SAMPLE WAGON WHEEL QUESTIONS (4 Ideas to Explore)

1. **Student Motivation:** Think of a time when you were motivated to learn. What was it about this experience that motivated you?

2. **Dropout Rates:** In your opinion, what are the main root causes why so many students are dropping out of school?

3. **School Improvement:** What can your school do to improve the graduation rate?

4. **Student Engagement:** What role can students play in improving the graduation rate?

SAMPLE SPLIT-DAY YOUTH SUMMIT AGENDA

Registration and Light Breakfast: 8-8:45

Total Summit Time: (8:45 - 11:30) 2h 45min

I. Introductions and Icebreaker (20 min)

This should be given a reasonable amount of time as a means of the youth to open up and start to feel comfortable to speak openly for the rest of the time (this feeling of purpose and connection and openness will make or break the process).

II. Setting the tone, defining the purpose and making the challenge (10 min)

The day should be framed by a youth speaker who talks about the importance of the day and the need for student input and working together with adults.

III. Setting the Norms (10 min)

See Sample Norms

IV. Presentation of the facts (15 min)

A brief reporting on the data related to dropouts or other relevant local data. This must be brief and clearly framed in the context of the previous section's challenge. The data will be important grounding for the dialogue of the day.

BREAK and Transition to Breakout Sessions (15 min)

V. Breakout Sessions: Information Gathering and Discussion (75 minutes)

Breakout sessions should be focused on gathering student input around identifying and addressing the core issues related to the dropout summit. See the Wagon Wheel attachment as an effective strategy for gathering this information. Multiple breakout session topics can be offered with students attending two different topics. This could still be accomplished in the sample time frame or you could extend the breakout session time allotment.

VI. Report Out with All Attendees (20 min)

2 students, possibly student facilitators or Student Advisory Board members, summarize the ideas from the breakout session and present 2-3 key findings to the summit participants.

VII. Closing Remarks (5 min)

One student wraps up the day, thanks everyone for participating and offers some insight into the next steps for the work.

At the end of the Split-day Student Summit, which runs concurrently with an adult summit, the students who share in the Report Out should prepare for their role in sharing the results of the student summit in the afternoon of the adult summit. This is most effective if these students present as a panel that is moderated by an adult who can help frame the morning with them.

SAMPLE FULL-DAY YOUTH SUMMIT AGENDA

Registration and Light Breakfast: 8-8:45

Total Summit Time: (8:45 – 2:15)

- VIII. **Introductions and Icebreaker** (20 min)
This should be given a reasonable amount of time as a means of the youth to open up and start to feel comfortable to speak openly for the rest of the time (this feeling of purpose and connection and openness will make or break the process).
- IX. **Setting the tone, defining the purpose and making the challenge** (10 min)
The day should be framed by a youth speaker who talks about the importance of the day and the need for student input and working together with adults.
- X. **Setting the Norms** (15 min)
See Sample Norms
- XI. **Presentation of the facts** (15 min)
A brief reporting on the data related to dropouts or other relevant local data. This must be brief and clearly framed in the context of the previous section's challenge. The data will be important grounding for the dialogue of the day.

BREAK and Transition to Breakout Sessions (15 min)

- XII. **Breakout Session I: Information Gathering and Discussion** (60 minutes)
Breakout sessions should be focused on gathering student input around identifying and addressing the core issues related to the dropout summit. See the Wagon Wheel attachment as an effective strategy for gathering this information.

LUNCH (45 Min) 11:00

- XIII. **Breakout Session II: Information Gathering and Discussion** (60 minutes)
- XIV. **Response Mapping and Action Steps:** (45 min)
Students should return after lunch to their last breakout session room and begin to work to identify 4-5 themes or key areas of focus from the morning session under which the many specific responses would all fall.
- XV. **Report Out with All Attendees** (20 min)
2 students, possibly student facilitators or Student Advisory Board members present 2-3 key recommendations to the summit participants.
- XVI. **Closing Remarks** (10 min)
One student wraps up the day, thanks everyone for participating and offers some insight into the next steps for the work.