CONNECTING YOUTH TO OPPORTUNITY:

HOW LATINO YOUTH PERSPECTIVES CAN INFORM A BLUEPRINT FOR IMPROVING OPPORTUNITY IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

Connecting Youth
MONTGOMERY COUNTY to Opportunity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Latinos/Hispanics now represent nearly one-fifth of the population of Montgomery County, Maryland. Clearly, this has implications for our schools, as Latinos/Hispanics make up more than one quarter (27 percent) of the total student body enrolled in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). And, for the first time in the County's history, there is a higher percentage of Hispanic students than white students among kindergarteners and first graders in the public school system (30.7 percent versus 30.0 percent). Yet in Montgomery County—a county that has had more than 30 "blue ribbon schools" recognized by the U.S. Department of Education since the early 1980s—academic success remains elusive for many Latino students.

Despite recent improvements, the status dropout rate (the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned high school credentials) among Hispanics nationwide is nearly three times the rate for white students and double the rate for black students. In Montgomery County, the dropout rate among Latinos is nearly 15 percent higher than it is for white non-Hispanic students. Low educational attainment is one of the leading indicators of youth disconnection. This is commonly understood to mean young people are neither in school nor working. And once youth become disconnected, they face tremendous obstacles to reconnecting and are at great risk of being socially excluded from the community.

Disconnection is also a leading indicator of poverty, which is increasing in Montgomery County. According to the Brookings Institution, poverty increased in the County by two-thirds between 2007 and 2010, with the labor market shrinking over the same time period. High dropout and unemployment rates and low post-secondary educational attainment rates have clear implications when it comes to the future Montgomery County workforce. The high rates further support the urgent need to examine how to connect Latino youth to an education that can create opportunity not only for them, but for all of Montgomery County.

This survey is the first of its kind to acknowledge that in order to achieve success in reconnecting Latino youth, the County must seek their input. It was

designed to understand what youth need and how they experience systems that are often designed for adults. We understand the barriers and opportunities they experience are critical to developing an education and workforce training system that meets their needs. Specifically, this study attempts to better understand three issues:

1. The needs and assets of disconnected Latino youth and Latino youth on the verge of disconnection in Montgomery County.
2. The predictors of disconnection from the school system.
3. The predictors of disconnection from the labor market.

Using trends identified through the survey instrument and feedback solicited in smaller focus groups, the youth voices outlined in this report emphasize that more deliberate and combined efforts are absolutely vital in helping all young people in Montgomery County achieve lifelong success.

Long-term success for the Latino youth of Montgomery County, Maryland requires positive change across a broad mix of youth and adult-serving government agencies, nonprofits, funders, and institutions. This kind of systemic reform is challenging, but it is not insurmountable. Other jurisdictions, including many with demographic characteristics similar to Montgomery County, are beginning to enact broad-based reform to develop community-level outcomes for underserved youth populations. This survey's findings and recommendations are meant to serve as a blueprint that informs the same kind of success for Montgomery County. These findings and recommendations provide a starting point for the County to begin working toward its goal of guaranteeing every young person the support, education, and training he or she needs to achieve lifelong success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the assessment study, Identity, Inc. and The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region offer three primary recommendations regarding policies, programs, and practices to prevent disconnection from school and the labor force and to assist Latino youth in becoming reconnected. While the primary goal is to stem the tide of—and ultimately stop—youth from becoming disconnected, we must also move deliberately to reconnect Latino youth with education and employment opportunities to put them on the pathway to more positive and fulfilling lives.

1. **MCPS SHOULD WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN TO LOWER THE LATINO DROPOUT RATE AND CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BY ADDRESSING THE KEY INDICATORS IDENTIFIED IN THIS REPORT.**

Issue: All students need a learning environment in which they feel welcomed, supported, valued, and engaged. Youth in Identity's survey who reported low expectations from their teachers and counselors during their high school years were more than three and a half times more likely to drop out of school. Half of the current high school students surveyed reported low teacher and counselor support and encouragement. While some progress has been made, key academic indicators continue to show that Latino students lag behind their white and Asian peers and will continue to do so unless significant steps are taken to engage these students and their families.

Recommendation: MCPS and the Montgomery County government—working in partnership with their employee associations, community groups, nonprofit agencies, and private funders—must develop an action plan to close the Latino achievement gap and increase the engagement of Latino students and families in improving student achievement. This plan should address some of the specific indicators mentioned in this report, including:

- Increasing cultural competency training for MCPS staff to ensure that teachers and other staff are better able to encourage and support Latino students and effectively communicate with Latino parents;
- Developing or expanding out-of-school programs for Latino students that will effectively increase their engagement in education, while addressing the social, emotional, and poverty-driven indicators identified within this needs assessment;
- Providing academic support and interventions for students, especially those with a grade point average (GPA) below 3.0; and
- Increasing efforts to improve Latino parental engagement so that Latino parents can better advocate for and support the education of their children.

Accountability: A workgroup consisting of representatives from both the public and private sector should work in partnership with MCPS on the development of and advocacy for this plan. The workgroup and MCPS should work collaboratively to:

- Present a plan to the Montgomery County Board of Education by December 2014 and advocate for resources to be included in future MCPS operating budgets for Fiscal Year 2016.
- Present the plan to funders, non-profit organizations, and other groups (once approved by the Board of Education) to determine how the community and funders can work with the school system to ensure the success of Latino students and families. The plan must include specific measures for benchmarking student success.
- The Latino community, working together with the nonprofit sector and other key stakeholders, will monitor the progress of MCPS and County government agencies in addressing the indicators that lead to Latino youth drop out and dis-connection by conducting biennial community needs assessments.

2. MONTGOMERY COUNTY MUST IMPROVE ITS WORKFORCE DEVELOP-MENT EFFORTS, INCLUD-ING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS IN SCHOOL AND THOSE WHO ARE NOT IN SCHOOL BUT LACK WORK-READY SKILLS.

Issue: Identity's survey results present a grim picture of the employ-ment prospects for Latino youth. The recently published (May 2014) Montgomery County Latino Youth Collaborative Oversight Workgroup report states: "… the crisis of dis-connected youth who are neither engaged in education nor gain-fully employed continues to plague the county." Seventy-seven per-cent of the high school dropouts in this survey had never received any job training. Among the high school graduates who were not employed, 62 percent had never received job training. The survey results reveal that Latino youth are woefully unprepared for the skilled labor market, which will be the growth area for employment in Montgomery County. Furthermore, as the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight affirmed in its December 2013 Youth and Work in Montgomery County report, "Connecting disconnected youth to education and employment are difficult tasks that require a com-prehensive set of services and long term funding commitments. The County's current commitments via its Positive Youth Development and Economic Development programs have been insufficient."

Recommendation A: MCPS must enhance and expand its efforts to prepare students for the workforce, including providing opportunities to develop skills and secure certifications that will prepare students to enter a career. These efforts should include:

- Improved career and technical education that includes defined career pathways;
- Expanded opportunities for apprenticeships and internships; and
- Career coaching and career exploration.

Recommendation B: Montgomery County must establish an infrastructure of comprehensive services and sustained funding to connect out-of-school youth to a career pathway. As recommended in the _Youth and Work in Montgomery County_ report noted above, the County should establish a task force to create a Career Pathways System for Disconnected Youth and charge it with preparing a report and strategic plan for implementation and evaluation. The recommended plan should include programs and services that support multiple pathways to employment and should be developed with the involvement of agencies such as Montgomery College.

The plan must address the affordability barriers that currently limit access to workforce development programs. The task force should examine effective workforce development infrastructures in places across the country in order to evaluate program components that could prove effective in Montgomery County.

In developing multiple pathways to employment, the taskforce should also consider the federal government's Registered Apprenticeships programs, which were recently examined in _In this Together: The Hidden Cost of Young Adult Unemployment_. The strategic plan should incorporate a culturally and generationally competent communication strategy to ensure that youth are aware of and can access these programs and services.

Accountability: Participants in the above-noted task force should include, but not be limited to: representatives from Montgomery County businesses and trades, Montgomery College, Montgomery County Public Schools, nonprofit organizations, and residents. In-school and out-of-school youth, the primary beneficiaries of the strategic plan, must also be part of the development of any strategies that will be advanced. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation _Youth and Work_ policy report points out, "Young people need to design what works for them, and they can provide crucial advice on how to do that effectively."

The youth workforce strategic plan must include specific markers and milestones, which will allow the Latino community and other stakeholders to hold the systems accountable for advancing.

3. **THE NONPROFIT SECTOR, COUNTY GOVERNMENT, AND MCPS SHOULD ASSIST WITH PROVIDING AVENUES TO HELP STRENGTHEN THE ABILITY OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY PARENTS, TO INCREASE THEIR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT THEM IN THEIR EFFORTS TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

Issue: Because of poor English language skills, lack of knowledge of the system, fear of repercussions, and cultural/social isolation, the Latino community is not sufficiently involved in the decision-making processes concerning issues and policies that affect access to a quality public education and ultimately affect their overall well-being. Latino parents often face enormous challenges that impede them from fully participating in their children's lives, including their education. As the report clearly shows, some of the greatest predictors of youth dropping out of school are the low expectations of their parents and the fact that parents or caretakers are simply not at home after school or during early evening hours.

Recommendation A: Nonprofit organizations, working together with the support of County government and MCPS, should offer opportunities to cultivate the leadership, skills, and collective power of the Latino community to exert their voice in decision-making processes that determine education and workforce policies, programs, and practices that directly affect their children and families. *The Alliance for Children and Families' Center for Engagement and Neighborhood Building* offers a blueprint for implementation of this recommendation. The model set forth by the Center allows individuals to identify their own strengths, aspirations, and solutions, in order to create long-lasting community change. Nonprofits cannot engage in this work without adequate resources. Therefore, funders should support civic engagement efforts that lead to system-wide change in the County. Supported efforts should be asset-based models of community engagement.

Accountability:

- The County government, MCPS, and the nonprofit sector, in partnership with the Latino community and funders, should establish a task force to map current civic engagement programs geared toward empowering the Latino community to engage in civic affairs, identify local and national best practice programs and initiatives that are culturally competent, develop the strategy to create and/or scale up civic engagement programs/initiatives, and define the funding strategy to ensure long-term sustainability. The task force must develop metrics to evaluate the success of such programs/initiatives. Examples of such metrics include: 1) Individual and collective participation in Board of Education meetings, budget hearings, and meetings of the County Council Education Committee; and 2) Impact on changing institutional or system policy, programs, and practice.
- The task force should present their recommendations to key stakeholders, including members of the Washington Regional Association for Grantmakers and nonprofit membership groups in Montgomery County, to obtain support for the task force's recommendations and financial support to implement the recommendations.

Recommendation B: Nonprofit organizations that support Latino youth and families must work in partnership with major stakeholders, such as the County government, MCPS, and Montgomery College, to develop strategies and programs to provide Latino parents with the support, education, and empowerment they need to improve their knowledge of and comfort with navigating the complex MCPS and Montgomery College systems, and enhance their ability to support their children's academic success.

Accountability:

- Funders must hold nonprofit providers accountable for providing culturally competent, evidenced-based services that effectively and realistically meet parents where they are.
- Funders must hold nonprofit providers accountable for achieving measurable outcomes in order to demonstrate their effectiveness and funding eligibility.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT MAY PREDICT LATINO YOUTH BECOMING DISCONNECTED FROM THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The following factors were found to be strong predictors of youth becoming disconnected from the education system. These factors were analyzed separately within their appropriate domains; they were not initially analyzed within the entire pool of variables used in Identity's surveys. For example, we first looked at all of the socio-demographic variables to determine which might be stronger predictors of youth becoming disconnected or dropping out of school. Then we looked at the variables in the emotional well-being domain alone, the academic performance domain alone, etc. The variables presented are all statistically significant.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DOMAIN:

· Foreign-born youth were over **1.5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as U.S.-born youth.

· Undocumented foreign-born youth were almost **5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as documented foreign-born youth. Youth who did not speak English were at an even greater likelihood of becoming dropouts.

· Youth who reported renting "a room" in the houses or apartments of other people were more than **4 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported owning or renting houses or apartments. Females who reported renting "a room" in the house or apartment of other people were more than **9 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as females who reported owning or renting houses or apartments.

· Non-heterosexual (bisexual, homosexual, transgender, or questioning) youth were more than **2 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as heterosexual youth.

PARENTING DOMAIN:

· Youth who reported having been pregnant or having gotten someone pregnant were almost **3 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts. This impact of this variable was greater on females than on males. Girls who reported having been pregnant were **4.5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts.

· Youth who reported living in single parent homes or without any parents were more than **1.5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth that reported living in two-parent/guardian homes.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING DOMAIN:

- Youth who reported having experienced symptoms of depression during their last year in school were almost **3** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who did not experience symptoms of depression. Males were affected by this variable at a much higher rate than females.

- Youth who reported having been arrested were almost **2** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who had never been arrested.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE DOMAIN:

- Youth reporting GPAs of 2.5 or lower during their last year in school were over **5** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth with GPAs of 3.0 or higher during their last year in school. Foreign-born youth were more likely to be dropouts if they had a GPA of 2.5 than were U.S.-born youth.

- Youth who reported having been suspended during their last school year were over **3** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who had not been suspended.

- Youth who reported they did not participate in extracurricular activities during high school were almost **3** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who did participate in extracurricular activities.

- Youth who reported they did not participate in extracurricular activities during middle school were almost **2** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who did participate in extracurricular activities.

- Youth who reported having repeated a school year were almost **3** TIMES as likely to report being a dropout as youth who never repeated a school year.

- Youth who reported spending fewer than five hours per week on homework during high school were **5** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported spending five hours or more on homework each week. Gender differences were marked in regard to this variable. Females who reported spending fewer than five hours per week on homework during high school were almost twenty times as likely to report being dropouts as females who reported spending five hours or more on homework each week.

- Youth who reported not having places at their homes to study that were free of distractions when they were in school were **2** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported they had appropriate places to study.

- Youth who reported poor levels of study skills when they were in school (did not set aside regular times for studying every day AND/OR did not take notes during classes AND/OR did not feel confident doing Internet searches) were **2** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported higher levels of good study skills.

- Youth who reported a lack of regular access to computers during either high school or middle school were almost **2** TIMES as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported full access. Within this group, U.S.-born youth who lacked computer access were much more likely to be dropouts than foreign-born youth.

SCHOOL INDICATORS:

- Youth who reported low expectations from their teachers/counselors during high school (their teachers/counselors did not expect them to finish high school AND/OR did not expect them to go to college) were more than **3.5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who perceived high expectations from their teacher/counselors. Among this group, foreign-born youth were more impacted by teacher expectations than their U.S.-born counterparts were.

- Youth who reported low expectations from their parents/guardians (their parents did not expect them to finish high school AND/OR did not expect them to go to college AND/OR did not expect them to be successful) were more than **3.5 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who perceived high expectations from their parents. Within this group, youth that did not speak English were almost **7.5 TIMES** more likely to be dropouts than youth that spoke English.

- Youth who reported having friends who did not do well at school during high school were almost **3 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported having friends who did well at school.

- Youth who reported low parent presence during middle school (there were no parents/guardians at home after school AND/OR there were no parents/guardians at home at dinnertime) were more than **2 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported high parent presence.

- Youth who reported that they did not feel safe during high school were **2 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who reported having felt safe.

- Youth who reported that their teachers/counselors did not support them during high school were almost **2 TIMES** as likely to report being dropouts as youth who felt more supported.

We performed a second type of analysis to determine which variables were most closely connected with high school graduation or with dropping out. The analysis revealed that, when all the variables of Identity's survey were analyzed together, **THE STRONGEST PREDICTOR OF A YOUTH DROPPING OUT OR GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL WAS GPA DURING THE YOUNG PERSON'S FINAL YEAR IN SCHOOL.** Among the youth who reported low parent expectations during high school, **THE NEXT GREATEST PREDICTOR OF A YOUNG PERSON DROPPING OUT WAS WHETHER OR NOT THE STUDENT HAD BEEN SUSPENDED DURING HIS OR HER LAST YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL.**

Findings are as follows:

- Youth with **GPAs OF 3.0 OR HIGHER** during their last year in school were more likely to graduate from high school. This difference was statistically significant. Only 17 percent of youth who reported GPAs of 3.0 or higher during their last year of school also reported they had dropped out of school.

- Youth with **GPAs OF 2.5 OR LOWER** during their last year in school were statistically significantly more likely to have dropped out of school. Sixty-one percent of youth who reported GPAs of 2.5 or lower during their last year in school also reported being school dropouts.

- For youth with **GPAs OF 3.0 OR HIGHER**, low teacher expectations during high school presented as the next greatest predictor of young people becoming high school dropouts. While 44 percent of the youth who reported low teacher expectations were dropouts, only 6 percent of the youth who reported high teacher expectations were dropouts.

- For youth with **GPAs OF 3.0 OR HIGHER**, after "low teacher expectations," the next strongest predictor of a youth dropping out is whether or not he or she participated in extracurricular or community activities.

- For youth with **GPAs OF 2.5 OR LOWER**, lack of a constant presence of a parent/guardian in the home after school or at dinnertime during middle school years was the next greatest predictor of a young person dropping out of school. Seventy-eight percent of these youth reported being school dropouts.

- For the youth that were not performing well academically, other important predictors of dropping out of school included: **NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH WELL IN HIGH SCHOOL,** having been suspended during his or her last year in school, having repeated a grade in middle or high school, and not valuing a high school education (i.e., do not see a diploma as valuable for a job or for the future).

- When GPA was removed as a variable from the data analysis, the greatest predictor of a student dropping out of school was "**LOW PARENT EXPECTATIONS** during a youth's high school years." Youth who reported low parent expectations during high school years were significantly more likely to drop out than those who reported high expectations from their parents during their high school years.

- When further analyzing the dropouts and graduates without GPA as a variable, among those youth who reported high parent expectations and yet still dropped out of school, the greatest predictor of dropping out was the **ABSENCE OF CONNECTIONS** with other youth in their school who were doing well academically.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEYED YOUTH

The following is a summary of the socio-demographic data of the Latino youth surveyed. The results are presented for each of the three separate surveyed groups: high school students, high school graduates, and dropouts.

Children who are not age 21 on the first day of school are eligible for enrollment in Montgomery County Public Schools. Despite the length of time youth are allowed to remain in the County public school system, 42 percent of the youth who reported being high school dropouts were between the ages of 16 and 19. Only 22 percent of the dropouts were 22 years of age or older. This demonstrates that many Latino high school dropouts are not youth who are "aging out" of eligibility to remain in public school, but rather they are youth who are abandoning school for other reasons long before the age cutoff.

The Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples had **significantly higher percentages of non-heterosexual (homosexual, bisexual, transgender and questioning) youth** than the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

		TOTAL (n=960)	HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (n=321)	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (n=330)	DROPOUTS (n=309)	DISCONNECTED YOUTH (n=152)
Gender	Male	59%	59%	56%	63%	57%
	Female	41%	41%	44%	38%	43%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	87%	87%	91%	83%	81%
	Other than heterosexual (homosexual, bisexual, transgender and questioning)	13%	13%	9%	17%	19%
Age	14 - 17	35%	76%	7%	21%	29%
	18 - 24	65%	24%	93%	79%	71%
Country of Origin	**U.S-Born**	**62%**	**60%**	**68%**	**58%**	54%
	Foreign-Born	**38%**	**40%**	**32%**	**42%**	46%
	El Salvador	*41%*	*47%*	*37%*	*39%*	34%
	Mexico	*7%*	*7%*	*8%*	*8%*	3%
	Other Central American and Caribbean Countries	*31%*	*26%*	*31%*	*35%*	45%
	South American Countries	*21%*	*20%*	*24%*	*18%*	18%

59% OF DROPOUTS REPORTED ABANDONING SCHOOL AT THE AGE OF 16 OR 17.

Not surprisingly, the country of origin of the vast majority of foreign-born youth is El Salvador. The Washington, DC region was a destination for tens of thousands of Salvadorans fleeing that country's civil war during the 1980s. Today, Montgomery County is home to the largest number of Salvadorans in the state.

IMMIGRATION STATUS OF FOREIGN BORN YOUTH

High School Students (n=114): Permanent Status 53%, Temporary Status 13%, Undocumented 34%
High School Graduates (n=101): Permanent Status 53%, Temporary Status 37%, Undocumented 10%
Dropouts (n=126): Permanent Status 46%, Temporary Status 15%, Undocumented 39%
Disconnected Youth (n=67): Permanent Status 52%, Temporary Status 16%, Undocumented 32%

■ Permanent Status (U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident)   ■ Temporary Status (TPS, DACA)   ■ Undocumented

The Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples had a **significantly higher percentage of undocumented youth** than the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

The High School Graduate sample had a **significantly higher percentage of U.S.-born youth** than the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples (p<.05).

The majority of foreign-born youth in each of the sample groups arrived in the U.S. prior to the age of 15.

WILSON AGE 17

If I go out looking for help, they will help me. Counselors have a lot of students to work with, though.

Wilson's family came from El Salvador, but he was born in the United States and raised in a Germantown, Maryland trailer park community with his mom and dad, two brothers, and two sisters. Wilson and his brothers saw their dad as their role model but, looking back, he realizes he could and should have been more respectful of his mom—especially as he came to understand in later years how his dad had mistreated her and how she had tried for so long to cover the truth.

School was okay at first, but Wilson's focus began to slip the summer of fifth grade, when he began smoking marijuana. Drinking started not long after. His friend's grandmother offered to pay Wilson $50 a month to wake the friend up each day to make sure they got to school, which motivated him to attend class. He made the honor roll once in seventh grade, and he still appreciates the interest

in him shown by his history teacher, who tried to make sure he stayed on top of his work. But his performance began to decline again in eighth grade, as pot smoking, drinking, and other distractions were still front and center in his life.

When asked whether he felt teachers and staff would be willing to help him turn things around, Wilson says, "If I go out looking for help, they will help me. Counselors have a lot of students to work with, though. I felt the drugs and the alcohol were going to help."
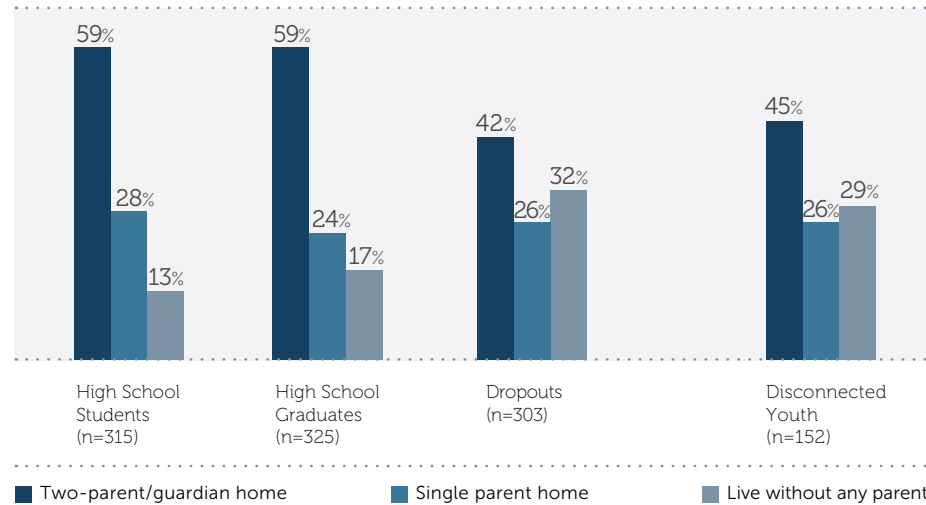
Today, at 17, Wilson says he has stopped smoking pot. However, while many of his peers are wrapping up high school, he is languishing in the 10th grade. He knows finishing school will be hard, especially as an older student surrounded by younger peers, but he is hopeful. Wilson says he is determined and would like to go to college—and maybe even go into law enforcement.

FAMILY LIFE AMONG LATINO YOUTH IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County residents are among the best educated in the nation. According to a 2007 study by the Research & Technology Center of the Montgomery County Planning Department, 80 percent of County residents have some level of higher education, and the Census Bureau ranks Montgomery County first in the nation for the percentage of adults with advanced degrees. The parents of the Latino youth in our study do not reflect these academic achievements: Only 33 percent of the high school graduate pool reported having parents who had at least some post-secondary education. For dropouts, this figure was only 14 percent. Many of the youth surveyed lacked a parent with a history of having obtained a college degree. Consequently, many youth lacked the support of parents familiar with the complex post-secondary process.

FAMILY COMPOSITION AT TIME OF SURVEY

| High School Students (n=315) | High School Graduates (n=325) | Dropouts (n=303) | Disconnected Youth (n=152) |

- ■ Two-parent/guardian home
- ■ Single parent home
- ■ Live without any parent

The percentage of youth that reported **living in single parent homes or without any parents was significantly higher** among the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples than in the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

All groups reported an average of 5.3 people living in their homes.

31% OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS DID NOT COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Chart: Education levels by group

High School Students (n=234): 31%, 38%, 31%
High School Graduates (n=272): 32%, 35%, 33%
Dropouts (n=207): 50%, 36%, 14%
Disconnected Youth (n=103): 45%, 40%, 15%

Legend:
- Less than high school
- High school graduates
- At least some post secondary education
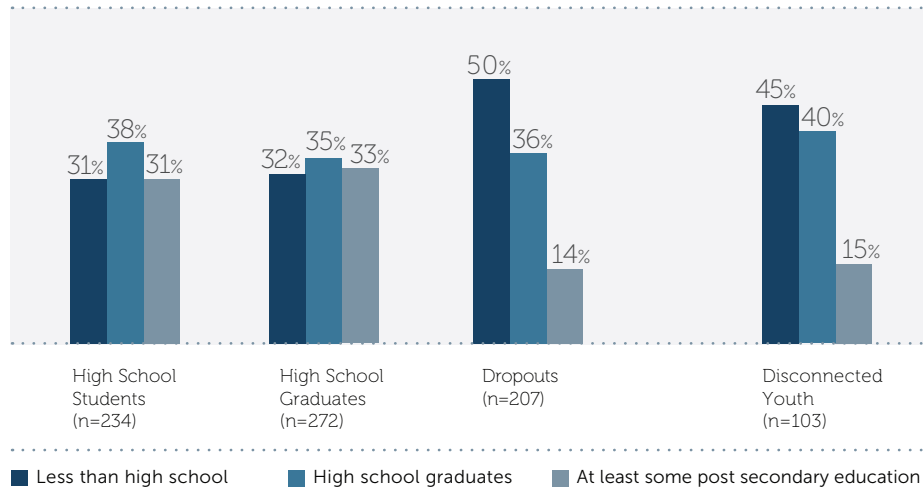
As reported by youth, parents/guardians from the High School Graduate sample had **significantly higher education levels** than parents/guardians from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples ($p<.05$).

PARENTING
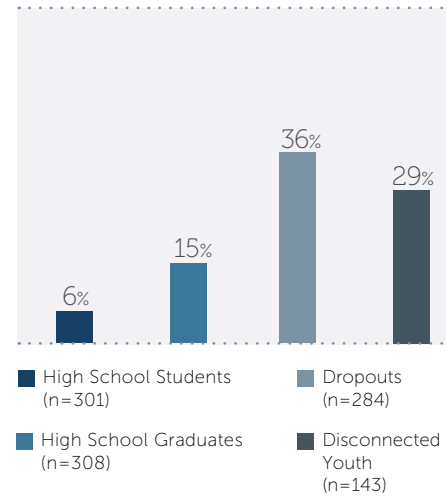
Chart: Parenting rates by group

High School Students (n=301): 6%
High School Graduates (n=308): 15%
Dropouts (n=284): 36%
Disconnected Youth (n=143): 29%

Legend:
- High School Students (n=301)
- High School Graduates (n=308)
- Dropouts (n=284)
- Disconnected Youth (n=143)

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported significantly **higher rates of teen pregnancy and parenting** than youth from the High School Graduate sample ($p<.05$).

More disconnected females than disconnected males reported having children.

6% OF THE TOTAL POOL OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED THEY BECAME PREGNANT OR FATHERED A CHILD WHILE STILL IN SCHOOL. EIGHTY-SIX PERCENT OF THESE PREGNANCIES OCCURRED IN 10TH GRADE OR EARLIER.

BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Doing poorly and lacking support or tools to succeed or improve academically are risk factors for youth abandoning school. Identity's survey results demonstrate that the disconnected and dropout youth performed much worse academically and behaviorally than the high school graduates—they had histories of suspensions, truancy, and academic failures. Though every school provides common tools necessary to succeed (e.g., computers, Internet access) via their libraries or media centers, all of the youth we studied do not access the supports available to them in their schools. This may be due to other factors in their lives, including poor study skills, poor locus of control, not feeling part of their schools, or lacking teachers/counselors who encourage them to do well. They see no reason to spend additional time in a setting where they feel unwelcome.

- *Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported a **significantly higher number of school suspensions** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).*
- *Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly higher rates of repeating a school year** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).*

31% OF THE ENTIRE SAMPLE OF SURVEYED YOUTH REPORTED HAVING FAILED MATH AND/OR ENGLISH AT SOME TIME. OF THIS GROUP, **45%** REPORTED THEY HAD NOT BEEN OFFERED ACADEMIC SUPPORT PRIOR TO FAILING THE COURSE.

- *High School dropouts reported being truant an average of **22 days during their last year in school**.*

GRADES

Bar chart:

High School Students (n=315): GPA 1.5 or less 20%, GPA 2.0 and up to 2.5 38%, GPA 3.0 or higher 43%

High School Graduates (n=312): GPA 1.5 or less 12%, GPA 2.0 and up to 2.5 24%, GPA 3.0 or higher 54%

Dropouts (n=259): GPA 1.5 or less 49%, GPA 2.0 and up to 2.5 38%, GPA 3.0 or higher 14%

Disconnected Youth (n=129): GPA 1.5 or less 47%, GPA 2.0 and up to 2.5 32%, GPA 3.0 or higher 21%

Legend: GPA 1.5 or less | GPA 2.0 and up to 2.5 | GPA 3.0 or higher

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower grades** in their last year in school than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

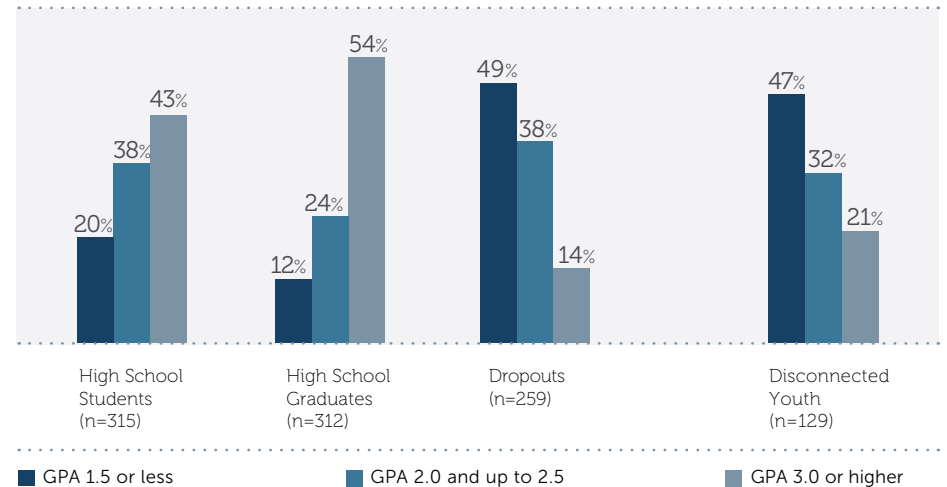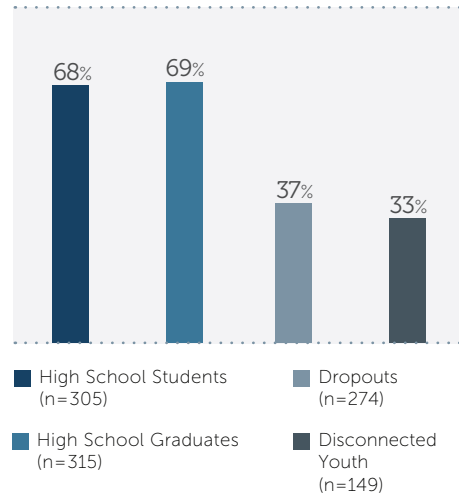**32%** OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED NOT HAVING REGULAR ACCESS TO A COMPUTER AND INTERNET.

47% OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED NOT PARTICIPATING IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO REPORTED REGULAR ACCESS TO A COMPUTER AND INTERNET DURING THEIR LAST SCHOOL YEAR

68%   69%   37%   33%

- ■ High School Students (n=305)
- ■ High School Graduates (n=315)
- ■ Dropouts (n=274)
- ■ Disconnected Youth (n=149)

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower levels of access to a computer or Internet either during their last school year** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO REPORTED THEY PARTICIPATED IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES DURING HIGH SCHOOL

53%   59%   25%   27%

- ■ High School Students (n=315)
- ■ High School Graduates (n=312)
- ■ Dropouts (n=259)
- ■ Disconnected Youth (n=129)
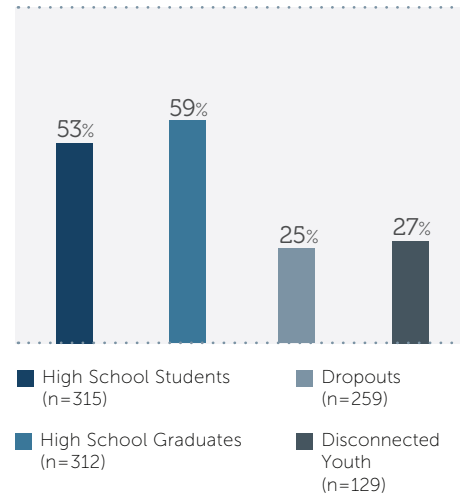
Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower rates of participation in extracurricular activities during high school** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

Within the High School Student sample, youth with **GPAs of 2.5 or less** reported having **missed an average of 14 school days** during their last school year, compared with students with **GPAs of 3.0 or higher** who reported **missing an average of only seven days**.

The following charts reflect several school/academic indicators that predicted statistically significant differences between the Dropout/Disconnected samples and the High School Graduate sample.

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO DID NOT BELIEVE GOOD GRADES WERE IMPORTANT FOR THEIR FUTURES

15%
19%
53%
48%

■ High School Students (n=315)
■ Dropouts (n=259)
■ High School Graduates (n=325)
■ Disconnected Youth (n=129)

67% OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED POOR STUDY SKILLS.

SCHOOL/ACADEMIC INDICATORS

67% 63% 86% 84%
41% 38% 66% 66%
62% 51% 83% 81%

POOR STUDY SKILLS
(Does not set aside regular time to study, AND/OR does not take notes during classes, AND/OR does not feel confident doing an Internet search)

DOES NOT HAVE A PLACE AT HOME TO STUDY FREE OF DISTRACTIONS

POOR LOCUS OF CONTROL
(Does not feel that things were under their control, AND/OR does not believe they could pass subjects by studying hard)

■ High School Students (n=312)
■ High School Graduates (n=325)
■ Dropouts (n=300)
■ Disconnected Youth (n=151)

SCHOOL/ACADEMIC INDICATORS

Bar chart — SCHOOL/ACADEMIC INDICATORS:

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL (Does not feel safe, AND/OR feels discriminated against, AND/OR has been bullied)
- High School Students: 50%
- High School Graduates: 42%
- Dropouts: 59%
- Disconnected Youth: 65%

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL (Does not feel safe, AND/OR feels discriminated against, AND/OR has been bullied)
- High School Students: 47%
- High School Graduates: 40%
- Dropouts: 51%
- Disconnected Youth: 58%

LOW SCHOOL CONNECTION IN HIGH SCHOOL (Does not feel part of school, AND/OR does not feel close to people in school)
- High School Students: 39%
- High School Graduates: 33%
- Dropouts: 58%
- Disconnected Youth: 57%

Legend:
- High School Students (n=311)
- High School Graduates (n=323)
- Dropouts (n=281)
- Disconnected Youth (n=144)

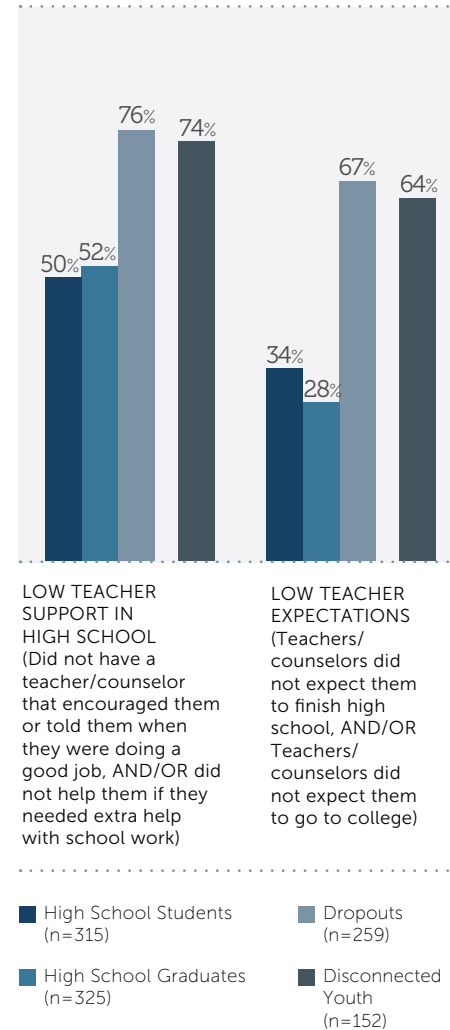**50%** OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED A NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

SCHOOL STAFF SUPPORT

Bar chart — SCHOOL STAFF SUPPORT:

LOW TEACHER SUPPORT IN HIGH SCHOOL (Did not have a teacher/counselor that encouraged them or told them when they were doing a good job, AND/OR did not help them if they needed extra help with school work)
- High School Students: 50%
- High School Graduates: 52%
- Dropouts: 76%
- Disconnected Youth: 74%

LOW TEACHER EXPECTATIONS (Teachers/counselors did not expect them to finish high school, AND/OR Teachers/counselors did not expect them to go to college)
- High School Students: 34%
- High School Graduates: 28%
- Dropouts: 67%
- Disconnected Youth: 64%

Legend:
- High School Students (n=315)
- High School Graduates (n=325)
- Dropouts (n=259)
- Disconnected Youth (n=152)

50% OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED LOW TEACHER ENCOURAGEMENT/SUPPORT.

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower levels of support from school staff** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

Parent support and encouragement is also an important protective factor that helps youth stay in school. In 2006, Civic Enterprises, in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates, prepared a compilation of survey responses and data from high school dropouts in the United States. Low proactive parental involvement was a factor that contributed to the students' decisions to drop out of school. Only 21 percent of those high school dropouts reported their parents were "very involved" in their children's schooling.[1]

A 2012 Huffington Post story reported on the then newly released 2012 High School Dropouts in America survey. The survey found that "absence of parental or educational support and becoming a parent are the two top reasons cited by respondents for dropping out of school."[2] Identity's dropout and disconnected samples also showed much lower parental and school support than the high school graduates and, as shown earlier, had higher rates of parenting.

1 The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, a report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, March 2006.

2 High School Dropouts Worsened by Lack of Support, Becoming a Parent: Survey, Huffington Post, November 15, 2012.

PARENT EXPECTATIONS
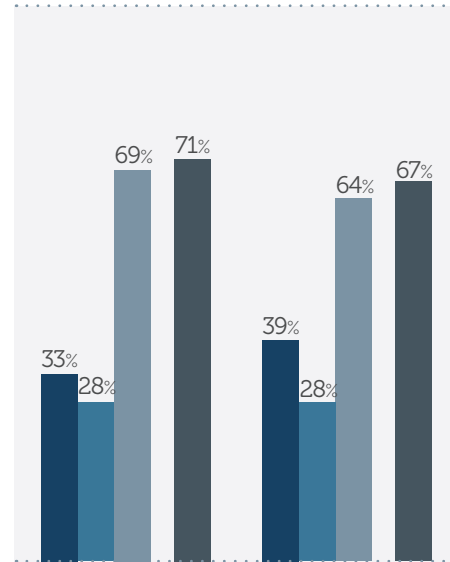
LOW PARENT EXPECTATIONS DURING HIGH SCHOOL
(Parents did not expect them to finish high school, AND/OR did not expect them to go to college, AND/OR did not expect them to be successful)
33% 28% 69% 71%

LOW PARENT EXPECTATIONS DURING MIDDLE SCHOOL
(Parents did not expect them to finish high school, AND/OR did not expect them to go to college, AND/OR did not expect them to be successful)
39% 28% 64% 67%

High School Students (n=314)
High School Graduates (n=324)
Dropouts (n=281)
Disconnected Youth (n=147)

PARENT EXPECTATIONS
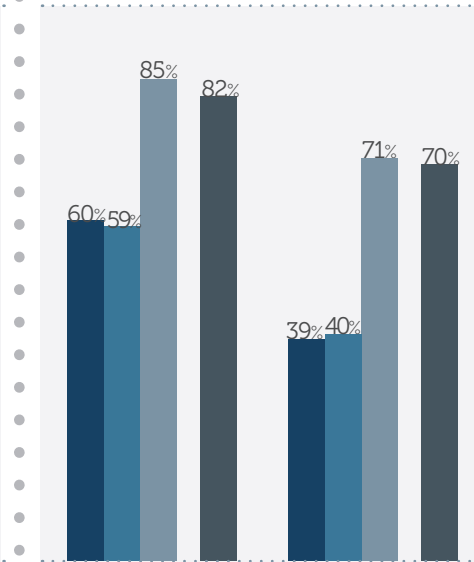
LOW PARENT EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DURING HIGH SCHOOL
(Did not go to parents/guardians if they had a problem, AND/OR did not feel listened to by their parents/guardians)
60% 59% 85% 82%

LOW PARENT PRESENCE DURING MIDDLE SCHOOL
(There was not a parent/gaurdian at home after school, AND/OR there was not a parent/guardian at home at dinnertime)
39% 40% 71% 70%

High School Students (n=313)
High School Graduates (n=324)
Dropouts (n=280)
Disconnected Youth (n=147)

60% OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED LOW LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM THEIR PARENTS.

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower levels of support by their parents/guardians** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

JOSE AGE 15

I realized that if I don't go to school, I'm going to be nobody. I wanted my education.

Jose was born in El Salvador and raised primarily by his grandmother in his early years. His dad died when Jose was 1, and his mom worked and only saw him on the weekends. Jose and his mom came to the United States when he was 7. Since then, his mother has worked long hours, and he rarely sees her and does not feel supported by her. Jose has a 6-year-old sister, whom his mom takes care of whenever she is not working.

Jose did pretty well in elementary school. He learned English, made friends, and felt supported by his teachers and the school. But things changed quickly for him when he went to middle school. Big for his age, Jose got caught up with a rougher crowd and got into a lot of fights with other students. His relationship with teachers became troublesome

and, ultimately, he was suspended for bringing a BB gun to school. He says he brought it to play with after school, but it was found in his locker. Because of the incident, he was sent to an alternative school for a few weeks; then he was given the opportunity to start over at a new middle school. Jose remembers being told by school authorities that it was a chance for "...a fresh start. You only get one chance. If you mess up, you're out."

At the new school, Jose says he felt more accepted and no longer felt like "the bad guy." He joined the soccer team and started doing a better job with his schoolwork. Getting to the new school required him to take a Ride On bus and to begin taking more responsibility for himself, which he says has turned out to be a good thing for him.
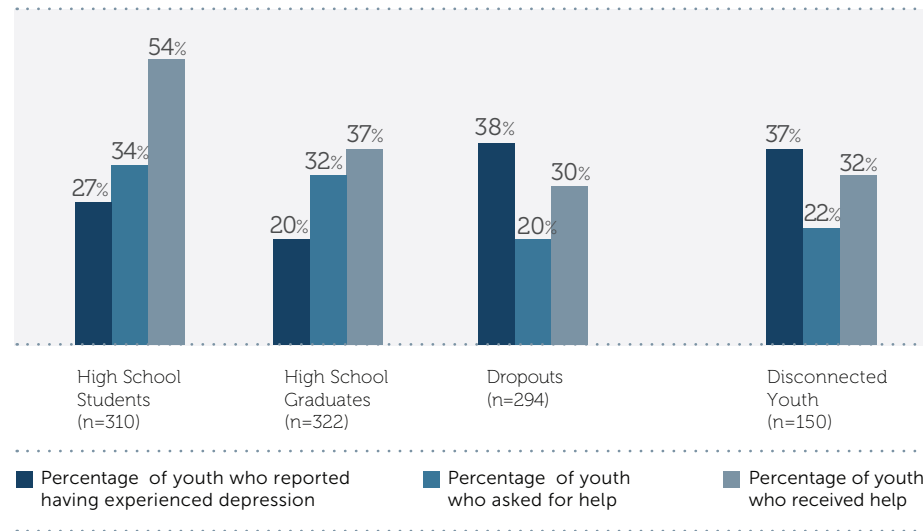
Jose just finished his freshman year of high school. A highlight for him: being one of only a few freshmen to make the varsity football team. Jose has kept his grades up and received encouragement and support from many of his teachers and—above all—his football coach. A talented athlete, Jose played some time on all three units of the football team: offense, defense, and special teams. His coaches believe he may have a path to a college scholarship, particularly if he continues to hone his kicking skills that were shaped earlier on the soccer field. Jose understands how important it will be to keep up his grades and believes that if he has a 3.0 GPA by senior year he will have a range of college options.
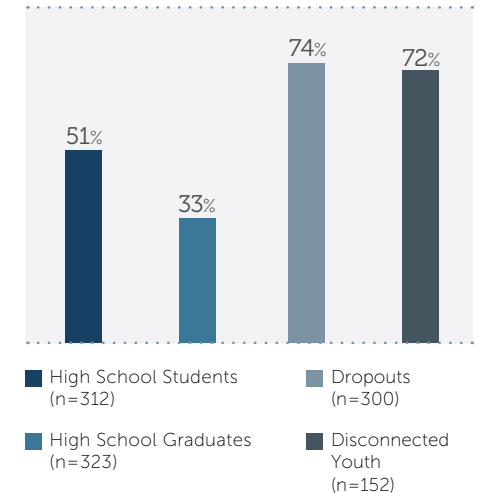
EFFECT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

There is a phenomenon known as the "toxic mirror" that greatly influences how immigrant children see themselves. These immigrant children confront discrimination and stereotyping in many areas of their lives. This may be one factor contributing to young people not feeling good or positive about their futures and their high levels of depression.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING/DEPRESSION

High School Students (n=310): 27%, 34%, 54%
High School Graduates (n=322): 20%, 32%, 37%
Dropouts (n=294): 38%, 20%, 30%
Disconnected Youth (n=150): 37%, 22%, 32%

■ Percentage of youth who reported having experienced depression
■ Percentage of youth who asked for help
■ Percentage of youth who received help

Disconnected youth reported having experienced **symptoms of depression at a greater rate than high school graduates** ($p < .05$).

EXPECTATIONS FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

High School Students: 51%
High School Graduates: 33%
Dropouts: 74%
Disconnected Youth: 72%

■ High School Students (n=312)
■ High School Graduates (n=323)
■ Dropouts (n=300)
■ Disconnected Youth (n=152)

LACK OF EXPECTATIONS FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE (Not feeling good/positive about their future, AND/OR not feeling prepared to deal with problems that they may face in the future, AND/OR not feeling that they will be successful in their lives)
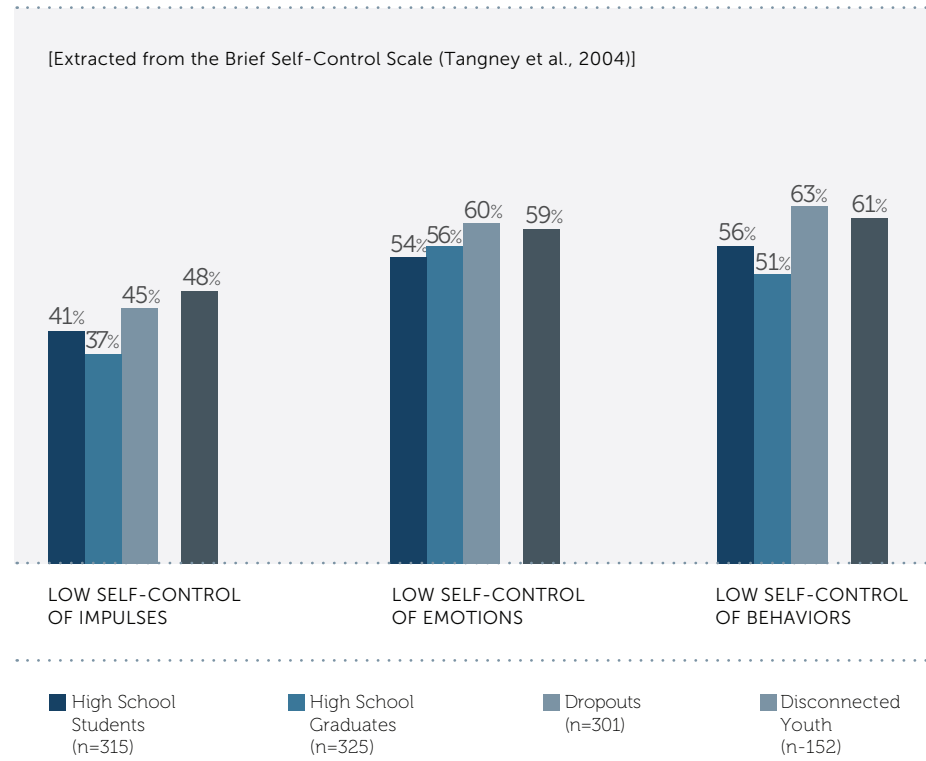
ALMOST
1/3 OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED HIGH LEVELS OF DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS.

42% OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH REPORTED THEY ARE CURRENTLY USING ALCOHOL ALMOST DAILY OR A COUPLE OF TIMES A WEEK.

37% OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH REPORTED THEY ARE CURRENTLY USING MARIJUANA ALMOST DAILY OR A COUPLE OF TIMES A WEEK.

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly higher levels of current substance abuse** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

SELF-CONTROL SCALE

[Extracted from the Brief Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004)]

LOW SELF-CONTROL OF IMPULSES	LOW SELF-CONTROL OF EMOTIONS	LOW SELF-CONTROL OF BEHAVIORS

■ High School Students (n=315)　■ High School Graduates (n=325)　■ Dropouts (n=301)　■ Disconnected Youth (n-152)

Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **significantly lower levels of self-control (reflected in all the domains)** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

35% OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH REPORTED HAVING BEEN PREVIOUSLY ARRESTED.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION FOLLOWING DISCONNECTION

59% of Disconnected Youth reported **NOT** knowing how to **OBTAIN MEDICAL INSURANCE** if they needed it.

50% of Disconnected Youth reported **NOT** knowing where to enroll in a **GED PROGRAM** if they needed one.

73% of Disconnected Youth reported not having ever received any type of job training, and **60%** reported **NOT** knowing where to **GET JOB TRAINING** if they needed it.

65% of Disconnected Youth reported **NOT** knowing where to get **SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES** if they needed them. This is of concern given that 70 of the 152 Disconnected Youth reported high levels of alcohol and drug use.

Within our Disconnected Youth sample, **21%** reported already being parents, yet **54%** of these youth reported **NOT** knowing where to get **CHILD CARE** if they needed it.

Over 1/3 of the Disconnected Youth sample reported experiencing high levels of depression symptoms in their last year of school, yet **58%** of this group also reported **NOT** knowing where to get **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES** if they needed them.

*Disconnected Youth reported **significantly lower knowledge about how to access important support services** than High School Graduates (p<.05). These support services could be valuable in helping these youth to become reconnected to school or the labor market.*

The study results detailed below demonstrate that Latino youth who are disconnected are facing tremendous obstacles to becoming reconnected to school or the labor market and are unable to access the services they may need to become reconnected.

Arguably, the inability of Disconnected Youth to access basic services (due to their lack of knowledge as to how to go about doing so) results in many of these youth being socially excluded from the community. Their levels of social exclusion cut them off from opportunities to grow and thrive. The result will be a worsening of their socio-economic situations.

The survey attempted to measure one other aspect of social inclusion: levels of awareness of or participation in political aspects of the society in which the youth are living. The youths' responses illustrate the higher degree of social exclusion seen among Disconnected Youth.

- When asked about gender equality in Maryland, an issue that saturated the media for months near the time of the survey collection, there was a significant difference in knowledge about this important state-wide issue between Disconnected Youth and High School Graduates.
  - While only **50 percent** of the Disconnected Youth sample were aware that same sex marriage had recently been legalized in Maryland, **77 percent** of High School Graduates were aware of this change.
- Whether or not an individual votes is another factor that may help measure levels of social inclusion.
  - **Eighty-one percent** of High School Graduates reported that if they were eligible to vote in the future, they would vote in the next presidential election. In comparison, only **63 percent** of Disconnected Youth reported that if they were eligible to vote in the future they would do so.
  - **Sixty-five percent** of High School Graduates who were eligible to vote in the last presidential election reported that they had voted, yet only **45 percent** of eligible Disconnected Youth voters reported that they had voted in the last election.
- When asked about the general public's attitudes towards Latinos:
  - Youth in each of the three samples were split in half regarding whether the public's attitude was positive or negative.

ANNA AGE 18

Why would I go somewhere that I am not wanted?

By the time "Anna"[3] arrived at high school, she was—by her own admission—anything but a regular 15-year-old. After her parents arrived in the United States in search of a better life, she spent much of her childhood in a tumultuous family atmosphere, moving from apartment to apartment. At age 9, her life changed forever when her father sexually assaulted her. Anna felt there was no one she could talk with in school or at home, especially after the revelation of what had taken place led her father to jail and removed him from her life. The rest of her elementary and middle school years were mostly painful times, as she felt alone, empty, and sad. Anna fell in with the wrong crowd and turned to drinking and smoking to help her cope.

High school did little to help. Anna says teachers and administrators were uninterested in her success and did not make her feel welcome at school. And, she recalls, they most certainly did not see the pain she carried. Anna feels they saw her as a careless, immature teenager, and they treated her as such. She lost any interest she had in school.

Anna did not only feel alone and depressed because of her past. She felt that everyone looked down upon her for her sexuality. Anna met her girlfriend in high school and feels that no one in school accepted her because of her sexuality. To this day, she struggles with acceptance from her mother.

After passing ninth grade and repeating tenth grade three years in a row, she felt she had no option but to drop out. The good news is that Anna is still working to get her GED. She recognizes the many bad choices she made, but she notes that if there had been someone in her life to talk to her and try to understand her, as a person, her life would most likely be very different. Anna is hopeful. She says she is determined to earn her diploma, start a career, and build a better life.

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3   "Anna's" identity has been concealed for safety reasons.
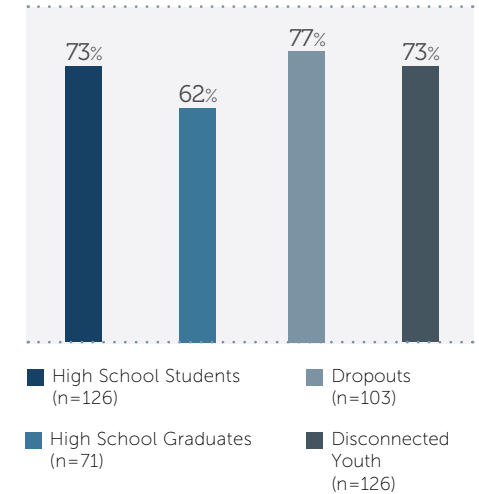
DISCONNECTION IN A SKILLED LABOR MARKET

Identity's survey results—and other research on the economy of Montgomery County—present a grim picture of the employment prospects for Latino youth. Seventy-seven percent of the high school dropouts in our survey had never received any job training. Even among the high school graduates who were not employed, the percentage who had never received any type of job training was high (62 percent). The survey results show that Latino youth are woefully unprepared for the skilled labor market that will be the growth area for employment in Montgomery County.

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH THAT REPORTED BEING EMPLOYED

74%

56%

36%

■ High School Students (n=315)
■ High School Graduates (n=328)
■ Dropouts (n=303)
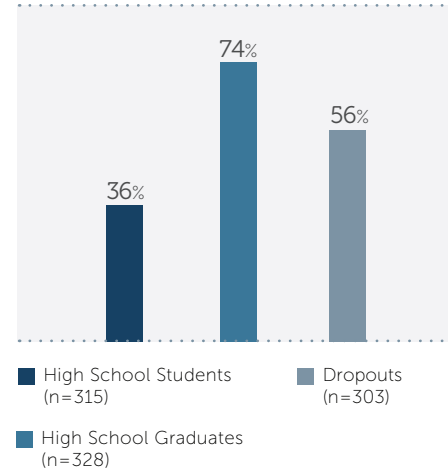
Youth from the High School Graduate sample reported **significantly higher levels of employment** than youth from the Dropout sample (p<.05).

PERCENTANGE OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH THAT REPORTED NEVER HAVING RECEIVED JOB TRAINING

73%

62%

77%

73%

■ High School Students (n=126)
■ High School Graduates (n=71)
■ Dropouts (n=103)
■ Disconnected Youth (n=126)

A significantly higher number of unemployed youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported **never having received job training** than unemployed youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05).

EVER FIRED FROM A JOB

- ■ High School Students (n=232)
- ■ Dropouts (n=275)
- ■ High School Graduates (n=295)
- ■ Disconnected Youth (n=131)
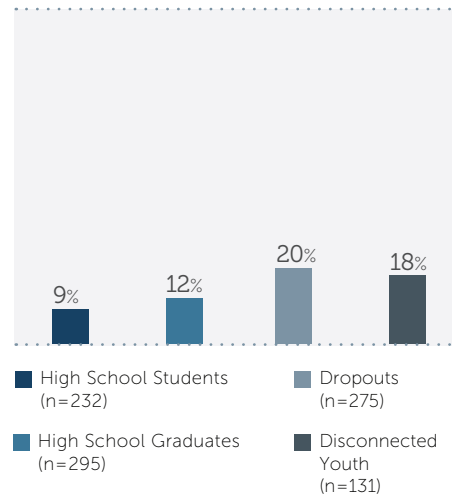
Youth from the Dropout and Disconnected Youth samples reported having been fired from jobs at **significantly higher rates** than youth from the High School Graduate sample (p<.05)..

*The following are **the four top reasons Disconnected Youth reported having been fired from a job**:*

1) Arrived late or missed a lot of days.
2) Had a fight with his or her supervisor or co-worker.
3) His or her supervisor was not happy with the youth's work.
4) Had a previous arrest.

There were no significant differences among any of the survey samples regarding the percentage of youth who had quit jobs in the past.

***Forty-three percent** of Disconnected Youth reported they had quit previous jobs.*

*The following are **the top four reasons Disconnected Youth reported for having quit a job in the past:***

1) Did not like his or her supervisor or co-workers.
2) Did not like the job.
3) Had to take care of his or her children (of this group, 90 percent were females).
4) Was not happy with the salary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program ranks Montgomery County, Maryland 12th among the approximately 3,140 counties assessed throughout the country. Montgomery County's population is over one million, and Latinos represent approximately 18 percent of the County population. MCPS has an enrollment of over 151,000 students, and Latinos make up more than one quarter (27 percent) of the student body. Yet, in one of the wealthiest counties in the United States, with over 30 "blue ribbon schools" between 1982–2013, academic success seems out of reach for far too many Latino students. In addition, Montgomery County has about 3,900 youth who are chronically disconnected, including 2.4 percent of teens and 5.1 percent of young adults. If national trends hold locally, there may be 3,900 more County youth who are only weakly attached to school and/or work, bringing the County's total count of disconnected youth to 7,800, or 7 percent, of all youth.

Latinos have consistently fared poorly in regard to high school graduation rates when compared with their white counterparts. From 2010 to 2012, Latinos in Montgomery County had graduation rates of 79.5 percent, 80.2 percent, and 81.8 percent, while white students had rates of 94.7 percent, 94.8 percent, and 95 percent and higher, respectively, over the same period of time. Disconnection from school is seen early on for Latinos. From 2011 to 2013, MCPS reported that Latino middle school students were absent more than 20 school days at higher rates than white middle school students were: 11.5 percent, 9.9 percent, and 10.7 percent versus 8.5 percent, 6.9 percent, and 7.9 percent, respectively. In high school, this trend worsens. From 2011 to 2013, Latino high school students missed more than 20 school days at rates of 13.7 percent, 24.8 percent, and 24.2 percent, whereas white high school students missed more than 20 school days at rates of 7.7 percent, 15.5 percent, and 15.8 percent, respectively (mdreportcard.org).

This study attempts to better understand three issues:

1. The needs and assets of Latino youth in Montgomery County who are disconnected or on the verge of disconnection.
2. The predictors of disconnection from the school system.
3. The predictors of disconnection from the labor market.

METHODOLOGY

Three versions of the survey, Identity Assets and Needs Assessment to Study Disconnected Youth, were pilot tested with youth from each of the three target groups, and the instruments were adjusted based on pilot test findings. The three survey group samples included:

a) **321** youth currently enrolled in high school and who had completed at least 9th grade at the time of survey administration.

b) **330** youth who had graduated from a U.S. or foreign high school, including 27 disconnected youth (i.e., youth who are not studying or working).

c) **309** youth who had dropped out of school at any time and any grade level prior to obtaining a high school diploma, including 124 disconnected youth (i.e., youth who are not studying or working).

Each survey contained over 150 questions. Youth took an average of 40 minutes to complete a survey.

A total of **960** Montgomery County Latino youth, ages 14–24 completed surveys. A group of nine bilingual Latino youth were trained on the protocol for survey administration, and between June and September 2013, they worked in pairs to collect surveys throughout the county. Survey administrators wore identification badges and Identity t-shirts. After listening to an overview of the project by the survey administrators, each youth was asked a brief series of questions to determine if he or she met the criteria for administration of a survey and, if so, which survey was the appropriate one for him or her. Survey administrators briefly reviewed surveys for completeness and asked youth to complete any sections or questions they had skipped. Surveys were placed in a collection folder, and each young person that completed the survey received a $20.00 Chipotle gift card. Youth signed for receipt of the card.

Almost 40 percent of the surveys were collected in the streets of Montgomery County and on public playing fields. One quarter of the surveys were collected at youth's homes, and the remainder were collected at work sites, community organizations, a Latino barber shop in Gaithersburg, and outside various high school properties.

Surveys were returned to Identity on a weekly basis and entered into SurveyMonkey Inc. database by Identity's project assistant. Dr. Daniel Arretche retrieved the data from SurveyMonkey Inc. and conducted the data analysis reported herein. A multiple logistic regression analysis was used to determine the relative contribution of several predictors of youth disconnection. We are only reporting findings that were statistically significant ($p<.05$) between the Dropout, High School Graduate, and Disconnected Youth samples.

THE SURVEYS

The surveys solicited a wide range of information, including demographic data and information on socio-economic status, family structure and support systems, academic performance and school connectedness, peer groups, risky behaviors, employment preparedness, and levels of social inclusion.

The surveys included a number of similar questions comparing youth's middle school and high school experiences to ascertain which factors or situations influenced young people to remain in school and graduate from high school or to drop out. Because a great deal of research points to middle school as a critical time wherein academic success or failure may be predicted, we examined what had happened to youth during that period. We were looking to identify what those factors were for our survey population to curb the flow of future dropouts and disconnected youth as early as possible.

The Alliance for Excellent Education's September 2010 fact sheet notes that "low attendance or a failing grade can identify future dropouts, in some cases as early as sixth grade".[4] The document also points out that "most dropouts are already on the path to failure in the middle grades." In an earlier policy brief, the same organization summarized several research studies looking at early warning signs of youth dropping out of school. Those early warning signs included failing 8th grade math or English or having very poor attendance rates in 8th grade (below 80 percent) (Using early-warning data to improve graduation rates: Closing cracks in the education system,\ Alliance for Excellent Education, Policy Brief, August 2008).

The National High School Center was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education until March 2013. One of its earlier publications examined the indicators that school systems could use to identify potential high school dropouts. As the publication states, "To be most effective in preventing dropouts, school systems should focus dropout prevention efforts in the beginning of the middle grades."[5] These research studies support the effort to examine dropout indicators as early as middle school.

Much of the information collected in our three surveys used well-established measurement tools. A selection of these tools is listed below:

- Academic Attitude, from the Racelessness Scale (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986)
- Academic Readiness Questionnaire (Foxcroft, 2005)
- Academic Self-efficacy subscale, from the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (Jinks & Morgan, 1999)
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (Bohn, Babor, & Kranzler, 1995)
- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention Government Performance and Results Act
- Engagement in Academic Activities (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991)
- Future Orientation Questionnaire (Nurmi, Seginer, & Poole, 1990)
- National Survey of Parents and Youth Questionnaires (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2002)
- Quality of School Life Scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1976)
- School Climate (Pyper, Freiberg, Ginsburg, & Spuck, 1987)
- School Connectedness Scale (California Department of Education, WestEd, 2006)
- Self-scoring Self-control Scale (adapted from Tangney, J.P., Baumeister, R.F., & Boone, A.L., 2004)

Most items were presented in Likert-scale format, such that youth indicated varying degrees of agreement from five options: "strongly disagree," "disagree," "not sure," "agree," and "strongly agree."

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4 High School Dropouts in America, Alliance for Excellent Education, Fact Sheet, Updated September 2010

5 Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs with Appropriate Interventions. Washington, DC: National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research (Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. October 2007).

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

The mission of The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region is to strengthen the Washington metropolitan region by encouraging and supporting effective giving and by providing leadership on critical issues in our community. We are a community of givers, dedicated to inspiring and creating change across the Washington region and beyond. The Foundation, and our two regional affiliate foundations—The Community Foundation for Montgomery County and The Community Foundation for Prince George's County—are part of a network of some 700 community foundations nationwide, each a tax-exempt, public charity made up of charitable giving funds established by individuals, families, corporations, and other organizations. We currently manage more than 700 donor funds with assets totaling more than $326 million. We are the largest funder of nonprofit organizations in the metropolitan Washington region, with annual grants of more than $90 million.

The Community Foundation
for the National Capital Region

IDENTITY, INC.

Identity, Inc. is a community-based nonprofit organization with headquarters in Montgomery County, Maryland that has been serving Latino youth and their families for over 15 years. Identity's mission is to provide opportunities for Latino youth to believe in themselves and reach their highest potential. Our goal is to facilitate youths' successful transition into adulthood by providing skills, guidance, positive role models, and a strong sense of community. We accomplish this by reaching out to the youth and their families, one at a time, and working with our partners to remove barriers to their success.

In FY 2013, Identity served close to 4,500 clients with school-based programs, two Youth Opportunity Centers, as well as mental health, case management, re-entry and reha-bilitation, and HIV prevention services.

A key element in Identity's strategic planning has always been to conduct regular community assets and needs assessments as the foundation for program development and advocacy. Identity regularly partners with universities, research institutions, foundations, or public agencies to carry out its community assessments.

Identity, Inc.
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Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)
55422 / United Way # 9642

identity

thecommunityfoundation.org