

National Dropout Prevention Center
Partnering with Parents in Dropout Prevention:
"The Need and the How"
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November 9, 2006

MODERATOR: Thank you, Loujeania. And before we continue with Deborah, I first would like to ask the audience to participate in another polling question. We would like you to use your telephone keypad in answering the following question about family involvement strategies. The question is, *What family involvement strategies are of the greatest interest to you today?*

Press 1 on your telephone keypad if it is "Help schools engage parents in the middle school and secondary school education of their children." Or press 2 if it's "Help parents promote the academic achievement of middle school and secondary school students at home." Or press 3 "Help parents who want to develop the leadership skills needed to become effective advocates for all students at both the school and school-district levels."

I'll cover that again. I want you to get an understanding of this question *What family involvement strategies are of the greatest interest to you today?* "Strategies that help schools engage parents in the middle school and secondary education of their children," press number 1. Or "Strategies that help parents promote the academic achievement of middle school and secondary school students at home," press number 2. Or "Strategies that help parents who want to develop the leadership skills needed to become effective advocates for all students at both the school and school-district levels," press the number 3.

And while those numbers are coming in, Deborah, I'd like to welcome you to the program.

DEBORAH LEUCHOVIUS: Thank you, Dick. Dixie and I are very pleased to be here today to talk with you about family involvement strategies that promote school completion, or I should say, school achievement.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge the work of Loujenia and the National Dropout Prevention Center, and thank them for providing leadership on this issue and this opportunity to share information with you all.

Also, I just want to recognize up front that while Dixie and I see parent partnerships and family involvement as an essential *piece* of the puzzle, they should be viewed as part of a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach to improve post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. This includes collecting data to evaluate and improve schools.

And I wanted to mention that PACER is working with the National Post School Outcomes Center to disseminate information to help parent centers and families prepare

them for the first wave of surveys that states will be conducting this coming spring and summer to gather information on the post-school employment and education outcomes of youth with disabilities who drop out of school, as well as those who are recent graduates.

And the last thing I want to do to, hopefully, help our listeners is to let you know that during the first part of this presentation, Dixie and I are going to be following an outline that, basically, follows a National Center on Secondary Education and Transition Parent Brief that was published this summer. If you haven't been provided a copy of the parent brief, itself, there's a list of online publications, and there's a link provided to that on that handout of additional materials.

And Dick, do you have the results of that polling question?

MODERATOR: I do, Deborah. Of those that responded, 68 percent of the respondents chose Number 1 as being of the greatest interest to them today, and that was "Help schools engage parents in the middle school/secondary school education of their children." Five percent chose Number 2, "To help parents promote the academic achievement of middle school and secondary school students at home." And 26 percent chose Number 3, "Help parents who want to develop the leadership skills needed to become effective advocates for schools at both the school and school-district levels." Back to you.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Okay, thank you. We'll keep that in mind as we go through our prepared remarks. And, also again, the list of handouts that is available online contains some publications and articles that were written to address the first two issues. So, some that are geared towards helping professionals involve families, and some that are more geared directly towards families with strategies that they can use at home. And, of course, professionals can use those to share with families, as well.

So why are we here? I am going to be following along a PowerPoint. I understand you have copies of that PowerPoint. If it is helpful to orient you, and you want to follow along by that, I'll refer to the slides as we go along.

I'm starting in the presentation that has that sort of Hollywood Squares presentation of nine spaces of views. And, actually, I'm going to start with the next one, Cause for Concern, which is just to acknowledge why we're here. And that is that we know that students who drop out of school face a difficult future. Students who do not earn a high school diploma are more likely to face unemployment; live in poverty; engage in criminal activities; be incarcerated; have children at an early age; use drugs, tobacco, or both; and become dependent on welfare and other government systems. So these consequences are serious, not only for the individual, but for society.

Dropout and Disability. I'm on the next slide if you're following along. Again, I imagine that those of us who are listening in to this topic are aware that students with disabilities are at far greater risk of dropping out of school. The Twenty-Sixth Annual Report to

Congress reports a dropout rate of 37.6, almost 40 percent, which is more than twice that of their peers without disabilities.

Among students with disabilities, students with emotional and behavioral disorders and students with learning disabilities are at the greatest risk of dropping out. For some minority students with disabilities, the dropout rate goes as high as 50 percent, and Hispanic youth have experienced the smallest improvement in school completion over time. So, such statistics have made school completion one of the highest profile issues in special education.

The Role of Families. Again, as Loujeania began, and as many of you are already aware, research shows that one of the most essential strategies for promoting school completion and achievement is family involvement. When families are involved, students are more likely to earn high grade point averages and score higher on standardized tests. They enroll in more challenging academic programs, and they pass more classes, earn more credits, attend school more regularly, display positive attitudes about school, graduate from high school, enroll in post-secondary programs, and refrain from destructive activities, such as alcohol, drug use, and violence. The source of that list is the National Parent Teacher Association. And I'll just say, again, unless otherwise noted, you can find the research that I'm citing in the references to that National Center on Secondary Education and Transition Parent Brief.

So, I've moved along to, I'm now on my slide 5, Family Involvement and School Completion. And I'm looking at a family and a graduate here. Parents *do* have a powerful influence, or they *can* have a powerful influence over whether their children finish high school. The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement—I just want to stress that—the most accurate predictor is the extent to which families encourage learning, and communicate high expectations for the student's education and future career.

One of the more interesting results of the National Longitudinal Transition Study that was published this summer, which looked at the involvement of families and the educational development of secondary school-age children or youth, suggests that family expectations for the future will shape the academic engagement—and “engagement” is a term we'll come back to and really stress again—that those high expectations help shape academic engagement and achievement of youth with disabilities, regardless of the nature of the youth's disability and their level of functioning.

And here I'm quoting, “If other factors are equal, youth with disabilities whose parents expect them to go on to post-secondary education after high school have more positive engagement and achievements while in high school than youth whose parents do not share that optimism for the future.” So it's essential that we cultivate that involvement, and cultivate high expectations.

I'm on Slide 6; this very studious young man writing in his notebook. Middle school and high school students whose parents remain involved tend to make better transitions. And

I say remain involved because many parents who are actively involved in the education of their children at the elementary school level become less involved when their children reach middle school. So if they stay involved, students make better transitions, maintain the quality of the work, develop plans for the future, have higher graduation rates, and advance on to post-secondary education.

I want to stress, too, that the idea of early intervention and the earliest intervention (both in terms of addressing problems when they arise, but also in promoting parent involvement) at this middle school time is crucial, not only for maintaining the engagement of the student, but for continuing to make efforts to have parents meaningfully involved in the education of their youth.

Dixie, I'm going to turn it over to you.

DIXIE JORDAN: Okay. You need to know that I'm probably a little less of a researcher than Deborah. I just have practical experience, and I'm beginning with the slide that says "Why Do Youth Drop Out?" There are lots reasons, as most of you already know, why kids drop out of school. They don't like it; they don't have personal relationships with teachers; their grades are so low that they're feeling unable to catch up; there are financial problems at home; they have to take care of their younger siblings; they need to have a job. We heard it all. What's *not* on this list is, a lot of times kids find more reinforcing environments somewhere else. If school's not fun, they're going where fun is. And so, lots of kids go to the mall. When I dropped out of school, it was to save face. When my son dropped out of school, it was because he could not be emotionally successful in a school environment, and people really didn't know how to adjust school at that time.

71 percent of youth surveyed who had dropped out of school felt that the key to keeping them in school would have been better communication between parents and the school, and to increase parental involvement in their child's education.

This, to me, is the key of the entire discussion today, because it's really easy to talk about parent involvement. It's really easy for us to acknowledge that we have a problem, but we've admitted it for a lot of years. We don't even have a concrete, common definition of what parental involvement is. And until we get one that fits within the context of the lives of families, I think we're forever going to hire specialists at school to do outreach programs for parents that will always miss the mark with the parents that we're trying most desperately to reach. So there are some things that we can do about this, and there are some things to talk about later.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: The 71 percent of youth surveyed (that Dixie mentioned) that felt one of the keys to keeping students in school was to have better communication with their parents and the school, just so you know, that is not cited in the inset briefs, but that comes from the *Silent Epidemic* publication, which is listed on your handout.

D. JORDAN: Moving to the next page, the Risk Factors for Dropping Out, we know that kids who are retained in school—as popular as that notion is becoming—are kids who are at increased risk of dropping out. They wind up being older than other kids in the same grade; they feel the need to go out and explore the world at 19 years old by the time they're a senior, or 20 or 21. Many have limited English proficiency, and many have family or economic problems.

What *isn't* listed on this overhead are kids who are repeatedly suspended from school who may be marginal students to start with, but who get into behavioral trouble at school and are often those kids who leave school because they just can't catch up anymore. Their parents may have dropped out of school. These kids may have had problems with the law, as well, which goes back to our high dropout rate for kids with emotional disorders and kids with severe learning disabilities.

Okay, let's take a look at the warning signs, which is page nine of your overhead. And, Deborah, you may have information on this, as well. But I wanted to point out before we deal with the warning signs, that parents should be involved *when*, and we're going to go through the areas where it's important to get parents involved. But we're almost putting the cart before the horse because the idea of parental involvement hasn't been fully explored. Kids want families involved; they've said so. Schools want families involved; they've said so. We know *when* families should get involved. We don't know how to do it. I think that's really the topic of today's discussion.

D. JORDAN: I think we all know that truancy, or poor attendance at school, is one of those huge warning signs that sends off red flags everywhere. Kids who are emotionally withdrawing from school. I work a lot with children who have suicidal ideation, and that emotional withdrawal is a cause for concern for many areas. But school dropout is probably one of the first things they do, or inappropriate conduct. All of these can indicate that a child has disengaged from school. And no one knows this better than the teachers who are at school with the children. But, really, families who know and see this going on, it's a critical time for them to get involved in their schools. So, we can say that they should contact the school to address the issues, but realistically, we need to figure out a better way to get families in, to start with.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: One of the things that we have to[do to] help parents, is to provide them with education [on] what it is that they *can* do. And part of what they need to know is what are key strategies, what [can be done] in order to promote school completion. I'm now Slide 10, with the heading "Connectedness" at the top.

And that word "connectedness"—doesn't that sound so nice and fuzzy? ...I'm sure researchers have found ways to measure this, but it is an essential part of what keeps youth in school. [Youth who actively] participate in and identify with their school are more motivated to stay in school and more likely to graduate than those who are not involved at school.

Youth with emotional disorders have a pattern of difficult experiences throughout their school careers, and have parents who disengage and who are disconnected, as well as themselves. If school's just been a battleground, it's really important that we find opportunities and we create strategies to engage not only the youth, but their parents.

One of the things that always occurs to me is that there are all kinds of parenting classes, and parent education classes in the early childhood area. But in the teens, especially the middle school years, there's actually as much developmental growth as in infancy, and yet, we haven't offered parents the same kind of opportunity to learn about how they can have meaningful relationships with their children, deal with...those difficult, turbulent teen years, and alert them to what can be symptoms of greater problems, and inform them about the consequences of youth dropping out early so that they can realize the benefits of education and convey that to their children.

D. JORDAN: To me, this is where the rubber hits the road. If we don't know how to get kids connected to school, if we don't know how to get parents connected to school, we'll never get kids to connect to the school. It's really easy to say that we have this didactic relationship between the teacher and the student that will make the school years meaningful for a child. But I know, full well, that I can sabotage anything a school is doing if *I* don't feel that the school has my child's best interest, or mine, at heart.

So, to me, that connectedness feeling is family to school, not child to school, but family to school. And figuring this out is, I believe, paramount to any kind of success, primarily, because if I don't believe in the value of formal education, that doesn't mean in my mind that my child will quit learning. It means he will quit going to school. And until I understand the relationship between going to school for myself, as a parent, the relationship between going to school and future outcomes—until I really understand that and integrate it, and feel welcome at the school, and feel that my child will be cared about and cared for at the school—until I get to that point, school is an extra “thing” that I'm expected to do when my child is of high school age. And I think that's really something that, in parenting programs or outreach programs or whatever we want to call them, we miss. If I'm not engaged, if I don't believe the teacher likes me, why would I believe the teacher likes my child? And I think it's something we really need to spend lots of time on in parent development programs, rather than simply coming up fun night at school, or doing some of those sort of standard things that we do all along, that work with a select group, but really don't work with people like me.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Thanks, Dixie. And I'll just add, again, that I want to stress that middle school is a really important time [to promote family involvement] because [typically] families become less involved in their son or daughter's education at that level, and you have to do outreach to show them that there are ways that they can still be engaged in a meaningful way, or you're going to lose them. It will be hard after you've lost that initial opportunity if they don't feel that, not even just that they're welcome, but that they have a role, and they certainly do.

So I'm going to move on to just the next slide in talking about supporting student engagement--supporting *family* engagement, as Dixie says, is probably more accurate. But one of the things—and this is more practical—that we can encourage families to do is that if students find academics frustrating, if it's the academic part of school that is causing frustration, we want to be able to build on their strengths, and encourage them to seek other kinds of activities where they can have more positive experiences, develop friendships, build new skills, have success, and feel good about that. There are many opportunities to do that through school programs, after-school programs, and extracurricular activities; or it could be community programs, it could be an after-school job or employment. It could be volunteering or service learning. And I would encourage both educators and parents, when they recognize that the strengths of a young person who's struggling in academics lie elsewhere, to encourage building on those strengths.

And I am now going on to Slide 12, Identify and Accommodate Disabilities. Well, talking about students who are frustrated by academics, one of the most important means of promoting student engagement is to identify and accommodate disabilities so that a student's academic knowledge can be accurately assessed, and once accurately assessed, they can either be addressed or recognized. Different learning styles, as well as learning disabilities, different life experiences can all contribute to low academic achievement or problem behavior. I believe this is also from that *Silent Epidemic* document talking about the student surveys.

Sixty percent of students surveyed said they do not know *how* to do better in school. Sixty-five percent think they have no control over the grades that they get in school. When there are unaddressed disabilities that are the cause of frustration, we need to be able to accommodate those disabilities. And, again, I think it's been documented that many youth with problem behaviors that end up in the juvenile justice system have disabilities that have not been diagnosed, or have disabilities that have not been really addressed effectively in their secondary school years. So that's something that both families and educators need to continue to work on. And I have to put in a [personal] plug for the concept of universal design for learning.

There are all kinds of reasons why students and families can become disengaged. But when you find that your son or daughter is being included in an academic class, but not really doing the same things as his or her peers, it can almost be more isolating than sitting at home in front of your home computer and doing your own research. So I do think that's something that parents can advocate for, and I would encourage school districts to more actively adapt.

I'm on Slide 13, Exploring Career Education and Workforce Readiness. One of the things that is disturbing, I think, to many educators and to family advocates is that with the focus on academic achievements, there are fewer opportunities for career and technical education. The National Longitudinal Study finds that youth with emotional disorders or disabilities are less likely to be taking occupationally-specific vocational education than students in the general population, even though such training has been shown to contribute to higher rates of post-secondary vocational training and competitive

employment for youth with disabilities. So I think that that's something that we have to, again, look at how we can engage youth in integrated academic and vocational education, career development, and hands-on, work-based learning. Youth with disabilities, and even emotional disabilities, are more likely to be taking these pre-vocational education, these skills-building [courses], rather than hands-on, work-based learning. And that, also, has been shown to be linked to better employment outcomes after high school. Dixie, do you want to add to that, or go on?

D. JORDAN: I think that's fine, Deborah. You've got that covered very well. However, I think we're moving into our next slide, which is School Discipline. And this is near and dear to my heart because for 20 years I've worked exclusively, with children with emotional and behavioral disorders and their families. And we know that discipline issues are *inextricably* tied to dropout. We know that 14 percent of students are suspended or expelled in the last year of elementary school. Those numbers are staggering to me, but they double—more than double—by the time kids are in secondary school.

The repeated use of these exclusionary, disciplinary practices—like suspension, or removal from class—is really one of the major factors that contributes to dropout. And because it's such a problem with kids who have discipline problems at school, it is certainly something worth paying attention to.

We have lost instructional time when we have in-school suspensions with people who are not adequately prepared to teach curriculum; or worse, out-of-school suspension, where even homework completion is sometimes not allowed. These things lead to increased academic difficulties, which in turn, lead to a lack of connectedness to the school. And, yet it's one of the things as an advocate, I know one of the most useful tools I have at my disposal is letting parents know what their rights are.

Now, I know that sounds pejorative ...but we rarely bargain from an equal position at school, when our children are in trouble at school in particular. And so I spend a great deal of time teaching parents what their rights are. Not necessarily how to get along with other people, but what their basic, foundational rights are, because around the issue of discipline, where we all know the rights are complicated to start with, if a parent knows the starting point, their relationships with schools are much greater, much more greatly improved than if they don't understand.

So they can go and advocate for individualized discipline procedures or modifications of particular school policies, such as producing alternatives to out-of-school suspension, but it gives them a base of power. And that base of power also, then, gives them a feeling of equality at school, which further develops the parent/professional relationship.

Another approach would be to help kids learn how to do problem solving. And I find this isn't always taught at school. How do you engage in effective problem solving? Do you even know how to think about who owns a problem? Those are things that I think would be *extremely* helpful, not just for children, but for their parents.

Engaging students in developing and enforcing school rules can help them learn to evaluate the consequences of misbehavior or not following those rules. So, there are lots of things that we *can* do, that I think all of us out there do in one form or another, but we need to put it together as a package. Deborah?

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Well, thank you. I am going on to just continue on [to the next slide], to talk about the fact that youth need adults who care. [Family members can be those adults that provide guidance and support Family members] can also help connect their youth to [other caring] adults. Students who drop out often feel that their teachers or administrators are not interested in them. So, this is something that parents and educators can work on together, as well. And that is, I should say, administrators can make their schools a place that encourage building strong caring relationships through organizational structures that provide time and the opportunity for those kinds of things. And these relationships enhance that connection to school and, ultimately, contribute to better school completion. ...It may be especially important for youth who do not have family support at home to have these kinds of relationships at school. Mentoring is certainly the catch word of the day. And there are certainly mentoring programs that exist to connect youth to caring adults, as well. And parents or educators can help facilitate that process.

D. JORDAN: Not only do *youth* need adults who care, but families need to know that other people who are involved in their kid's life care. Kids need adults who care, and families care. Kids need adults who care and who know how to support their development. And they need it, overtly. I've never met a teacher who said 'I don't like the kids I teach.' But I've met thousands of kids who say, "The teachers don't like me." So somewhere there's a disconnect between the relationship, and I think it's not as overt as it needs to be. As we've become more sophisticated in teaching curriculum, sometimes we get less sophisticated in teaching children.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: I'm on Slide 16 now, looking at helping middle school students succeed. I've already stressed, I think, how strongly I feel that this is a crucial time. High school's too late to begin dropout prevention programs.

Attendance problems and truancy usually begin well before high school, and when identified early, those attitudes and behaviors can often be changed before they become entrenched. So, again, in the interest of time, I will move on, but I want to tell some of the listeners who are interested in information about things that parents can do to engage their children, things that they can do at home, to refer them to some of the handouts that we provided links to.

Helping High School Students Succeed. Again, the teen years are notoriously turbulent ones. Teenagers are challenging their parents' authority. Youth still need their parents, but it's challenging for their parents to remain involved in many ways. They are rethinking their authority relationship as their child becomes an adult. And limit-setting and guidance are needed. At the same time, those need to be balanced with independence. And, again, there are developmental changes that necessitate teenagers being self-absorbed, and that can make being a parent of a self-absorbed teenager very difficult.

And I also want to add that parents of children with disabilities, oftentimes it's in high school when they realize they're re-experiencing how different from the norm their child is, as their peers go off and on to other kinds of adult rites of passage that are, perhaps, not open to them. There are tips for parents of high school students in the handouts that I won't spend time going over. But I want folks to make sure they know they're there, and that they can share them with either families or youth. Dixie?

D. JORDAN: I'm going to move us in to a slightly different direction. It is an overhead that begins, When There's a Problem. Clearly, for special education, there's a process for resolving major problems, and that's the process for IEP development, or problem solving, that's imbedded in federal law. We almost need to think broader than this. I think it's important that families understand the importance of IEPs, as it is important that the general education teacher understand the importance of IEPs, and that this document become dynamic, and people participate in an effective way.

But if we're talking about how to engage families in supporting their kids' academic achievement, I just need to say this. I think we need to start with the definition of what is meaningful family involvement, and how involved are the families and parents in your school in creating that definition? Because I've seen the definition—many of them, across the country—and some of them are replete with strategies that involve family picnics, or other activities. But I've never met a parent not involved in their child's education. I've met lots of parents whose level of involvement does not include going to school, does not include, perhaps, monitoring homework, but parents know that their kids are in school, and they're involved in their education. The trick is going to be for us to find out what's their level of involvement? What's their desired level of involvement? And really reconsider what family involvement means.

The other thing I think schools could do that would be *enormously* helpful is begin to overtly value the importance of alternative school settings. We have focused for so long on every kid's going to go college—and I'm not de-valuing post-secondary education—but college just isn't for everyone, and, particularly, it's not for a lot of kids who have academic difficulties throughout their school careers. And, yet, alternative school settings would give them that leg up for post-secondary settings in a much more effective way, than when they get sent to an alternative setting solely because they're unable to cut the mustard in a regular setting, and then it's seen as that dropout place or that lesser place.

When I was a child in school, we didn't have that. We had alternative schools, and they were great. We had schools that future farmers attended, you know? Today, though, it's the place where you go if you *fail*. And instead of talking about school, *in school*, if teachers would simply stop talking about college as the only option, and begin to embrace the whole continuum of alternative settings when kids are *out of school*, they could be more hopeful that they could see themselves *in* one of those settings, and their parents would be more hopeful in supporting them. When we feel *pushed* into those settings is when we really fight, rebel against, or not want our children there, even though they may be *much* more successful in the alternative setting. So that's that piece.

And there's one more piece that I think is critical, and that is schools really need to put a focus on creating an environment at school that is truly welcoming of families. I know that we have a focus on reduction of school violence, and I understand the necessity for that. But when you tell me that I need to report to the principal's office, sign in, and wear a badge, and the last time I signed something, because I don't *read* well, or I don't *write* well, the last time I signed something, I signed away my rights, or I signed a document that was harmful to me, I'm not gonna tell you I can't read or write. I'm not gonna sign it. I'm not going to come. So we have to, at least conceptually, think about *why* families don't get involved in the building, itself—the structure, this imposing structure, itself—even before we start thinking about why they don't get involved in supporting their older children's education. Because if we don't do that, then we're wasting our time with a seminar like this.

And I think it's different when you have families who are from different cultures, perhaps, because maybe their perspective on the value of formal education isn't the same as the mainstream value. And it's not because they don't value education or want their children to be successful, it's because they don't understand. No one's tied those pieces together between the importance of coming to school *and* a future outcome. No one's tied that together for them.

There's a power imbalance. And whether you believe it or not, it's a *perception* in the minds of most of our families that they're not powerful beings when they go to school. There's a perception about how much their information isn't valued. I think there were policies that actively *discouraged* the kind of involvement we're talking about in supporting students staying in school. And until we really begin to do an assessment of what those policies are, and really begin to look at this from the eyes of someone from a different culture and language, it's really hard to develop a program plan approach, outcome, whatever we want to call it, a philosophy around family involvement that works with the diversity of families in our country today. We have to really value the importance of family involvement..

D. LEUCHOVIUS...Dick, do we time for questions from the audience at this point?

MODERATOR: Sure. We'll open it up for questions right now. You can ask a question of Deborah or Dixie by simply pressing "star" and then the number 1 on your telephone keypad. That will place you in the live queue, and then I'll call on you by your city and the first name of the person that registered at your site. If you're on the speakerphone, please use the telephone handset, if possible. This way, everyone will be able to hear you more clearly, and then when replacing the handset, remember to press and hold the speakerphone button so that you're not disconnected for your answer. If your question's answered before we call on you, press the pound key and you'll be taken out of the queue. So, if you have a question or a comment, go ahead and press star 1 now.

And you can also continue to email questions during the program to moda@krm.com. And while the audience is deciding if they want to queue in for a telephone question or not, let me go to the email first. I see there are a couple of phone questions coming in, so

first email question is, *Is there a list of professional references to refer to in regards to the data that's being shared?*

D. LEUCHOVIUS: ...I would refer you back to the parent briefs. The statistics around dropout are from the most recent OSERS report to Congress on IDEA. I would also say that some of the specific statistics are referenced in that brief. In addition, some of the student surveys are found in that *Silent Epidemic* document from the Bill Gates Foundation. And if people have more specific questions about particular references, you can email those to Dick, and he can get those to me, and I can get more specific citations for you.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We've got a couple of people on the phone. So let's go to Albany, New York. And after that, we're going to go to Eugene, Oregon. Albany, welcome to the program.

ALBANY, NY: Hello.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Hi. We're ready for your question.

WOMAN: I just have a general question on the statistics. I wanted to know if they were from youth, in general, or youth with disabilities?

D. LEUCHOVIUS: In the *Silent Epidemic* Report, those are for youth in general. However, I think that another great source for statistics is the website for the National Longitudinal Transition Study. They have statistics in their reports on, one, family involvement, and two, on the academic or school experiences of youth with emotional behavioral disabilities. So that's a really great source for that information.

D. JORDAN: I think the dropout statistics came from the Twenty-Sixth Annual Report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

ALBANY, NY: Great, thanks.

MODERATOR: Thank you for that question. Let's go on to Eugene, Oregon. Welcome to the program.

EUGENE, OR: Deborah and Dixie, this is Roz. I'm really enjoying listening to you and learning from what you have to teach us. I have a question. When you mention "graduate from high school," Deborah, what do you mean when you say "graduate?"

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Well, when I say "graduate from high school," I mean leave with a diploma. ...It may differ in states that have special education diplomas that differ from regular education diplomas. [For example,] if the youth qualifies for services from 18 to 21, after the completion of that.—

ROZ: There might be a variety of ways, then, for one to graduate?

D. JORDAN: Roz, I think that's a wonderful question because No Child Left Behind and IDEA have put such a heavy emphasis on academic achievement, that academic achievement has now been defined as "graduate from school with a regular diploma." I prefer to think of it as graduate from school with the skills to move into your next life experience. And for some kids, for me, a GED is *as* viable and, perhaps, more so than a high school graduation diploma, depending on your future course. And I don't know that there's a universal definition of graduation because states are so different.

ROZ: Thank you, Dixie. That's really why I was asking. Another question, actually. Dixie, you talked about post-secondary education not being an option for many young people. But there are a variety of ways for one to attend post-secondary education, and I'm hoping that parents, teachers, and young people understand the variety of ways they can do that.

D. JORDAN: If I called it post-secondary, as opposed to college, then I do apologize because I think most of our expectation for most kids is that they will pick up some form of post-secondary education, whether that happens to be vocational training, or an enriching academic experience in an ivy league school. I just really view it as continuing education. But I do think that the value we've placed on college, itself, as *the* outcome, has really diminished the importance of our vocational and trade schools. And that's just so wrong.

ROZ: Community colleges in some states, though, do provide the vocational opportunities. I'm not thinking about only four-year universities.

D. JORDAN: Right. Oh, I agree with you, and I think those are wonderful, but in our state, if you attend a community college, and you're in a high school class with a group of other kids, most of whom are going to a four-year university, that community college is seen as a place where the dumb kids go. And we have to change that perception. But I think that teachers sometimes tie into that perception by always looking at college as the outcome for kids, rather than training or further education, as the outcome. Maybe it's just a question of terminology.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: I think it may be a question of terminology. I think both Dixie and I would encourage post-secondary opportunities for all youth, and youth with disabilities. But I think that they're very prescribed at this moment. I think there are more opportunities for youth with intellectual and cognitive disabilities to attend post-secondary education, and some very exciting models are taking place along those lines. But I also think of the [increased] emphasis on academics[in many] trade and vocational programs.... We've just encountered families with young people who are able to complete some of the tasks [in a vocational program] perfectly but can't complete the whole, entire program, now that it includes a larger portion of academic classes. So they're not getting the certificate that qualifies them to go on and [successfully] pursue a vocation [of their choice]. Rather than, again, saying that "we certify that you can do A, B, C and D," you just have to do everything.

D. JORDAN: And, Deb, if I may, what I find is the door *to* those alternative programs—the alternative education programs beyond high school—is wide open for kids who do well academically in public schools. But I have to tell you that a lot of our schools, whether they be for someone who wants to become a cook, or someone who wants to pursue a variety of potential options, those doors are closed if you are not beyond the tenth grade, or beyond the sixth grade in reading, or beyond the eighth grade in something else. And so the strictures that are put on a lot of our post-secondary schools rule out the possibility for a lot of kids with severe learning disabilities and emotional disturbance to go there. Even though once you get out, I always tell my kids, the ones I work with, "If you survive high school, you'll do okay when you're out in the real world in post-secondary." But then the post-secondary doors are not always open to those kids, either, even though they may have the skills to be successful.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: And there may be some variation in what's available to youth and families in states, as well.

D. JORDAN: That's true.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Dick, are we running out of time?

MODERATOR: Well, actually, we are. I've got one more quick question before we move on to Aurelio, and then we do have to go. *Has the question of student mobility been addressed when discussing dropout rates?*

D. LEUCHOVIUS: Well, I can tell you that it definitely has been, but that's probably a question that someone else could answer better than me.....—

D. JORDAN: I guess I'm not really clear. Is it a contributory factor? Because we know that homeless and highly mobile students drop out of school at a much greater rate than other students. But I'm not sure the intent of the question.

D. LEUCHOVIUS: If you're looking for statistics on that, I have not addressed that in any of the references or the handouts that we provided to you. And I would refer you back to the National Dropout Prevention Center, and I would check their website because they have quite a wide range of information related to the topic.

D. JORDAN: But I think it's a critical question because, in fact, family involvement for highly-mobile students is crucial, and it's not being done because it's too hard.

MODERATOR: All right. Well, with that, we've got to move on. So, Aurelio, you're up next. Welcome to the program.

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