



NYC Students Call for Respect, Equity, and Voice in their Education

Our schools are failing us. Current graduation rates in New York City range from 40 to 50 percent-- depending upon how the data is calculated and by whom. This is a clear indication that our generation is not being prepared to take our rightful places as effective citizens in our city.

The Youth Researchers for a New Educational System (YRNES) completed a participatory action research project that explored youths' experiences in public schools. To do this, we conducted a citywide survey of over 500 New York City youth, and held two focus groups with youth education organizers.

To design our project, we worked with the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD), a New York City based youth participatory action research collective. Our work was also supported by Fordham University's National Center for Schools and Communities and the Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE).

We had **three major findings**: the first is that **young people in New York City believe that their schooling is important to them**. The second major finding is that **resources and access to opportunities are unfairly distributed in the New York City public school system and in schools**. Our third major finding is that **youth want to participate in school decisions that affect their lives**.

Our data indicated that there are important differences in how white youth and youth of color view their schools and their school experiences. There are important differences between how middle-high income youth and low-income youth, and between how youth who attend specialized and vocational schools, and youth from the large or recently converted schools experience schooling. For example, less than half the low-income youth in our survey reported that they are getting a good education or that their schools have a sense of purpose, as opposed to more than 70% of middle-high-income students.

Youth of color, lower-income youth, and youth from the large and recently converted schools experience more inequities in school. Less than half believe they get the resources they need to learn, feel positive about getting help in school to make education work for them, or believe they are being prepared for their next steps after high school. Substantially more students in these groups believe their schools are overcrowded, that there are not enough desks and chairs for all, and opportunities for learning in their schools are not equal. Youth are frustrated that they have to compete for school resources and access to guidance counselors.

Youth participants were critical of the physical conditions of their schools, and of the curriculums delivered believing them to be too narrow in their test-focus and lacking

connections to what they care about. Students want more voice in choosing their courses and want teachers to ask them for feedback on their teaching.

Eighty percent of the youth surveyed want to participate meaningfully in setting rules and policy at their schools. Seventy-six percent believe they know how to make their schools better. Further, more than 60% said the community surrounding the school should have a voice in how the school is run and that both community members and students have good ideas for programs, which could improve the school and the community. Less than 40% of all youth surveyed and an even lower percentage of low-income youth and youth of color, think school rules are fair.

Forty-seven percent of the youth surveyed said police have a negative impact on their schooling. Fifty-three percent of the youth view the Mayor's impact on schools as negative, and only 13% believe the Mayor Bloomberg knows best how to run schools.

In summary, our findings support the need for increased fairness in the distribution of school resources and educational opportunities. YRNES believes education is a human right and thus, wants all students to be treated with dignity and respect in schools that equitably provide their learning in clean environments that are safe, yet free of overcrowding and over policing. We want to participate meaningfully in decision-making and have a say in the changes that will bring about fair distribution of educational resources throughout all New York City public schools. Our recommendations and willingness to work towards change is meant to ensure that every student, regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, gender or income has the equal opportunity and fairly distributed resources to learn and achieve.

For a copy of the full report, contact Ellen Raider, Independent Commission on Public Education, 718 499-3756 or Ellen.Raider@gmail.com.