

[Summit moves on dropout prevention blueprint](#)



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Every nine seconds, a student in America becomes a dropout. For Pittsburgh high school students the dropout rate averages at approximately 35 percent, reaching as high as 50 percent for African-American males.

In the opening minutes of the 2010 Graduate Pittsburgh Summit on Nov. 4, the audience of educators, youth advocates, students, parents, and leaders in government, business, and the community heard the stories of four local dropouts who are now on the path to graduating.

“As I got older, middle school high school, I jumped off the porch at a young age started in the streets selling, using guns, all of that,” said Drake Cheadle, 17. “But then I just decided to go back to school because there wasn’t really no point in dropping out. I’ve been in school all these years. Why am I going to drop out now? My grades is coming up and they’re not going to fall back down. I’m gonna keep them up and get up out of here and do something good.”



SABRINA SAUNDERS

Along with three other former dropouts, Cheadle was featured in “Youth Voices,” a video produced by Ya Momz House, illustrating the plight of inner-city students, the factors that cause them to dropout, and what is being done to help them succeed.

The video was only one component of the day-long summit held at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture and hosted by Communities in Schools. This was the third year of the summit, originally hosted by CIS, a non-profit dropout prevention organization that works in public schools, facilitates after-school programs, and operates alternative educational academies.

In partnership with the mayor’s office, this year’s summit focused on implementing research done through the Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint Grant. The project identified options beyond traditional education pathways, education support programs, policy and procedure reforms within the Pittsburgh Public School District and stakeholders that are needed to take action.

“The folks who are here, we’re going to rely on everyone to follow the community action steps,” said Nicole Molinaro, executive director, CIS. “What we really realized is we needed an action.”



NICOLE MOLINARO
(Photo by Rossano P. Stewart)

“The most important action item from the summit was having the participants agree to meet outside of the summit and continue the momentum. The summit was more than an opportunity for participants to gain valuable information, they are now accountable to seeing the work and ideas that were generated come to life,” said Sabrina Saunders, youth policy manager of the City of Pittsburgh. “The city’s future is directly connected to the success of our students. We are committed to being actively involved in seeing the opportunities presented during the summit through.”

Serving as the summit’s keynote speaker was Horacio Sanchez, president of Resiliency Inc., a company that trains individuals on how to successfully educate and treat the most difficult to serve children and their families. His presentation, “The Science Behind Working with Vulnerable Youth,” gave the audience a look at how to combat the internal forces keeping a student from scholastic achievement.

“Many of the kids suffer from hostile attribution bias, the overreaction to benign things,” Sanchez said. “We’ve seen kids react like this and the person who extends a hand gets bitten.”

In order to combat this kind of student behavior and help students stay motivated in their education, Sanchez said it is important to be consistent with systems of praise and rewards.

“There are people who say, I didn’t get rewards for doing what was right so I shouldn’t have to. Philosophically you may not like it, but if the person needs it, why would you bother not doing it,” Sanchez said. “Unless we change adult behavior, we’re screwed. After all this science, here’s what it comes down to, you.”

The Summit will reconvene in February with further action steps created through public comment at the summit.

(For more information visit www.cispac.org.)