

# DON'T QUIT ON ME

## What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships

In *Don't Quit On Me*, Center for Promise researchers at Boston University School of Education explore the roles relationships with adults and peers play in young people's decisions to stay in, leave and return to high school.

Researchers — who surveyed nearly 3,000 young people and spoke with 120 more — reached four conclusions.



### FINDING 1

**Too many young people are facing too many hurdles to graduation with too little help.**

Young people who left school before graduating experienced twice as many “adverse life experiences” as youth who stayed in school.

- There are seven adverse life experiences that rise to the top as significant predictors of leaving school without graduating: becoming a parent, being suspended or expelled (even once), having many friends leave school, not feeling academically prepared for school, having a major mental health issue (such as depression or anxiety), being homeless and moving homes.
- More than 50 percent of those who left school before graduating experienced five or more adverse life experiences between the ages of 14 and 18, compared to 20 percent of those who graduated without interruption.
- Compared to young people who graduated on time, young people who left school before graduating were twice as likely to report that they reached out to “no one” for help and half as likely to have reached out to a teacher for help.



### FINDING 2

**Relationships matter, but their importance to graduation varies by type, source and intensity of support.**

- The presence of stable, trusting relationships is a key factor for enabling re-engagement. Stable relationships with non-family adults, in particular, play a big role in young people's re-engagement with school.
- The type of support matters. The four types of social support are: emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental. Each of these plays a specific role for a young person's development, but emotional (love and caring) and instrumental (actions like providing a bus pass, a meal, a ride or babysitting) acting in tandem are most likely to increase the number of students graduating without interruption.
- When nearly 1,200 survey respondents who left school before graduating were asked why they returned to school, by far the most frequent response was, “Someone encouraged me to return.”



## FINDING 3

**Support buffers adversity’s effects on graduation. But young people facing the greatest adversity need more intensive support than family, school and friends can typically provide.**

- For young people reporting medium levels of risk (two to four adverse life experiences), a Web of Support from parents, adults in school and friends can buffer adversity and increase rates of uninterrupted graduation.
- For young people reporting five or more adverse life experiences, social support alone does little to buffer the effects of adversity. Uninterrupted graduation stays well below 50 percent, even with high support from multiple sources.
- More intensive support that includes intentional efforts to resolve trauma, food insecurity, housing and other adverse life experiences can help youth re-engage and very likely keep them on a path to graduation.

“**RELATIONSHIP POVERTY** is not a lack of love or family, but a lack of access to additional sources of support that can lead to a more promising future.”

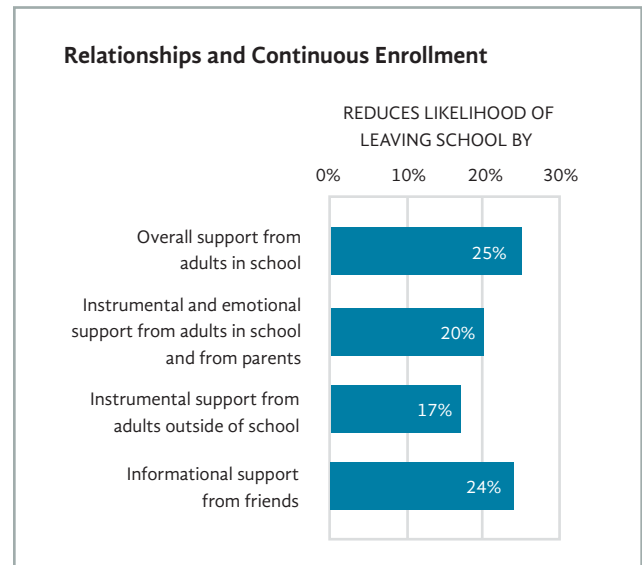
**John Gomperts, President and CEO  
America’s Promise Alliance**



## FINDING 4

**Young people are more likely to graduate if they have access to an Anchor and a Web of Support.**

- A relationship with one stable, trusted person or Anchor allows young people to access available community assets and leverage internal strengths.
- But a single caring adult cannot be the sole support. The anchoring relationship serves as a gateway to a Web of Support—which may include family, caring adults inside and outside school and peers.



### HOW CAN WE HELP MORE YOUNG PEOPLE GRADUATE ON TIME?

#### INDIVIDUALS CAN

- Listen
- Connect
- Start a conversation
- Be a mentor, tutor or coach

#### SCHOOLS CAN

- Make it harder to leave school
- Make it easier to return to school
- Bring the Web of Support in
- Invest in building relationships
- End zero-tolerance disciplinary policies
- Engage young people as peer supporters

#### COMMUNITIES CAN

- Assess risks and resources of young people
- Improve the odds that all young people have an Anchor
- Engage health care professionals
- Include social support systems
- See education and youth services as investments in your future



The Center for Promise is the research institute for America’s Promise Alliance, housed at Boston University and dedicated to understanding what young people need to thrive and how to create the conditions of success for all young people.

For the full report, go to [GradNation.org/DontQuit](https://gradnation.org/dontquit).  
To talk about it, use [#NotDropouts](https://twitter.com/NotDropouts).