



DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Don't Quit on Me explores what young people say about how relationships with adults and peers affect their decisions about staying in, leaving and returning to high school. The young people we interviewed and surveyed told us that the strength, number and nature of relationships in their lives are important factors that influence their engagement with school.

So how can communities help create more of the kinds of support young people are seeking? This guide suggests some questions you might pose at a GradNation community summit, a comprehensive community initiative meeting, or any community gathering focused on creating a strategic plan for supporting young people.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How are young people engaged directly in your planning effort?
- How do the findings in *Don't Quit on Me* reinforce or challenge what you believe about young people who interrupt their high school education? What surprised you? What new questions are you asking yourself as a result?
- Where do young people in your community encounter people who show they care? Where do they encounter apathy? Where might they feel unwelcome or unsupported? How can you boost daily encounters with supportive adults both inside and outside school?
- What data about graduation rates in your community is available? What data is available about the risks children and teens are facing that might get in the way of school success? How can you improve access to and awareness of that data?
- If you were a teenager living in poverty, what might be hard for you about getting to school? Brainstorm a list of what is needed to get to school each day, and identify potential barriers. These might be related to transit costs, neighborhood safety, access to breakfast or lunch, or caregiving responsibilities at home. Who or what could make showing up easier?
- Who in your community is serving young people at greatest risk of not graduating — those facing five or more adverse life events in their teens? How can you boost graduation-focused support for this group of young people?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- To bring more data about assets and risks into your conversations, consider utilizing the [Search Institute's Developmental Assets Profile](#) or state-level data from the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#).
- Review the Community section of the report's recommendations, which includes several links to other potential data sources.

On Building Trust

Consistent with previous literature on relationship building, young people we interviewed described four ways that adults or peers can build or rebuild trust in relationships with young people who have experienced a lot of instability. They can:

- **Invest time.** Showing up once for a young person or saying that you will do something to help is not sufficient for building trust. Instead, the participants in our study talked about adults in their lives who invested significant amounts of time in listening to them or helping them.
- **"Be there no matter what."** Time alone is not sufficient. The young people we interviewed have been through and continue to face substantial adversity. They need someone to be present and supportive when they need help, whether because they have an immediate problem to resolve or because they need help accessing resources or opportunities.
- **Empathize.** The young people we interviewed described the need to be appreciated for who they are and what they have been through. They said they need someone who can empathize with them and respond to their needs.
- **Offer help without judgment.** The young people we interviewed know they've taken some wrong turns. They need help to get back on track, and they appreciate people who can offer needed resources without judging their circumstances or their choices.