

**Reconnecting Youth Symposium**  
**August 13, 2009**  
**Hosted by Multnomah ESD & Leaders Roundtable**  
**Summary**

1. **Welcome/introductions** provided by Ron Hitchcock, Superintendent of the Multnomah Education Service District: Too many students disconnect too early from education and too few reconnect with education in a meaningful way
2. **Youth Voice Panel:** What led to disconnect/attempts to reconnect
  - Lack of caring adult
  - Don't fit the school mold
  - Small fish in big pond
  - Lack of healthy social outlets – leading to gang involvement
  - Need for school access that is different than the mainstream
  - Literacy proficiency helps drop outs succeed
  - Many people frustrated with trying to get through the system
  - Getting GED hard with life issues
  - A lot of frustrating, fragmented history of attempts to complete or engage in education after drop out
  - A lot of self study – trying to keep up on their own
3. **What Happens to Dropouts? A Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning** (click on link for presentation), Steve Reder, Portland State University. See also LSAL summary on page 4 of this document.
  - Reconnection needs to be about where the individual is going, not where they are coming from
  - Realistic learning plans
  - Need a community wide learning support system
  - 35% of dropout students interviewed in the study were either school identified or self identified as having a learning disabilities
  - Need to look at resources available to districts to support education past year 21. After that schools can't support them (no state funding beyond age 21)
  - Many individuals don't connect until their mid-late 20's and the restraints make it harder for them to reconnect
4. **ACCESS, Alternative Community & Correctional Schools & Services in Orange Co, Calif.** Dr. Bill Habermehl, Orange County Supt. of Schools
  - Serve 18,298 students in alternative education
  - Orange County dropout rate 10%, Oregon 13-16%
  - What is different about ACCESS?
  - 130 sites – from store fronts to full buildings. Located in strip malls and near Starbucks
  - Easy access to people where they are
  - Lease and rent facilities rather than build
  - Participation by police, probation officers, drug and alcohol, county health services
  - Principals have responsibility for multiple sites
  - Funding model

- As early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade up through high school
- Never give paperwork and send home. Start the day they walk in
- Open 7am to 7 at night for flexible learning
- Smaller student ratio, teachers have regular contact...phone calls etc.
- Most students are drop outs or behind in credits
- Delinquent or disruptive
- High risk health behaviors
- Low achievers
- Pregnant or nursing
- 85% of students pass the state test
- 75% of students go to secondary education
- Must meet minimum graduation requirements and district requirements
- Close connections with youth employment
- Some title 1 funds
- Teachers are hired because they are willing to teach in non-traditional ways

5. **Small group discussion & report out:** Participants were asked to discuss **what resonated the most** with them from the presentations and discussion, and to **identify possible next steps** to move the conversation forward

**What resonated**

- Meeting students where they are at
- \$ being lost
- Scope of the problem & the success in Orange County
- Lack of something like that (Orange County) model in Multnomah County
- Need for system change to a student focus
- Multnomah Co. is rich in choices & opportunities but no systematic approach
- Less emphasis on barriers is needed
- Mult. Co. has lots of unused capacity—is this true and is it enough to fill needs?
- Developing relationships with students/families, family engagement, peer engagement is critical
- Need for immediacy
- Committed leaders in place
- Student voice & the data both focus on relationships
- Is the dropout issue a problem per se or symptom of deeper issues?
- Students are more courageous than we think
- Are schools built to “love” each student?
- Cooperation & collaboration is essential—need leadership
- Portable goals for students
- Systems of support need to be flexible & accessible (NOW)

**Possible next steps/need to know** (*Note: these range from the general to the specific, no attempt to categorize or prioritize was made*)

- Could benefit from creation of a design workgroup with representative constituents
- Inventory of capacity & resources
- Commitment to accountability—how can this be formalized, who’s responsible (dropout czar)
- Use data to create a sense of urgency
- Cost recovery needs to be built into any model
- Many players needed to have the impact of Orange Co. model

- Reduce/eliminate obstacles to immediate access, balance with responsibility (including culturally) to ensure “best fit” (define best fit)
- Who are the students at risk and who are the dropouts, by name
- Solid number of disconnected youth—define the community we are trying to reconnect with, measure with unused capacity in the system
- Continuum of youth serving community, inter relationships and impacts on each other
- Is there any capacity to collect/do any of the above?
- Any other models to review in addition to Orange Co.?
- What does dollars following the kid mean, what does it look like, what would be the impact?
- Do something quickly, now and quit talking around and about its, call it what it is, “a crisis”

**Recommendations for next steps** (*note: these are recommendations only, no attempt was made to reach consensus*)

- By Dec. 31, Supts. Council come up with an action plan
  - Within 30-60 days—identify the capacity, the youth and recruit community partners
  - Use existing resources to pave the way for new model
  - MESD is in position to connect efforts & students with resources
  - Decrease wait time to reconnect youth
  - Work with social services & Tri met among others
  - County wide engagement needed to track students, monitor progress, go beyond high school
  - Make systems more personalized
  - Actively seek out students to make reconnections
  - Education Cabinet/Student Data Task Force are key players
6. Next steps: Leaders Roundtable & MESD to convene follow up session



The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) followed a random sample of about 1,000 Portland area high school dropouts over a 10-year period. LSAL conducted periodic in-depth interviews in individuals' homes, assessed their basic skills, and with their permission, collected administrative data about their employment, earnings and educational histories. The LSAL data give us a rich picture of what happens to dropouts after they leave school, whether and how they reconnect with learning, enter the workforce, participate in civic activities, become lifelong learners, and so forth.

Some key findings emerging from LSAL:

- Youth drop out of school for diverse reasons, some related to school or academic problems, others related to non-school problems (e.g., family problems, substance abuse).
- Dropouts leave school with a broad range of basic skills
- Their basic skills continue to improve after they leave school
- Their continuing skill development is related to their employment and earning outcomes
- Many have educational and occupational goals but lack realistic plans for attaining them
- Support services are fragmented and disconnected from the perspective of learners
- Although many dropouts receive GEDs, relatively few attend college and very few complete 2-year or 4-year college degrees
- Employer-provided training is rarely available to this population

Some implications of these and other LSAL findings:

- Solutions to the "dropout problem" require both ongoing school reform efforts *and* systematic supports for youth and adults after they have left school in order to reconnect them with learning and work
- Existing "smokestack" programs, while often effective for particular populations and goals, need to be connected and coordinated around individual needs
- Youth and young adults need *realistic* and *customized* plans to follow to reach their learning and life goals, plans that blend improved basic skills training, modularized work-related and college-related content, and use of technology
- Bridge programs are needed that provide *active* and *individualized* support to youth and young adults transitioning into postsecondary education, training and family-supporting jobs

More information is available at [www.lsal.pdx.edu](http://www.lsal.pdx.edu) and [www.learnerweb.org](http://www.learnerweb.org)