



**THE YRNES REPORT**  
**NEW YORK CITY 2008**





## **The Youth Researchers for a New Education System Project, 2007-2008**

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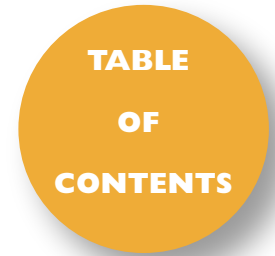
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**The Youth  
Researchers  
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**PUBLIC.** *n., a. (p əblik)*

From the Latin word publicus, from populus, meaning people. Of or pertaining to the people; belonging to the people; relating to, or affecting, a nation, state, or community.

*(Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1913)*

**YRNES.** *v. (yûrns)*

To strongly desire radical change in the New York City public school system. To demand action from our leaders and community on behalf of youth. To affect change within our city and communities. To work in effort to have students finally fulfilled by schooling.



## WE ARE THE YOUTH RESEARCHERS FOR A NEW EDUCATION SYSTEM,

*Y.R.N.E.S.*

a diverse group of youth from all over New York City (NYC) who have come together for a common goal: to be instruments of change in the NYC public school system. Because of our experiences as public school students and now researchers on public schools, we are yearning for something enormous: radical change within the NYC public education system. We are an independent youth organization that worked on this project in partnership with the Education is a Human Right Campaign, and two member groups of that campaign, The National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University (NCSC) and the Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE). Our design process was facilitated by researchers from the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD).

### The Education is a Human Right

*EDUCATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT*  
**Campaign**

**O**n April 16, 2005, parents, students, teachers and advocates met at the Education Action Summit to call for a new system of public education in NYC based on human rights. As a result of that conference the Education is a Human Right Campaign officially launched on Sept 28, 2005 on the steps of City Hall. Over twenty organizations joined the lead organizer, the Independent Commission for Public Education (iCOPE) and endorsed the campaign. Endorsers included Class Size Matters, Time Out From Testing, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, Amnesty International, Black New Yorkers for Educational Excellence, the Human Rights Project of the Urban Justice Center, the Anti Racist Alliance, and the Center for Immigrant Families (see [www.icope.org](http://www.icope.org) for full list).

In collaboration with the campaign, in April 2006 NCSC launched Task Force 2009 made up of educational leaders, community organizers, parents and youth to help design the new system. iCOPE formed five Independent Borough Education Commissions (one in each borough) in order to get broad based community input for the plan.

In November 2006, iCOPE invited youth researchers to independently design and conduct a participatory action research project; this group became YRNES. During 2007, the campaign conducted two tribunals, met with various community, youth and parent organizations, and held a day-long retreat to envision a human rights-based school system.

The purpose of the Education is a Human Right Campaign is twofold:

- 1) To show that a more just, democratic, and effective education system is possible;
- 2) To encourage a citywide dialogue, so that all stakeholders can knowledgeably share their views before a legislative decision is made in Albany about the sun-setting of the current governance law, which gave the mayor total control of the system. The campaign insists that this decision, which affects the education of 1.1 million students, can be made only after open, public dialogue.

## The Yrnes Project

THE YRNES PROJECT

This participatory action research project took place between January and September, 2007. The goal of the project was to capture NYC youths' experiences in public schools. As the team of youth researchers began to work together, two main questions emerged:

- 1) What are NYC youths' perspectives on what is and isn't provided in their schools?
- 2) What are NYC youths' perspectives on school organization and leadership?

To answer these main questions, YRNES utilized a mixed methods approach that included a quantitative survey, qualitative focus groups and the "problem tree" (see Section 2 for methods).

As we collected and began to analyze our data, we realized that the question of youth perspectives on what is and isn't provided (question one) could be largely understood as related to unevenly and unfairly distributed resources and competition. The question of youth perspectives on school organization and leadership (question two) could be understood as related to mayoral control, as well as diminished community, and youth participation in educational decisions. These realizations helped us to hone our questions so that we could pose direct questions to youth about their experiences with school resources and access, competition, mayoral control, and opportunities for participation.

The data collection phase of our study was coincidentally simultaneous to a major survey effort in public schools initiated by the mayor's office. Although we applauded the mayor's office for systematically polling

parents and students about their experiences with the school system, we observed that important questions of resources, leadership, and participation were absent from the survey items. For this reason, we spread the word of our survey as, "Not your mayor's survey."

Our research yielded three major findings that each serve as an umbrella for many other findings.

Our three findings are:

- 1) Young people in New York City believe their schooling is important to them;
- 2) Resources and access to opportunities are unfairly distributed in our school system and in our schools;
- 3) Young people in New York City want more meaningful opportunities to participate in decision making about schooling.

Our findings may come as a surprise to some, but we doubt they will be a surprise to many of those who are educators, parents, current or former students, or those who are thoughtful about schooling. These arguments also serve as a progression of our critique of the NYC school system in 2008.

We hope that our findings will assist in efforts toward improving our schools, especially in the redressed distribution of resources and distribution of leadership and participation.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH DESIGN

We designed this research project to listen to school survivors. Depending on the measurement tool, graduation rates in New York City range between 40-60% each year, hovering around 50%. If youth earning GEDs are not included, the percentage dips even lower. This means that in any given year, more youth leave school without a diploma than stay and finish with a diploma. We wanted our study to capture the voices and opinions of those who have stayed.

This doesn't mean that youth who have dropped out, been pushed out, or who have earned or are seeking a GED were excluded from participating in our research (some of our YRNES research team fall into these categories!), but it does mean that almost 90% of our participants have or will complete a high school diploma. This is a very different percentage than in real life.

We wanted to know about the experiences of those who stay in school. At the heart of our inquiry was a city-wide survey to help us get a quantitative sense of youth experiences. Then, to fill in some of our questions that couldn't be answered on a survey, we conducted two focus groups with youth education activists in the Bronx and Queens. We decided to talk with youth education activists because we wanted to talk with youth who have thought a lot about their experiences in schooling, and who would help us unpack what is really going on in our schools. However, now that we have spoken with hundreds of youth across New York City, we know that we could have done our focus groups with almost any group of youth, because youth here spend a lot of time thinking critically about schooling.

Indeed, in every borough, in every district, in every school, youth are ready to participate in decision making about our schooling.

## Methods

### Survey

We requested current and former NYC public school students aged 14 to 22 to complete a very common activity: use their pencils to bubble in answers! As a group we developed a series of multiple choice and "agree" or "disagree" questions on youths' access to school resources and opportunities, guidance, and participation, as well as their views on school control and leadership. In many questions, we posed a statement, such as: "I believe that the community surrounding the school should have a say in how the school is run," and asked youth to agree or disagree. With extensive help from NCSC, we developed a paper version and identical online version of the survey. We sent emails, posted on listserves, and used websites like Myspace and Facebook to spread the word on our online survey. We also hit the streets, malls, parks and other public spaces, long subway and bus rides, neighborhood corners, lunchrooms, community centers, and a youth conference to collect surveys in person. In total we collected 546 surveys during May, 2007. Sixty percent (n = 325) of our surveys were collected online and 40% (n = 221) were collected on paper.

### Focus Groups

We conducted two focus groups with youth organizers from well regarded youth organizations: Sistas and Brothers United (Bronx, NY) and Desis Rising Up and Moving (Queens, NY). Both groups are actively involved in education organizing, and we tapped into this experience and knowledge with semi-structured group questions. Each focus group was facilitated by three or four YRNES researchers. The total number of focus group youth participants was 18.

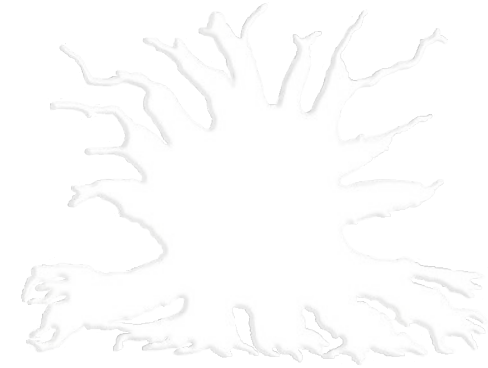
The focus groups began with an individual mapping exercise, in which youth used markers and paper to portray a "map" or visual representation of their educational experiences.

After each participant and facilitator shared her map, the facilitators asked the group the following questions:

- What would meaningful participation in school look like for you?
- If you did participate meaningfully in how your school was run, how would your overall school experience be different?
- In some classrooms, hip hop culture is recognized as a valid teaching tool that speaks to students' experiences. What are other ways that teachers and students can learn from each other?
- Why do you go to school (other than because your parent / legal guardian tells you to)?
- In your opinion, why does our government mandate that we go to school?
- Do you feel that your school is meeting your needs? Please explain your answer.

To conclude the focus groups, the facilitators asked youth to write in response to this prompt:

**“Imagine  
what your educational  
experience would be  
like if it truly  
fulfilled your  
purpose.”**



## The Problem Tree

During our project design process, the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD) utilized the “problem tree” with our group to aid us in identifying our research questions. CREDD borrowed the problem tree technique from popular education and used it to both help conceptualize and plan our project, and as part of our data. The problem tree is an approach to mapping (creating a visual representation) a specific problem determined by a group.

In this method, we began with the question, “What concerns us about our school system?”<sup>1</sup> and used a tree shaped outline to map the symptoms, intermediate causes and roots of this problem. Then, we deconstructed or pulled apart our tree in order to think about how to address this old problem in new ways. (An extended discussion of this method, along with images of our Problem Tree and the deconstructed Tree appear at the end of this report. Also see Ferreira and Ferreira, 1997; Tuck, 2007; and Tuck et. al. 2008.)

Later in our project, we returned to the tree to help us analyze the results of our other methods. Now, we have shared our Problem Tree with a range of audiences to show the relationships between the everyday experiences of a broken school system and the larger ideological and systematic roots of the problems.



*Our identification of this question came from a prior paper exercise, the True False “Test.” In this exercise, participants mark true or false for a series of prompts, such as “If you leave school before turning 21, you give up your right to return to school” and “Schools can transfer you to a GED program or other school without your or your parent’s permission.” (Both are false.) See the appendix of this report for the full version of the True False “Test.”*

## Our Participants

All of the participants in our survey were aged 14-22 (mean = 17), and focus group participants were aged 16-22. Our participants were diverse by race and ethnicity, including African-American, African-Caribbean, Arab, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latina and Latino, Native American and Alaskan Native, Southeast Asian, and White Youth.<sup>2</sup> Participants were diverse by class, including low-income and middle-high income youth.<sup>3</sup> Focus group participants lived and attended school in all five boroughs of NYC, spoke a diversity of languages at home and with their friends, and were born both in the United States and abroad. Participants included those identifying as men, women, and non-heteronormative gender conforming; youth also reported a multiplicity of sexual orientations, but for the purposes of this report, we have not disaggregated data by sexual orientation (demographic tables and graphs are placed throughout the report and in Section 6).

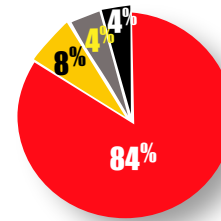
Our participants were in grades 6-12, had high school diplomas, had or were seeking GEDs, or were secondary school non-completers and attended a range of different kinds of public schools.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that fewer than 10% of our participants were school non-completers (1%) or GED earners (3%) or seekers (5%) as discussed previously. This study largely documented the experiences of those who have stayed in their schools despite the sometimes troubling aspects. They tell us a story about the accumulation of injustice in NYC public schools, the disproportionate nature of disrespect, and the missed opportunities to make things right.

### 2

We asked youth to indicate their ethnicities by marking as many of the following that applied: African-Caribbean, Arab, Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American / Alaskan Native, White, Latina/Latino. For the purposes of analyzing our survey, "students of color" include youth who marked African-Caribbean, Arab, Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan Native and Latina/Latino. "White" youth include those who marked White.

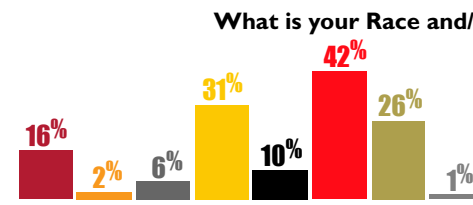
### 3

We used the Metropolitan Life Insurance Indicator of Social Class: We asked youth to agree or disagree with the statement, "I or my family have a hard time paying for what we need." Sixty-two percent agreed and 38% disagreed with the statement. For the purposes of analyzing our survey results, we categorized the 62% that agreed with the statement as "low-income" and the 38% who disagreed with the statement as "middle-high-income."



What is your Country of Origin? (n = 493)

- Born in the United States
- Arrived in U.S. between infancy & age 5
- Arrived in U.S. between ages 6 and 10
- Arrived in U.S. between ages 11 & 15



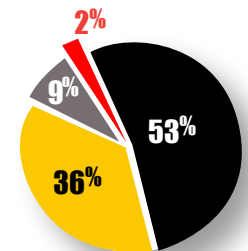
What is your Race and/or Ethnicity?\* (n = 463)

- African Caribbean
- Arab
- Native American, American Indian, Alaskan Native
- Black or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latina, Lat no
- White
- Other

\* This totals more than 100% because we invited survey participants to select as many ethnic identities as applied. Seventy-one percent indicated a single identity, and 29% indicated one or more identities.

What is your Gender? (n = 543)

- Woman
- Man
- Declined to answer
- Non-heteronormative Gender conforming



### 4

We asked youth to categorize the type of school the attended by marking one of the following: alternative school; enrollment based on application/audition; one large school; Second Opportunity School (SOS) within a detention facility; specialized/vocational school (performing arts, business, culinary); converted school (a large school that was converted into different schools).

To analyze our survey data by school type, we separated the choices into two groups:

- 1) "large high school" which included those who marked one large high school and converted school;
- 2) "specialized high school" which included those who marked alternative school, enrollment school, SOS, school within a detention facility, and specialized/ vocational school.

## Context of the Study

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

We designed our study so that the diversity of our pool of participants reflected the diversity of our school system. As a whole, the NYC public school system is immensely diverse, including 85% youth of color and 74% youth who qualify for free lunch among 1.1 million students (Sullivan, 2007).

Although the system as a whole is diverse, recent studies and anecdotal evidence support that many individual school buildings are less diverse and more racially segregated than expected (Fine et. al., 2004). Further, in NYC and across the United States, youth who grow up in poverty are more likely to attend under-resourced schools, separate from middle and high income counterparts (Rebell and Wolff, 2008).

In 2002, following examples in Boston and Chicago, Albany awarded Mayor Michael Bloomberg control over the over 1,400 public schools in NYC in an effort to thwart the infamous bureaucracy of the Board of Education and infuse

the public school system with accountability (Stern, 2007). Mayor Bloomberg appointed Joel Klein as Schools Chancellor, and for the past six years, both have taken an openly business-like approach to centralizing schools. For example, in September 2007, principals were encouraged to run their schools as “independent franchises” (Medina and Herszenhorn, 2007).

Although there are many on the left and the right as well as grassroots groups that critique the effectiveness of Bloomberg’s control, mayors from Los Angeles and Washington, DC have visited to gain wisdom for their own versions of mayoral control. The criticisms that contest the mayor’s transparency are disquieting. For example, one report pointed out that Bloomberg’s “Department of Education routinely undermines accountability with a public relations juggernaut that deflects legitimate criticism of his education policies, dominates the mainstream press, uses the schools as campaign props, and, most ominously, distorts

student test-score data. Without transparency, real accountability doesn’t exist” (Stern, 2007).

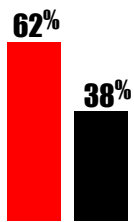
Mayoral control of NYC is up for reauthorization in 2008-09, and regardless of the decision, mayoral term limits mean that a new leader will be at the helm of this city.

Finally, this study is also contextualized by several ongoing movements that mark NYC public schools. These include the breaking down of large comprehensive high schools into “small” schools, persistent overcrowding, increased police involvement in school discipline, and the increased role of standardized testing in the curriculum. Each has consequences that fall disproportionately on poor youth and youth of color in New York City.

### Metropolitan Life Insurance Indicator of Social Class:

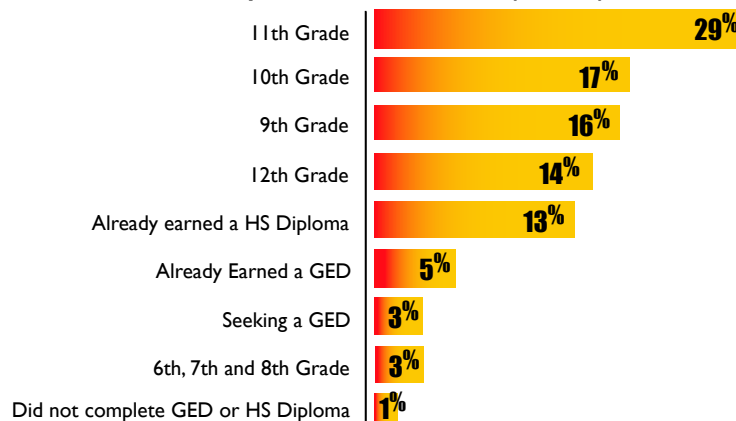
“I or my family have a hard time paying for what we need.”

(n = 467)

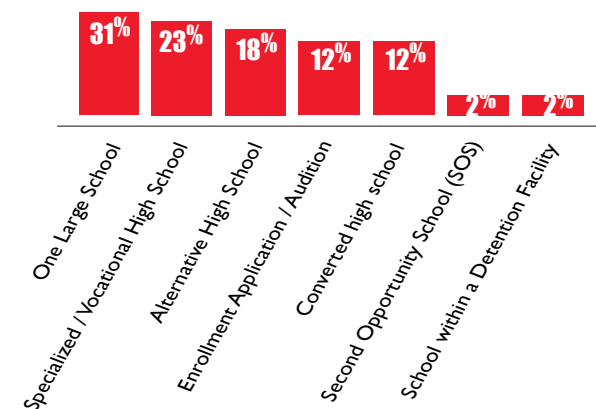


- Agree (Low-Income Youth)
- Disagree (Middle-High Income Youth)

### Respondent School Status (n = 491)



### “What Kind of School Do You Go To?” (n = 474)



We have done this research to contribute to a crucial conversation at a crucial time: the future of mayoral control and school organization and leadership in NYC. We have written this report to widen the perspectives on this debate to include youth voices and concerns. This report is organized around our three umbrella findings:

- 1) Young people in New York City believe their schooling is important to them
- 2) Resources and access to opportunities are unfairly distributed in our school system and in our schools
- 3) Young people in New York City want more meaningful opportunities to participate in decision making about schooling.

Each section begins with focus group findings and survey results that have been analyzed by class, race and ethnicity, gender, and/or type of school. It is important to remember that these variables are intimately related, especially race, class, and type of school. A closer look at the inter-relatedness of these variables can be found in our appendix. Each section concludes with a discussion. The report closes with recommendations and an extensive appendix.

---

## FINDING #1: Young people in New York City believe their schooling is important to them.

### Focus Group Results

This section presents our findings pertaining to the importance youth place on their schooling and education. This importance comes from their families' goals, their own goals, and less often, from the schools that they attend. The major lesson we learned from our data is this: from youths' perspectives, the purpose of schooling needs to be re-evaluated, and at the same time, youth place a lot of importance on their schooling.

The first part of this lesson comes from our focus groups. We asked youth; "Why do you go to school (other than because your parent/legal guardian tells you to)?" When we asked this question in one group, there was a pause, and then many voices together said, "Friends!" One young man told us:

"School has taught me that you can get along with a lot of different kinds of people. That, and I have a lot in common with a lot of other people. Sometimes what we have in common is we agree on why we hate school."

Another young man told us, "I go to school because unfortunately it's the only way of fitting in to this society." This idea is echoed in an exchange from our other focus group:

Young man: "If you don't go to school, it's difficult to have a future... No matter how much you hate it, if you want to have a future you have to go to school."

Young woman: "But what if you're not even learning anything? If your teachers are not teaching you the right stuff?"

One young man summed it up for us in this way: "No matter what happens, I've learned from the experience. Even if it's a negative experience."

Several youth told us that the only reason they attend school is because they have no choice. We pursued this line of thinking with the question, "In your opinion, why does our government mandate that we go to school?"

One young woman told us:

"If you go to school you are taught to obey. You know, like 'over throwing the government?' The school is designed to train you not to think that way. They train you to think in whatever manner they want you to think."

Youth did not take the notion of employment for granted, and pointed to the ways in which future employment opportunities are different based on class, race, and gender. This can be seen in this exchange between two youth of color:

Young man: "They want our country to be educated so that we can work."

Young woman: "Yeah, but do you really need to be educated to do the kinds of jobs they want us to do?"

## Survey Results: *Aspirations and Experiences of Schooling*

When we asked youth to tell us what they think their parents/guardians want them to do after they complete high school, 80% answered that their parents and guardians want them to go to college (see Table 1).

In Table 2, we present results pertaining to youth aspirations for schooling. You can see that overall, youth demonstrate a confidence about their own futures and purposes in schooling, but there are some important differences by class and school type. Further, as questions shift from confidence in self to confidence in classes and school, the percentage of youth who agree drops.

In Table 3, we disaggregate survey responses to the statement, “I am getting a good education at my school.” Although the overall responses seem to be positive, it is important to consider whether 61% is adequate, and to attend to the lower “agree” response rate of low income youth, youth of color, and youth attending large/converted schools.

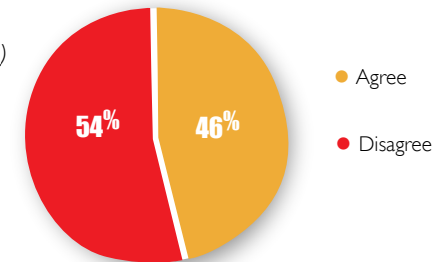
**Table 1: PARENT AND GUARDIAN ASPIRATIONS FOR SCHOOLING:**  
(n = 492)

What do you think your parents or guardians want you to do after high school?

Option	Percentage
Go to college	80%
Work full time	6%
Join the military	2%
Not sure	4%

**“I feel that what I learn in high school is relevant to my life outside of high school” (n=492)**

(from Table 2)



**Table 2: YOUTH ASPIRATIONS FOR SCHOOLING**

General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>I have a sense of my purpose in school</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>37</b>
Low income Youth		50	50
Middle-High income Youth		71	29
<b>My school provides me with good reasons to keep attending school</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>45</b>
Large / Converted School		48	52
Specialized School		59	41
<b>Grades in high school matter for success in the future</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>27</b>
Young Men		68	32
Young Women		79	21
<b>My classes give me useful preparation for what I plan to do in life</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>In the past two years, my school has been making positive changes that have benefited the students</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>

**Table 3: “I AM GETTING A GOOD EDUCATION AT MY SCHOOL”**

General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>I am getting a good education at my school</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>39</b>
Low income Youth		48	52
Middle-High income Youth		70	30
Youth of Color		59	41
White Youth		74	26
Large/converted school		54	46
Specialized school		66	34

Even though youth are dissatisfied in their schooling, they see it as crucial to their lives. Although in the following sections our research participants expressed their frustration and disappointment in their schooling, our findings in this section demonstrate that school and a high school diploma are still seen as valuable to youth. Their beliefs in the value of their education, even and especially when being denied resources and respect, compounds the insult of this denial.

Most of our survey respondents agreed with the statement, “I have a sense of my purpose in school,” even though, as our focus group participants told us, the current, foggy purposes of schooling are less than inspiring. Youths’ abilities to maintain a sense of purpose within schools that feel purposeless is an indication of how youth view schooling as something to “get through” or “put up with” in order to enjoy better situated futures.

Schooling should be something much more than that. If they were respected, affirmed, supported, and encouraged, many more youth would feel that they are participating in schooling that deserves their high hopes and aspirations.

## FINDING #2: Resources and access to opportunities are unfairly distributed in our school system & in our schools.

### Focus Group Results

This section presents our findings as they pertain to the distribution of resources and access to opportunities in NYC public schools. Our findings reveal that there are important differences in the distribution of resources and access for youth across groups by class, race, gender, and school type.

We asked our focus group participants, “Do you feel that your school is meeting your needs? Please explain your answer.” Out of 18 focus group participants, two answered “yes.” One young person told us why, “I found out from friends of mine who graduated before me that the courses I am taking now in high school are more difficult than what they are taking in their first year of college. That makes me feel like I am being prepared.” This response was profoundly distinct from the other responses, especially from youth who observed that the main focus of schooling is on tests. One young man said: “It’s obvious that schools are just about

passing the tests, because all we do is prepare for the test, and all that is said is ‘We don’t have time for that because we have to get ready to do the test.’ But then, after we take the test, you barely even have to come to school because there is totally nothing going on. [After testing week] the school day is just about passing time until we’re out.”

Youth not only connected testing to the ways in which their schools don’t meet their needs, they also insisted that tests don’t measure what is important to measure in schooling: “Tests are unnecessary for being able to show that you put in effort, show that you care, that you pay attention; what’s the point of having a test if it can’t tell you these things?”

One young person had a somewhat cynical, yet reasonable answer: “These tests are given to you to see how much of their bullsh\*t you believe.” In our other focus group, youth centered in on

the limited availability of guidance counselors as a main reason their schools did not meet their needs. One young man said, “At my school there about 4,000 students and four counselors, so that is 1,000 students per counselor. That doesn’t meet my needs.” A young woman followed up with an example from her school: “You can’t just see a counselor for no reason. You have to explain to someone first why you want to see them, and it’s like, “No I don’t want to tell you, I want to tell my counselor.” You have to actually fill out an application to see the guidance counselor... It’s ridiculous.”

In the end, one young man observed: “High school is fine for kids who are fine in their lives, but if there is anything hard going on in someone’s life, school becomes very difficult... When things are hard in your life and you’re not excelling academically, it’s easy to be like, ‘This is stupid, I don’t need to be here.’”

## Survey Results: *Aspirations of Access & Resources*

In Table 4, we present our survey results that pertain to issues of access to help and resources. Just over half of our respondents agreed “I have access to all the help I need to make my education work for me,” but, in a school system where fewer than half graduate each year, the number of those who disagreed with this statement should be of concern. Then, as we move into questions of preparedness to make next steps and resources in order to learn, we see that there are some important differences, especially in terms of race, but also class, gender, and school type.

When designing this research project utilizing the problem tree, our group identified the potential issue that unfairly distributed and limited resources and limited access to opportunities contributes to a negative atmosphere of competition in schools. Table 5 presents the results of our survey items that took up this line of questioning. As you can see, 56% of youth told us, “My school is overcrowded,” and 48% told us that “In my school there is the general feeling that there are not enough desks and/or enough chairs for all students.” Low-income youth, youth of color, and youth who attend large / converted schools were more likely to agree with these statements. Sixty-two per cent of youth agreed that their schools are providing equal learning opportunities, which is generally a positive finding, but only half of low-income youth agreed with this statement. Fifty-eight percent told us that they compete for things to which they feel they actually have rights in school, with 72% of low-income youth agreeing with this statement.

**Table 4: DISTRIBUTION OF ACCESS & RESOURCES**

General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>I have access to all the help I need to make my education work for me</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>I feel prepared to take my next steps after high school from information I have received at school</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>51</b>
Youth of Color		48	52
White Youth		59	41
<b>My school provides me with the resources I need in order to learn</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>
Low-income Youth		49	51
Middle-High Income Youth		68	32
Youth of Color		58	42
White Youth		74	26
Young Men		55	45
Young Women		66	34
Large / Converted School		49	51
Specialized School		68	32

**Table 5: MALDISTRIBUTED ACCESS AND RESOURCES RESULTING IN INCREASED UNDUCE COMPETITION**

General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>My school is overcrowded</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>44</b>			
Low Income Youth		69	31			
Middle-High Income Youth		47	53			
Youth of Color		58	42			
White Youth		45	55			
Large / Converted School		63	37			
Specialized School		51	49			
<b>My school provides equal opportunities for learning to every student</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>38</b>			
Low Income Youth		50	50			
Middle-High Income Youth		71	29			
<b>In my school there is the general feeling that there are not enough desks and/or enough chairs for all students</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>52</b>			
Low Income Youth		61	39			
Middle-High Income Youth		40	60			
Youth of Color		49	51			
White Youth		39	61			
Large / Converted School		59	41			
Specialized School		38	62			
<b>I feel that students in my school have to compete for things that we actually have rights to</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>42</b>			
Low Income Youth		72	28			
Middle-High Income Youth		50	50			



## Survey Results: A Closer Look at Guidance

Limited access to fully informed guidance counselors also came up as a key issue in responses to our survey. We used a series of survey items on guidance authored by the Chicago Consortium of Public Schools, and asked youth to check all that apply (see Table 6). Forty percent of our respondents answered none of the above. When reading this table it is important to note that most youth respondents were in eleventh grade, and that we administered the survey in May, close to the end of the school year.

**Table 6: GUIDANCE PROVIDED BY GUIDANCE COUNSELORS:**  
Throughout high school, my counselors...[1] (n = 546)

	Agree (%)
Helped me select courses that meet my high school's graduation requirements	49
Helped me select courses that I need for work or admission to college	30
Helped me decide what I want to do after I graduate	25
Encouraged me to take AP/honors courses	28
Encouraged me to continue my education after high school	51
Talked to me about how to get a job	18
Talked to me about how to get a job that I would want	15
Talked to me about colleges/schools that are suited to my interests and abilities	32
None of the above	40

[1] This series of questions was directly drawn from Chicago Consortium of Public Schools annual survey for grade 12

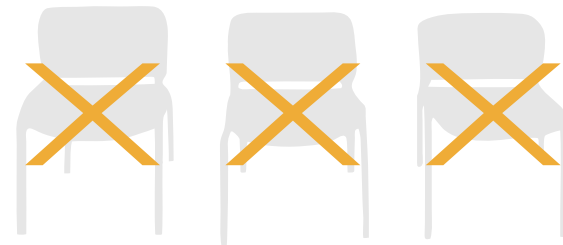
**I**n focus groups youth discussed the current testing trend and limited access to guidance counselors in terms of disrespect. Perhaps the most covert yet pervasive form of disrespect is the uneven distribution of resources. Our findings in this section expose the gaps in resources and access to information and opportunities that youth in NYC see in their schools.

The skewed distribution of resources identified in Table 5 has a direct impact on the issues that play out in Table 6. Overcrowding, not enough seats, and competing for things to which youth actually have rights are some of the most disheartening and dehumanizing aspects of the current system.

Overcrowding and the general feeling that there are not enough seats for all students are intimately connected. We link them to competition, but they also point to the ways in which schools make students feel unwelcome, or like they don't belong. The persistent feeling like there isn't enough room for everyone contributes to schools as places that no one wants to be.

## Discussion

Youth in NYC public schools are competing against one another for opportunities, resources, and treatment for which they actually have human and civil rights. Youth in our focus groups observed that because schools are in part designed to keep capitalism in motion, the competitive environment may not be accidental. In the words of one focus group participant, school is about "learning to fight [for every little thing] so we'll fight out there." Advocates of "invisible hand" capitalism might argue that this indeed should be the function of schools. We, however, hold that it is reprehensible for schools to deny us our human and civil rights, and that the competition that results from unfairly distributed resources and access is undefendable.



## FINDING #3: Young people in New York City want more meaningful opportunities to participate in decision making about schooling.

*This section presents findings pertaining to the distribution of resources and access to opportunities in NYC public schools. Our findings reveal that there are important differences in the distribution of resources and access for youth across class, race, gender and school type.*

### Focus Group Results

When we began our focus groups, we asked youth to draw a map or visual representation of their experiences in school. Each person had a few minutes to draw, and then everyone showed their map to the group, identifying some of the major elements of their schooling experiences.

One young person opted to write, not draw:

“I wrote a list of what I see in school: metal detectors, school safety agents and police officers, crowded classrooms, books which might be 20 years old, a lot of fights, every period lunch, coming in school, coming out of school there is always a fight, students getting harassed by cops to take off an [item of clothing.] I saw five cops jump a girl because she took too long removing a chain [belt] around her pants...”

Metal detectors were depicted in many youths’ maps of their schools. When one young woman



Figure 1:  
Focus Group  
participant's  
schooling map

featured a metal detector in her drawing (Figure 1), a passionate discussion ensued.

Youth observed that metal detectors provide a false sense of security, as in this quote from a focus group participant:

“They put the metal detectors in for nothing. Now it’s making things worse. They think oh, now you can’t bring knives to school, but it’s easy for students to sneak them in and it’s worse that there are knives in school when no one thinks they are there. And there’s plenty of fighting spots just outside of the school, but the thing is, the school just doesn’t want to take responsibility. As long as it [the violence] isn’t inside the school.”

Youth also observed that metal detector areas become sites for potentially escalating encounters with police, as in the following quote:

“I knew that I didn’t have anything metal in my person and I told them. But I was wearing new jeans that I didn’t know that were the type of jeans that have metal built into them. I kept having to go back and forth and back and forth [through the metal detector] and it got to the point where the police officer shoved me. I didn’t want to go any further with it because I knew it was going to escalate to bigger problems, so I just let it slide. But then I tried to report it, but it was ignored.”

In another scenario we learned about in our focus groups, youth can be penalized in their class-

One youth, who described himself as a generally very quiet person told us,  
**“Being wanded everyday is humiliating, I dread it.”**  
*(scanned by a wand-like device)*

rooms by abiding by school policies in the entryways and hallways. Youth who wait in slow-moving lines to go through security and metal detectors avoid trouble with school officers, but might be turned away from their first period class because of lateness. This kind of contradiction and compartmentalizing of what is expected of students is defeating and frustrating.

In our focus groups, the consequences of not having school identification when encountering police officers and school security was an especially hot topic. One young man told us about what happened to him:

“I was handcuffed for not showing my ID. It was both real NYPD and school security. The school security knew me, knew that I was a student there. I had lunch that period, and I showed them my program. They handcuffed me because I did not want to show them my ID; they were going to say that I was cutting class and I wasn’t, and I was just a few stairs

away from lunch. After I was handcuffed and [was being] taken to the dean's office, [the security guard that I knew] let me go, and let me go to lunch."

One young woman told us, "I saw a student get surrounded by cops with guns drawn just for not showing ID."

In the online version of our survey, we asked three optional, open-ended questions, one of which was, "When do you feel safe in school?" Many students told us that they felt safe when security personnel and police officers were around, but just as many students said that security personnel and police officers make their schools unsafe. Unfortunately, the most common response to our question was "Never."

Youth described their schools as "crazy crowded," and "swarmed" and in the words of the youth who created Figure 2, "everyone who is there wants to be somewhere else."

In Figure 2, students have their heads down, sleeping, dreaming of their beds or McDonalds (where they go after school). Metaphorical bars keep the students in the classroom, the teacher's notes on the board are just, "blah blah blah," while the clock reads, "forever." In the hallways, a "cop" tells a student "Take that hat off," and when the student says no, the cop calls on his walkie-talkie "Code Red!"

In the words of the young person who created Figure 3, being in school feels like "carrying extra

luggage, baggage," especially when faced with "things that I knew weren't right but I couldn't do anything about." He continued, "My map shows me being weighed down by trying to graduate and the pressure of being in that building."

Youth are acutely aware that there is a lower level of respect operating in the schools that youth of color and low-income youth attend than in the schools that white youth and middle-high income youth attend. During our conversation, one young woman of color told us, "I didn't go through all the stuff the [other focus group participants] went through; I went to a white school."



Figure 2: Focus Group participant's schooling map



Figure 3: Focus Group participant's schooling map

## Survey Results: **Decision Making**

**I**n Table 7, we can see that fewer than 40% of youth surveyed think that their schools' rules are fair, and that low-income youth and youth of color are less likely to think that their schools' rules are fair than middle-income youth and white youth. Eighty percent of all youth told us that they would want to participate in setting the rules and policies of their schools.

**Table 7: SCHOOL RULES AND POLICIES**

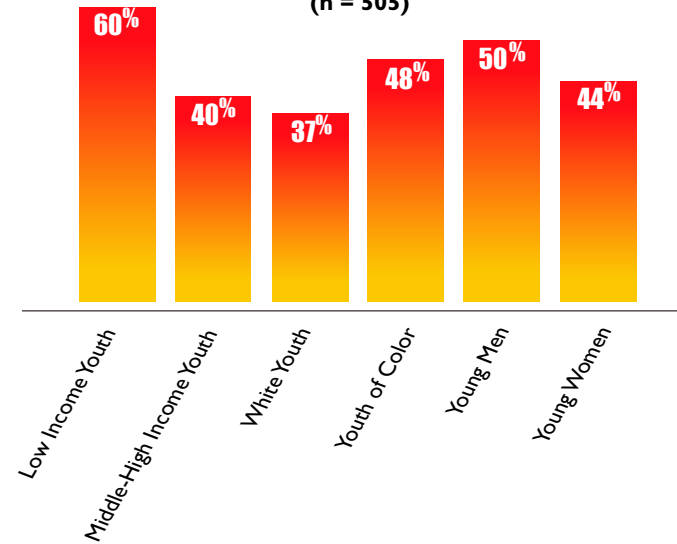
General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>I think that my school's rules are fair</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>61</b>
Low-income Youth		31	69
Middle-High Income Youth		44	56
Youth of Color		37	63
White Youth		48	52
<b>I would want to participate in setting the rules and policies of my school</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 8 compiles results that reveal youths' views on the current system of external (mayoral) control, and the increased involvement of the New York Police Department (NYPD) in school discipline and security under that system. While just over half of all youth feel respected by administrators and faculty, 35% of low-income youth agreed with this statement. Overall, youth are not convinced that their principals or the mayor singularly know best how to lead their schools.

Finally, in the case of police involvement, low-income youth, youth of color, and young men reported negative impacts in greater numbers than their respective counterparts.

**Youth indicate that mayoral control and NYPD involvement are negatively affecting their schooling.**

**The Police Department has a Negative Effect on My Schooling (n = 505)**



**Table 8: SCHOOL CONTROL AND LEADERSHIP: Youth Perspectives on the Current Model**

General responses and selected comparisons	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>On the whole, I feel respected by administration and faculty at my school</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>
Low-income Youth		35	65
Middle-High Income Youth		63	37
Youth of Color		50	50
White Youth		71	29
<b>My principal knows what is best for us students</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>I feel the mayor knows how to best run my school</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>The mayor has a negative effect on my schooling</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>

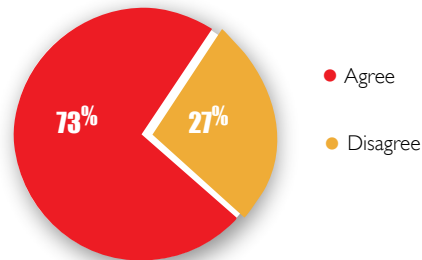
In Table 9, we present survey results about missed opportunities for youth input. Seventy-six percent of youth told us, “I know the changes that need to be made in my school, but the power to make these changes is out of my hands.” In our conclusion, we discuss some of those potential changes.

**Table 9: SCHOOL CONTROL AND LEADERSHIP: Missed Opportunities for Youth Input**

	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>My school administrators value my input when deciding what I should be learning</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>I know the changes that need to be made in my school to make it better but the power to make these changes is out of my hands</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>24</b>

In Table 10 and the chart below, we display survey results that are evidence of youths’ desires for increased roles for community in school leadership and control. Under the current system, such opportunities have been thwarted, but as our survey participants tell us, increased community involvement in school leadership can have mutually beneficial rewards, including youths’ contributions to community improvement.

**"I have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve the problems in my community" (n = 507)**



**Table 10: Re-VISIONING SCHOOL CONTROL & LEADERSHIP: Youth Perspectives on the Current Model**

	(n)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
<b>I believe the community surrounding the school should have a say in how the school is run</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Members of my community have good ideas for programs or projects that would help solve the problems in my school</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>

## Discussion

*Discussion*

There are two important, inter-related issues raised in this section, and both pertain to what youth perceive as an over-reliance on external control of schools, and an under-utilization of community expertise in school leadership. The first issue, raised concretely in the focus groups and in Table 8, is over policing. The second issue is mayoral control.

Recent policy shifts that have given the (NYPD) more jurisdiction in schools and in school discipline are negatively impacting student learning. (See also Nolan, 2008.) Yet, youth in our focus groups observed an irony of NYPD control in schools: police presence is negatively impacting the everyday lives of students, while not really protecting students from bullying, fights, and other kinds of common school violence. Youth see NYPD involvement as a way for schools to avoid taking responsibility for ending this kind of violence.

Mayoral control was granted to Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2002, and his approach to school leadership in the past six years had openly been based on his experience as the head of corporations. Eighty-seven percent of youth polled were critical of his leadership, disagreeing that he “knows best” how to run schools. In part, this critique can be connected to the exclusion of youth and community at decision-making tables.

It is clear from our findings that youth want to be included in making the decisions that affect their learning. We contend that our positions as students have taught us a lot about what does and doesn’t work in school leadership.

Most youth feel that the community needs to have a stronger voice in the decision making of their schools. Sixty-percent of youth polled believe that the community surrounding the school should have a say in how the school is run and most youth agreed that schools and communities could work together to solve problems in the school and community.

Youth report  
that  
they want to  
participate  
in meaningful  
ways.

SECTION 4

CONCLUSION:

YEARNING

Yearning for Meaningful Participation

In our focus groups, we asked, “What would meaningful participation in school look like for you?” and youth talked with us about some of the barriers to participation. One barrier is that youth don’t pay attention to fliers and announcements, effectively ignoring current opportunities.

To this, one young person said:

“I agree that sometimes we don’t pay attention [to fliers and announcements about existing opportunities] but I think that if we believed that they really cared about us, cared about us participating in these opportunities, we would look. If they actually cared, we would care too.”

Another student told us:

“Oversized [numbers of students in] classrooms make it difficult to communicate important information... Lots of times it’s just plain hard to hear [what an announcement or teacher is saying.]

In our focus groups, youth told us that hundreds show up for the student leadership team orientation in their schools, but because only a handful of youth are allowed to participate, hundreds are turned away.

Current opportunities for youth to meaningfully participate are far too limited and unimaginative. For example, several youth referred to their school’s suggestion box as the perfect example of what is lacking in opportunities for meaningful participation. Whenever youth raised a complaint, particularly about “treatment” by school personnel, they were instructed to write it on a piece of paper and submit it to the suggestion box. The problem is, the piles of pieces of paper

in the box, if ever read, were read only as suggestions, not as needs, demands, or rights. One participant who was a student government representative tried to engage in the suggestion box, but was quickly shut down by the administrators of his school.

In our view, many current attempts to increase “student participation” in schooling operate under a weak definition of participation because opportunities are for only a handful of students, and are not structured for mass participation.

Multiple ways to participate, beyond those that are just for show, are needed. In our conclusion we turn to some deeper definitions of participation.

Though youth in our focus groups could see how many youth might be viewed as not wanting to participate because of the ineffectiveness of fliers and announcements, one young man insisted that “People want to give up on student participation before it’s really been tried... You can’t say you can’t do it unless you’ve tried. We have to try it and stick with it if it works.”

One young person told us about his experience in which he does feel that he gets to participate:

“I do participate and it really is a lot of work, I work really hard... For me, it makes it a really good environment, I feel like they take care of me... My friends don’t get that opportunity.”

Focus group participants told us that they would like to participate in budget decisions, event planning, rule and policy setting, curricular decisions, and have a respectful, highly responsive space in

which to bring grievances.

Some of the visions have to do with possibilities for relationships between teachers and students. In our focus groups we posed the following question: “In some classrooms, hip-hop culture is recognized as a valid teaching tool that speaks to students’ experiences. What are other ways that teachers and students can learn from each other?” The conversation turned to the qualities of, and the role of student participation in, good teaching.

Another young woman told us, “I love it when my teachers are creative, it keeps us interested because it is our environment. [One teacher] shows us pictures, plays music and gets us up to talk, and students really like it.”

One young man said, “I wish teachers thought about their jobs as being about motivating students.”

"They know, we know, all of us know that we'll learn if something comes across as interesting, if they're [the teachers] interested."

One participant expressed a desire for teachers to solicit honest feedback from their students; "Sit down with the students and ask them, 'How am I doing?' Teachers should ask students to evaluate their teaching [regularly]...It's a good way to find out, 'Okay, I'm going a little hard on them. Maybe I should do it in another way.'"

Finally, youth emphasized the need to have a more personable relationship with their teachers. One young man told us, "I think that getting to know us personally would help teachers and students learn from each other. It doesn't usually happen that students come out [of their experiences in schooling] feeling known."

In our focus groups, we asked youth to tell us what they would prioritize as leaders of their schools. First, youth would decide to financially and professionally support teachers so that they can focus on being interested in their students, and "helping students succeed in life." Second, classrooms would be based on "conversation" or dialogue, rather than textbooks and looming tests. Third, students would be intimately involved with setting their own course schedules, and in an ideal world, youth would be encouraged to "pick any class I want to learn about." Finally and perhaps most importantly, youth would ensure that family income is not a factor in receiving a respectful and quality education, so that no one "has to pay money to get a better education."

The closing activity of the focus groups was another mapping activity, but this time, we asked youth to draw their dream schools.<sup>5</sup> The list that came from this activity is both idiosyncratic and hopeful:

### IN OUR DREAM SCHOOLS...

**We would make the art on the walls**

**We would learn to be critical of our government**

**We would get really good at asking questions**

**Teachers are interested in what they are teaching and in students, so that students are interested too**

**Everything that every adult in the school does would be telling kids,**

**"I support you."**

One young woman drew an elaborate castle, surrounded by many other castles and said: "My dream school would be a castle with every thing inside. They would have big cafeterias. You get to pick any class you want to choose. Football fields and basketball courts. Everyone is treated equally and we're diverse... You don't have to pay money to get a better education, every school has what it needs. Every school provides healthcare."

At the end of our focus groups, we asked youth if they had any messages they would like us to carry to our audience. Two rang loud and clear: "If the school doesn't care, why should we? If the principle doesn't want to work with us, why should we care? If a guidance counselor says, 'No, I'm not going to do that,' why should we care? If I'm getting refused everything I need to get a proper education, why continue with the education?"

And, "Build more schools, please! That's it... The overcrowding? Please. When there are 40

kids in a class, no one is learning from each other: No one can participate."

*We hope that this conclusion is not an ending but a beginning.*

Our study is a story of school survivors and some of those who didn't make it across the stage to receive the diploma. It is a story of disappointment and humiliation, but also possibility and promise.

**We are asking** for a school system that makes all 1.1 million of us feel welcome, like there is enough room for us, like we're not being crowded out of our classrooms, and that our schools have been made just for us.

**We are asking** for schools that are safe but not over policed.

**We are asking** for teachers who are interested in us and in what they are teaching us.

**We are ready** for schools that have a purpose that we can believe in.

**We are ready** for schools that are rigorous but not toxically competitive.

**We are ready** to be treated with dignity and respect.

**We are ready** for our communities to be treated with dignity and respect.

**And, we are ready to be at the table to help our schools accomplish all of this.**

5

*This time, we asked youth to take home their maps of their dream schools, to remind them of their dreams as they continued to organize for educational justice.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Diffuse the feeling of competition in schooling by fairly distributing material resources, and effective teachers and guidance counselors.
- Develop multiple ways for meaningful mass youth participation in school decision making, rule and policy creation and enforcement, and a reassessment of the purposes of schooling.
- Re-imagine a school leadership model that integrates local control that is based on meaningful youth, family, and community participation.





# APPENDIX: *APPENDIX* Survey Participant Demographics

(n = 494)

MOTHER / GUARDIAN EDUCATION	
31	6.3% Did not graduate from high school
33	6.7% Obtained a GED
92	18.6% Said that their mothers/guardians graduated from high school
52	10.5% Attended but did not graduate from college
91	6.9% Graduated from a 2-year college
91	18.4% Graduated from a 4-year college
73	14.8% Obtained a graduates degree
88	17.8% Didn't know mother's/guardian's level of academic achievement

(n = 492)

BOROUGH OF RESIDENCE & SCHOOL ATTENDANCE	
176	36% Reside in Queens
136	28% Reside in Brooklyn
80	16% Reside in the Bronx
85	17% Reside in Manhattan
15	3% Reside in Staten Island

(n = 400)

353	88.2% Responded that they live and attend school in the same borough
47	12% Responded that they travel to different boroughs for school

(n = 485)

148	30% Responded that they go to school in their neighborhoods and 70% do not
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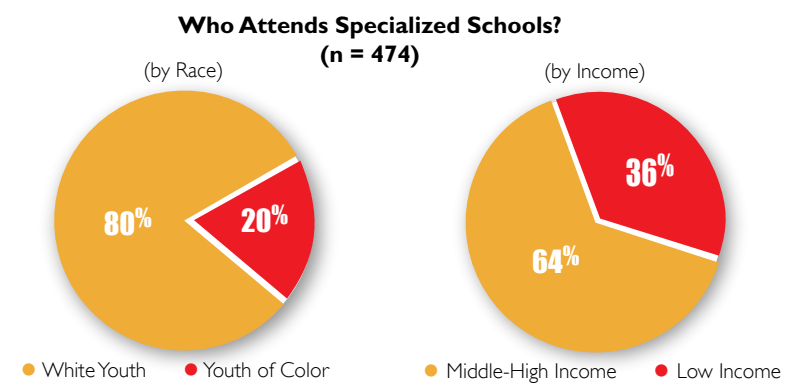
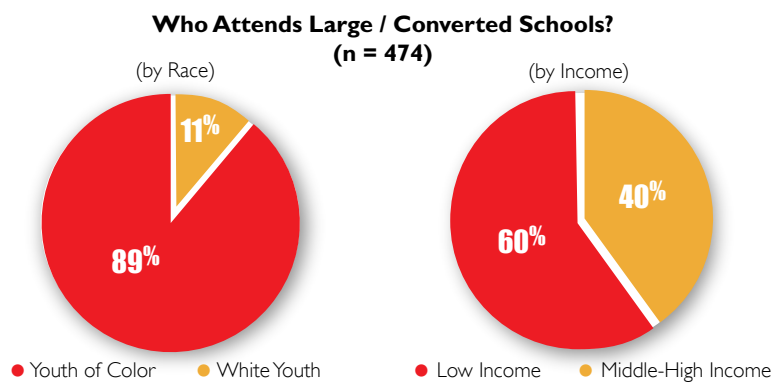
(n = 491)

LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME & WITH PEERS	
<b>Home Language:</b>	
60% of youth who answered our survey speak languages other than English at home	
Several of the languages include Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, and Japanese	
99	20% Said that they always speak a language other than English in their households
91	19% Answered that they sometimes speak another language at home
108	22% Answered that they speak a language other than English once in a while
193	40% Answered never

(n = 492)

Peer Language:	
30	6% Always speak another language other than English among their peers.
62	13% Agreed that sometimes they speak another language with their friends
152	31% Answered they speak a language other than English with friends once in a while
248	50% Responded that they never speak a language other than English while socializing with their friends

SEXUAL ORIENTATION (n = 542)		
56%	Indicated that they are straight	16% Indicated LGBTQ
28%	Declined to answer	





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## The Problem Tree



We used the classic popular education tool, the "problem tree" originally developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as a participatory research mapping method. In addition, we also created a complementary mapping method, "Deconstructing the Problem Tree." Here we share our experience with these methods because the content is part of our research findings, the theory behind them is cutting edge and we hope you add them to your research or activist toolbox.

The tree is a metaphor to depict and identify how and from where a problem grows. We constructed the Tree with about 20 current or former NYC public school students who investigated the problem: "The Current School System Isn't Working."

We began by crafting the leaves, which represent the visible symptoms or everyday ways we know that a bigger problem exists. Participants wrote occurrences that they've witnessed on sticky notes to add to the Tree. For clarity sake we later grouped similar themed leaves together. (See content of the Tree on the accompanying image, the YRNES Problem Tree.)

Next, we collectively brainstormed the trunk, which consists of the attitudes, goals and policies that set up the leaves and perpetuate and enlarge the problem.

Lastly, we named the roots, the underground current, systems and ideologies or deeply held beliefs and values that lead to the trunk contents and keep the whole problem (tree) anchored as a long-term fixture of the environment.

Our Problem Tree was very helpful in mapping the relationships of everyday occurrences, attitudes, and systems involved in the problem that our current school system isn't working, but not helpful in plotting a course of research or action. For example, do I need to fix capitalism to get my lunch-room cleaned up and for my teacher to stop humiliating me? Most education policy only addresses the leaves or every-day urgencies, and forgets about the roots, which is a band-aid approach. However, if we only try to address the roots without alleviating some of the everyday urgencies, those everyday urgencies will continue to hold us back from securing genuine reform. The Problem Tree helped us see what we wanted to look for, but was too linear to be helpful in figuring out how we would approach our research and plan our action toward a new education system.

What image would more accurately model our theory of change? How could we design a project that will fulfill our desire for research and action that addresses the roots, trunk and leaves of a problem? How can we choose to focus on an

issue area without losing sight of the interconnectedness of reality? We needed to deconstruct the problem tree, and did so using the content from the problem tree, rearranged by linking most closely associated leaf themes, trunk parts and roots, forming connected chains. (See accompanying graphic, The YRNES Map.)

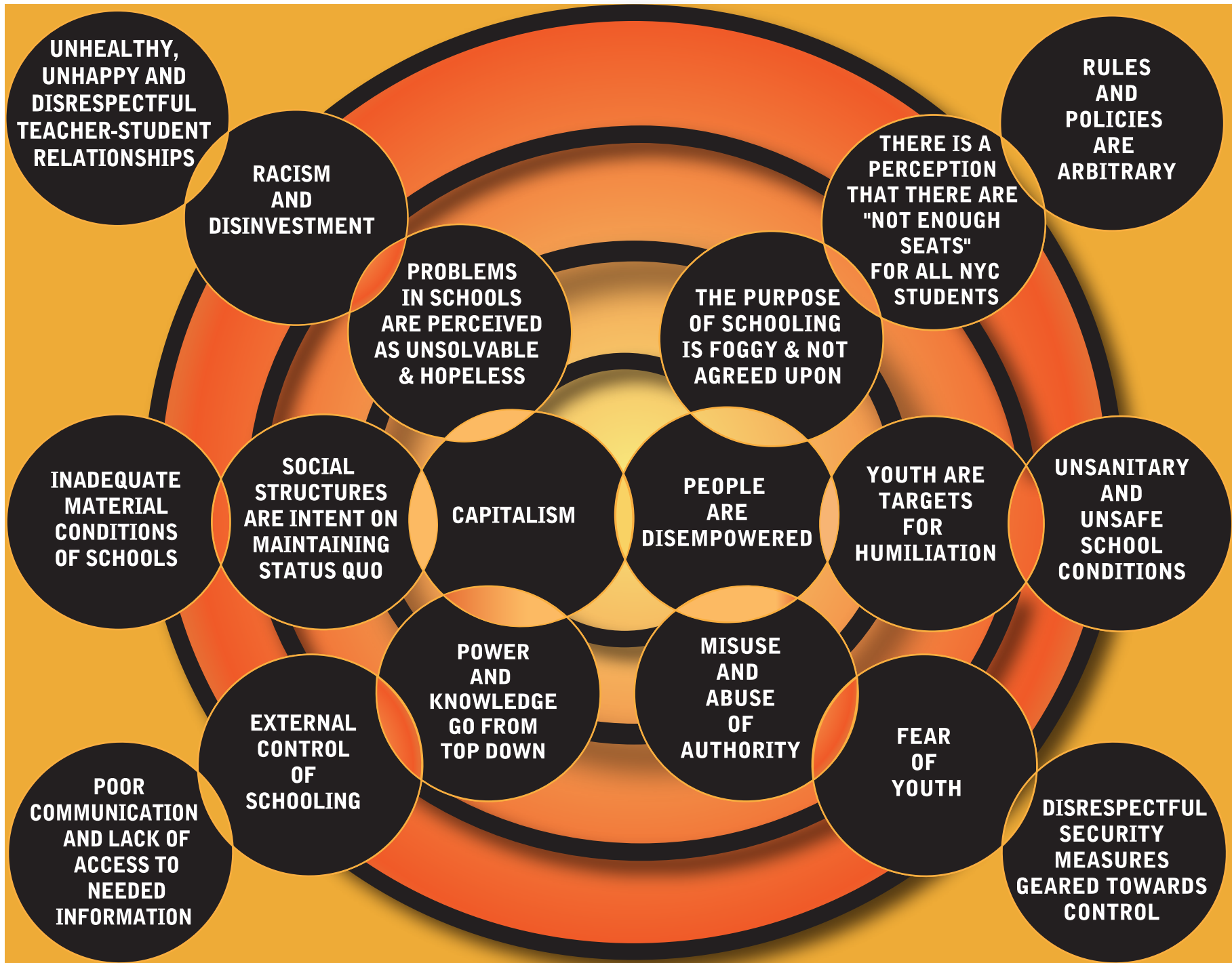
We were able to clearly see several possible, connected rings of inquiry/issues around which we could choose to do our research and action. We then narrowed it down to the two areas in which we were most interested and had the capacity to do.

The first inquiry circle we constructed included:

- The foggy purpose of schooling;
- Competition for things we have rights to;
- Administration and school rules.

Our second inquiry circle is composed of:

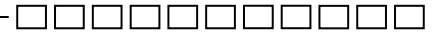
- Problems with top-down power/knowledge;
- External (mayoral, police) control of what goes on in the school;
- Communication and access.



**True or false?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ The original reason for the school day being so long was to keep young people out of the workforce and keep them off the streets during the day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In 2006 the “drop out” /push out rate was 43%
- \_\_\_\_\_ You have the right to attend school until the age of 21.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You cannot be kicked out, expelled, suspended, or excluded from school due to poor behavior or cutting class without a full hearing and chance to get instruction, school work and tests during the period of suspension.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you leave school before turning 21, you give up your right to return to school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you have a disability you cannot be discharged from school without your parent’s permission and other notices.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Schools can transfer you to a GED program or other school without your or your parent’s permission.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The population in prison has quadrupled since 1980
- \_\_\_\_\_ Although African-Americans make up 12% of the population, African-Americans make up 44% of the population of those incarcerated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the US, the richest 1% own 38% of the wealth, and the richest 5% own half of the wealth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The US is one of only two countries that have not ratified the convention on the rights of the child

Answers to True / False: T, T, T, T, F, T, F, T, T, T, T



## CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

### **Independent Commission on Public Education**

P.O. Box 582 • Brooklyn, NY 11215

(718) 499-3756 • [www.icope.org](http://www.icope.org) • email: [icope.info@verizon.net](mailto:icope.info@verizon.net)

The Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE), is a volunteer citywide collective of parents, students, educators and activists, and founding organization of the Education is a Human Right Campaign. Over the past two years, iCOPE has developed an alternative human rights based vision of public education for NYC. iCOPE believes that system transformation based on human rights principles, not merely a change in governance, is needed to create schools that meet the needs of every child and place greater power in the hands of parents, students, teachers and school communities.

Human rights represent a legal framework, political vision, and global strategy for ensuring the equality and dignity of every human being, as well as a culture shift in attitudes and practices. Bringing a human rights culture to New York City schools would mean the creation of safe and nurturing environments for children that help fully develop their capabilities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights documents guarantee the rights to quality education, dignity and safety for every child, an equitable distribution of resources, freedom from discrimination, and meaningful participation for parents, students and communities. iCOPE contends that the New York City public education system currently and historically has failed to meet these human rights standards. Further, the causes of these persistent failures are systemic and can only be addressed if acknowledged and then tackled collaboratively by those with the political will and courage to made the systemic changes needed for education in the 21st century.

### **National Center on Schools and Communities**

33 West 60th Street, 2nd Floor • New York, NY 10023

(212) 636-6699 • [www.ncscatfordham.org](http://www.ncscatfordham.org) • email: [beam@fordham.edu](mailto:beam@fordham.edu)

The National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC) is a policy advocacy initiative focused on equity issues related to the access of children and youth to high quality public education regardless of their race, income, or language. Sponsored by the Fordham University Graduate Schools of Social Service and Education, NCSC provides data and policy analysis and other strategic assistance to community-led struggles to improve public schools and youth services. The Center is an active contributor to the citywide debates around mayoral control of the schools and possibilities for a human rights-based education system. In that role, NCSC has supported the work of the Independent Commission on Public Education; with iCOPE, convened Task Force 2009 to explore the potential for such a system; and provided technical and logistical assistance to the participatory action research of the Youth Researchers for a New Education System (YRNES).

### **Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire**

email: [credd06@gmail.com](mailto:credd06@gmail.com)

The Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD) is a New York based youth research collective that came together in February 2006 to do participatory action research on the policies and practices in New York City public schools that push out students before they earn a high school diploma. Their project, titled the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project, also explored youths' valuing of the GED in relationship to available routes to graduation. CREDD researchers facilitated the project design process for the YRNES project and provided YRNES researchers with training in instrument design, data collection, and analysis.





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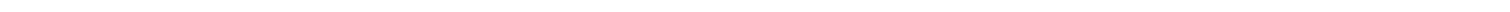
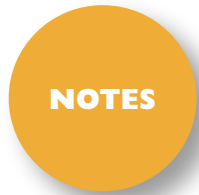
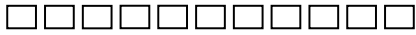
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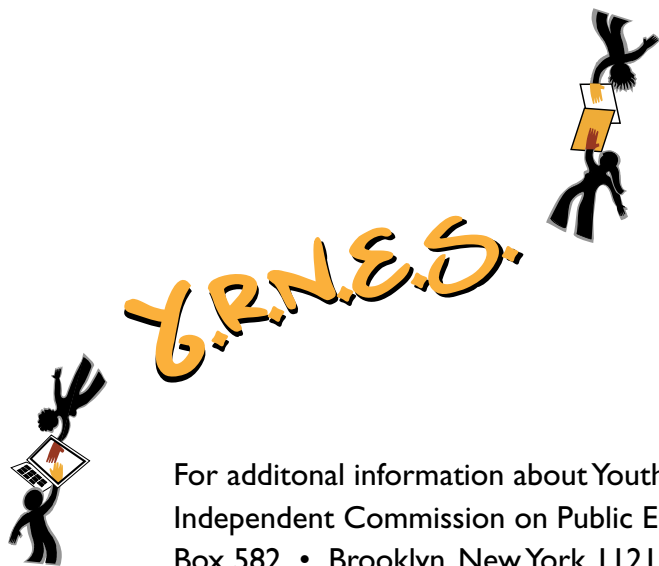
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**NOTES**







For additional information about Youth Researchers for a New Education System, contact:  
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