Graduation Matters Billings   LISTENING SESSION GUIDE

What is a "Listening Session?"

We have learned a lot about the drop out issues in our community from school data, but we are still missing the stories behind the numbers. To dig deeper into the causes of drop out in our community we need to listen to students, parents, and teachers further. Graduation Matters partners will be trained to conduct listening questions around identified issues. They will meet with students, parents, and teachers to ask some focused questions, listen to, and record answers.

WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR		
We summarized what we know so far in a table like this and then used this to help identify our questions and target audiences for Listening Sessions.		
From Archived Data		
Issue	Further Information Needed	Method of Gathering Information

Purpose of "listening sessions" is:

1. <u>Understand the story behind some of the numbers</u> we see in the hard data. For example: students who drop out are more likely to have attendance problems. In the listening sessions we will ask what the barriers are to regular attendance.
2. <u>Learn about community thoughts/perceptions and desires</u> regarding school success.
3. <u>Build public trust in the process and results </u>of Graduation Matters.
4. <u>Lay the groundwork for identifying specific goals and actions</u> for Graduation Matters.

Listening Session Model can be based on four simple themes[1].

1. **Honesty:** Acknowledge Graduation Matters limitations. Acknowledge that we don't have the answers but that we will get the best input possible from the community's diverse stakeholders.
2. **Outreach:** Ensure key stakeholders are engaged. Carefully planned outreach, including representatives from groups that connect people with specific areas of expertise, can help ensure representation by all members of the community.
3. **Data Collection:** Maintain consistent questioning among all groups. Take care to ensure that each group is being asked the same basic questions. Unless comparable conversations occur, it is impossible to compare and contrast the priorities of different stakeholders.
4. **Follow-up:** Communicate and clarify our next steps with all participants. Build thoughtful and comprehensive follow-up into all listening activities to ensure specific, coordinated steps, goals and activities and keep trust strong.   It is worse to ask the community's opinion and do nothing than to never ask at all.

The community input from these Listening Sessions will provide crucial material for Graduation Matters activities focused on building public will, decision-making, and future partnerships around Graduation Matters goals.

Listening Sessions Products

1. Story collection about what works/doesn't.
2. Resource map showing what services exist for youth to succeed.

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[1] *These are paraphrased from United Way Worldwide "Building Support for Effective Teaching: The Impact of the Public Will"*

GMB Potential Listening Session Target Audiences

EDUCATORS			
School Building	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
High School Principals/Assistant Principals/Associates			
Middle School Principals & Assistants			
High School Counselors + Tumbleweed Staff + Rimrock + Youth Probation + SROs+ Social Workers			
Middle School Counselors			
High School Teachers (NovaNet, Core, Credit Recovery)			
Middle School Teachers			
Central Admin	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
Director of Curriculum Superintendent			
Adult Ed: "Alternative Programs" Staff Hearings Officer GED Instructors			
Indian Ed for All Staff			
Colleges	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
COT Admissions/Professors	1		
MSU-Billings Admissions/Professors	1		
Rocky Admissions/Professors	1		
Union	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
BEA			
BCEA			
MPC			

STUDENTS AND PARENTS			
Students	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
High school students who are thriving			
High school students who are struggling			
High school students who have dropped out			
Parents	**# of Groups**	**Date**	**Who**
Parents of students who are thriving			
Parents of students who are struggling			
Parents of students who have dropped out			
Parents at UWYC business partners (mixed groups/thriving, struggling, dropped out)			
Parents at Non-Profit partners			

Potential Listening Session Questions

Identified Issue: ATTENDANCE

A look at Billings school data shows that many youth who drop out of school are more likely to have attendance problems. The majority have missed one third or more of the time – that is one and half or more days a week, or about one week or more every month….

1. In your experience, what are the reasons students struggle with attendance?
2. What school policies/procedures are helpful at encouraging attendance?
3. What school policies/procedures are not helpful?
4. What kind of support do the following groups need to ensure that every student in your school attends school regularly? Parents, students, community members, teachers, administrators

Identified Issue: FAILED CORE CLASS

A look at school data shows that many youth who drop out of school are more likely to have failed freshman math or English

5. In your experience, what are the reasons students fail a core course?
6. What school policies/procedures are helpful at encouraging a passing grade?
7. What school policies/procedures are not helpful?
8. What kind of support do the following groups need to ensure that every student in your school passes every core course? Parents, students, community members, teachers, administrators

IDENTIFIED ISSUE: GED RELATED (FOR GED STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS)

We were surprised to learn in our assessment that the "official drop-out reason" for 54% of the students who were counted as dropouts in the Billings School System in 2010/2011 was GED related. They left to pursue a GED.

9. Why did you/your child/your students choose to leave one of our high schools to pursue a GED?
10. What is it about the GED program that works for you/your child/your students that is different from what they were experiencing in their high school?
11. What would have to have been different at your/your child's/your students' home high school for you to have stayed there?

THINGS WE KNOW MATTER FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

RELATIONSHIPS

12. How does "your school/your child's school/your neighborhood school") make sure that every child has a meaningful relationship with a caring adult?
13. What helps you/your child/a child feel like they belong at their school?
14. What could be done to help students in your school feel like the adults there care about them?

RIGOR

15. Do you feel like you/your child/your student acquired knowledge in his/her classes?
16. Give an example of a class or other learning situation which really made you/your child/your student think.
17. What could your school do to promote deep thinking in the classroom?

RELEVANCE

18. Is the curriculum meaningful to you/your child/your student right now?
19. How is the curriculum preparing you/your child/your student for the next step in your/his/her life after high school?
20. What could be done to make the curriculum more meaningful to you/your child/your student right now? To prepare them for the next step after high school?

ALWAYS TO CLOSE

21. Our dream is a school system that completely engages youth, teaches them meaningful skills for the twenty-first century, and where no student wants to drop out. This would also be a system that encourages and support teachers so they can be the best. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for us to know or think about as we work to realize this dream?