



## Youth and Adult Perspectives on Re-engagement in Tucson

*“Yeah, they let me know. I needed money more than I needed a diploma at the time and they told me I can work at school and still get my money, so I'm like okay, cool...not everybody's going to answer a phone call but knock on the door, that's a good idea. Because even if you just mention it a little bit, kind of get in their head, to plant the seed, it'll expand, give them the idea. There is a way you can do this and still go to school. Once I had that idea in there, and then focus on work after that, it eliminates the reason for not being in school.”*

*-Ricky*

# Framing Activity

- Why do you think young people in your community leave school?
- In what ways does your community support youth re-engagement?
- What are the systems and interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving and promoting re-engagement?



# Agenda

Organizational introduction

“Youth systems” theoretical framework

Overview of study 1: I’m Going Back

Overview of study 2: More Than A Village

Implications for policy and practice

Questions and discussion



# America's Promise Alliance and the Center for Promise



**Center for**  
**Promise**

---

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE®



**Center for**  
**Promise**  
AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE®

[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org) | [www.gradnation.org](http://www.gradnation.org) | [@AmericasPromise](https://twitter.com/AmericasPromise)

Boston University Wheelock College of Education  
& Human Development

# GradNation State Activation

**GradNation is a national campaign to increase the high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the Class of 2020 and put millions more young people on the path to adult success.**

NATIONWIDE

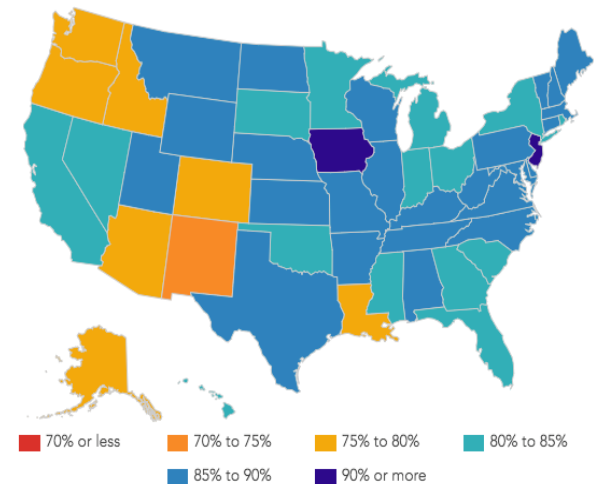
**84.6%**

Graduation Rate for the Class of 2017

**2,800,000**

Additional high school graduates since the launch of the GradNation campaign

[See State-by-State details >](#)



# Our Work



# I'm Going Back

## Research Focus Areas

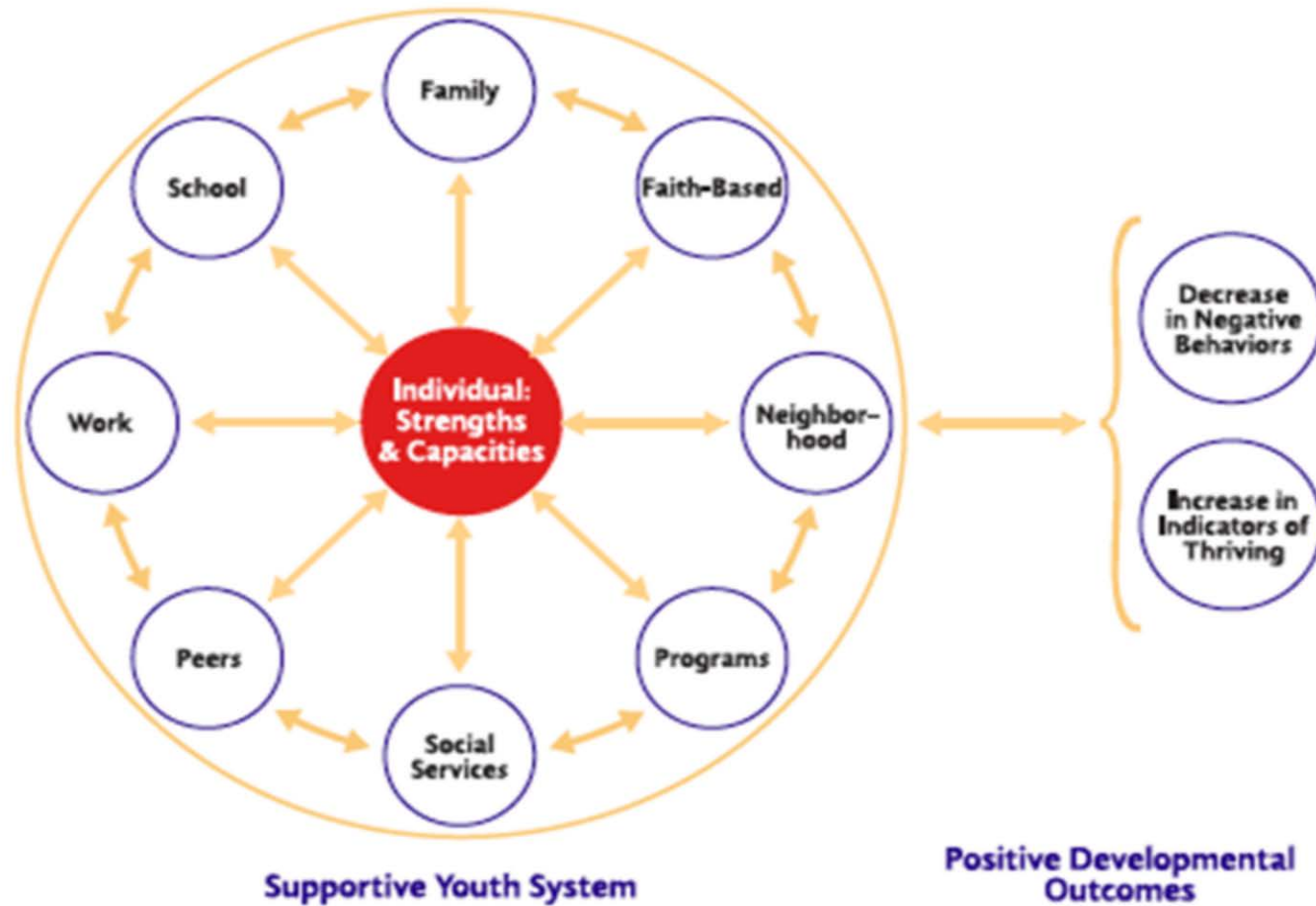
- Why students disengage from their education
- Why some students re-engage while others do not
- The factors that contribute to or impede re-engagement
- The factors that contribute to persistence through graduation

## Study Design

- Partnership with TUSD Office of Dropout Prevention
- Multiple visits to Tucson
- **28 45-60 minute interviews with young people**
- Half were involved with Steps to Success
- Interviews analyzed to identify common themes

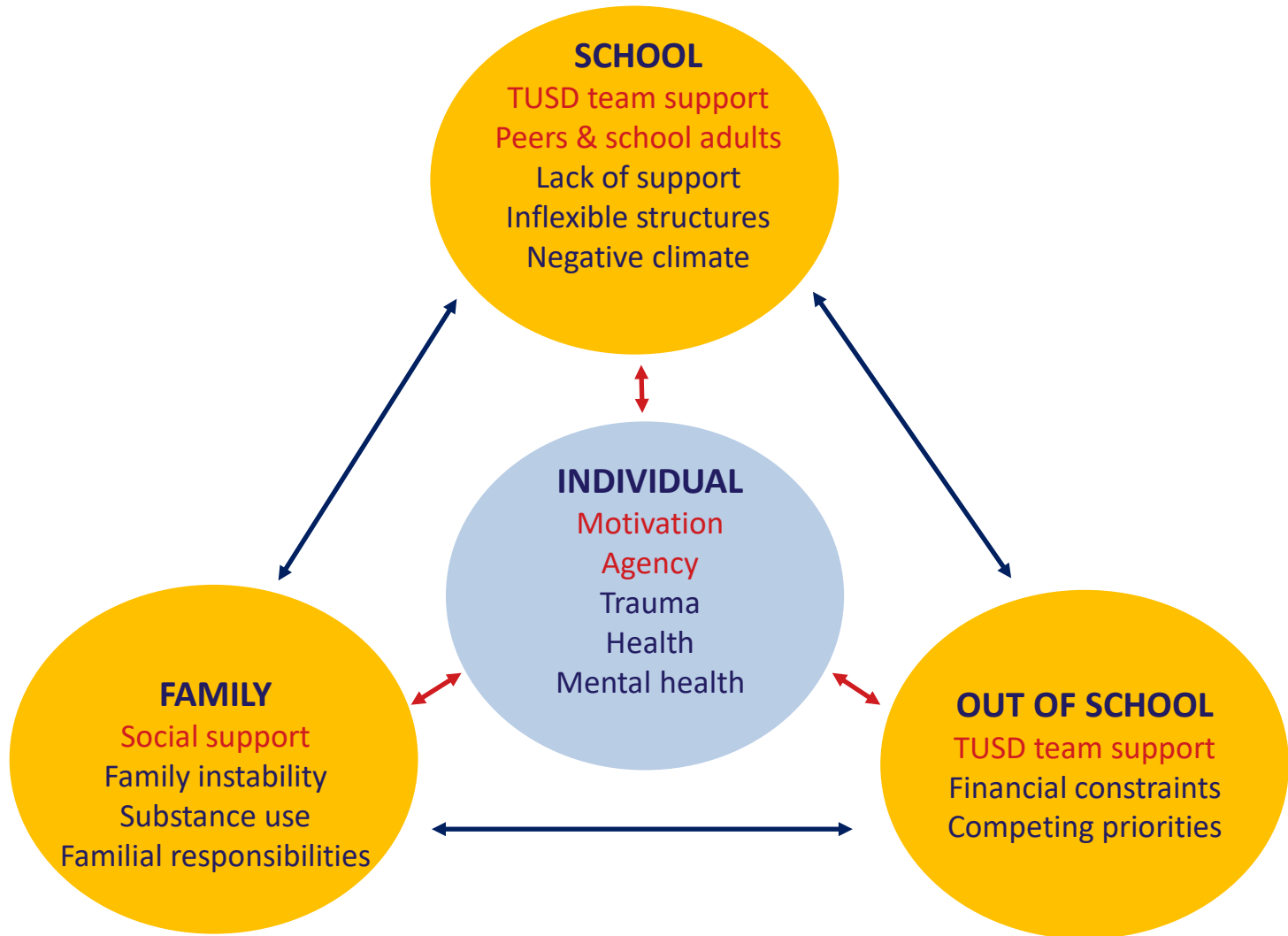


# Conceptual Framework: A Supportive Youth System



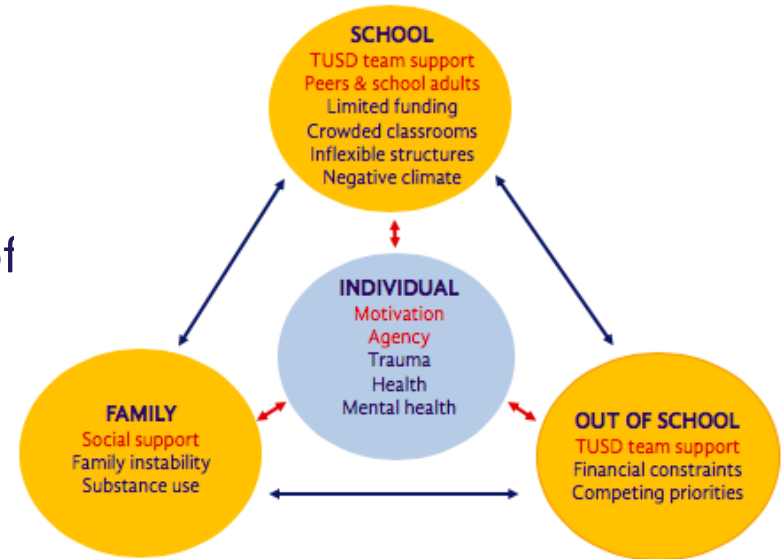


# Findings



# Findings

- Leaving school is an agentic decision
- Most (22/28) young people disengaged and re-engaged multiple times
- Young people were struggling with a range of adversities and challenging circumstances
- These experiences intersect and build upon one another
- Multiple forms and sources of support, internal motivation, and changing circumstances supported successful re-engagement



# Factors Contributing to Disengagement: Individual Mental Health

*“So that was hard and that hit me really, really hard. So, depression kicked in and my attendance was going down. I think it might have dropped down to 50 or 60 percent. Eventually I got kicked out ...because of my attendance, but I was really, really close. .... My motivation was just gone and I know it must have been very frustrating for people around me, they were like, ‘Dude, you have half a credit left. What’s wrong with you?’, but my motivation was just gone. I had been stuck in this kind of place in living on my own, barely making enough money to get by and not having finished high school. It was very frustrating for me and for the people around me. I literally just got out of that, the past couple weeks. Which feels great, but my dad passed away last year.” -  
Elijah*



# Factors Contributing to Disengagement: Out of School

## Family Adversity, Financial Instability, and Competing Priorities

*“...freshman year was great. I loved [high school]. I thought it was a great school, all my friends went there from middle school. I pretty much got a lot of A’s and B’s. I’d say I was a really good student. I never had problems with any of my classes. Sophomore year was the same in the beginning, but towards the fall, my stepmom lost her job, and my dad’s not able to pay the bills by himself, because it’s me and my three brothers at home, and it’s a lot to support. My mom, she’s been in trouble in the past. She’s been in jail before, and she went down that same route. I was just more concerned about my little brother at the time who was two years old. I was scared for who was gonna watch him, and who was gonna be there for him because my parents were just mostly concerned about paying bills. So my mind just wasn’t at school. It was what’s gonna go on with my brothers, who’s gonna take care of them? [Then] my mom got arrested, and my dad had told me that he couldn’t pay for daycare. He could only pay for rent and food. The important stuff we need. So I chose to drop out of school and take care of my little brother.” -Camila*



# Factors Contributing to Disengagement: Out of School

## Family Adversity, Financial Instability, and Competing Priorities

*“School was like, they force us to do a certain thing and it's like, at different hours of the day ... If you understand our jobs, we can't really be picky at a job our age, or otherwise it's really hard to get hired, and then we have to move schools or switch schools because they don't go towards our hours. Like my last school, I wanted to go to that school, I loved that school. I only went there for a little bit, but it was a really cool school. I couldn't continue going there, because the hours I worked just didn't match up with the school hours. I do overnights and I work mornings sometimes, it's like, I need to work night school. I just couldn't do it.”*

*-Pedro*



# Factors Contributing to Disengagement: School Climate

## Unsupportive Experiences and Messaging

*“Yeah it was pretty ridiculous....Nobody cares, why would I go there and try to impress all these people? Do these things for them when they don’t care. They honestly don’t care about you and it sucks. Especially in the school environment. ...You grow up your entire life thinking so highly of high school. You’re going to be popular. You’re going to get all these friends. Meet all these friends that you’re going to have the rest of your life. Meet your high school sweetheart. All this stuff that you have in your head, then you get there and it’s blasted with getting searched by cops and just being treated like a degenerate. It’s just bad. It’s hurtful and it made me not want to go to school anymore. Just the way that the faculty is. The way that they treat their students.... That’s not school.... It was just a lot, it was too much. I just stopped going. It just wasn’t for me in a way. Not because of school, I don’t have a problem with school. But I didn’t want to come somewhere where people looked at me like I was garbage.” -Juan*



# Factors Contributing to Disengagement: School Structures

## School Policies

*“They suspended me and I couldn’t get any more credits. I missed 10 days of school in each of my classes so I didn’t get any of those credits. It was just like they were literally trying to break me down. It was just wrong, in a way. I wasn’t dumb. I was in pre-calc a year, I took AP Physics. I could have gotten college credit for some of my classes. It wasn’t like I was in there and just struggling.” –Juan*

## Aligning Options with Learning Needs

*“Some classes I really liked where I would go to but in others I didn’t like because I’m more of a hands-on person and so just sitting there I couldn’t, I don’t wanna be there, basically. Doing online now it’s easier because I’m home but at the same time it’s hard because I like to be in class where I have that more one-on-one help.” –Alicia*



# Factors Contributing to Re-Engagement: Individual

## Motivation and Agency

*“My grandmother ... graduated college with a master’s. She did that while being a single mother. She really persevered. My mother, being in an abusive relationship ... she had an education to fall back on...That’s something that he could never take away from her. Nobody can. [Education] is something that I want for myself as well as my sister to look up to. I had all these barriers, yes. I went through a very rough time and she’s seen that first hand. But I also don’t want her to have those excuses of, ‘Well, okay, well, you didn’t do it.’ No, I’m doing it slowly but I’m gonna do it.” – Amelia*

## Changing Circumstances

*“I mean, nothing. Nobody can tell me nothing. I don't have no reason to not go back to school, but more of it's 'cause my son's a little too small, so I'm trying to bond with him and get him a little bit used to people, so when I do go back, he's not crying without me, or I don't have to worry about him 24/7 where he's at, who he's with, what he's doing, is he okay, so more of it is I'm just not ready to let him go yet, by himself.” –Rose*





# Factors Contributing to Re-Engagement: Social Support

## Comprehensive Support | TUSD Team

*“Yes...Pretty much all the dropout prevention. They are the most incredible women. I don’t know what the perfect word for them is, like the power goddesses of the school. Seriously, they are the power sources for the school when it comes to saving the kids. When it comes to the kids literally saying they don’t want to be here anymore, [TUSD Dropout Prevention Team Member] looks at them and says, ... You’re not doing that. This isn’t about what’s going on in your life, this about what’s gonna be going on in five years when you get a job. She points out those things that you’re not in the brain set of thinking about. She helps to pretty much force you into graduating. I know that sounds aggressive but she’s definitely that woman...She’s a great woman. She’s done a lot. She helped me come back, she helped me come back twice. If I were to leave again, she would definitely not leave me alone at this point. She’d be like, all right, I’m tired of this, we’re done. You’re graduating. We’re getting this done. Nora, just shut up and come back.” –Nora*



# Factors Contributing to Re-Engagement: Steps to Success

## Tenacity and Follow Through

*“Like the whole town came to our house and I was like, “What?” I was still in this mindset where, “Oh, hell no. I’m not going back.” Then I found out [he] went to my work. [My manager] was like, “This guy [TUSD DPS] stopped by and he wants you to finish. He said he’ll see it where you can go back, you won’t be embarrassed. It’ll be comfortable. You can go back.” I was like, “I don’t know. Really, I feel like I should be out of there. I don’t belong there anymore.” She was like, “Well, just see. Just go find out and see.” Then that’s when he called later on that day too and my mom was on the phone with him. He wanted to meet up, so I was like, “Fine. I’ll go down to the school and see what’s going on.” Yeah, he went out of his way to get special permission from the district where I can only have one class in the morning. I saw the effort he was putting in and I was like, “Fine. I don’t see why not.” I don’t want to be that stubborn like, “Oh, you’re going through all this. Nah. I’m still not going to go.” I was like, “Fine. I’ll go with it.” I did and now I’m going back.” - Eric*



# More Than a Village

## Research Focus Areas

- What re-engagement options are available for young people in Tucson?
- What does it take to help a young person re-engage?
- What do they recommend to encourage more school persistence and completion?

## Study Design

- **14 30-45 minute interviews with adults** working in re-engagement in Tucson
- 6 were from the TUSD Dropout Prevention Office
- 8 were with adults from the Youth on the Rise Collaborative
- Interviews analyzed to identify common themes



# Approaches to Re-engagement in Tucson

Dropout Prevention  
Office; Steps to  
Success

Youth on the Rise -  
Cradle to Career  
Partnership; Re-  
engagement Center

Alternative High  
Schools

Charter Schools

Community School Initiative



# Relationships Come First

*“I think one of the biggest factors [for re-engaging] that I’ve heard again and again from young people is trust, which I think has to do with building caring relationships with adults, and being able to trust that even adults... [because many young people get into the situation where they meet adults] who are saying they have your interest in mind that aren’t necessarily trustworthy.”*

*– Youth on the Rise Member*

***We get to build relationships and trust with these kids. We’re on their team and we’re here to help them. With that being said, we build those bonds. Once those bonds are built, we can go into the schools and advocate for these kids and say, “Hey! You know this young lady here, she’s going through this situation.” TUSD Dropout Prevention Team***

***The most [important] thing I think we do, probably, this might be unique to dropout prevention, is our home visits. We’ve connected with the parents a lot more than most people in the school. I think the home visits piece is, I think, what we do. It’s probably the most important part of our re-engagement to the students.” -TUSD Dropout Prevention Team***



# “It Takes More Than a Village”

*“I guess we look at it as based on what the individual needs are. We take pride in just meeting the kids where they’re at, when they come down here. For some, that may be like, “Hey, I’m in need of a housing program. I’m currently couch surfing, or I’ve been kicked out somewhere.” So re-engagement means, to us, that we’re going to connect you back to an organization, or agency, that can help you get into the process of getting housing within the City of Tucson. It could also mean, “Hey, I’m a young person and I’m on juvenile probation, and I haven’t been doing anything productive to meet my probation requirements.” It could be get connected with community service options. It could be giving back to the community somehow. It could be, also, helping young people connect to where they can go and get their health needs met within Tucson. When we normally might refer young people to different partners, or agencies, or organizations, because most every adult in their life have let them down, they’re really leery and hesitant with going to places that they’re not sure about. So we try to invite those providers, those community partners in, so helping somebody get set up with healthcare benefits, or SNAP benefits, food stamps. That could be a form of re-engagement, as well.”*

*-Youth on the Rise Member*



# Include Youth at the Center of Solutions

*“I would say a significant assist to what direction we’re moving in not only in regards to juvenile court but Youth on the Rise is the youth leadership council. It plays a huge role in identifying what direction we’re heading and what we need to do. We felt that youth’s voice was very important to include in regards to anything and everything that we do in our next steps. So our youth leadership council members are attending almost every one of our United Way Youth on the Rise meetings. And they’re involved in a lot of what they do and a lot of the youth leadership council members are also on our United Youth Leadership Council that we have for juvenile court. So they do have double duty because a lot of them have like crossed over. They’re dependent, they’re delinquency, they’re homeless, they’re foster care youth, you know, things like that. They’re 21 and over, they’re special education, they have mental health needs so they help us in both of those arenas and that has been ... I can’t even measure how helpful that has been in regards to the direction that we’re going and where we’re heading and how intentional we are in what we do.” -Youth on the Rise Member*



# Common Learnings Across Studies

1

High school disengagement should be thought of as a process rather than a discrete event

2

Young people want to finish high school and have high aspirations for themselves

3

Youth who left school often deal with multiple adversities and in and out of school challenges

4

Re-engagement efforts require comprehensive supports rooted in strong, caring relationships





# Implications for Policy & Practice

- Cultivate a relational mindset – understand youth’s context within and outside of school
- Enhance collaboration across organizations and systems
- Provide tenacious, comprehensive, and caring supports
- Create more accessible, high-quality educational alternatives
- Integrate more workforce development opportunities and incentives
- Listen to youth and place them at the center of solutions



# Questions & Discussion

