

On the Frontline in McDowell County, WV:
Post-Discussion Questionnaire Findings

Report generated by the
Program Evaluation and Research Center (PERC) of the
College of Human Resources and Education at West Virginia University

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PERC brings together expertise in program evaluation, research design, data analysis (quantitative and qualitative), and dissemination of findings to support the implementation and evaluation of education-related endeavors throughout West Virginia (<http://perc.hre.wvu.edu/>). We conduct research and evaluation to inform the work of practitioners and policymakers concerning the efficacy of existing programs and the needs of specific populations for improvement of educational and social outcomes. As one component of this mission, PERC has been working closely with Education Alliance to provide educational research and evaluation in support of their vision that “Every West Virginia public school student will graduate from high school college or career ready.”

This report provides analysis of post discussion questionnaires completed by 52 attendees of two Frontline Network (<http://www.educationalalliance.org/?ID=33&FrontlineNetwork>) community forums held in McDowell County during spring 2012. This report will provide information on the demographics of respondents, responses to 16 Likert-type survey items, and 5 open-ended questions (see Appendix A for questionnaire). Analysis of data from additional counties will be provided in subsequent reports.

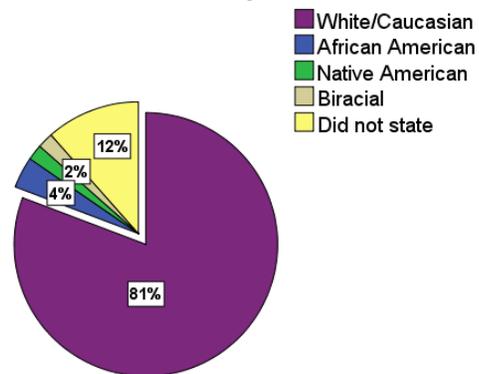
Demographics of Respondents

There were 52 community forum participants who returned post discussion surveys. Looking at the most frequent category in each case, respondents’ were most often White/Caucasian adults with college degrees working in educational careers. While there was little ethnic diversity, it should be noted that over a third reported only high school or some college and there was substantial diversity in occupation.

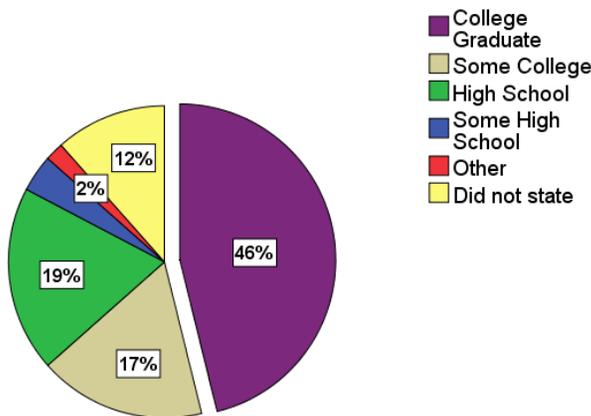
Age

| | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| <18 | 3 | 6 |
| 18-30 | 4 | 8 |
| 31-45 | 9 | 17 |
| 46-64 | 22 | 42 |
| >64 | 5 | 10 |
| Declined to state | 9 | 17 |
| Total | 52 | 100 |

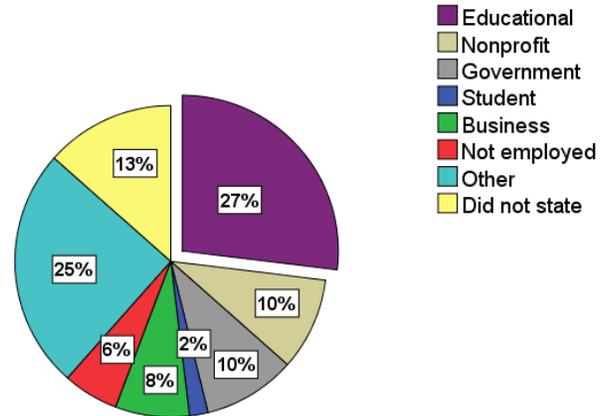
Ethnicity



Schooling Completed



Type of Employment



Likert-type Survey Items

Likert-type items were arranged in 3 groupings, each with different response options (see Appendix A). Across all items, responses of “not sure” were treated as missing data and higher numbers indicated stronger agreement. Reliability analyses revealed low but acceptable internal consistency within groupings (4 items, $\alpha=.67$; 6 items, $\alpha=.55$; 6 items, $\alpha=.59$ for groupings 1 through 3, respectively).

Each table below is organized with highest rated items first showing averages and standard deviations per item and across all items in each group. Items in the first grouping asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with 4 statements (1= “strongly disagree” through 4 = “strongly agree”), and items in the second group were similar exchanging the word “favor” for “agree”. Items in the third grouping asked respondents how concerned they were with various statements (1= “not at all” through 3 = “very”).

The most highly rated items focused on partnering among schools and local businesses, attracting and retaining effective teachers, supporting students with reading difficulties, and concerns about substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and the amount of time youth spend with adult role models. The lowest rated items focused on free online courses for struggling students, increasing funding for schools with high dropout rates, increasing the amount of healthy foods available in schools, and concerns about liability issues in mentoring programs.

Average ratings were high across all items, always between the highest two response categories (e.g., “strongly agree” and “agree”) with only the 4 lowest item means below the midpoint between those categories. Recognizing little discrimination across items (all items rated highly) and considering item content, we believe biases such as social desirability may have inflated responses. Respondents may have perceived these items to be suggestions from Education Alliance and been reluctant to “contradict” their expertise.

Items in first grouping

| | N | Mean | SD |
|--|----|------|-----|
| Local businesses should partner with schools to provide internships and job shadowing in the local area. | 51 | 3.75 | .63 |
| Schools and communities should provide more mental health services to children and youth. | 52 | 3.62 | .72 |
| Parents need additional resources to raise children that stay in school and do well in life. | 52 | 3.52 | .78 |
| Schools should provide free online courses to help struggling students. | 51 | 3.37 | .82 |
| Across items | 52 | 3.56 | .52 |

Items in second grouping

| | N | Mean | SD |
|---|----|------|-----|
| Do more to attract, support, and reward effective teachers. | 49 | 3.82 | .39 |
| Provide reading classes during the school day for high school students with reading difficulties. | 50 | 3.80 | .45 |
| Tie school curriculum closely to specific career paths. | 51 | 3.69 | .55 |
| Increase the compulsory attendance age to 17. | 47 | 3.53 | .78 |
| Increase the quality and quantity of healthy food offered in high schools. | 49 | 3.49 | .87 |
| Provide more funds to schools with high dropout rates. | 46 | 3.35 | .85 |
| Across items | 51 | 3.61 | .35 |

Items in third grouping

| | N | Mean | SD |
|---|----|------|-----|
| Substance abuse by youth in my community. | 50 | 2.92 | .27 |
| Teenage pregnancy among secondary school students. | 50 | 2.84 | .37 |
| The amount of time parents and community members have to spend with youth. | 51 | 2.78 | .45 |
| Shortchanging student-teacher relationships because of pressure to improve test scores. | 50 | 2.60 | .64 |
| Early career focus shortchanging a well rounded education. | 49 | 2.57 | .68 |
| Liability issues associated with mentoring students. | 49 | 2.43 | .58 |
| Across items | 51 | 2.69 | .29 |

Open-ended Questions

The survey included five open ended questions probing for specific examples of important topics from the community forum discussion. There were 52 respondents and questions were answered at varying rates, ranging from as few as eight responses (Question 5) to as many as 30 responses (Question1). Responses were coded according to relevant categories that arose from the data with clear categories apparent for each question. A miscellaneous category was created for each question to include a limited number of answers that were not related to the other categories. Some responses were included in multiple categories where relevant. The description of the qualitative data includes a brief overview of the responses followed by a list of the categories in order from most to least frequent. A single participant response is provided (in italics) as an example for each category. Appendix B provides additional responses under each category with responses included verbatim with punctuation and spelling remaining intact from the original surveys.

Question 1: What is the best idea, program, or practice you heard in the discussion today?

Categories and sample responses:

- Increasing Parent Education and/or Involvement
 - *Educating parents to help children at home.*
- Integration of Services
 - *Our county needs to join and become united to change and improve our county.*
- Policy
 - *Accountability for both teachers, principals, and parents*
- Specific Programs
 - *Parents as Teachers. Stop the Hurt*
- Mentoring
 - *Mentoring & involving more in the community (Resources?)*
- Miscellaneous
 - *lots of good ideas—can't pinpoint one.*

Answers to Question 1 centered on increasing constituents' involvement, the availability of resources, and outreach services to students and the community. In general, respondents were positive in their comments, offering agreement with the ideas presented by Education Alliance. The most frequent concerns were voiced about increasing parent education and involvement. This was closely followed by

agreement that social and academic services in the community and school should be integrated as much as possible to provide support for students. Respondents next listed specific policies that should be revised or implemented, followed by specific programs, and then student mentoring (see Appendix B).

Question 2: What can you do personally to help students graduate from high school in your community?

Categories and sample responses:

- Be Involved
 - *Volunteer—Be involved, As an old Big Creek Owl—Give A Hoot!*
- Encourage
 - *Encourage students and listen if they want to talk.*
- Mentoring
 - *Continue to mentor and encourage the kids in my community.*
- Miscellaneous
 - *I think there should be more to do for the younger kids they have nothing better to do than get in trouble.*

In response to Question 2, participants' answers were grouped into four categories focusing on how they could facilitate high school graduation for students. The most frequent responses related to community members becoming more involved in multiple areas with students. This was followed closely by an emphasis on encouraging students. Mentoring was the next most frequent response; however this was mentioned much less frequently than the first two categories (see Appendix B).

Question 3: What should the community do about this issue? Who should do it?

Categories and sample responses:

- Increase Involvement
 - *Our major county stakeholders need to become involved and help the educational system.*
- Utilize Resources
 - *positive mentors and/or counselors readily available and encouraged*
- Develop Programs and/or Activities
 - *Have more clubs for High School Students*
- Miscellaneous
 - *Drug issues (laws, enforcement) need to be enforced*

Responses to Question 3 were organized into four categories that focused on how the community should respond to a need and who should respond. The majority of respondents focused on the need for increased involvement in the community at large. This was followed by a focus on utilizing community and school resources to the greatest extent possible. The next most frequent response type focused on the development of specific types of programs or activities for students (see Appendix B).

Question 4: What policies—local, state, or national—should be changed to address the issue?

Categories and sample responses:

- Dropout Age
 - *Change the law of the age you have to be to quit school*
- Academic Policies
 - *less emphasis on standardized testing*
- Substance Abuse
 - *Tough on Drug. Better Drug Rehab Centers*
- Miscellaneous
 - *Better selection and vetting of teachers and administrator!*

Question 4 asked participants what policies should be changed to address the issue of high school dropout. Fewer respondents answered this question than others; however there were four categories that arose from the data. Increasing the dropout age and academic policies were equally supported as policies that need change. These were closely followed by a focus on substance abuse issues within the community. The miscellaneous category had the most responses though they were quite varied in content, often focusing on school policies beyond academics (see Appendix B).

Question 5: Any other thoughts?

The final question followed up with respondents asking for any other relevant information. Only eight of 52 respondents replied to this question. Answers varied greatly in content so each answer has been listed below.

- *Develop a program to apprise elementary parents of the importance of school attendance.*
- *I really enjoyed the presentation that was presented today. It was very educational.*
- *thank you*
- *I would like to see more communication (maybe computer wise, email, etc.) b/w teachers & parents*
- *parenting classes, mentoring programs*
- *It would be nice to have a website for the county that did not rely on each school to be looked at but at one site for county wide activities.*
- *The group of concerned citizens would grow if each person would bring 2 people to another meeting.*
- *Zero Teacher Absenteeism!*

POST-DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Now that you've had the chance to participate in a discussion on this issue, please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your insights will help set directions for local work on the issue. Additionally, participants' views will be summarized in a statewide report that will be shared with you, schools, organizations, policymakers, media, and the public.

| 1. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below? | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Schools and communities should provide more mental health services to children and youth. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Parents need additional resources to raise children that stay in school and do well in life. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Schools should provide free online courses to help struggling students. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Local businesses should partner with schools to provide internships and job shadowing in the local area. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| 2. Do you favor or oppose the following actions? | Strongly Favor | Somewhat Favor | Somewhat Oppose | Strongly Oppose | Not Sure |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a.. Provide more funds to schools with high dropout rates. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Do more to attract, support, and reward effective teachers. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Tie school curriculum closely to specific career paths. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Increase the quality and quantity of healthy food offered in high schools. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Increase the compulsory attendance age to 17. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Provide reading classes during the school day for high school students with reading difficulties. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| 3. Are you concerned about the following? Sure | Very | Somewhat | Not at all | Not Sure |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Early career focus shortchanging a well rounded education | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. The amount of time parents and community members have to spend with youth | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Liability issues associated with mentoring students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Shortchanging student-teacher relationships because of pressure to improve test scores | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Substance abuse by youth in my community | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Teenage pregnancy among secondary school students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What is the best idea, program, or practice you heard in the discussion today?

What can you do personally to help students graduate from high school in your county?

What should your community do about this issue? Who should do it?

What policies—local, state, or national—should be changed to address the issue?

Any other thoughts?

In order to summarize the demographic representation of participants in the dropout prevention discussions, **please circle all of the responses that apply to you.**

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 17 or younger | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-64 | 65 or older |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| African American | Asian American | Hispanic | Native American | |
| White/Caucasian | | | | |
| Other (please specify) _____ | | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| <i>Schooling completed:</i> Graduate | Some High School | High School | Some College | College |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| <i>Type of employment:</i> | Student | Business | Nonprofit | Educational |
| | Government | Not employed | | |
| | Other _____ | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Town/community _____ | Not a county resident _____ | | | |

Open-ended questions, coding categories, and representative verbatim responses:

Question 1: What is the best idea, program, or practice you heard in the discussion today?

- Increasing Parent Education and/or Involvement
 - *Educating parents to help children at home.*
 - *Help parents. Educate us on what our children are doing. Do online classes to teach us how to help our kids w/ homework.*
 - *I believe it all starts at home. There's so much apathy in McDowell County—if parents don't care, then their children have little chance in succeeding. Education has to be cradle to grave. It sometimes seems as though children believe they can get away with anything- that teachers or the system can't touch them. It must start at the beginning.*
 - *I think the parents should be looked at more we need a better substance abuse program & rehab facilitys*
 - *Parental involvement.*
 - *needs more involvement w/ parents, teachers & students*
 - *Parents as Teachers. Stop the Hurt.*
 - *Stop the Hurt, Parents as Teachers*
 - *Parents as Teachers=immediately support this program to draw a line in the sand-get them early. Stop the Hurt, Inc.=start utilizing this agency to address the behavioral issues-which will help the education.*
- Integration of Services
 - *Mentoring & involving more in the community (Resources?)*
 - *mentoring, connecting students- a career*
 - *needs more involvement with parents, teachers & students*
 - *Our county needs to join and become united to change and improve our county.*
 - *"Role Models", "Addiction" Specialists*
 - *the reinvention of community involvement*
 - *Social workers in the schools*
- Policy
 - *Improved management!*
 - *adding more opportunities at vocational school*
 - *About Attendance*
 - *Enforce rules for attendance—legally or thru school system*
 - *Accountability for both teachers, principals, and parents*
 - *Accountability*
- Specific Programs
 - *Parents as Teachers=immediately support this program to draw a line in the sand-get them early. Stop the Hurt, Inc.=start utilizing this agency to address the behavioral issues-which will help the education.*
 - *save the children program could be a big help in giving children a second chance.*
 - *Parents as Teachers. Stop the Hurt*
 - *Stop the Hurt, Parents as Teacheres*
- Mentoring
 - *Mentoring & involving more in the community (Resources?)*
 - *Mentoring students*
 - *mentoring, connecting students-a career*

- *The best thing was that community members could voice opinions. I like the idea of mentoring but barriers prevent that*
- Miscellaneous
 - *Add the Human Element in Teaching/School*
 - *Finding ways to stop drop outs.*
 - *lots of good ideas—can't pinpoint one.*
 - *The best thing was that community members could voice opinions. I like the idea of mentoring but barriers prevent that.*
 - *All*

Question 2: What can you do personally to help students graduate from high school in your community?

- Be Involved
 - *Encourage students and listen if they want to talk.*
 - *Advice*
 - *As victim advocate and responsible adult take time with the children! Families in my scope and invest in their understanding of self and know their values.*
 - *Be supportive*
 - *be there for someone*
 - *get involved more*
 - *Get involved with my teenagers friends and encourage them to stay in school that their life will be better with an education*
 - *participate in school functions*
 - *Set a good example.*
 - *Show more Interest*
 - *Talk to them about the importance of an education*
 - *Talk with potential dropouts*
 - *teach*
 - *Volunteer—Be involved, As an old Big Creek Owl—Give A Hoot!*
 - *volunteering at schools*
 - *work in home with teen moms.*
 - *Work with parents and students to show them how important it is to finish school and graduate*
- Encourage
 - *Encourage students and listen if they want to talk.*
 - *Encourage them.*
 - *Encourage youngsters by example.*
 - *Continue to mentor and encourage the kids in my community.*
 - *Whenever possible—encourage students without condemnation*
 - *Get involved with my teenagers friends and encourage them to stay in school that their life will be better with an education.*
 - *Inspire them to succeed in life. "Role Models"*
 - *Work with parents and students to show them how important it is to finish school and graduate.*
- Mentoring
 - *become a mentor, aid with reading programs in the schools.*
 - *Continue to mentor and encourage the kids in my community.*
 - *mentoring*
 - *Mentoring program*

- Miscellaneous
 - ?
 - *Help (provide?) housing for teachers.*
 - *I think there should be more to do for the younger kids they have nothing better to do than get in trouble.*
 - *Start a program with a museum.*

Question 3: What should the community do about this issue? Who should do it?

- Increase Involvement
 - *be involved. Everyone.*
 - *Become more involved—Every person in the community should be involved*
 - *Get involved. Everyone.*
 - *Show up-get involved*
 - *Be more aware and involved*
 - *Work together*
 - **work together**
 - *Attend meetings & support students*
 - *Everything possible!! We all HAVE a responsibility to do our share...and then some!*
 - *get more people willing to get involved and tell the teens there is a better life than waiting for a monthly check.*
 - *More communities need to come together. Everyon*
 - *Our major county stakeholders need to become involved and help the educational system.*
 - *Parents, churches need to do more*
 - *we need counselors for teens & we all should chip in*
 - *involve the civic orgs. & gov.*
- Utilize Resources
 - *We need to find ways to teach/inform parents*
 - *Be guided by professional educators!*
 - *Involve the civic orgs. & gov.*
 - *comm. leader*
 - *everyone needs to see our children are/is the future of our county*
 - *positive mentors and/or counselors readily available and encouraged*
 - *we need counselors for teens & we all should chip in*
 - *Parents, churches need to do more*
- Develop Programs and/or Activities
 - *Develop a plan & work. Collaborating on improving attendance*
 - *Develop activities for youth in your community*
 - *Have more clubs for High School Students*
 - *Help fund a museum to create interest*
 - *Mentor the children more.*
- Miscellaneous
 - *Drug issues (laws, enforcement) need to be enforced*

Question 4: What policies—local, state, or national—should be changed to address the issue?

- Dropout Age
 - *Change the law of the age you have to be to quit school*
 - *Dropout-18*
 - *The drop age should be raised to 18 and increase the truancy fine. Force parents to attend school when their brats refuse to go*
- Academic Policies
 - *less emphasis on standardized testing*
 - *NCLB (No Child Left Behind)-students being taught on their academic level instead of grade level*
 - *State support 1-online classes and 2-mental health mentoring programs*
- Substance Abuse
 - *Issues with drug use in utero. Months of drug use prior to birth sets a course of life that is often irreversible.*
 - *Tough on Drug. Better Drug Rehab Centers*
- Miscellaneous
 - *?*
 - *Agencies should be allowed in the schools*
 - *Attendance & Behavior Policies*
 - *Better selection and vetting of teachers and administrator!*
 - *Many.*
 - *Not sure if government should be involved*
 - *State support 1-online classes and 2-mental health mentoring programs*
 - *The schools themselves (I'm only involved with Welch Elem & MVM & MVH) don't seem to be volunteer friendly*

Question 5: Any other thoughts?

- *Develop a program to apprise elementary parents of the importance of school attendance.*
- *I really enjoyed the presentation that was presented today. It was very educational.*
- *thank you*
- *I would like to see more communication (maybe computer wise, email, etc.) b/w teachers & parents*
- *parenting classes, mentoring programs*
- *It would be nice to have a website for the county that did not rely on each school to be looked at but at one site for county wide activities.*
- *The group of concerned citizens would grow if each person would bring 2 people to another meeting.*
- *Zero Teacher Absenteeism!*