

FutureMakers Regional Student Summit Report 2017

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Executive Summary

The FutureMakers Coalition is a regional initiative and partnership in Southwest Florida (Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee counties) with the goal to transform the workforce by increasing the number of college degrees, certificates or high-quality credentials to 55% by 2025.

Based off the 2016 FutureMakers Regional Student Summit, the Coalition mini-team worked together to implement the second annual Student Summit in spring 2017. The 2017 Student Summit included County Summits and a Regional Summit. This approach ensured that many students could be engaged in the process, heard from, and left activated for change. Here are the objectives of the student summit process.

1. Understand education and career aspirations and challenges from the student perspective.
2. Share that information with the FutureMakers Coalition and the regional Southwest Florida community.
3. Develop student leaders to participate in the FutureMakers Coalition.

This report focuses on the knowledge shared during the FutureMakers Regional Student Summit. In addition to learning about general student challenges and desired changes, students were asked to reflect on data demonstrating equity gaps for students of color and economically disadvantaged students. Lessons from the 2017 FutureMakers Regional Student Summit include:

- Students overall have a mixed view on their community, reflecting on the nature of their community and economic difficulty.
- Students want people to know that they have valuable talents and resources.
- Bullying and avoiding negative influences are the biggest reported challenges.
- Students report difficulty in accessing information related to higher education and career paths.
- Students want to see improvements in school policies, as well as more supportive and interactive teachers.
- Students want more career exploration opportunities.
- Teachers, schools, and family are most trusted by students to make changes.

Recommendations based on student perspective

- Examine high school policies on teacher-student engagement, bullying, and student discipline, particularly as they relate to students of color and economically disadvantaged students.
- Look at ways to introduce information about career and education paths to students early on in their schooling.
- Engage schools and teachers for interventions. Test ideas that support student motivation toward graduation and support the positive development of a student's sense of self.
- Engage student support agencies for interventions. Test ideas that help students navigate negative peer influences.

Introduction

The FutureMakers Coalition is a regional initiative and partnership in Southwest Florida (Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee counties) with the goal to transform the workforce by increasing the number of college degrees, certificates or high-quality credentials to 55% by 2025.

Based off the 2016 FutureMakers Student Summit, the Coalition mini-team worked together to implement the second annual Student Summit in spring 2017. The 2017 Student Summit included County Summits in Collier, Lee, and Glades, and a Regional Summit including students from Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee. Due to circumstances in Charlotte County, no students from there were able to participate. This approach ensured that many students could be engaged in the process, heard from, and left activated for change.

The Student Summits were created upon the belief that it is necessary to engage and involve students as context experts in the progression of the work of the FutureMakers Coalition. The team set out to 1) understand educational and career aspirations and challenges from their perspective, 2) share that information with the FutureMakers Coalition and the regional Southwest Florida community, and 3) develop student leaders to participate in the FutureMakers Coalition.

The FutureMakers Student Summit process was collaboratively designed by a group of FutureMakers Coalition partners, including Kelly Thawley from the Foundation for Lee Public Schools, Jessica Manchette from Champions for Learning, Laura Perry from the Glades Education Foundation, and the Hendry County School District. The project team reviewed the summit proposal designed by Dr. Cindy Banyai, refining it and planning for implementation of the project.

The team decided to have each county hold County Summits where time and staff capacity allowed to hear from a variety of students in their area. These events provide an entry point for identifying student leaders to participate in the Regional Summit. Each county providing data from a local summit received a tailored report for their county to share with students and decision-makers.

The Regional Student Summit was then planned for the spring of 2017 by Dr. Cindy Banyai and the FutureMakers Coalition backbone organization, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation. After a brief introduction to the FutureMakers Coalition and the process for the Summit, participants moved through a series of interactive stations. The stations included the data gallery walk (Bowman, 2005), focusing on equity gaps faced by students of color and economically disadvantaged students. During the gallery walk, students were asked to review charts that demonstrate equity gaps and comment via sticky note and discuss ideas with a facilitator. Students also participated in graphically facilitated discussions on challenges and desired change in education and career planning. The results of the stations and activities are discussed later in this report.

This event brought together select student leaders to participate in discussions on the challenges and desired change in education and career planning, connect with one another, gain insight on student experiences related to equity gaps, and to identify student leaders to participate in the FutureMakers Coalition.

Research design

This research has been undertaken as an investment in understanding communities around Southwest Florida to assist nonprofits, agencies, and regional leaders in developing programs, projects, and initiatives linked to the collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011) desired through the FutureMakers Coalition. It helps guide change agencies by helping to provide some information to lay the context of the community, helping to “take stock” consistent with the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) design model (Wiseman, et al., 2007).

Collective impact is a way to organize around causes and goals to make regional change for good. It is a way of moving the needle on regional causes and creating change consistent with the vision of the community. In fact, “the success of collective impact depends on genuine ownership by the larger community that starts with placing a value, not only on expert knowledge, but also on public knowledge that comes only from authentically engaging the community (Harwood, 2014).” Therefore, acknowledging and tapping into the knowledge that students have can be a benefit to the success of the FutureMakers Coalition and its related initiatives.

These student summits were developed to be consistent with principles of participatory action research (Heron & Reason, 2006; Small, 1995). Each summit was conducted using a question guide that was developed based on suggestions for community engagement for collective impact from Richard Hardwood’s 2014 work for the Collective Impact Forum “Putting Community in Collective Impact.” The question guide can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 -Community Collective Impact Question Guide

Question	Rationale
What story do you tell about our community?	Identify positive/negative community narratives
What’s going on in your community?	Identify community context - issues/situations/conditions/assets that are not obvious to outsiders
What challenges do you face in your daily life?	Better understand the challenges people face in moving toward their aspirations; how people experience those challenges in their daily lives
What needs to change to make these challenges less difficult? (also referenced “ideal community”)	Articulate community’s aspirations; identify community level outcomes
Who do you trust to make these changes?	Gauge enabling environment for program development/effectiveness
What role would you want to play in this change?	Engage group to become active; develop belief in collective impact potential
What challenges do you face in planning your future education/career?	Better understand the challenges students face in moving toward their aspirations, specifically around higher education/careers
What changes need to be made to make it easier to pursue your education/career goals?	Articulate potential intervention points to improve student outcomes

Questions were asked to the group verbatim and additional follow-up questions, clarifications, and age-based modifications were made so answers reflected the true intention of the question (based on qualitative data gathering approaches outlined in (Patton, 2002)). Participants discussed the questions and answers amongst themselves and with question facilitators, reporting on them in shared posters and sticky notes.

2017 FutureMakers Regional Student Summit

The Regional Summit continued the work that was done at the county level on convening and listening to students in their area. The overall design of the summit was crafted by Dr. Cindy Banyai and vetted by the FutureMakers Coalition project partners. After a brief introduction to the FutureMakers Coalition and the process of the summit, participants moved through a series of interactive stations. The stations included the gallery walk and graphically facilitated discussions on challenges and desired change in education and career planning. Participants also responded to the questions individually via sticky notes. The results of the stations and activities are discussed later in this section.

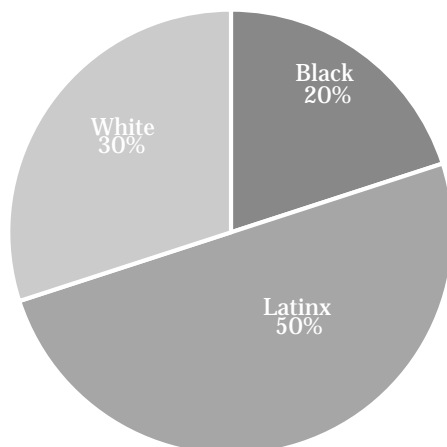
Each county summit convener was asked to send student participants to the Regional Student Summit. Participants were selected by the Coalition project team based on the following principles:

- Inclusion of participants from as many schools as possible;
- Inclusion of participants from an array of cultural and economic background, and diversity in ability, focusing on early high school grades; and
- Number of participants is relative to the relative the capacity of county partners to gather and transport the students to the event, and are as inclusive and representative as possible.

The Regional Summit was held after school on May 3, 2017 at Hodges University in Fort Myers and was coordinated by Southwest Florida Community Foundation, the backbone organization for the FutureMakers Coalition. Twenty students from across Southwest Florida and 10 volunteer guides and facilitators from across the region participated in the Summit.

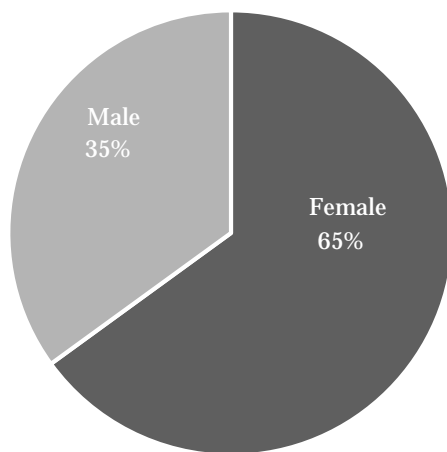
Latinx and Black (African American and Caribbean descent) students were well represented at the Summit, comprising 70% of participants. This bodes well for engaging the youth involved in the demographic shifts in the region, as well as from traditionally underserved communities. The next graph shows the demographic breakdown of Summit participants.

Figure 1 - Regional Student Summit participation by demographic



Girls were also well represented at the FutureMakers Regional Student Summit, as most participants, 65%, were female.

Figure 2 - Regional Student Summit participation by gender



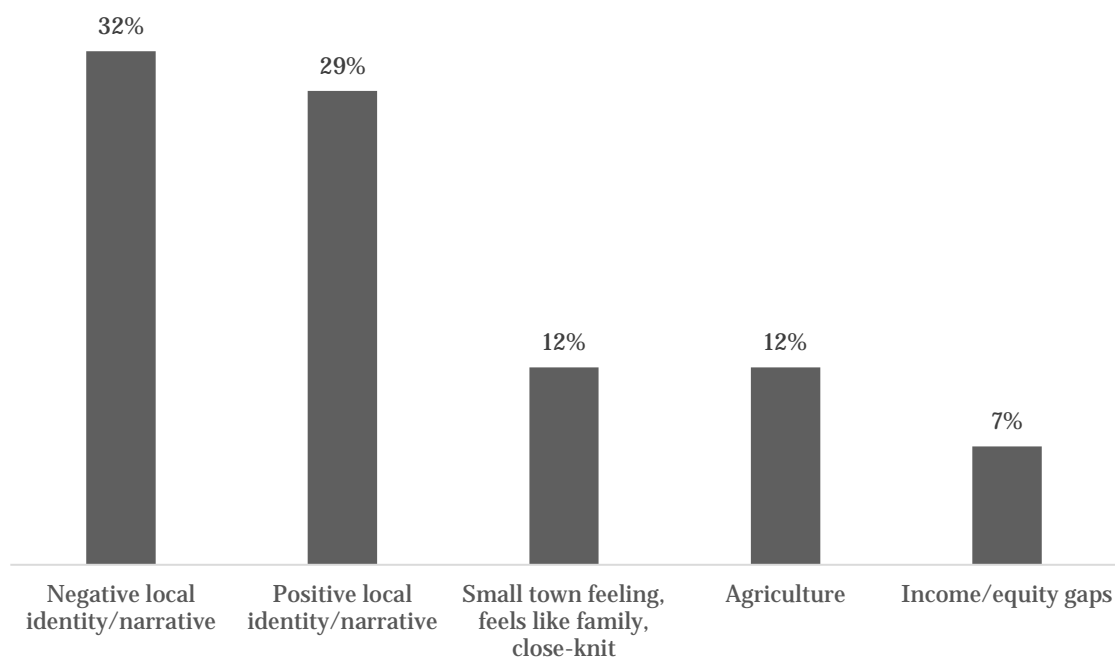
Responses to the Collective Impact Questions

Facilitators for the questions helped lead students through poignant discussions to help reveal their true perspective on pressing issues and challenges in our community and with education. The first question was “What story do you tell about your community?” This question serves to

understand the way people view their community, as well as to define their community frame for the rest of the questions.

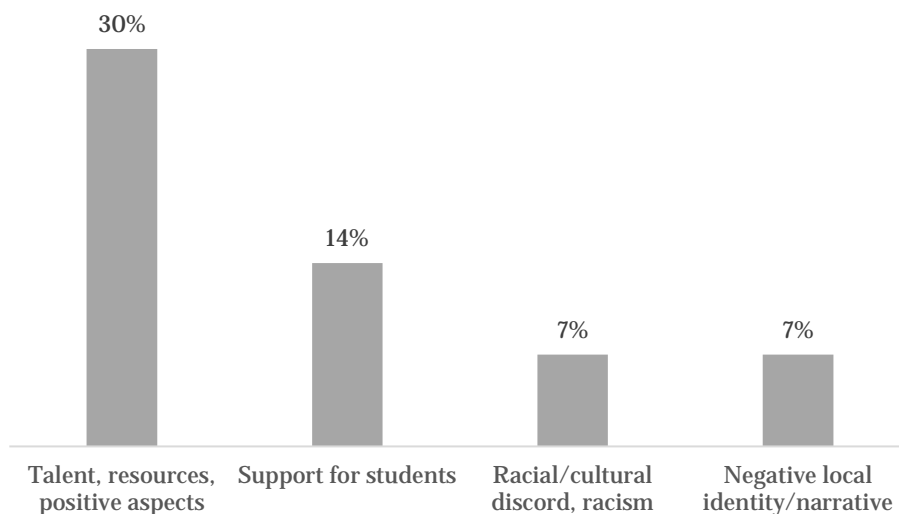
The responses were coded into positive and negative responses, as well as for some prominent ideas that could not easily be coded as positive or negative. Response themes are demonstrated in Figure 3. Overall, students share a mixed view on their community with 32% of all the responses to this question being negative. This is captured by two similar, although somewhat opposing quotes from students. One student said, “our community gives us opportunities,” while another noted “lack of opportunities [in a] small town, little amount of work places.” Students also identified themes related to agriculture, small towns, and economic disparities, items that are specific to their particular community.

Figure 3 - Response areas for "what story do you tell?"



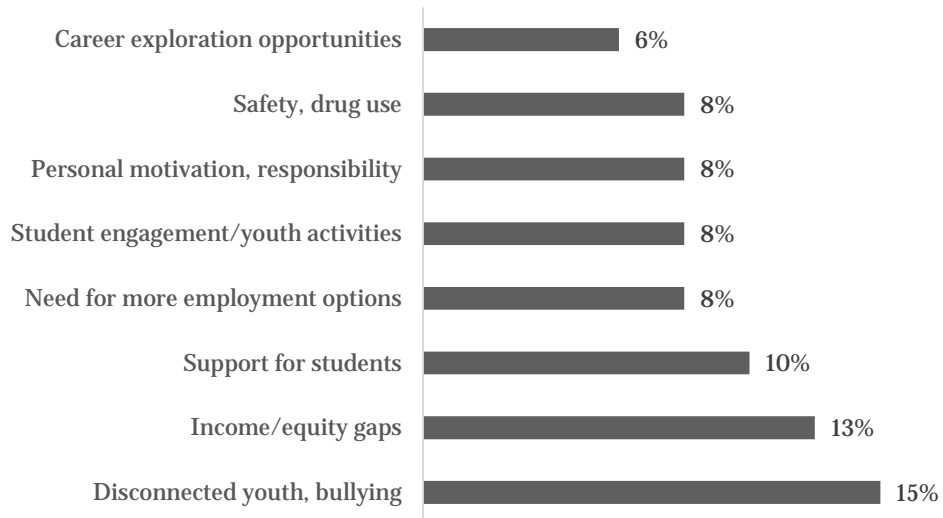
The second question, “what’s going on?,” looks to uncover what is really going on in students’ communities. Figure 4 shows the most often discussed areas by students at the summit. Students most frequently discussed their talents, resources, or positive aspects of their community or school. This is captured by one student’s quote “there’s good people in the neighborhood.” Some conversation focused on support for students and racial issues. One student noted “They don’t want us to graduate,” which conveys some of the stress students are feeling. When it comes to issues related to race, students shared what they think is really going on. One student wrote “STEROTYPES - only white people are able to afford everything...they have all the good jobs.” Understanding students’ perspectives on these types of challenges is valuable to better address equity gaps.

Figure 4 - Top response areas for "What's going on?"



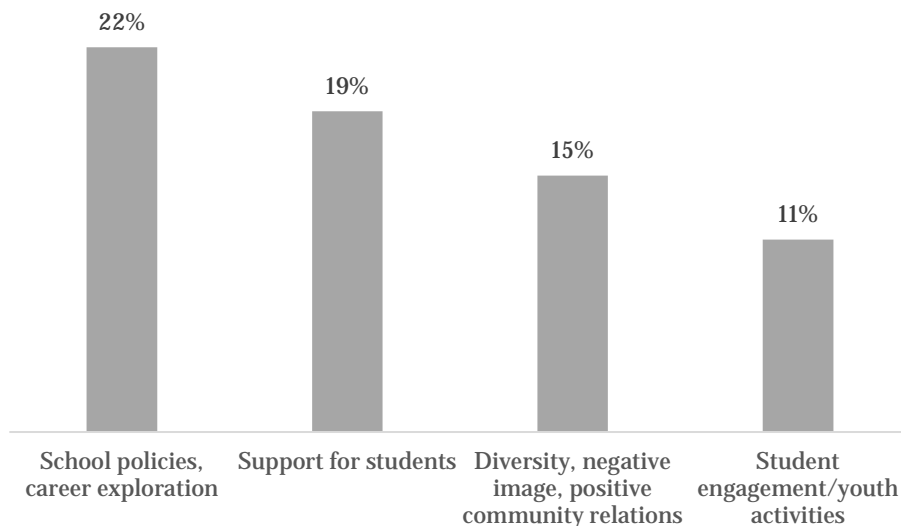
Question three looks at the challenges students face in their life, both in school and outside of school. Figure 5 shows the top response areas on challenges for the students and their community. Disconnected youth/bullying, income/equity gaps, and student support are the top three areas where students feel challenged. In response to a discussion on negative influences, one student said it was like “crabs in a bucket,” where those negative people are always “trying to pull you down.” The student further explained the helpless feeling of being a “crab in a bucket” with nowhere to escape the negative influences, even when you are trying to lift yourself up there are always others around trying to pull you back down. Students also seem to be keenly aware of economic issues that are faced in their community with one student expressing a need for more “local jobs - instead of having people go out of town! Many can't afford it so, they stay in town in poverty :(.” A call for more support for students also appears in discussion on challenges, with some students saying they “feel disrespected by teachers.” Students also hope they are “strong enough to handle stuff.”

Figure 5 - Top response areas on challenges



Question four asks about desired changes. Figure 6 shows the areas of top responses around desired change in response to their challenges. Students focus much of their discussion on the situation in the schools. Some students want to be more academically challenged with a call for “more academic opportunities i.e. AP classes, advanced classes, physics classes.” When it comes to student support some desire simply “more understanding from teachers.” Top among changes is also to address issues related to diversity with students asking for “an acceptance of diverse people.”

Figure 6 - Top responses on desired change



Question five asks about those that students trust to make their desired changes. Students first look to themselves to make the changes they want to see. One student said “Us! Ourselves!! How can we bring any changes, if nobody wants to act?!” When they begin to look outward for assistance, they trust schools and teachers to make their desired changes, which is consistent with the notion that they would most like to see changes in school policies and activities. Students also look to their family to make the changes they want to see.

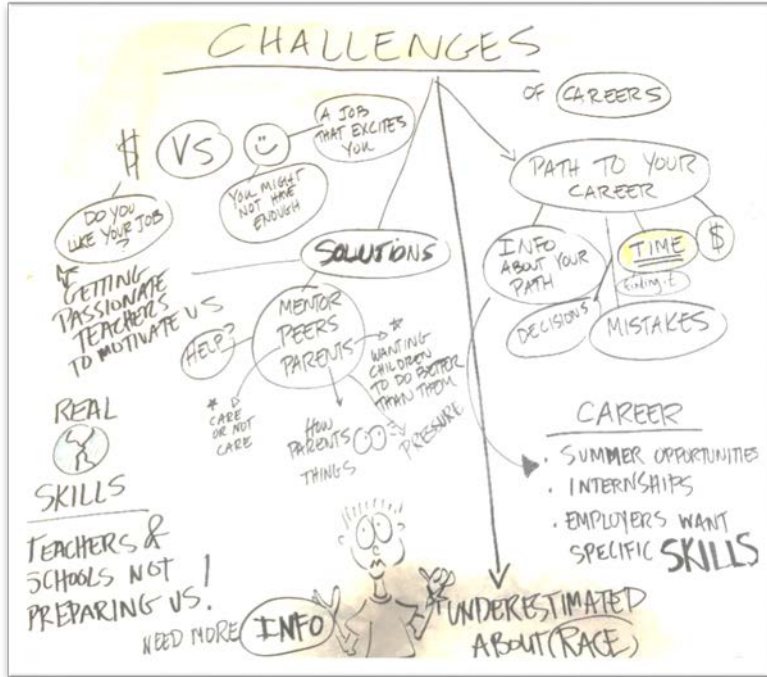
The final interactive question reflects on the students’ willingness to activate to make the changes they want to see. All student participants said they want to take an engaged role in making their desired changes. Supporting this notion one student said that they want to “be the voice to kick start these changes for myself and students in my position.”

Facilitated discussions and graphic recordings

Aside from the gallery walk and the interactive question set, students cycled through two graphically facilitated discussions. In each discussion, students were seated in a circle and focused on a guiding question with discussion lead by a trained facilitator. Simultaneously, a trained graphic recorder was in the front of the room capturing the group’s discussion visually. This was done to help the students track their discussion, as well as to have a way to record and understand the discussion trends. The graphic facilitation sessions focused in on the education-related questions – “What challenges do you face in planning your education and career?” and “What can be changed to help you overcome challenges in planning your education and career?” Each graphic recording was coded to find the discussion trends in each of these areas.

Figure 7 shows one of the graphic recordings, created by artist Red Rohl, from the facilitated discussion on education and career challenges. It demonstrates the issues students have getting information to get on the right path to their future career.

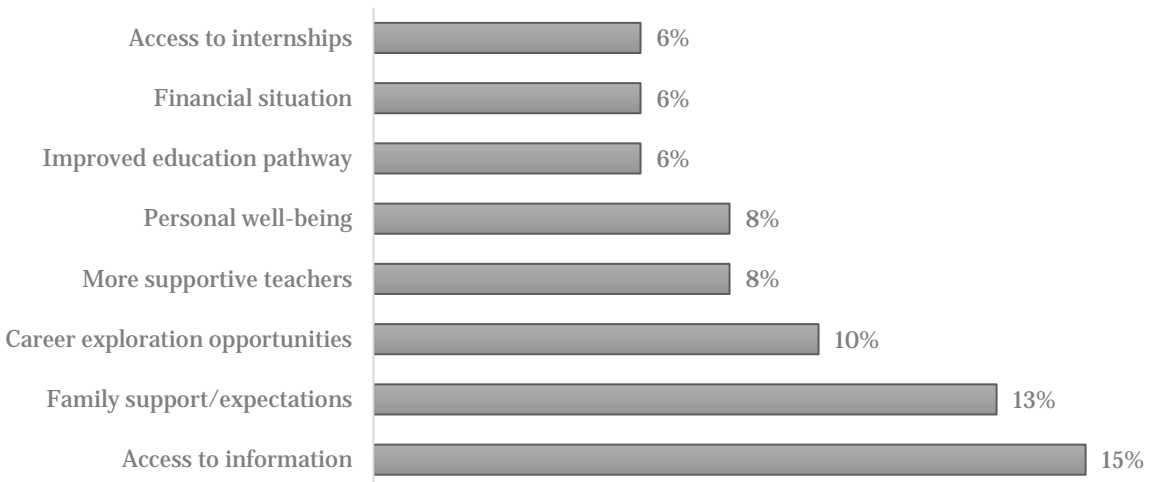
Figure 7 - Graphic recording of student discussion on education challenges



Artist: Red Rohl

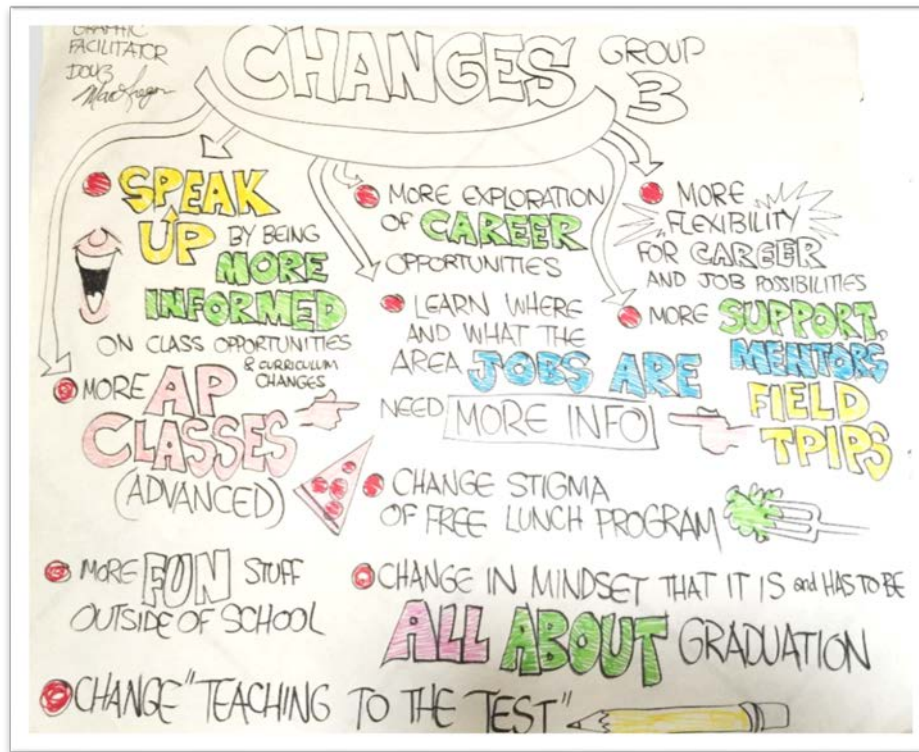
Figure 8 shows trends in the coded responses that students had when discussing education challenges. The top concerns were access to information and having family support for their education and career path.

Figure 8 - Topic trends in education and career challenges discussion



Another graphically facilitated discussion during the Regional Student Summit focused on the changes students wanted to see to make their education and career path more aligned. Figure 9 shows one of the graphic recordings from this discussion done by local cartoonist Doug MacGregor. It shows the types of changes in school policies and processes, including adding more challenging classes and exposure to local employers, that students want.

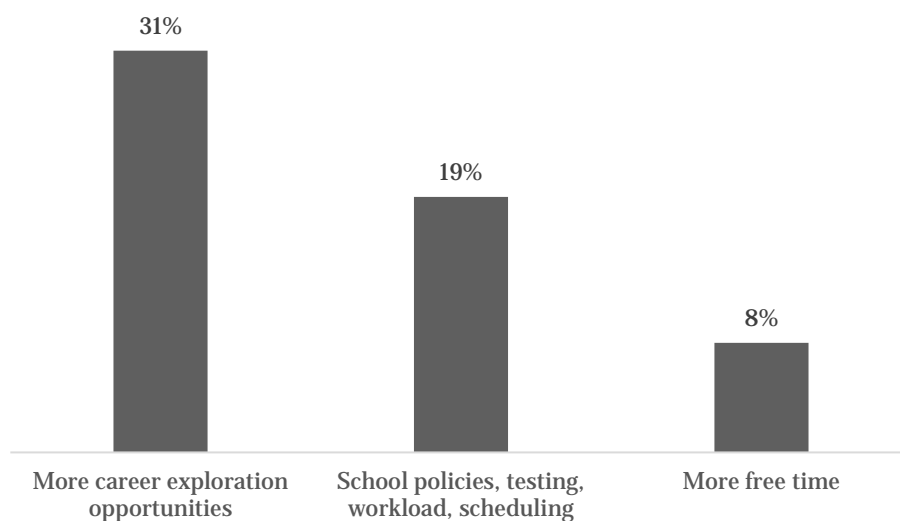
Figure 9 - Graphic recording from education and career changes discussion



Artist: Doug MacGregor

Figure 10 looks at discussion trends when the Regional Student Summit participants were asked about the changes they would like to see to help overcome their educational challenges. Overwhelmingly, students want more access to career exploration opportunities earlier in their education.

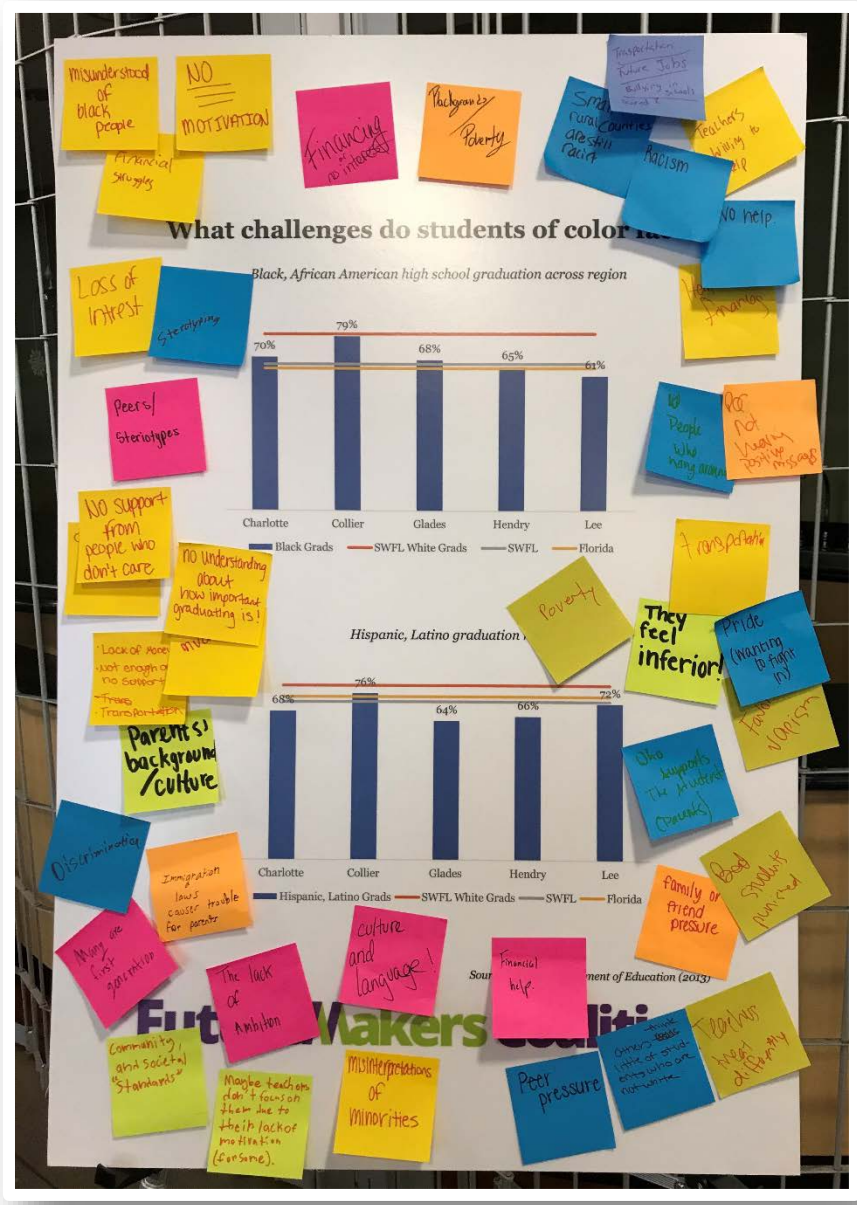
Figure 10 - Topic trends in desired change in education and career challenges discussion



Data gallery walk on equity gaps

The final station was the data gallery walk (Bowman, 2005), focusing on equity gaps faced by students of color and economically disadvantaged students. One poster in the data gallery walk displayed charts demonstrating the equity gap between African America/black and Latinx students versus white students respectively. Students were then asked to reflect on why these gaps might exist and what are the circumstances surrounding the discrepancies. The interactive poster can be seen in Figure 11.

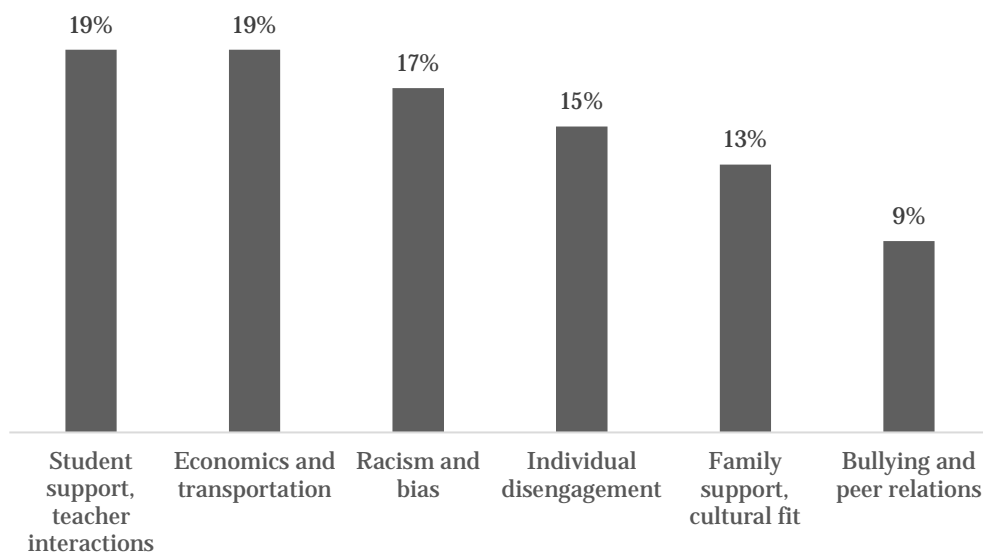
Figure 11 - Equity Gallery Walk poster on race/ethnicity



Some students were surprised to learn of the equity gaps in high school graduation, but many students were prepared to offer insight. When students were asked why such gaps exist they offered the following responses, “people of color not hearing positive message” and “maybe teachers don't focus on them due to their lack of motivation (for some).” Figure 12 shows the trends in the student responses and reflection on racial/ethnic equity gaps in high school graduation rates. Support for students and economic/transportation barriers were the top cited

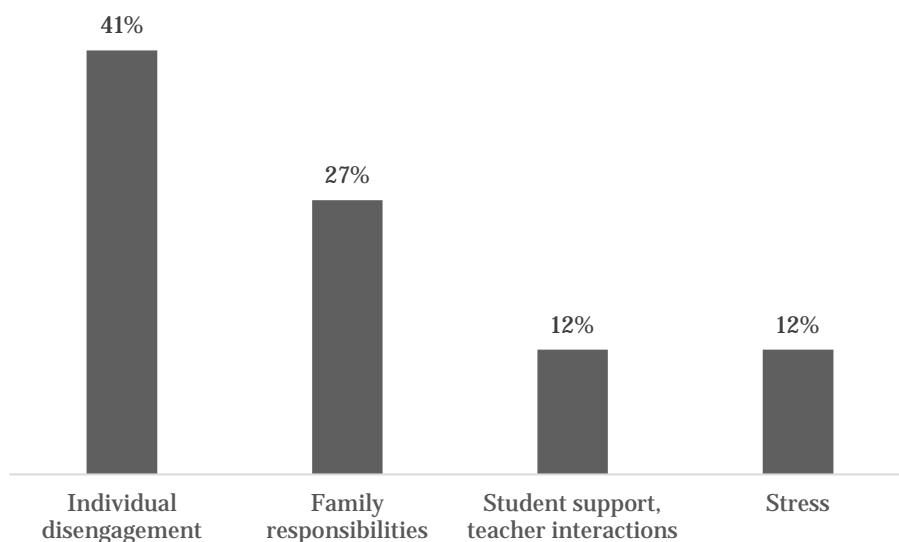
challenges for students of color when it comes to completing high school on time. Racism and bias, as well as individual disengagement were also top concerns.

Figure 12 - Top reported challenges for students of color



Students often linked the challenges faced by students of color to economic disadvantage. Although this is consistent with the racial realities of poverty in the United States, where poverty rates for African American/black (25%) and Latinx (23%) people is roughly double that of white people (11%) (Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013), the equity gap on economics is a parallel issue. Students were also asked to reflect on a poster that contained charts demonstrating that SWFL students who are economically disadvantaged are nearly twice as likely to not graduate high school on time in comparison to their peers without economic disadvantage (Florida Department of Education, 2013). Figure 13 shows this gallery walk poster and responses.

Figure 14 - Top reported challenges for economically disadvantaged students



The bulk of the conversation around challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students was around their individual disengagement. This encompasses feelings of worthlessness, as well as general lack of motivation. It is clear that according to students, economically disadvantaged students have a hard time in school and planning for future success.

Student Leadership Team

The Student Leadership Team is comprised of participating students that demonstrate exemplary interest, articulation, and passion for regional change around educational attainment. FutureMakers Regional Student Summit participants were invited to self-select to be part of the Student Leadership Team. Nineteen students from the Regional Student Summit elected to participate in the Student Leadership Team.

This team is invited to participate in FutureMakers events and Regional Action Team meetings to bring the student voice, as context experts, to the discussion and development of co-designed projects and programs and the interpretation of related data. This work may be considered as part of a students' service learning. Thus far, there are at least three examples of members of the Student Leadership Team contributing to the work of the Coalition. First, one student leader participated in the in-person Persistence and Progress Regional Action Team meeting, where the regional shared outcomes were introduced and the rapid-cycle testing of related ideas was initiated. Another student leader wrote an editorial on the student perspective and engagement in the FutureMakers Coalition as part of a large piece on the Coalition in the local newspaper, the Fort Myers News-Press. Yet another student attended the 2016 Breakfast of Champions. More examples like this are sure to arise as the Student Leadership Team becomes more fully integrated into the work of the FutureMakers Coalition, but this is an area that could be further developed.

Overview and conclusion

The FutureMakers Coalition values the perspective of students. The collaborative design and implementation of the summit process throughout the region engaged students, listened to them, and highlighted their perspective in the shared work of the coalition. It has been an iterative and interactive process involving several steps of discussion, analysis, and interpretation, by the content experts in the Coalition and the content experts, the students. It has been a long process, taking over one year, but the results are valuable pieces of information that can guide the work and future activities of the FutureMakers Coalition.

The gallery walk helps gauge the student perspective when it comes to unpacking issues related equity gaps in high school on time graduation rates. Students indicate that individual disengagement, barriers related to economics and transportation, and support of struggling students are the biggest challenges here.

The graphically facilitated discussions on education challenges and changes elicited the need for students to have better access to information on their future education and career opportunities and a deep desire to better connected to jobs and employers earlier.

Lessons from the interactive question set include:

- Students overall have a mixed view on their community, reflecting on the nature of their community and economic difficulty.
- Students want people to know that they have valuable talents and resources.
- Bullying and avoiding negative influences are the biggest reported challenges.
- Students want to see improvements in school policies, as well as more supportive and interactive teachers.
- Teachers, schools, and family are most trusted by students to make changes.

Based on the student perspective learned through the Regional Summit, some recommendations for action are offered to the FutureMakers Coalition.

- 1) Examine high school policies on teacher-student engagement, bullying, and student discipline, particularly as they relate to students of color and economically disadvantaged students.
- 2) Look at ways to introduce information about career and education paths to students early on in their schooling.
- 3) Engage schools and teachers for interventions.
- 4) Test ideas that support student motivation toward graduation and support the positive development of a student's sense of self.
- 5) Engage student support agencies for interventions.
- 6) Test ideas that help students navigate negative peer influences.

This report represents a piece of dialogue for the FutureMakers Coalition, with perhaps some of the most important stakeholders in the work to increase post-secondary attainment, students. This student summit engages context experts into the FutureMakers Coalition. In addition to the information provided here, the student summit process continues to explore and improve upon a framework and set of tools to guide future community and context expert engagement in the FutureMakers Coalition.

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