

Kafé12



The Best Start is Finishing

Report on Proceedings from June 5, 2008

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IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

Community Framework – Continuing the Conversation

From the June 5th Kafé12 session

Introduction

In 2007, the Funders for Youth agreed to pool their resources and invite citizens from diverse backgrounds to participate in a world café about improving high school completion rates for Calgary youth. One of the Funders, EducationMatters, agreed to be project manager and to develop a virtual place called Kafé12 where the community could continue to converse about this important issue online. (www.kafe12.org). Merrill Cooper was hired to write a background paper on vulnerable youth and high school completion in Calgary. Maze Consulting was contracted to co-ordinate a world café event.

On April 10, 2008 over 230 community stakeholders representing the education, social service, government and business sectors gathered to address the issue, understand the problem and identify solutions (visit www.kafe12.org and click on April Event for details). Several weeks after this highly successful gathering, an invitation was sent to all Kafé12 participants to attend a follow-up session to review the draft Report from April 10, identify priorities and develop a strategy for next steps.

The Follow-Up Session

The June 5 follow-up session was held at the Marlborough Park Community Association. Support for the event was overwhelming, as registration reached maximum capacity of 60 guests within one week of sending out the notice. Again, multiple sectors throughout the city (see appendix 1) were represented. The session was expertly facilitated by Elizabeth Dozois from Word on the Street. The formal session began with a presentation (see link) of the draft Report from April 10. Focusing on the conclusions from the world café, Blair McNaughton of Maze Consulting used concrete examples from his own teaching experiences to exemplify the recommendations that emerged from Kafé12.

Michelle Clarke, Executive Director of Burns Memorial Fund, then presented a draft Community Skeleton Framework (see appendix 2) based on the Funders for Youth's analysis of the April 10th Report that was used as a guide to the discussions for the remainder of the session.

Community Skeleton Framework

The framework consists of three broad components:

1. Policy
2. Partnerships
3. Public Awareness

Each of these components would be further broken down into:

- Collective Action and
- Personal Action

After receiving the group's consensus that the focus of the three part framework made sense as a starting point for building an action plan around improving high school completion rates, the participants were asked to move to a table that focused on the Framework component that interested them the most. There were seven tables; three for *policy*, three *partnerships* and one assigned for *public awareness*. The Kafé12 Background Paper and Executive Summary by Merrill Cooper (visit www.kafe12.org and click on April Event) were placed at each table. There were also designated worksheets to guide the table discussion (see appendix 3 and 4) and draft copies of the April 10 Report. Similar to the April 10 Kafe 12 event, each table chose a facilitator and a note taker who wrote on a flip chart. The opinions and ideas from the table discussions are intended to serve as a guide for future planning on this issue.

Overall Objective

An overall objective was agreed upon by the group:

- To help mobilize and align all key community stakeholders to significantly improve Calgary's high school completion rate to 90% by 2020. (As of 2008, the rate was 70%)

THE TABLE DISCUSSIONS:

Next all groups were asked to read the worksheet guidelines, and refer to the draft report findings in order to discuss potential collective and personal actions and identify top priorities. The results that emerged from the very animated discussion were:

1. Policy Enhancements and Developments

A common theme from April 10 was the need to review current policy, identifying existing strengths and developing improvements or enhancements to positively impact public school students and high school completion rates.

5 Top Priorities

The *policy* discussion groups reviewed the framework and determined the top five policy priorities should be:

- Changing completion requirements (i.e. allowing students 4-5 years to complete high school on entering grade 10).
- Increasing focus on early literacy.
- Supporting changes at the ministry level that would increase collaboration.
- Increasing funding for at risk youth (such as ESL and Aboriginal youth).
- Creating site based alternative programs (from a student based perspective).

All priorities were considered critical first steps towards improving high school completion.

Collective Action

There are many other ways that the public can support the cause of increasing high school completion from a policy perspective. (Some of these suggestions may blur the lines between policy/partnerships, but there will always be an overlap). One common thread that emerged from the policy round tables was the benefit of multiple sectors participating in advocacy efforts to address policy changes, leading to more students graduating from high school. There needs to be a push to improve existing policy and develop new policies in education. Many suggestions were discussed at the round tables which included:

- Better identification and understanding of youth who are not in school and not attending classes.
- Revitalizing the old model of all levels of schools working together.
- Providing more space for learning environments.
- Training teachers to be responsive to learner needs.
- Developing evidence based programs and age appropriate literacy programs.

Personal Action

Individuals have the ability to raise the profile of the issue of high school completion on the public agenda. Acting as an individual citizen to influence decision-makers can generate greater public policy focus on increasing high school completion. Three suggestions of individual action were offered at the April 10 Kafé12 session and were supported again at the June 5 follow-up. Speaking or writing an MLA or School Board Trustee in support of a selected policy change was the first suggestion. People who are members of a group can encourage their peers to also speak or write to MLAs and School Board Trustees. The final thought was to question people who are running for office about what their position is on improving high school completion.

2. Partnership Opportunities

Creating and building on current partnerships in the community, leveraging and strengthening existing services, and identifying new initiatives was another key area identified on April 10. Creating a social change is impossible without engaging many partners. The partnership component would engage all sectors of the community to collaborate in an effort to increase high school completion.

5 Top Priorities

The *partnership* discussion groups looked over what had been identified throughout the session. Many ideas below will involve different community partners such as schools, businesses, health professionals and social service agencies. The group felt the top five priorities should be:

- Implementing wellness centres in schools (including offering cultural components).
- Enhancing career programs (such as job shadowing, business partnerships, employment skills training).
- Increasing mentorship programs (i.e. for new Canadians, Aboriginal students, high needs students or kids in care),
- Supporting and expanding teacher training programs and coordinating mechanisms, and
- Developing a clearing house to better share information and identify the service/program gaps.

These priorities are the starting point for creating change through partnerships.

Collective Action

Collective action is required to enhance existing partnerships and create new partnership opportunities. Many suggestions were offered on June 5 that would require a strong collaborative effort. In addition to the top five priorities, the list of recommendations also included:

- Increased funding for and collaboration between community-based supports.
- Supporting changes at provincial ministry level to increase collaboration and coordination of children and youth services.
- Engaging private sector for program participation, advocacy and funding.
- Identifying schools to be a hub of community life, including positive activities involving the neighbourhood.
- Providing more homework support, including more arts and recreation in public school curriculum.
- Expanding programs and/or partnerships for marginalized youth.

Personal Action

Three ways to personally contribute to a child's success in school were discussed at the April 10 Kafé12 and restated by participants at the June 5 session. Reading to a child (whether it is a son, daughter, grandchild or a local school child) to improve literacy. The second action item was to become a mentor to a child in the community to increase their exposure to positive role models. The final way to help improve high school completion rates, considered important by all Kafé12 participants, was to volunteer at child-serving organizations and schools.

3. Public Awareness

In order for the high school completion initiative to be embraced by the community at large, the *public awareness* group was asked to identify key messages and important factors to consider for a public awareness campaign to be developed.

Problem Statement

"Calgary's awareness must be increased in regards to high school completion rates."

Target Audiences

The group identified important audiences who must be reached through an awareness campaign, each requiring a specific message/medium to address their unique concerns. The benefits of each relationship will be identified in an upcoming session. The target audiences are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ▪ Businesses/Private Sector | ▪ Non Profits/ social service agencies |
| ▪ Cultural Communities | ▪ Parents/parents to be |
| ▪ General Public-mass media | ▪ School Boards |
| ▪ Government-Policy Makers | ▪ Seniors |
| ▪ Medical/ Healthcare | ▪ Students |
| ▪ New Canadians | ▪ Teachers/Teacher Institutions |

Key Messages should reinforce:

A. Long-term Indicators of Success

Increasing high school completion can positively impact society in ways such as a stronger economy, improved healthcare, reduced crime rates (resulting in a safer society), more dedicated citizens, enriched community health, increased self-esteem and personal growth, greater civic engagement, improved quality of life (community welfare) and more meaningful personal and business values.

B. Recommendations from Final Report of April 10

The importance of the first Kafé12 session was to create the ground work for a movement towards high school completion. The input provided by participants was vital information and their recommendations that were identified in the April 10th report will be reinforced throughout the key messaging process. These recommendations include redefining the image (or definition) of success, encouraging early intervention (prenatal, parenting, care giving), embracing cultural diversity (orientations for parents in their mother tongue regarding high school completion as they may not understand the importance in English), identifying the needs of the at-risk population as well as encouraging community engagement.

C. Personal Action

Word of mouth is the most powerful tool in spreading important messages. High school completion is an engaging topic and by creating awareness within the community that increasing completion rates is an attainable goal, can significantly increase the potential outcomes from Kafé12. Speaking to family, friends, clubs, co-workers and professional associations about the need for change was strongly recommended by participants from Kafé12. Other suggested actions were, asking organizations to become supporters of increasing high school completion rates, becoming a United Way Ambassador and speaking about the importance of increasing high school completion, writing to an MLA and donating to the education sector.

Slogans to Inspire

The following slogans are meant to inspire messaging for a local campaign. Some are original while others have been used for other campaigns in North America.

- "High school completion is everyone's responsibility."
- "High school completion benefits not just students, but society as a whole."
- "No child left behind."
- "When a child cannot read, it is a national emergency."
- "It takes a village to raise a child."

Defining who we are? (the community members engaged in HSC issue)

It is important when creating public awareness that the public knows who is behind the initiative. It is also important that the people who are actually creating the messages understand who they are so the communication is clear and focused. The *public awareness* group moved beyond a discussion of their professions (i.e. educators, social service providers, funders) and instead defined their values. They felt they are people who care about children and humanity, people who believe education is everybody's responsibility, people who care about the future of Calgary and of the world, people who want children to be well positioned for success and ultimately people with the common goal of increasing high school completion rates.

Next steps in creating key messages

The next steps are meant to help narrow the focus and begin building the outline of a public awareness campaign. The first steps are developing strategies, creating a communications/ community engagement plan, developing key messages, delivery methods to target audiences (mediums) and creating a timeline.

Communication Vehicles

Communication mediums to be decided on (i.e. print, T.V, radio, posters, brochures, online).

- Being proactive – what needs to be done long term?
- Being reactive – what needs to be done immediately?

Summary of June 5th

Common Threads

The following specific areas/ideas to support youth completing their high school education were repeated throughout the session:

Creating a definition of high school completion

Greater collective understanding of the definition of high school completion was mentioned as important so that the public and those involved develop a better understanding of the goals and objectives associated with increasing high school completion and to ensure a targeted scope of the initiative.

Integration of more wellness centres into the school system

Participants supported increasing awareness regarding the evidenced based benefits of wellness centres in schools. Schools with holistic wellness models or centres have reported positive impacts in many aspects of students' lives. (social, healthcare, mentoring etc.)

A more intense focus on early literacy

Focusing on early literacy was considered a critical preventative strategy and a fundamental factor to increase high school completion as it helps create stronger, more confident readers in the school system. Participants expressed that enhancing literacy will contribute to solving problems related to self-esteem and engagement in learning.

Mentorship programs

Increasing the involvement of children and youth in mentorship programs through partnership opportunities, such as the Alberta Mentoring Partnership, was frequently mentioned as a priority due to the importance of students connecting with positive and supportive influences. Mentoring can allow for more diverse influential relationships for children of all backgrounds and abilities.

Government involvement

Positive relationships and ongoing engagement with strong influencers and policy makers was considered critical. Participants believed it is important to have government representatives involved throughout the process in order to effectively initiate action.

Communication/public engagement plan

An effective communication plan, including branding, is important as it will give the initiative a voice. Getting the word out to the public is critical to garnering broad support for the initiative and trust in moving towards improving high school completion.

School and workplace links

Increasing the amount of interaction between businesses and the school system will provide more opportunities for youth (12+) to be involved in work experience and work skills training.

NEXT ACTION STEPS

– For the Community Framework (policy, partnerships and public awareness)

At the end of the session participants identified what some of the next steps could be in moving towards increased high school completion rates. While this is still a work in progress due to time constraints at the half day June 5 session, this is intended to be a guideline for fleshing out and developing working groups in the fall.

Policy working group

- Advocate for flexibility within current structure of education delivery

Partnerships working group

- Clearly articulate the role of the private sector
- Recruit key decision makers
- Leverage existing relationships and models
- Improve communication between ministry and teachers/schools
- Coordinate a mechanism for existing partnerships e.g. clearing house (communities in schools model)
- Link with agencies working with older adults and with a similar profile to youth we are targeting

Public Awareness working group

- Develop a media plan; Involve media in public awareness
- Target parents, prenatal educators, family physicians
- Improve communication between ministry and teachers/schools

All working groups

- Define high school completion
- Reinforce root causes impacting high school completion that should be addressed
- Create timelines/deliverables
- Create terms of reference for working groups
- Look at the right/appropriate terminology – i.e. Immigrants vs. new Canadians
- Involve youth in the initiative, i.e. create a youth forum
- Build in communications mechanisms between working groups and various publics

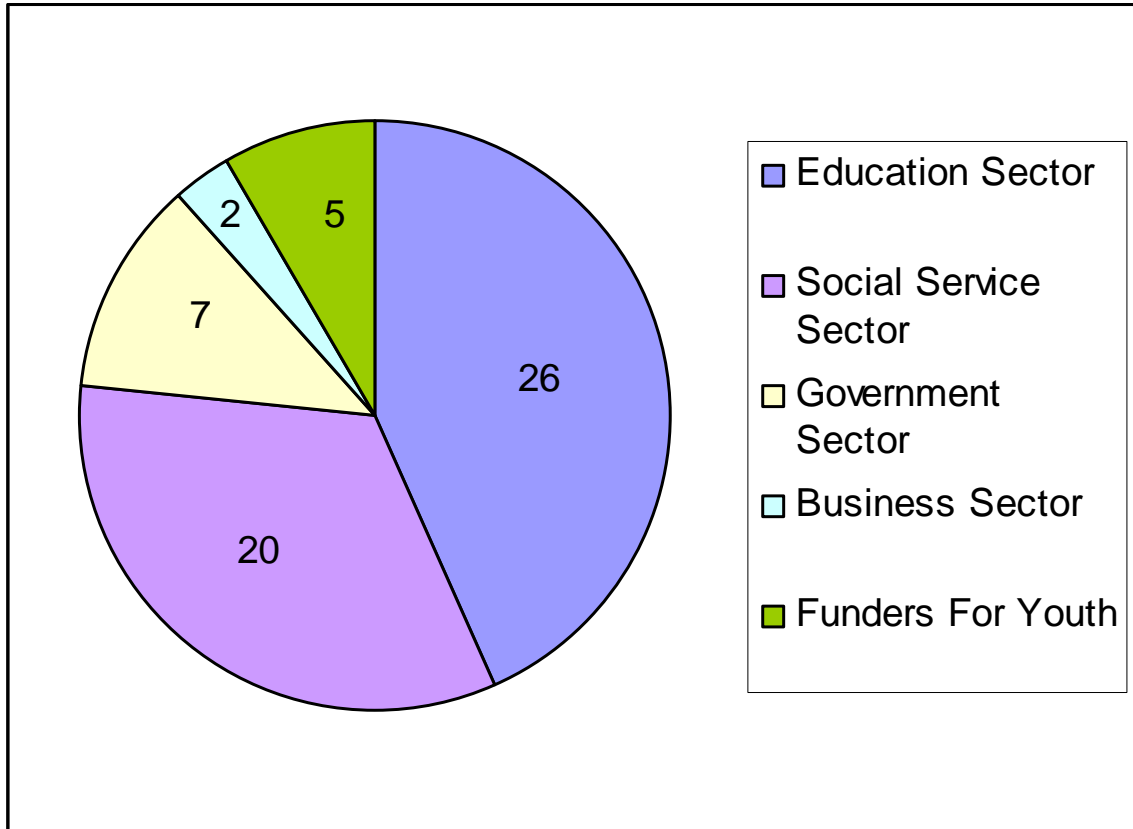
Closing

To close the session, Barbara Burggraf, of EducationMatters, invited the conversation to continue online at www.kafe12.org with the launch of a new participatory public forum beginning with more discussion on the Powerful Themes from April 10. Joining the online conversation over the summer will help to build momentum and more community feedback and support. Barbara also indicated that by the end of June, the Final Report on Proceedings from April 10 will be posted on Kafé12 and that feedback is welcome.

Funders for Youth will take a leadership role in connecting with and engaging Kafé12 members and other community stakeholders in the issue and the progress of high school

completion. In the fall, the Funders will be inviting the community back to the table to develop a strategic plan and convene working groups related to policy, partnership and public awareness around the Framework that will lead to 90 per cent high school completion rates by the year 2020.

June 5, 2008 Kafé12 session: Sector Breakdown of Attendees



DRAFT
Skeleton Community Framework
High School Completion

Suggested Objective of the Framework – to help mobilize and align all stakeholders to significantly improve Calgary’s high school completion rate to 90% by 2020.

The framework could have three broad components: policy; partnerships; public awareness. Each heading could be further broken into collective actions vs. personal actions.

Policy Enhancements and Developments

Collective Action

- Develop alternatives to placing immigrant and refugee children in age appropriate class rooms
- Allow for optional 4 and 5 year high school completions
- Increase support for adults returning to school
- Enhance and improve vocational education
- Change completion requirements
- Increase focus on early literacy
- Increase funding for ESL programs
- Increase funding for Aboriginal programs
- Increase support for alternative schools and alternative education programs, to help normalize a strength and interest-based focus
- Increase support for specialized schools
- Ensure policy, program and curriculum development are evidence-based
- Strengthen teacher training on best practices
- Increase support for employment skills programs
- Enhance school-career curriculum
- Increase funding for, and collaboration between, community-based supports for vulnerable families and children, including immigrants, Aboriginals, homeless families and families living below the low-income cut-off line
- Support changes at the provincial ministry level to increase collaboration and coordination of child and youth related services
- Develop alternative programming and supports at the junior high level

Personal Action

- Speak or write to your MLA or School Board Trustee in support of a selected policy change
- Ask the members of a group to which you belong to speak or write too, e.g. your social groups, service club, church, or professional association
- Ask people running for public office what their position is on improving high school completion

Partnership Opportunities to Enhance High School Completion (could involve schools, parents, students, community organizations, corporate sector, government, other systems, individuals)Collective Action

- Develop Wellness Centres in schools or implement a program similar to the American Communities in Schools
- Support and enhance mentorship programs (adult and peer)
- Revitalize the community schools program
- Support and expand literacy programs
- Support and expand early childhood programs
- Support and expand ESL programs
- Support and expand programs focused on the success of Aboriginal and immigrant students
- Support and expand programs to engage parents
- Support and expand employment skills training programs
- Implements Pathways to Education programs (similar to Ontario model)
- Increase links between schools and workplaces, to support school to career curriculum

Personal Action

- Read to a child -- yours, your grandchild, a local school child
- Become a mentor
- Volunteer in a child-serving organization

Public Awareness On the Importance of High School Completion for Life SuccessesCollective Action

Business/Government/School/Community campaign focused on the importance of high school completion, for both academic and vocational/alternative streams

Appendix 2

Kafe12 June 5, 2008 Report

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- Create key messages and materials for individuals and organizations to distribute amongst their networks
- Create a mechanism for organizations to sign up as supporters of the need to increase high school completion
- Produce materials that can be integrated into the curriculum and shared by students and used at home

Personal Action

- Speak to your family , friends, co-workers about the need for change
- Speak at your club, professional association
- Ask your organization to sign up as supporters of the need to increase high school completion
- Become a United Way Ambassador of the Way and speak about the need to increase high school completion

Small Group Discussion: Developing Strategic Priorities

The purpose of this exercise is to identify strategic priorities in each of the three key areas: policy, partnerships, and public awareness. Please take time to discuss the actions listed in your area of focus, using the following process.

1. *Assess the actions listed in your focus area against the following criteria:*

- **Potential impact of the action:** Does this action have the potential to have a large impact or a small one? Does the evidence suggest that this action is effective in increasing high school completion rates? *On a piece of flip chart paper, please list all of the actions that you think have the potential to have significant impact.*
- **Local need:** What is happening in Calgary with respect to these actions? Where are there significant gaps? Where are there opportunities to build on existing momentum? *On another piece of flipchart paper, please list any actions that you think address significant gaps and/or have the potential to build on existing momentum.*
- **Need for collective action:** Which of the actions would benefit most from *collective* action and advocacy? Which ones most require a broad base of support to move forward? *Please list these on a separate piece of flip chart paper.*
- **Potential to influence:** Which of the actions are within the power of this group to influence? Which are beyond our sphere of influence? *Please review the three lists you've made and cross off any actions that you feel we do not really have the power to influence.*

2. Review the actions listed on your three pieces of flip chart paper. Are there some actions that meet all four criteria? Use this as a starting point for selecting your top one or two priorities.

(Please note: The priorities selected today will help to serve as a starting point, giving us an initial focus for collective action. This does not mean that the other actions are unimportant. They will remain in the framework and potentially serve as a strategic focus as we move forward).

Small Group Discussion: Developing Key Messages

The purpose of this exercise is to identify key messages to support collective advocacy efforts.

1. Before developing key messages, please briefly review the actions listed in the *Public Awareness* focus area and make sure they resonate with you: are these actions appropriate for this group? Is there anything you would add or remove?
2. Please use Merrill Cooper's discussion paper, *The Best Start is Finishing* and Blair McNaughton's *Draft Report on Kafe12 Proceedings* (copies at your table) as references to develop key messages around the following:

- **Goal or target**
 - *What is it we are trying to achieve?*
- **Current situation (problem statement)**
 - *What are current rates? How do they compare to other provinces?*
 - *Why is this issue something anyone should pay any attention to?*
- **Why high school completion matters:**
 - *What does the evidence suggest about the importance of high school completion?*
- **Why it's a community issue, and not just something for the school boards to worry about**
 - *Why does this issue require broad based support and collective action?*
 - *Why is this more than a school-board issue?*
- **Who we are**
 - *How do we describe this group?*
- **Other?**
 - *Please feel free to develop other types of messaging.*

Note: Try to avoid wordsmithing at this point. The most important thing to achieve today is agreement on the basic *content* of the messages. We can refine them later.