

REPORT FOR THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Effective Program Features and Practices for Reengaging Young Adults

*Jacob Williams, Libbie Brey, and Ming Yin*

January 2025



# About Education Northwest

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping all children and youth reach their full potential. We partner with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve student success. While most of our work centers on the Pacific Northwest, our evaluations, technical assistance, and research studies have national impact and provide timely and actionable results.

This research was funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation; and we thank them for their support; however, the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

## CONTACT

Education Northwest  
1417 NW Everett Street, Suite 310  
Portland, OR 97209  
educationnorthwest.org  
503.275.9500

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Williams, J., Brey, L., & Yin, M. (2025). *Effective program features and practices for reengaging young adults: Report for the Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Education Northwest.

# Contents

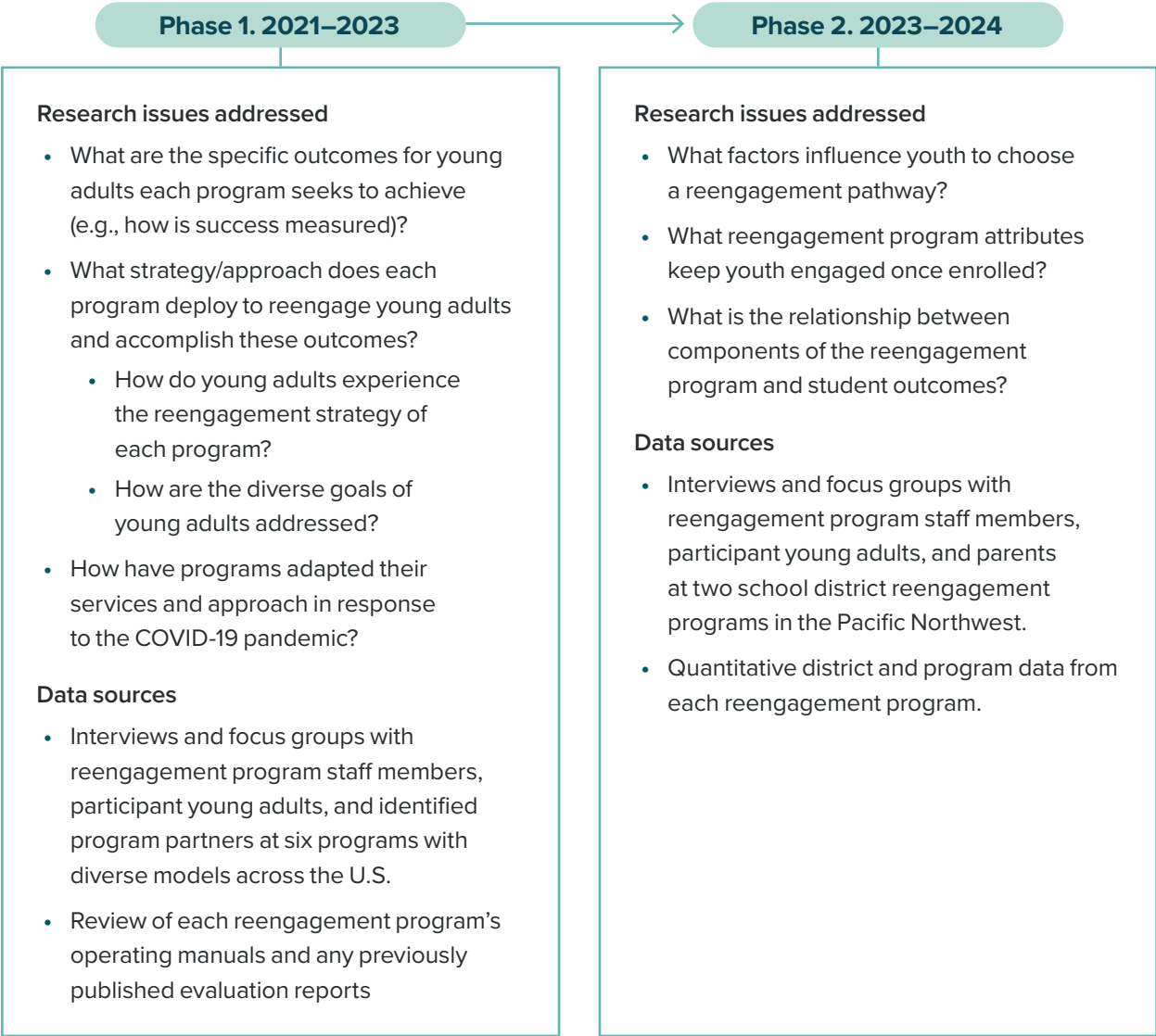
- Introduction ..... 1**
- Overview of project phases and goals 1
- Overview of report 4
- Methods for phase 2 5
- Overview of young adults served by the two participating reengagement programs 9
- Effective program design features and practices 18
  
- Recommendations for strengthening program implementation capacity ..... 22**
- Identify and connect with students directly 22
- Expand options to meet the demand 22
- Focus on upstream supports to reduce reengagement demand 23
  
- Reflections on data capacity in youth reengagement ..... 26**
- The identified state of and recommendations for improvement in reengagement program data quality and completeness 26
  
- Conclusion ..... 30**
  
- References ..... 31**
  
- Appendix A. The state of quantitative data for District 1 and District 2 ..... 32**
- District 1 quantitative data 32
- District 2 quantitative data 32
  
- Appendix B. Young adult/parent and reengagement program administration/staff interview and survey protocols ..... 34**
  
- Appendix C. Quantitative variables provided by District 1 and 2 and additional data tables ..... 39**
  
- Appendix D. Overview of successful and unsuccessful phase 2 reengagement program sites .... 44**

# Introduction

## Overview of project phases and goals

In the decade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2010–2019), the rate of young adults disengaged from both employment and school was falling steadily. However, this rate increased dramatically between 2019 and 2021, when 4.6 million young adults were identified as being disengaged from both work and school (Lewis, 2023). To learn more about how this trend could be reversed and how disengaged young adults could be reengaged in work and school, the Annie E. Casey Foundation collaborated with Education Northwest (EDNW) to conduct two investigations of reengagement program practices.

**Figure 1. Reengagement program investigation overview: phase 1 and phase 2**



## PHASE 1

EDNW conducted phase 1 of the investigation in 2022 by collaborating with six reengagement programs (see [Williams et al., 2023](#)). Each program used a unique implementation model but all served a diverse population and engaged in either passive or active outreach to and referral of young adults. The program locations span the United States. The investigation included interviews and focus groups with reengagement program staff members, participants, and program partners, as well as a review of program implementation documents. We sought to identify each program's young adult outcome goals, their strategies to reach these outcomes, and how young adults experienced their engagement with the programs. Key findings from phase 1 included:

- Program participants were intrinsically motivated to reengage with the goal of achieving a diploma or GED.
- Key strategies to support the attainment of a diploma or GED were personalized support with wrap-around services to meet the needs of the whole individual and flexibility in scheduling and timelines for completion.
- Interviewed young adults who received these supports shared a positive view of their engagement with the programs. However, most young adults we interviewed did not share the same positive views of their K–12 education experiences. Many noted that they would not have required a reengagement program at all if the K–12 education system had provided the basic support they had requested prior to disengagement.

## PHASE 2

The purpose of phase 2 of the investigation was to identify actionable factors associated with positive participant outcomes that could be immediately implemented and scaled across different reengagement program settings. The goals of the investigation were to identify:

- Factors that influence a young adult's decision to choose a specific reengagement pathway
- Reengagement program attributes that keep youth engaged once enrolled
- The relationship between implementation components of the reengagement program and student outcomes

As will be described below, we must consider several data limitations alongside the findings. (see table 1). Outcome and implementation data were limited, preventing any relational analysis of reengagement program implementation components and student success.

**Table 1. Phase 2 proposed research questions, data sources, and summaries of findings**

Research Question	Data Source	Summary of Findings
<p><b>1.</b> What are the characteristics (e.g., demographics) of youth enrolled in the reengagement programs?</p>	District and program data	See tables 2–5
<p><b>2.</b> How are opportunity youth informed of the reengagement program prior to their initial engagement?</p> <p><b>a.</b> Were other programs considered? If yes, what differentiated the chosen program?</p>	Staff member and young adult interviews/ focus groups	Referrals by school staff members, word of mouth, or individual investigation. Youth did not report pursuing different programs due to the multiple offerings within each district.
<p><b>3.</b> What factors facilitate opportunity youths’ engagement with the reengagement program?</p> <p><b>a.</b> What factors facilitate a youth’s initiation of contact with or enrollment in the reengagement program?</p> <p><b>b.</b> What factors support sustained engagement for youth with the reengagement program (e.g., why do youth view the program as a value add)?</p> <p><b>c.</b> For the above, do youth view a particular factor(s) as more impactful than others?</p>	Staff member and young adult interviews/ focus groups	Staff members working to build trust and strong relationships with young adults. Program flexibility and differentiation to meet the needs of young adults. Program staff members were identified as the principal factor for young adult success and engagement.
<p><b>4.</b> What is the process for developing individual support plans for youth?</p> <p><b>a.</b> How are youth involved in this process?</p> <p><b>b.</b> Are more personalized, detailed, or complete plans associated with goal achievement?</p>	Staff member and young adult interviews/ focus groups	Goals and plans were developed between the reengagement outreach coordinators and the young adults during intake interviews. The process is led by the young adult and the reengagement coordinator works to match the participant with a placement that aligns to their goals. Plans were not accessible, so (b) could not be answered.

Research Question	Data Source	Summary of Findings
<p><b>5.</b> What is the average length of engagement with the reengagement program for opportunity youth?</p> <p><b>a.</b> What factors result in discontinuing support for a youth?</p>	District and program data	Datasets lacked sufficient reliability to answer this question. Enrollment and unenrollment dates were reported by both districts to be unreliable. No data related to 5a was available or collected.
<p><b>6.</b> What number of youth who engage with the reengagement program:</p> <p><b>a.</b> Self-report attainment</p> <p><b>b.</b> Achieve individual goals</p>	District and program data	Unable to address the question 6 as neither district tracked achievement of individual goals that may be set during an intake process. Concurrently, neither district reliably tracked ultimate outcome data for reengagement program participants.
<p><b>7.</b> What reengagement program factors are associated with youth goal achievement?</p> <p><b>a.</b> Is there a relationship between the number of contacts with reengagement staff members and goal achievement?</p> <p><b>b.</b> Is there a relationship between the frequency of contact and goal achievement?</p> <p><b>c.</b> Is there a relationship between length of enrollment and goal achievement?</p> <p><b>d.</b> What factors do youth identify as supporting their goals?</p>	<p>Staff member and young adult interviews/ focus groups</p> <p>District and program data</p>	<p>Staff members working to build trust and strong relationships with young adults. Program flexibility and differentiation to meet the needs of the young adults. Program implementation data was not available; therefore (a), (b), and (c) could not be answered.</p>

## Overview of report

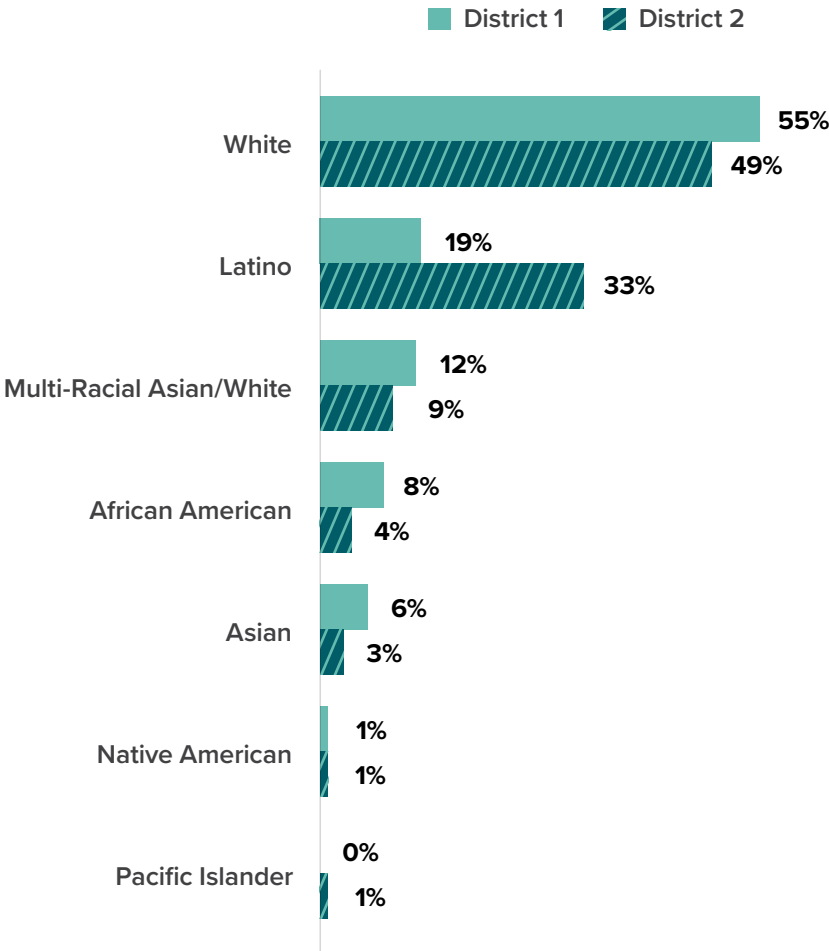
In this report we draw on data from two school district reengagement programs. We discuss methods and data used in phase 2 as well as present findings that align with those from phase 1—namely, that the leading factors associated with young adults’ initial and sustained engagement in engagement programs are personalized support with wraparound services to meet their needs and flexibility in scheduling and timelines for completion. We also provide recommendations for strengthening program capacity for quality implementation. The report concludes by discussing the most salient finding our investigation identified, which relates to limitations in reengagement program data capacity and aspects of data collection and infrastructure that can be leveraged for immediate program improvement.

# Methods for phase 2

## STUDY SITES

Following unsuccessful attempts to partner with two reengagement sites that participated in phase 1 (see appendix D), we identified partner engagement programs for phase 2 with the support of the National League of Cities Reengagement Network. An email to participating network programs outlined our research aims and asked for volunteers. We received responses from two reengagement programs run by school districts in the Pacific Northwest. District 1 was a large urban district that served 44,771 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (PK–12) students in the 2022–23 school year. District 2, a large suburban district adjacent to District 1, served 11,380 PK–12 students that year. Demographic data for the two districts are provided in figure 2.

**Figure 2. Participating districts’ overall student race and ethnicity for 2022–23**



Note: District 1 N = 44,771. District 2 N = 11,380.

Source: Enrollment data from district websites.



## Commonalities and differences in districts' approaches to reengagement

The two participating reengagement programs operated with similar models. Specific similarities and differences are outlined in figure 3.

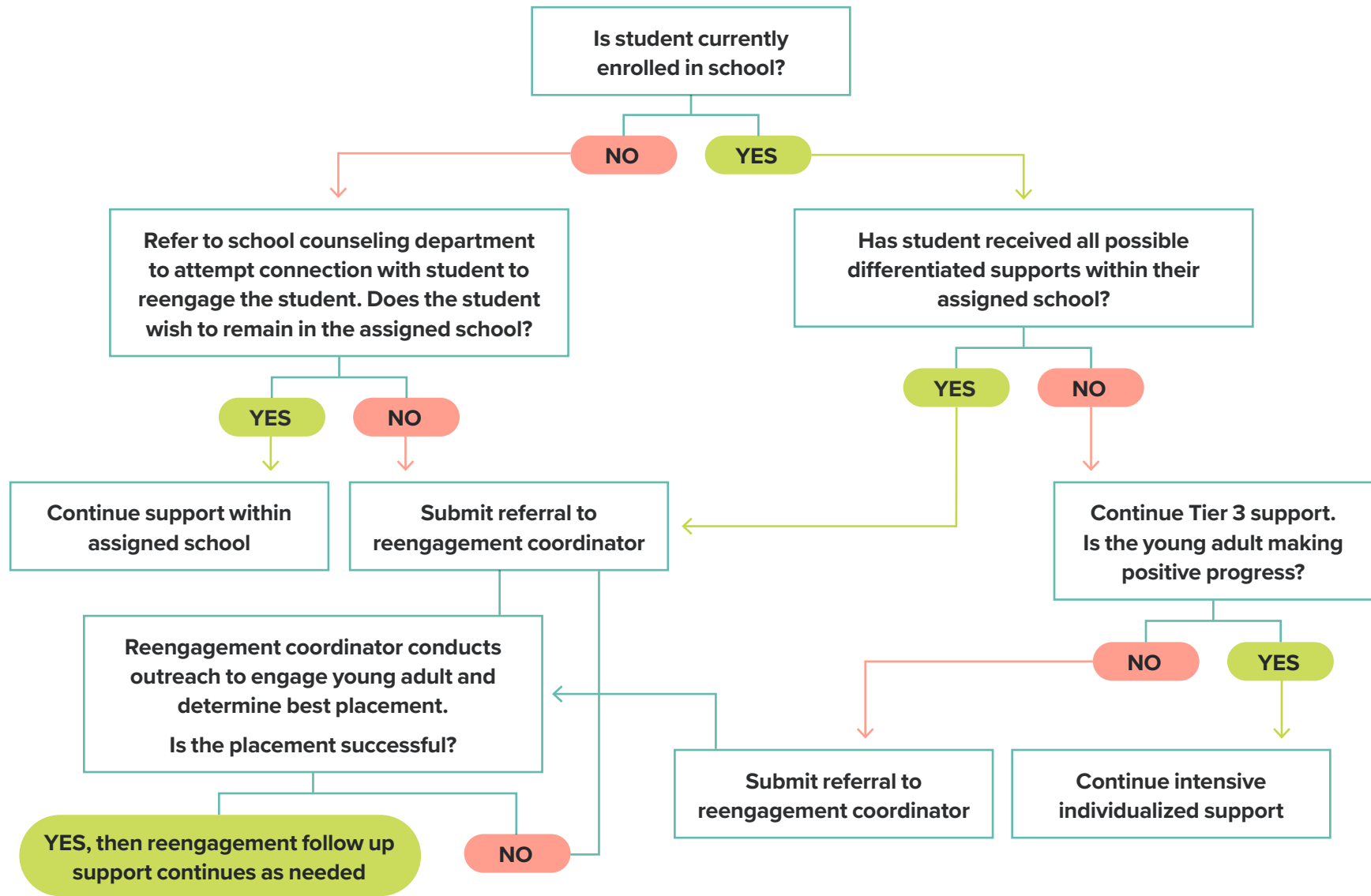
**Figure 3. Commonalities and differences in District 1 and 2 reengagement programs**

Program Component	District 1	District 2
<b>Most common method for young adults to connect with reengagement program</b>	Referral through school counselor to reengagement coordinator	Referral through school counselor to reengagement coordinator
<b>Central hub that facilitates referrals</b>	Seven reengagement coordinators	One reengagement coordinator
<b>Number of in-district alternative placement options</b>	One transitional reengagement center  12 alternative educational settings	Six alternative education settings

Source: Author review of district reengagement program model descriptions.

Each district has a central hub, typically a person in the role of a reengagement coordinator, who receives a referral for a young adult from a school staff member and/or community service provider. These referrals are initiated with the school counselor by school staff members, the student, the student's family, or other individuals in the student's environment (see figures 5 and 7 for more detail). The coordinator then attempts to make direct contact with the young adult. Once contact is made, the coordinator facilitates connections with other alternative education sites or service providers to meet the needs of the young adult. Upon placement and connection to services, the coordinator maintains contact with the young adult, to the extent possible, to monitor progress and support additional connections or placements as needed. This process is described in figure 4.

Figure 4. Overview of District 1 and 2 reengagement process



Source: Author review of district reengagement program model descriptions.

District 1 has 12 alternative school options, each with a different program model (e.g., fully online, GED focused, academic credit recovery, evening classes). These include self-paced online learning programs, career-technical focused schools, and settings structured like general high schools but with fewer students and more opportunities for individual support. District 1 also operates a reengagement center that serves a select group of students who are awaiting a spot in another program or require a short-term placement to help prepare them for reentry into an academic setting. This center has the capacity to serve 100 students per year, but serves 50 on average. Placements were generally limited to 12 weeks. District 2 does not have an equivalent reengagement center and operates six alternative programs, including a community college GED program. In the absence of a transitional reengagement center type setting, they explained their goal is to meet with the student, explain to the student all of the options and how they can meet their needs and reduce barriers through the available alternative education settings, but if a student isn't ready then they don't push them to enroll.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Quantitative data**

Both Districts 1 and 2 provided demographic information including date of birth, gender, race/ethnicity, English learner status, special education status, teen parent status, and homelessness status. They also shared enrollment data for reengagement services, including school year, grade level, start and end dates, and current enrollment status. We requested but were unable to obtain reliable data for student outcomes from either district.

Neither participating reengagement program collected implementation data (e.g., number of reengagement coordinator contacts with a program participant, specific supports provided) in a systematic manner that could be aggregated and shared. Additional descriptions of data limitations are provided in appendix A. All analysis presented in this report is descriptive.

### **Qualitative data**

#### *Focus groups and interviews*

To further investigate the reengagement programs, we conducted focus groups and interviews with program staff members and students (see appendix B for interview protocols).

In District 1 we engaged the program administrator, program staff members (N = 9; reengagement coordinators, social worker, data analyst, and counselor) students (N = 5), and parents (N = 2). One parent participated in the interview with their student who was currently in the reengagement program, and the other participated independently from their young adult who had previously participated in the reengagement program. To support student and parent participation, the reengagement program invited all students from the past two years who were age 18 or older to participate. Interested students completed a sign-up form and EDNW followed up with them to schedule a session. Students participated in either virtual or in-person interviews and focus groups.

District 2 participants included program administrators (N = 2), program staff members (N = 3; social workers and the reengagement coordinator), and students (N = 6). To support student outreach, the reengagement coordinator invited students who have received reengagement support and were currently enrolled in one of the available alternative education programs who were over the age of 18 to participate. Students who participated in virtual interviews or focus groups from each district received a \$50 electronic gift card.

EDNW conducted a thematic analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts with a codebook that included codes based on the research questions: factors facilitating engagement with the program (table 1; RQ2, RQ3), the process for developing support plans (table 1; RQ4), and program factors associated with successful reengagement and goal achievement (table 1; RQ7). There were also codes for recommendations related to improving program practices, addressing gaps in collected data, and improving reengagement programming in general. We coded the transcripts using Atlas.ti and triangulated findings with the quantitative data and documents collected from the two programs.

### *Demographic survey*

We also administered a demographic survey to the 13 students and parents across both districts who took part in interviews and focus groups (see appendix C). The response rate to this survey was 54 percent (N = 7). Participants identified their race/ethnicity as white (N = 2), Black (N = 1), Latinx (N = 2), or two or more races (N = 2). Across the seven respondents, three identified as female, four identified as male, and one identified as transgender. Nearly half of the survey respondents reported having caregiving responsibilities (two respondents have caregiving responsibilities for a child under the age of 18 and three for someone over the age of 18). Nearly half of survey respondents reported currently or previously having experienced housing insecurity or having lived in a group home or correctional facility (N = 4). As our sample of program participants was not randomly selected, these data are to be viewed as descriptive and not representative.

## Overview of young adults served by the two participating reengagement programs

### DISTRICT 1 REENGAGEMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Tables 2 and 3 show demographics for each unique individual in District 1's reengagement program from 2018–19 to 2023–24. Participants are only represented a single time in the data (e.g., the 1,257 participants displayed in 2018–19 are not included in subsequent year calculations). The data was analyzed in this manner to better understand how many participants engaged with the program for the first time each year and the demographics of those participants. **The number of young adults who enrolled in the program in 2020–21 and 2021–22 is much lower than the other five years because of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Demographic representation for District 1 remained consistent over the six years presented. **The proportion of students of color the program served was larger than the proportion of students of color in the overall district population.**

**Table 2. District 1 demographic percentages from 2018–19 through 2023–24 indicate the reengagement program serves a disproportionately large percentage of young adults of color when compared to the overall population**

Student Identity	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Average age	17	16	16	16	16	16
Female	42%	44%	39%	46%	47%	48%
Male	57%	55%	59%	53%	50%	50%
Native American	<2%	<2%	<3%	*	2%	2%
Asian	3%	3%	3%	*	<2%	2%
African American	22%	17%	16%	20%	17%	17%
Latino	24%	25%	26%	33%	28%	25%
Multi-racial	12%	14%	10%	16%	15%	15%
NHPI	*	*	*		*	1%
White	37%	39%	41%	29%	37%	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>827</b>

\*Indicates cell suppressed because N is less than 10.

Note: Duplicate students are removed from subsequent years. NHPI = Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander.

Source: Data provided by District 1 reengagement program.

On average, **10 percent of those served by District 1’s reengagement program were young adults receiving support through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** (see table 3). This indicates they were experiencing housing instability and lacked fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residences. This can include young adults who are sharing the housing of others or staying in motels, transitional housing, or other substandard housing settings. Local education agencies have liaisons for students experiencing homelessness who can facilitate bridges to reengagement programs (see figure 4). There was a slight increase in the percentage of participants receiving McKinney-Vento support during and following the pandemic.

**Table 3. District 1 reengagement program serves a larger percentage of young adults who are experiencing homelessness than the overall district population**

Student Experience	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
English learner	4%	2%	2%	*	2%	1%
Section 504 <sup>1</sup>	*	*	*	*	3%	3%
McKinney-Vento	7%	<b>9%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>	10%
Special education	17%	14%	15%	13%	13%	10%
Teen parent	5%	5%	3%	*	2%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,257</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>827</b>

\*Indicates cell suppressed because N is less than 10.

Note: <sup>1</sup> Students receiving support though Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 have identified disabilities but are not receiving support though the district’s Special Education services. Section 504 allows for the provision of accommodations and services that the individual student needs and provides equal access to the same educational programs and activities available to nondisabled peers.

Source: Data provided by District 1 reengagement program.

We also found that, on average, 25 percent of reengagement program participants are associated with the program for two years, 7 percent for three years, and 2 percent of program participants included in the 2018–19 data were still identified as being connected to the program four years later in 2021–22 (see appendix C, table C3 for additional detail).

From 2018–19 to 2023–24, **26 percent of program participants received multiple referrals to the reengagement program.** Within that group, 83 percent were referred two times, 15 percent were referred three times, and 2 percent were referred four times. It is likely that some young adults were referred to the reengagement program multiple times as a result of an unsuccessful initial alternative education placement. In this scenario, a young adult is placed into an alternative education setting following an initial connection with the reengagement coordinator. At that point, contact with the reengagement coordinator is reduced and the responsibility of support falls on the alternative education setting. If the young adult is unsuccessful in this alternative education setting and does not wish to continue, or if the staff of the alternative education setting determines it is no longer the best placement, the young adult must be referred again to the reengagement program in order to pursue placement in another alternative education setting. Therefore, a reengagement program participant may receive multiple referrals to the reengagement program without necessarily being fully disengaged prior to each referral.

Of participants who attended District 1’s transitional reengagement center, 16 percent attended on multiple occasions—12 percent attended twice and 4 percent attended three or four times.

Finally, **reengagement program participants attended an average of 2.3 different high schools prior to their enrollment with the reengagement program** (see appendix C, table C4 for additional detail).

## DISTRICT 2 REENGAGEMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, District 2 was unable to provide data for 2020–21. Excluding 2018–19, because we cannot determine how many of the 335 total participants may have enrolled in the program prior to that year, the number of young adults engaging in the program each year was not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As in District 1, the demographics of District 2 reengagement program participants remained stable over the years we studied (see table 4). An unexplained exception is a **spike in the percentage of participants who identified as multi-racial that occurred in 2019–20 and 2021–22 compared to the surrounding two years** (see appendix A).

**Table 4. District 2 demographic percentages from 2018–19 through 2023–24 indicate the reengagement program serves young adults similar to those in the overall district population**

Student Identity	2018–19	2019–20	2020-21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Average age	17	17	X	17	16	16
Female	38%	44%	X	45%	27%	27%
Male	56%	53%	X	47%	55%	39%
Native American	*	*	X	*	*	*
Asian	*	*	X	*	*	*
African American	6%	5%	X	7%	10%	10%
Latino	41%	34%	X	33%	34%	40%
Multi-racial	<b>9%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>22%</b>	*	<b>8%</b>
NHPI			X		*	*
White	40%	40%	X	37%	46%	39%
Total	335	237	X	229	225	244

\*Indicates cell suppressed because N is less than 10; X = 2020–21 data is not available for the district.

Note: NHPI = Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander.

Source: Data provided by District 2 reengagement program.

District 2’s reengagement program **serves a larger percentage of individuals identified as English learners than District 1’s program**. This percentage is also larger than the percentage of English learners in the overall district population. Each district’s program serves a similar number of students receiving McKinney-Vento, but there was an unexplained increase from 11 percent to 19 percent between 2022–23 and 2023–24 (see table 5).

**Table 5. District 2 reengagement program serves a larger percentage of young adults who are identified as English learners than is in the overall district population**

Student Identity	2018–19	2019–20	2020-21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
English learner	31%	28%	X	21%	20%	25%
McKinney-Vento	12%	9%	X	10%	<b>11%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Teen parent	9%	*	X	6%	*	*
Special Education	10%	10%	X	9%	<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Total	335	237	X	229	225	244

\*Indicates cell suppressed because N is less than 10; X = 2020–21 data is not available for the district.

Note: 2020–21 data is not available for the district.

Source: Data provided by District 2 reengagement program.

We were unable to conduct analysis of students who received multiple referrals in District 2 because the sample size of students who were identified as returning over multiple years was less than 10. It is uncertain whether this represents successful alternative academic placement for most young adults following the reengagement program’s initial support or is instead due to a lack of reliability in the dataset.

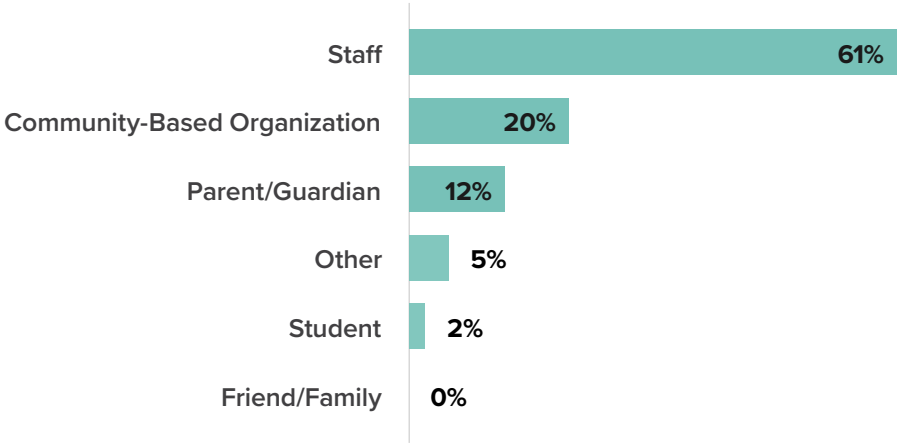
**WHY AND HOW DO YOUTH CONNECT WITH A REENGAGEMENT PROGRAM?**

**District 1**

District 1 provided program data for school years 2020–21 through 2023–24 detailing who initiated a young adult’s referral to the reengagement program and why. The provided data does not indicate whether the referred individual has been identified as fully disengaged from school or as someone not yet fully disengaged who could benefit from additional support to prevent disengagement. Figure 5 demonstrates that across these three years **most referrals (61%) to the reengagement program originate from staff members at the young adult’s assigned school** (e.g., teachers, administrator). Total referrals remained consistent with 1,224 in 2021–22, 1,305 in 2022–23, and 1,196 in 2023–24 (see appendix C, figure C1 for additional detail).



**Figure 5. School staff members originated most referrals for District 1 reengagement services from 2020–21 through 2023–24**

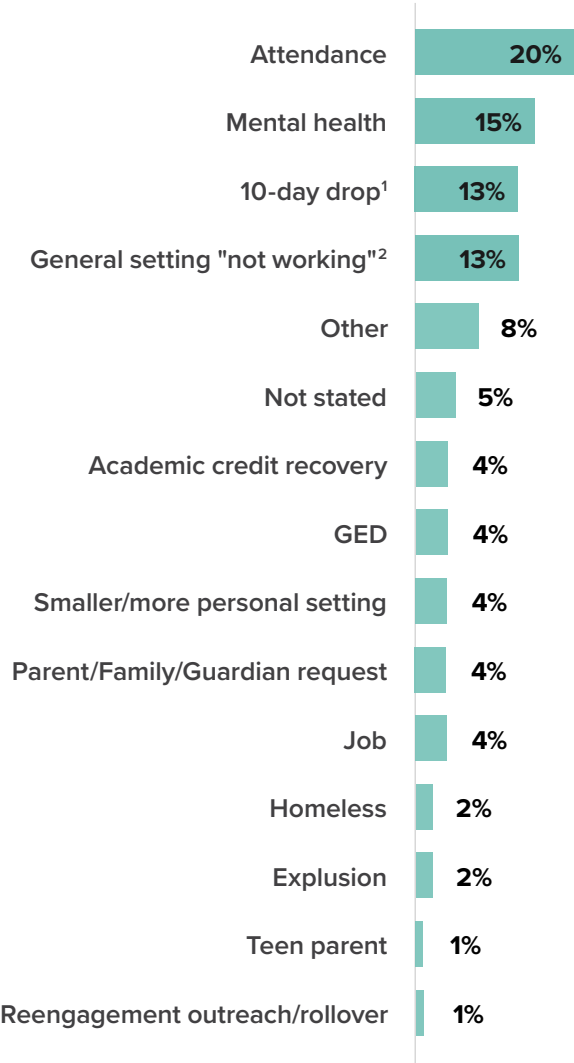


Note: Source of referral was recorded by reengagement program staff members in spreadsheets with a list of explicit options. Selections were limited to one.

Source: Data from District 1 program database.

District 1 provided anecdotal notes indicating the reason for referral for 3,725 referrals that occurred between 2021–22 and 2023–24. We analyzed the data to summarize the reasons for a young adult’s referral to reengagement services. Referrals for **students with poor attendance, but who had not yet fully disengaged or been unenrolled, represented approximately 20 percent of referrals**. Students experiencing mental health issues accounted for the second most common reason for referral (15%; figure 6). The reasons for referrals in each of the 15 categories remained consistent across the three years.

**Figure 6. Attendance issues account for most referrals to District 1’s reengagement program from 2020–21 through 2023–24**



Note: <sup>1</sup> **10-day drop** represents a mandatory unenrollment due to 10 consecutive unexcused absences. <sup>2</sup> **General setting not working** was defined as any referral stating the young adult was not successful in their general setting at their assigned school and wished to pursue alternative options.

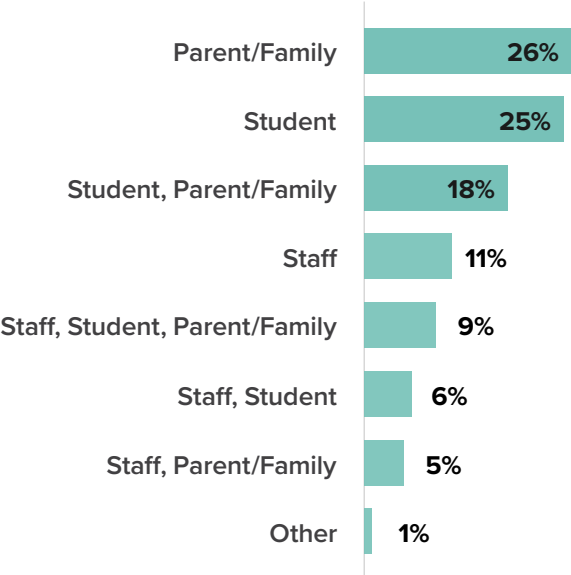
Source: Data from District 1 program database.

**District 2**

District 2 provided program data for school years 2021–22 through 2023–24 detailing who initiated the referral and why. The total number of referrals decreased over the three years from 294 to 161, perhaps as stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic lessened (see appendix C, figure C2 for additional detail). In contrast to District 1, **parents were identified as initiating the largest percentage of referrals to the district’s reengagement program (26%)** with students initiating the second-largest percentage (25%; figure 7).

The percentage of referrals from students and parents flipped over the three years: In 2021–22, 29 percent of referrals came from students and 21 percent from parents or other family members but in 2023–24, 20 percent of referrals came from students and 29 percent from parents or other family members.

**Figure 7. Parents/family originated most referrals for District 2 reengagement services from 2020–21 through 2023–24**

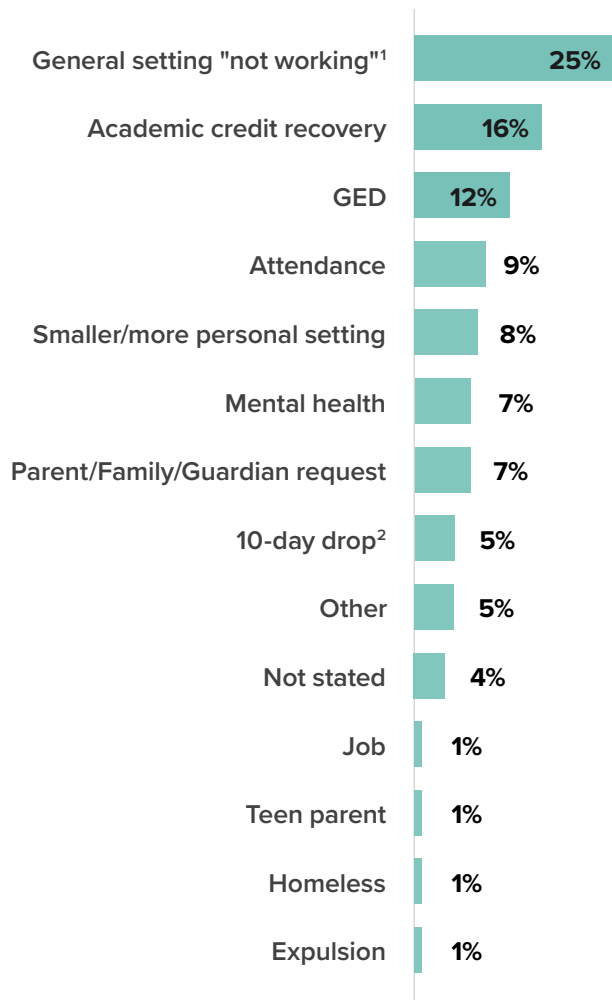


Note: Identification of source of referral was recorded by reengagement program staff in spreadsheets with a list of explicit options. Selections were limited to one choice.

Source: Data from District 2 program database.

The most common reason for referral documented in District 2 **was the general education setting not providing the support necessary for the young adult (25%)**, followed by a need for academic credit recovery (16%) and a desire to obtain a GED (12%; figure 8).

**Figure 8. A lack of success in the general setting was the reason for most referrals to District 2's reengagement program from 2020–21 through 2023–24**



Note: <sup>1</sup> **General setting not working** was defined as any referral stating the young adult was not successful in their general setting at their assigned school and wished to pursue alternative options. <sup>2</sup> **10-day drop** represents a mandatory unenrollment due to 10 consecutive unexcused absences.

Source: Data from District 2 program database.

## Effective program design features and practices

### EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO REENGAGE YOUNG ADULTS AND SUPPORT CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

The reengaged young adults we interviewed overwhelmingly identified two factors that supported their reengagement and continued engagement in alternative education settings.

1. Relationships with and support of program staff members
2. Program flexibility to reduce barriers (e.g., scheduling, timelines for completion of milestones) and differentiated support

#### Individuals within the school system facilitate youth reengagement

School system staff members' support and encouragement was the most common factor related to the decision to reengage or maintain engagement with school that program participants mentioned in interviews. Participants spoke of staff members who maintained supportive contact while not pressuring the young adult to return to school. These adults demonstrated an understanding of young adults' lives and let them know the door to reengage was open when they were ready. Interviewed youth reported this to be a principal factor supporting their reengagement.

*What made me come back to school was that I had the support from the teachers, they were all telling me like, "Hey, we know you're having a hard moment, a hard time, and especially at school with turning in your assignments. If you need help, just know that you're more than welcome to give me a call or email me or whatever you feel is right." They even gave me their contact phone number so that if I did get stuck at some point, I wouldn't get irritated and close my computer because that's what I would always do.*

– Reengagement program participant

*The person who genuinely made me feel like I should go back to school was the reengagement program staff member. Regardless of everything that has happened in my life, they've always pushed me to go back to school. She would always check up on me and call me and basically tell me, "Hey, come to school even if you don't want to do your work, just come talk." Or she'll make stuff happen for me ... they told me I could do a project with my English teacher so that I can get the two credits that I need for that class. They make it really, really easy for me. It's just, I need to put my part in.*

– Reengagement program participant

## **Alternative education programs' flexibility supported young adults' continued engagement**

Both participating districts offered multiple alternative programs to which young adults were matched through the reengagement program. This matching of a young adult to a program that can support their needs is essential. Young adults noted that the flexibility of program design was a key factor in their continued engagement. Programs that were flexible enough to differentiate individual needs following enrollment were most effective in supporting engagement.

*[School staff member] just gets it, bro. She knows that there's life outside of school. It's not always just going to revolve around school. Bro, she makes it so much easier for me and she just gets it.*

– Reengagement program participant

*I have my kid, so I don't be sleeping. I can't come in at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning. When I first started this year, we set a schedule where I was supposed to start second period, and I wasn't making it to that class. I think it was like 9:15, when I was supposed to be at class, I wasn't making it. I was always making it to my third period, though. What [reengagement staff member] did is she's like, "Look, so I don't fail you on a class, I'm just going to start you at third period, the class you always make it to."*

– Reengagement program participant

## **Youth participation in planning and goal setting supported a successful initial alternative education placement**

A secondary support that arose in interviews was the involvement of young adults in articulating goals and devising a plan for achieving these goals to guide placement decisions. Once reengagement coordinators contacted a referred young adult, the next step was an intake interview. The goal of these initial meetings was to hear from the participants about their educational needs and goals, to initiate a trusting partnership between the young adult and the reengagement coordinator, and to help ensure the best possible alternative education placement. Program staff members noted that this intake interview was necessary to establish the practice of including a young adult's voice and to establish trust in the relationship.

*I sat down with one of the reengagement program staff and we made sort of a goal for the rest of the year. And my goals were basically just finishing up my credit requirements and being able to walk with my class. And they sat down with me, we spoke about it in depth, and we made a plan and we made it happen. So I'm very grateful for them.*

– Reengagement program participant

## FACTORS THAT SUPPORT POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Factors that lead students to disengage from schools include failing to see why school matters, believing they are not capable of succeeding in school, and feeling that school is a hostile or unsafe place (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Dary et al., 2016). To avoid these factors, the two reengagement programs focus on developing positive relationships with young adults once they reengage to help ensure a positive outcome. Once a relationship is established, the program can begin to support the young adult by:

1. Identifying individual reasons why success in school can support the young adult's goals, providing a reason why school matters
2. Providing individualized support to facilitate success for the young adult
3. Demonstrating over time that the academic environment, even if virtual, is safe and not hostile

### Positive relationships are the principal factor in young adult success

Both staff members and program participants described relationships as the foremost driver of young adults' goal achievement. Many young adults have had a negative experiences with school system staff members and need consistency and persistence to trust reengagement staff members. Interviewees reported that there is no specific formula for this work—consistent support and encouragement often have the greatest impact.

*I had a young adult last year, they were trying to get to graduation, who had previously been told they couldn't graduate. She was starting to lose her mind a little bit because she was working so hard, and she was just so discouraged. And so at 10 o'clock every night, she would text me what she accomplished and I would just tell her, "Good job." And for two and a half weeks, I did that every single night, and she would do it every single night. But that was our way of meeting that goal. She said "I just need encouragement to keep going," so we came up with this plan.*

– Reengagement program staff member

Additionally, when staff members created conditions to recognize a young adult's success along the way, it was identified as beneficial in supporting young adults persistence and continued engagement in an educational setting.

*We just did a lot of individualized goals, not specific to where we're going to end up, but more on how we're going to get there. It's more about the process of it all.*

– Reengagement program staff member

## INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT FACILITATED SUCCESSFUL REENGAGEMENT

Positive relationships, once established, supported school staff members' ability to provide individualized support to young adults. This support was often in non-academic areas such as acquiring internet access or addressing social-emotional needs. In terms of academics, program participants noted that staff members who spent time one-on-one helped them to understand and complete their tasks.

*I got my computer the same day I got enrolled, but I don't have internet at home. The reengagement staff are working on getting me internet.*

– Reengagement program participant

*The teachers every day reassure all the students, "You got this. The finish line is right there. You can be something in life. We can help you with anything that you want." Just them reassuring us all the time, that for me was one of the biggest things, because, like I said before, in high school I would hear a lot that I wasn't going to be anything in life and that I was getting too far back, and hearing that just brought me down and killed my motivation.*

– Reengagement program participant

*Biggest struggle for me throughout all of high school and middle school was math. Our reengagement program teacher was great. I would struggle a lot, and he'd just sit there and be like, "Okay, let me help you get through this," and he'd explain it. And if I didn't understand it one way, he'd break it down more and more until I would get the concept of it, and he'd help me practice those strategies and just smaller steps.*

– Reengagement program participant



# Recommendations for strengthening program implementation capacity

## Identify and connect with students directly

Districts 1 and 2 provided data indicating the source of a young adult's referral to reengagement services. Most referrals in District 1 were recorded as having originated from staff members. However, each young adult we interviewed indicated that either they themselves or their parents or family members had identified reengagement services and initiated contact. In most of these cases the young adult searched online or heard about reengagement services from another student rather than a school staff member. In District 2, the number of referrals initiated by young adults has decreased over time, but most referrals still come from either the student, the family, or both.

We found that neither district is helping young adults who need reengagement support to connect with the programs. One reason for this in District 2 is available resources, as this district has a single reengagement coordinator with many responsibilities including, but not limited to, compiling all data for the reengagement program, receiving all referrals, working to connect with the referred young adult, and facilitating alternative education placements. Nevertheless, the burden of finding support in a school system should not be on young adults or their families. Reengagement programs often have limited personnel and financial resources, but school districts and reengagement programs must focus on improving their ability to identify and connect with all students who can benefit from reengagement support. One area of focus to improve a school's ability to identify all students who may benefit from extra support is to ensure they collect and use data not only related to the traditional screening indicators associated with risk of disengagement (e.g., attendance, behavior, and course performance), but also more holistic data indicators as well (e.g., data related to student agency, connectedness, and belonging) (Scala et al., 2023).

## Expand options to meet the demand

Representatives of both Districts 1 and 2 said they receive more student referrals for reengagement support than their alternative education programs can accommodate. District 1 staff members noted that they keep a "rollover list" of students who cannot be placed by the end of each school year. Reengagement staff members attempt to stay in touch with the young adults on this list over the summer and facilitate a placement in the fall. The field—districts, regional cooperatives, municipalities, and nonprofit service providers—must collaborate to determine how to fill these service gaps and ensure all young adults have access to a reengagement program that meets their needs. Admittedly, expanding these options will be tied to available resources, which are currently limited. However, resource allocation is often a product of perceived

priorities. When making decisions about resource allocation, policy makers and district leaders should note that 2012 estimates indicated that every \$1 spent to support an opportunity youth graduate high school has a return on investment of \$3.50 (Belfield et al., 2012).

*Resources, resources, resources. It's about access. We functioned at [...] Academy up until about four years ago with no budget, no money. There was one point in our program where we were restricted. We couldn't make more than 10 copies at a time. We weren't given paper. We weren't allowed to have paper. We dug our chairs and tables, literally out of the garbage pile that the district would throw away. We'd go through the Graveyard, as we called it, to go get our supplies because that was the only access that we had.*

– Reengagement program staff member

## Focus on upstream supports to reduce reengagement demand

A recurring theme from phase 1 of this reengagement program improvement work was the K–12 general education setting failures that contribute to the disengagement of young adults. When asked during phase 2, “what can improve reengagement programs?” many program staff members noted that the most impactful way to improve the reengagement program was to reduce the demand for the program’s support. Our phase 1 investigation identified four gaps in the K–12 system that negatively impacted participants who participate in reengagement programs:

- Lack of basic support when needed or requested
- Lack of differentiation in instruction and instructional environments
- Not feeling connected to the K–12 environment
- Lack of support for mental health

Reengagement program participants in this investigation reported facing similar difficulties. We heard from multiple young adult respondents that they weren’t receiving required basic support through 504 or special education programs. This issue is compounded by the fact that many alternative settings do not accept students with individualized education programs (IEPs) because they cannot meet the necessary accommodations. Phase 2 program participants who required extra support to be successful noted that they felt “pushed out” of their school and left with no other options. The IEP/504 planning and review process is designed to prevent this from occurring. Certified staff members who lead support for individuals with exceptional needs are supposed to ensure the program meets the individual’s needs and that appropriate support is assigned. It may again be resource limitations that prevent schools from providing

the supports all individuals feel are necessary, but often the support is not limited by a lack of funds but a lack of connection between the individual and school. This creates a need for reengagement support that can be addressed without additional monetary resources.

*I had 504 plans and IEPs all throughout my school career and really, all it turned into was just like, “How can we find more ways to stop you from disrupting other people.”*

– Reengagement program participant

*There’s a lot of good people, but some of the staff can be unsupportive, especially if you’re in special ed. They can be unsupportive or not knowing what to do.*

– Reengagement program participant

*Need better teachers and staff. People who listen, especially for kids who are in special ed, they shouldn’t be treated [as] less[er]. In fact, they should have more attention paid to them. I’ve noticed with the special ed, the classwork is completely different. It’s very low-level stuff.*

– Reengagement program participant

Just as relationships are a key factor in supporting young adult reengagement and sustained engagement following reengagement, interviewed participants also identified a lack of strong relationships in their general high school setting as a factor in their initial disengagement. Staff members in their assigned schools often did not take the time to understand the context of the young adult’s life and provide appropriate support. Often young adults felt they were ignored or blamed for their lack of success, when in reality factors beyond their control limited their ability to be successful. This issue can also be addressed without an influx of monetary resources.

*School staff should connect with students a lot more. People don’t know what the students are going through in their personal life and how it affects their academic life. We all have problems, but we’re still trying to figure it out. As kids, future graduates, we just need more time to reconnect with people that wouldn’t mind helping us.*

– Reengagement program participant

*Students will try to tell teachers about certain things and then the teachers will blame the students for not doing it and when it's not really the student's fault. And so it's just the back and forth that no one can win.*

– Reengagement program participant

Finally, reengagement program participants noted that a lack of support for their mental health in the general K–12 setting prevented them from staying engaged. In District 1, mental health challenges were the second most common documented reason for referral to the reengagement program. In District 2, mental health was not a top reason but did represent 7 percent of all referrals. Interviewed reengagement program participants specifically noted a need for more intensive support than could be provided by a school counselor in the general K–12 setting. Participants stated that access to a psychologist who could help them identify difficulties and plan for support would have been beneficial.

*Having some support and services around mental health would've made a big difference. But not a school counselor, because school counselors are great. I talk to a lot of them, but it didn't really change much. More so like actual, qualified psych evals.*

– Reengagement program participant

*[It would have helped] if they could get maybe a district psychologist that can just do mental health evaluations for kids that need help beyond the scope of the administration and counselors that exist within the school itself.*

– Reengagement program participant

# Reflections on data capacity in youth reengagement

In phase 2, prior to eventually working with Districts 1 and 2, the research team recruited two ultimately unsuccessful sites as a result of data capacity limitations (see appendix D for more detail). However, available data and infrastructure in Districts 1 and 2 were still limited to the point that we could not answer all our research questions. As a result, we feel we learned more about reengagement program implementation improvement from what was not in place—specifically in terms of data systems and collection—than from what was. A summary of data capacity strengths and areas for improvement in reengagement data systems follows.

## The identified state of and recommendations for improvement in reengagement program data quality and completeness

### CENTRALIZED DATA SYSTEMS

We found districts maintain longitudinal student databases. However, we identified gaps in their databases ability to accurately track reengagement program participants who disengaged and reengaged multiple times and so this district was ultimately unable to participate in the investigation. District 1's data did allow us to track individuals who engaged with the reengagement program multiple times, but did not indicate whether the individual was fully disengaged prior to each engagement or simply wished to transfer from one alternative setting to another.

Concurrently, each school district program tracked some student data separately from their district's central data system. District 1's reengagement outreach coordinator is a trained data analyst. As a result, the program data was organized in Smartsheet in a manner that facilitated analysis. However, there remained a disconnect between district data and the program-collected data as the two systems did not communicate. Two facts highlight this disconnection.

First, we requested data from the district for all students associated with the reengagement program. The data received from the centralized district dataset included a total of 3,288 young adults from 2018–19 through 2022–23. The dataset we received from District 1's reengagement program included 4,425 young adults in that timeframe. Second, the centralized district dataset we received included dates for enrollment in the reengagement program. However, the district outreach coordinator told us those dates were meaningless because enrollment actions happen through the reengagement program and the system only allows students to be identified as enrolled in one program at a time. This means that a student may be enrolled in their assigned school and not attending but receiving reengagement services support—but there is no way to mark when this support started.

We did not receive centralized data from District 2. We received data collected and input by the reengagement program itself that was not connected to the district's centralized system. This data was compiled by reengagement program staff members and maintained in an Excel dataset housed within the program. The data sets built in Excel relied on multiple open-ended text fields, which creates an increased risk of inconsistency and unreliability within the data as well as making it more difficult to systematically analyze data for program improvement.

The existence of datasets compiled by the reengagement programs themselves and not connected to a centralized district database inhibits reliable data collection and analysis. In these instances, the program has one view of what is happening, and the district has another. As investigators, we cannot determine which dataset is most reliable. This discrepancy in data impacts programs' ability to generate an accurate assessment of what is happening, especially when it comes to young adults' terminal outcomes. This not only impacts the ability to continuously improve but resource allocation as well.

### **COLLECT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION DATA SYSTEMATICALLY**

One of our research questions was "did the number and frequency of contacts between reengagement staff members and participants correlate to student outcomes?" We could not address this question for either program as this data was not available. Neither district program systematically tracked implementation data, limiting our ability to address research questions related to program implementation and young adult outcomes. The programs' limitations in collecting implementation data involved multiple factors. First, the individualization of reengagement services often makes it hard to standardize program actions. However, there are other fields where services are individualized, yet implementation data is tracked and has been linked to improved consumer outcomes (e.g., financial coaching; see Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2021). Second, the limited staffing of reengagement programs in each district made it hard for staff members to allocate time to collecting such data. As mentioned above, this may be the result of allocating resources to areas that do not yield as large a return on investment as does reengagement programming. The lack of reliable program implementation data limits not only outside evaluation but internal continuous improvement processes as well. Given reengagement programs' typical lack of staffing resources, implementation data would allow programs to scrutinize reengagement actions and ensure resources are allocated to the most effective practices.

### **ENSURE SYSTEMS ALLOW ALL DISTRICT STAFF MEMBERS TO MONITOR THE PROGRESS OF ALL STUDENTS**

In interviews, staff members from District 1 identified gaps in their data systems. The first was that most data analysts work at the central office. The database is centralized and requires schools to access an online hub to obtain data. We were told that the website for this hub "has not been updated in five years, so not all aspects work." Therefore, schools hoping to use data proactively to support young adults may not be able to access it and don't have an analyst on staff who is familiar with the database. As a result, the reengagement program reported that schools were coming directly to its staff data analyst to obtain data for students who are identified as disconnected.

Both districts' reengagement programs acted as hubs to support students in either reenrolling in their originally assigned school or identifying an appropriate alternative placement. However, neither district had the ability to efficiently track student progress in their data systems following an alternative placement. In District 1, this meant students referred to the reengagement program could be unsuccessful in their placement, necessitating a second referral to the reengagement program within the same school year. We see this in the dataset provided by the central office for District 1, as the percentage of student records containing the reengagement program marker code decreases year-over-year because a student can only be identified as being in one program at a time. Best practice could be to ensure that once a student receives reengagement support, they can always be identified as such for progress monitoring. Both districts did provide some outcome data, such as credits earned during enrollment, graduation flag, and GED flag. However, the data provided by both programs was inconsistent, as post-program status was missing for most reengagement students. As a result, we were unable to accurately analyze how many students completed a diploma or GED. This means that the program and district are unable to efficiently track a reengagement participant's progress once they receive a placement through the reengagement program or to accurately assess their program's effectiveness in positively impacting student academic outcomes. District 2 also had no efficient way of monitoring reengagement participant progress once a placement was made. Their process for tracking progress was described as:

*I check in with the schools I work with. I have good relationships with all the people running all the different schools. I don't mind sending them an email like, "Hey, how's so-and-so?" We get monthly statements from the other programs. I get to see all the kids that are still there, that are still enrolled. And if I notice if a kid's not on the billing statement, then I try to ask the school, "Hey, what happened?"*

– Reengagement program staff member

## **DEVELOP A SYSTEM TO ALLOW DATA TO FACILITATE TIMELY SUPPORT**

The lack of centralized data systems that would allow district staff members, especially those responsible for reengagement, to identify students in critical need of support necessitates that the two districts maintain a reengagement program referral system. As this system relies on a chain of judgement decisions by multiple staff members in different roles, some eligible students may not be referred to reengagement services. As no district-wide system for screening young adults exists, reengagement staff members do not have a mechanism to intervene earlier or support school staff members in doing so. This limitation of the referral system is compounded by a state law requiring school districts to withdraw students who are absent for 10 consecutive days to avoid impacts on the distribution of state educational funds. The result is that some young adults with the highest need for reengagement services are removed from the dataset completely. If the young adult has not received a referral prior to being withdrawn, or the withdrawal itself does not trigger a referral, they disengage without connection to the district's reengagement program.

## **CREATE REGIONAL DATABASES AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

The factors associated with young adults switching schools and disengaging are related to the issues discussed above, and switching schools is directly associated with disengagement (Gasper et al., 2014). Participants in District 1's reengagement program attended an average of 2.3 different schools in a year. The districts in this investigation are adjacent to each other and to several other districts as well. As a result, the issue of monitoring and supporting student progress is exacerbated by the fact that many young adults who are disengaged may move short distances but change school districts. When a student enrolls in a new school district, the previous district will request their records—a process that often does not deliver the data to practitioners in a timely manner. This is significant considering the 10-day drop law. A young adult who needs reengagement support and is not yet referred, is currently receiving reengagement support, or has already received a placement may be unenrolled from one district prior to enrolling in another. In this scenario, the young adult is withdrawn from the original district's database so staff members can no longer support them. The young adult may not respond to outreach, and the new district has no record of the student needing reengagement support.

To alleviate the issues described above, District 2 is partnering with its local regional educational service district to create a database to track students moving within the region. The district is continuing to build and improve this system, but currently reviews regional data monthly to identify "lost" students. District 1 has access to the regional database but is not yet using it. However, the district reengagement coordinator mentioned being engaged in internal discussions about a regional system.



# Conclusion

Phase 2 of this investigation found that effective reengagement programs succeed by forming trusting relationships with disengaged young adults, empowering young adults, and providing services that match young adults' needs. This type of program is difficult to standardize and relies heavily on individual staff members. However, continuing evidence of these successful practices provides a framework that can guide more effective implementation in the future.

Our investigation found that the shortage of reengagement opportunities is a barrier to success for all students. Successfully implementing reengagement programs can require substantial resources. As a result, partners in the field of education and the surrounding community must continue to determine how best to effectively allocate resources to ensure the greatest impact and that all young adults have access to academic opportunities that provide the individual support they need.

We also identified a second area of improvement in reengagement data system capabilities. We found that a lack of data system capacity inhibits programs from efficiently identifying and monitoring student progress and status as well as engaging in continuous program improvement. Finally, findings from interviews with the young adults pointed to missed opportunities within the K–12 system that could have positively impacted their ability to remain in the general education setting. These statements continue to highlight the necessity of improving K–12 school environments to facilitate relationships and connectedness for all students and to improve access for young adults to the differentiated support and learning opportunities they need. Reengagement staff members referred to this as improving factors “upstream” of reengagement programs.

# References

- Belfield, C. R., Levin, H. M., & Rosen, R. (2012). The economic value of opportunity youth. *Corporation for national community service*.
- Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., & Burke Morison, K. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Civic Enterprises. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED513444>
- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. (2021). Financial coaching initiative: Results and lessons learned. <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/data-research/research-reports/financial-coaching-initiative-results-and-lessons-learned/>
- Dary, T., Pickeral, T., Shumer, R., & Williams, A. (2016). *Weaving student engagement into the core practices of schools*. National Dropout Prevention Center.
- Gasper, J., DeLuca, S., & Estacion, A. (2012). Switching schools: Revisiting the relationship between school mobility and high school dropout. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(3), 487–519.
- Lewis, K. (2023). *Ensuring an equitable recovery: Addressing Covid-19's impact on education*. Measure of America, Social Science Research Council. <https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2023>
- Scala, J., Husby-Slater, M., Denjongpa, M., Chamberlain, R., & McPhee, K. (2023). Early warning intervention and monitoring system district implementation guide. [https://mtss4success.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/23-21566\\_DistImplemtGuide\\_ed\\_FINAL.pdf](https://mtss4success.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/23-21566_DistImplemtGuide_ed_FINAL.pdf)
- Williams, J. L., McLennan, D., Rooney, K., Fujita-Conrads, E., Frantz, T., Tate-Wooson, T., & Mazzeo, C. (2023). *Effective approaches to reengaging young adults*. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/pdf/reengaging-young-adults-report-508c.pdf>

# Appendix A. The state of quantitative data for District 1 and District 2

## District 1 quantitative data

District 1 was able to provide data from the district’s centralized database for all students identified as having received reengagement program support for the 2018–19 through 2023–24 school years. However, we discovered substantial variance between this data and that provided by the reengagement program. The centralized database identified a total of 3,288 unique students who received reengagement outreach services from 2018–19 through 2022–23. In contrast, data provided by District 1’s reengagement program itself included 4,416 unique students who they supported through the reengagement program from 2018–19 through 2023–24. Additionally, when cross-referencing the data we identified 448 students in the smaller district dataset who were not in the larger program dataset.

Given the discrepancies we chose to use the larger dataset provided by the reengagement program for our analysis. The exception was for student mobility. The district dataset included an indicator of student mobility between schools. This is the only case (see appendix C, table C4) where we present an analysis using the centralized district data.

We were limited in our analysis by a lack of reliable outcome data. We did receive “credits earned” from the reengagement program. However, the reengagement program asked that we not use the data as an “outcome.” They stated that credits earned were not a reflection of a successful outcome for many individuals, as many young adults have other goals such as sustaining attendance or social emotional goals that may be achieved but not captured by credits earned. Concurrently, they said some young adults may only require one or two credits to be successful. As a result, these students may have achieved their goal despite the number of credits they earned being lower than those of other students. We requested outcome data from the district, but received not ultimate outcomes but rather the young adult’s outcome track (e.g., general diploma, modified diploma, GED), with no verification of whether the ultimate outcome was achieved.

## District 2 quantitative data

District 2 was able to provide data collected at the program level in 2018–19, 2019–20, 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24.<sup>1</sup> This data was not as comprehensive as that provided by District 1, particularly in the first two school years (2018–19 and 2019–20). Additional data elements include initial referral, placement, and alternative education program enrollment. Note that identification information, such as student ID number, was

---

<sup>1</sup> 2020–21 data was not collected due to disruption from the COVID pandemic

not provided for all students. To identify the number of times students were being referred to the reengagement program over the five-year period, we relied on other identifying elements, including first name, last name, date of birth, start and end date, and home school. Since coordinators entered most of this information manually and may have entered names differently at separate times, only students with an exact match across names and birth dates were considered returning students.

Due to these data limitations, we advise caution when interpreting findings from the District 2 quantitative data, as the number of returning students may be underestimated. See appendix C for a complete list of the descriptive variables used for district-provided data. District 2 provided limited outcome data. A portion of the data set did include outcome variables, but outcomes were not provided for all students. We were informed this because the reengagement coordinator tracked outcomes by cross-referencing post-hoc the district graduation lists to identify any students on the list who had been a part of the reengagement program. Subsequently, if a former reengagement program young adult was on the graduation list an indication of their outcome was manually marked in the reengagement program dataset. We did not identify this outcome data as reliable and valid for analysis.

# Appendix B. Young adult/parent and reengagement program administration/ staff interview and survey protocols

## Young adult/parent interview protocol and demographic survey

Let's begin with an activity to discuss what led you to [program name]

1. Tell us about your journey in school that led you to where you are today?
  - a. Probe about,
    - i. Changes in schools
    - ii. Breaks in school enrollment
    - iii. What schools have you attended?
    - iv. What prompted any "breaks" where you were not attending school?
    - v. What led you back to school
2. Tell us about your experience with the reconnection program (if applicable)?
  - a. How were you contacted?
  - b. What about the contact from reconnection led you to decide to return to school?
  - c. What did reconnection services do that was most helpful for you?
3. Now that you are back in school, what has helped you stay?
  - a. What has helped you/made it easier to stay in school?
  - b. Are there things that have made it harder to stay in school?
  - c. What do you think is the most important factor that has kept you in school?
4. Can you tell us about your goals as you were working to return to school?
  - a. Did reconnection services help you identify individual goals and a plan to achieve them?  
Can you describe what they did to help?
  - b. Are you achieving your goals? Explain.
  - c. What in your life is supporting you to be successful?
    - i. Is there one thing that you think helps you more than anything else?

5. Could the schools have done anything different that would better help you achieve your goal(s)?
  - a. Do you have any recommendations for improving services to help students return to school and be successful?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share regarding your experience with [program name] and its role in supporting you to reach your goals?

## **SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Thank you for participating in this survey. As we discussed at the beginning of the focus group, Education Northwest is working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to learn more about re-engagement programs and how they help people like you. The survey will ask a few questions about your background and demographics.

Your responses are confidential and will be stored securely. Only Education Northwest employees involved in the project will have access and the collected data will not be used for other purposes. Survey responses will be grouped in one big bucket, and no information that can personally identify you will be reported.

Completing the survey will only take a few minutes, and your participation is voluntary. On any question, if you don't want to or don't see anything that feels right don't mark anything. There are no consequences or risks if you skip any questions or choose not to participate.

## **YYA REENGAGEMENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

1. What year were you born? [drop down]
2. Please mark all that apply
  - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Latina/o/x or Hispanic
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - f. White
  - g. Two or more races
  - h. Something else fits better (blank to fill in)
3. Please mark all that apply:
  - a. I am a woman
  - b. I am a man
  - c. I am gender non-conforming
  - d. I am transgender
  - e. Something else fits better (blank to fill in)

4. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I am responsible for taking care of someone under the age of 18.
  - b. I am not responsible for taking care of someone under the age of 18.
  - c. Something else describes this better.
  
5. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I am responsible for taking care of someone who is over the age of 18 (e.g., you take care of your parents or grandparents)
  - b. I am not responsible for taking care of someone who is over the age of 18 (e.g., you take care of your parents or grandparents)
  - c. Something else describes this better.
  
6. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I was previously in foster care.
  - b. I have never been in foster care.
  - c. Something else describes this better.
  
7. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I currently do not have a consistent and safe place to live.
  - b. I'm good now, but there have been times in my life when I have not had a consistent and safe place to live.
  - c. I have never experienced a time when I did not have a consistent and safe place to live.
  - d. Something else describes this better.
  
8. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I have previously been in trouble with the law (i.e. arrested, placed in a juvenile hall or detention center, formerly in jail or prison).
  - b. I am currently awaiting a trial for breaking the law.
  - c. I have never been in trouble with the law.
  - d. Something else describes this better.
  
9. Please mark all that apply.
  - a. I have close friends or family that have previously been in trouble with the law (i.e. arrested, placed in a juvenile hall or detention center, formerly in jail or prison).
  - b. I have close friends or family that are currently in trouble with the law (i.e. arrested and awaiting trial, placed in a juvenile hall or detention center, formerly in jail or prison).

- c. I don't have any friends or family in trouble with the law.
  - d. Something else describes this better.
- 10. What do you consider to be your biggest strength?
- 11. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about you? Please explain below:

## **REENGAGEMENT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Let's begin by discussing you and your program.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your role in [program name]?
  - a. Probe: How long have you been in this role?
2. What are the goals of the program and how is it structured?
  - a. How do you know if your program is successful in meeting its goals?
  - b. How do you assess program success?
  - c. Do you look at any long-term student outcomes (i.e., remaining engaged, graduating etc.)?
  - d. Who monitors such program success to ensure goals are being achieved?

The next question has to do with how you serve the needs of your students.

3. From your perspective, what are the greatest barriers for youth, who are no longer enrolled in school or working, to reengage in school or work?
  - a. How does your program work to minimize those barriers?
4. Do you have students who participate in the program multiple times?
  - a. Do you have to reconnect with these participants from scratch each year?
  - b. Do you have any recommendations that you think could improve this process or reduce repeat instances?

Now we want to talk about how your program operates.

5. First, how do you connect with youth who are no longer enrolled in school or working? (*Probe: how do you provide supports for students to stay enrolled or re-enroll?*)
  - a. Are incentives offered to students to reengage?
  - b. Is this process different for students who have previously been involved with the program?



- 6.** How do you support youth to achieve their goals?
  - a.** Do you help youth develop individual support plans?
  - b.** How are youth involved in this process?
  - c.** How do you assess the needs of your YYA?
  - d.** Have identified any key's to ensuring youth success?
  - e.** Are there any benefits that you've noticed for more personalized, detailed, or complete plans? Any specific components that help make plans more or less successful?
- 7.** What do you think is the most essential component(s) of your program? Why?
- 8.** How do you incorporate student voice in your program? (i.e. student feedback, critique, and suggestion)

To close, we'll discuss potential challenges and next steps of reengagement programs.

- 9.** What are the greatest barriers to your program's reengagement efforts?
- 10.** What do you envision as the future of reengagement centers?
- 11.** Is there anything else you'd like to share regarding your experiences working on reengagement?

# Appendix C. Quantitative variables provided by District 1 and 2 and additional data tables

**Table C1. List of the data elements for years 2018–19 through 2023–24 used for quantitative analysis of District 1**

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Variable Description</b>
<b>Program data</b>	ID	Student identification number
	Year	School year of program enrollment
	State grade code	Grade level
	Gender	Male, female, or non-binary
	LEP	English learner status
	Section 504	Section 504 eligibility status
	Title X Part C	Title X Part C eligibility status
	SpED	Special education status
	Pregnant parenting	Teen parent
	Race/ethnicity	Racial or ethnic groups
<b>Data from centralized office</b>	ID	Student ID
	High school attended	Number of PPS high schools a student has attended, not including reengagements, Summer/Virtual/Evening Scholars, or other supplemental programs such as Student Success, Teen Parent, etc.

**Table C2. List of data elements 2018–19 through 2023–24 used for quantitative analysis of District 2\***

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Variable Description</b>
<b>Reengagement Student Referral Data (2018–19, 2019–20, 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24)</b>	Time stamp	Time stamp of the referral
	First name	Student first name
	Last name	Student last name
	Resident school	Home school
	Grade	Grade level
	Birthday	Date of birth
	Race/Ethnicity	Racial or ethnic groups
	Gender	Male, Female, or non-binary
	Teen parent	Teen parent status
	English learner	English Learner status
	Homelessness	Homelessness status
Special education	Special education status	
<b>Reengagement Students in Alternative Education Placement Data (2022–23 to 2023–24)</b>	Grade level	Grade
	Race/Ethnicity	Racial or ethnic group
	Gender	Male, female, or non-binary
	Special education	Special education status
	Homelessness or teen parent	Homelessness or teen parent status
	Home school	Resident school
	Entry date	Enter date of the program
Exit date	Leave date of the program	

\*2020–21 data was not received.

**Table C3. Between 2018–19 and 2023–24, on average, 25 percent of reengagement program participants were engaged with the program for two years**

Year of first enrollment in the 6-year program data	Total number of first-time students in the six-year data	Percentage of students participated for 1 year only	Percentage of students who participated for 2 years	Percentage of students who participated for 3 years	Percentage of students who participated for 4 years
2018–2019	1257	59%	32%	7%	2%
2019–2020	693	71%	21%	8%	*
2020–2021	454	74%	19%	6%	*
2021–2022	119	72%		*	NA
2022–2023	1066	74%	26%	NA	NA
2023–2024	827	NA	NA	NA	NA

\*Indicates cell suppressed as a result of N being less than 10. Complementary suppression is applied to the next smallest cell value.

Note: The data includes both reengagement service and reengagement center enrollments.

Source: Data from District 1 program database.

**Table C4. Between 2018–19 and 2023–24, District 1 reengagement program participants attended on average, 2.3 different high schools prior to a connection with the reengagement program**

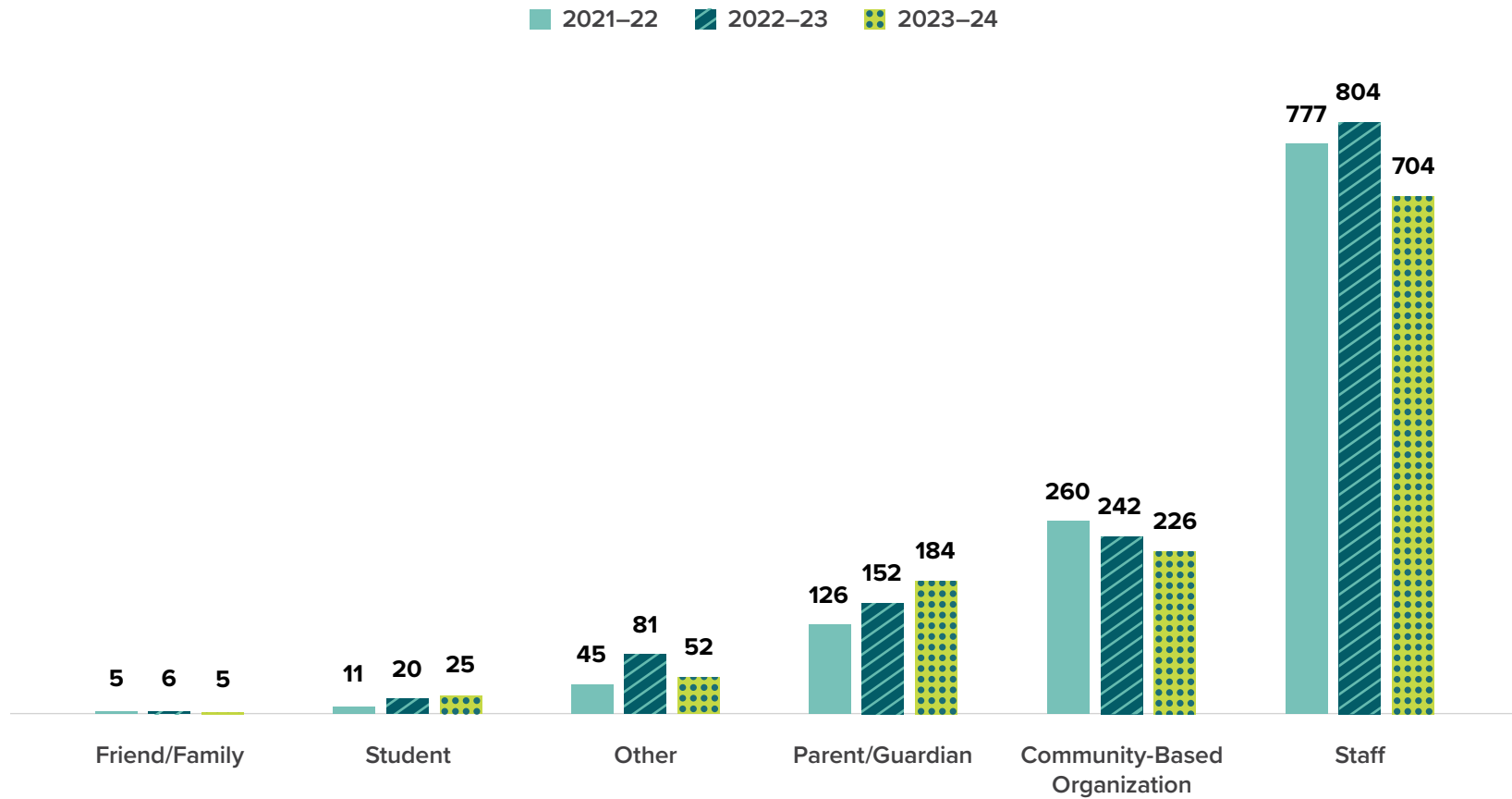
	2018–19 or earlier*	2019–20	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Total unique enrollments	934	560	355	765	673
Average number of different high schools attended	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.2

\*We are unsure how many prior years this number includes.

Note: The total number of participants in this table will not align to tables 2 or 3 because this was calculated from District 1’s centralized dataset. See above for additional description.

Source: Data from District 1 central database.

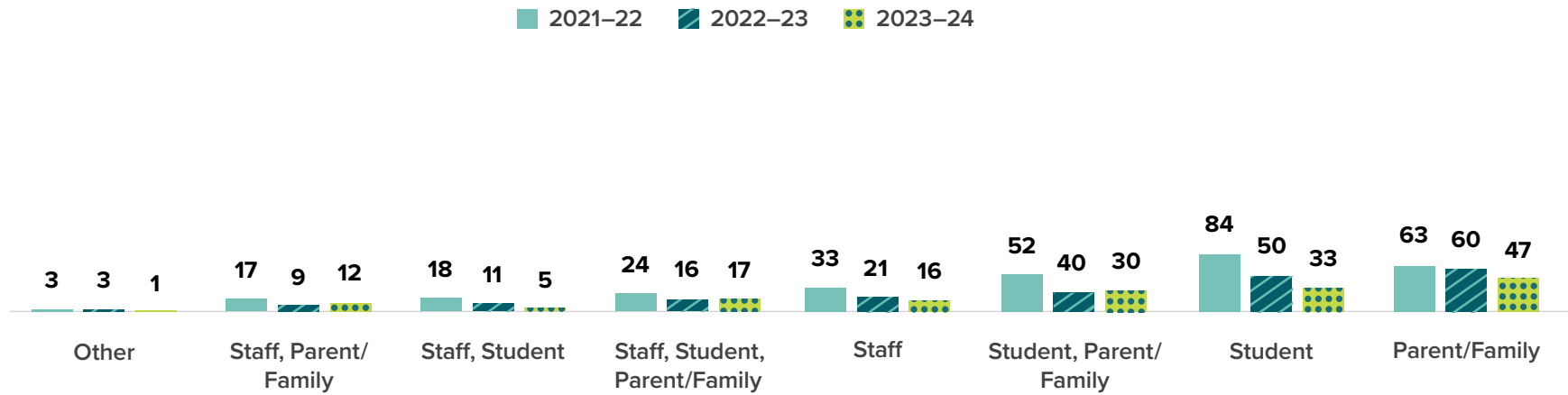
**Figure C1. Number of referrals by the originating source for District 1 reengagement services from 2020–21 through 2023–24**



Note: Identification of source of referral was recorded by reengagement program staff in spreadsheets with a list of explicit options. Selections were limited to one choice.

Source: Data from District 1 program database.

**Figure C2. Number of referrals by the originating source for District 2 reengagement services from 2020–21 through 2023–24**



Note: Identification of source of referral was recorded by reengagement program staff in spreadsheets with a list of explicit options. Selections were limited to one choice.

Source: Data from District 2 program database.

# Appendix D. Overview of successful and unsuccessful phase 2 reengagement program sites

The initial focus of phase 2 was to quantitatively investigate the relationship between reengagement program implementation and student outcomes. In our efforts to complete this investigation we encountered several severe limitations related to the data systems associated with reengagement programs. Our initial attempt to complete the investigation was an effort to collaborate with a large East Coast city school district but was unsuccessful because of a large gap in their ability to track students who may disengage and reengage over time. We discussed potential options such as creating a “ever/never disengaged flag” with the district, but a district data analyst noted this would rely on “exit codes” that the district felt were not implemented with fidelity. A second option was to create what the district analyst referred to as a “pathway model.” However, this would only flag an individual on initial disengagement and ultimate reengagement. This means that if multiple cycles of disengagement and reengagement occurred, only one instance would be identified. As a result of these limitations, we were unable to continue collaboration with the site (see table 2 for an overview of reengagement programs engaged during phase 2).

Our second attempt to complete the investigation involved collaborating with a reengagement program in a large city in the Southwest. This program, unlike the program in our initial attempt, was not operated by a school district but was run cooperatively by a large national nonprofit and the city government. After several months of effort, the legal teams of the program’s public and private partners were unable to resolve complexities in their data management to allow for the necessary data to be shared. The program was able to highlight gaps in their processes related to sharing information with research partners which prompted them to update consent forms and data sharing agreements. Their hope was that these changes would ensure that in the future they could successfully move forward with studies like the one we had proposed.

While we were unable to fully remediate these limitations with the two districts that did ultimately partner on phase 2 of this investigation, we felt these partners provided us the best opportunity to gain useful knowledge given what we had learned about the state of data systems within the reengagement program environment. An overview of the four reengagement programs is provided in table D1.

**Table D1. Reengagement programs involved in phase 2**

<b>Program order of engagement and location</b>	<b>Lead agency</b>	<b>Program model</b>	<b>Context of relationship to phase 2</b>	<b>Included in investigation (yes/no)</b>	<b>Data system strengths</b>	<b>Gaps in data system</b>
<b>1. Large East Coast urban school district reengagement program</b>	School district	Conducts targeted outreach to students who have disengaged, accepts walk-ins, and referrals. Upon connection reengagement coordinators assesses youth’s academic status and non-academic needs to help them develop personalized reengagement plans; identifies good-fit educational options; supports reenrollment; and provides ongoing support for at least one year after reenrollment.	Partner in phase 1 that was identified as a partner for phase 2 due to expressed interest and anecdotally expressed data capacity  Collaboration was unsuccessful due to limitations in ability track disengaged students over time	No	District central office maintained a centralized longitudinal database for all students within the district  Program collected implementation data (e.g., number of contacts with young adults)	Inability to track young adults who may disengage and reengage multiple times  Implementation data maintained in a database separate from the centralized district database <sup>1</sup>
<b>2. Large Southwestern urban reengagement program</b>	Local municipality and national nonprofit organization	Education/career and life coaches at a centralized reengagement center conduct targeted outreach to young adults who have disengaged, accept walk-ins and referrals. Coaches collaborate with participants to create individualized education plans and facilitate enrollment in appropriately aligned programs.	Partner in phase 1; following unsuccessful initial site, this program was contacted and expressed interest  Collaborating was unsuccessful due to legal implications of the reengagement program sharing participant data with an outside research entity	No	Centralized data set tracking maintained by the partnering municipality.  Program collected implementation data (e.g., number of contacts with young adults)	Program participation consent forms inhibited sharing of data with outside entities  Implementation data maintained in a database separate from the centralized district database <sup>2</sup>



<b>Program order of engagement and location</b>	<b>Lead agency</b>	<b>Program model</b>	<b>Context of relationship to phase 2</b>	<b>Included in investigation (yes/no)</b>	<b>Data system strengths</b>	<b>Gaps in data system</b>
<b>3. District 1: Large Pacific Northwest urban school district reengagement program</b>	School district	Most young adults connected through referrals originating from assigned school. Reengagement coordinators also conduct targeted outreach to students who have disengaged and accept walk-ins. Upon connection reengagement coordinators assesses academic status and non-academic needs of youth and use this information to help them develop personalized reengagement plans, identify good alternative education placements within the district, and support the reenrollment process. Operates a reengagement center, which is a school within a school that can support up to 100 students a year who are awaiting a spot in another program or require a short-term placement to help prepare them for reentry into an academic setting.	The reengagement program coordinator volunteered to participate in the investigation in response to a request for partners sent through the National League of Cities' reengagement network	Yes	District central office maintained a centralized longitudinal database for all students within the district  Program compiled demographic data on participants systematically within a sophisticated database  Program compiled implementation data (e.g., number of contacts with young adults)	A discrepancy of 1,112 participants existed between the provided centralized district dataset and program collected dataset  Neither dataset reliably tracked reengagement program outcomes  Program implementation data was not tracked in a systematic way that could be compiled and shared

<b>Program order of engagement and location</b>	<b>Lead agency</b>	<b>Program model</b>	<b>Context of relationship to phase 2</b>	<b>Included in investigation (yes/no)</b>	<b>Data system strengths</b>	<b>Gaps in data system</b>
<b>4. District 2: Large suburban pacific northwest school district reengagement program</b>	School district	Young adults connected through referrals originating from assigned school. Upon connection, reengagement coordinators assess academic status and non-academic needs of youth and use this information to help them develop personalized reengagement plans, identify good alternative education placements within the district, and support the reenrollment process.	The reengagement program coordinator volunteered to participate in the investigation in response to a request for partners sent through the National League of Cities' reengagement network	Yes	District central office maintained a centralized longitudinal database for all students within the district  Program compiled demographic data on participants	No centralized district dataset was available for inclusion in the investigation  Program compiled data not standardized and incomplete

Note: Understanding of implementation data for rows 1 and 2 is from collaboration with program in phase 1 and initial discussion for phase 2. Collaboration with district did not continue long enough to allow investigators to engage directly with implementation data.

Source: Investigators personal engagement with the reengagement program and district staff members, the datasets, and program operation documents.