

How Can You Help Your Student Succeed in High School?

You might not realize it, but many students who are doing "just fine" in the 8th grade eventually fail to graduate with their class, if at all. What can you do to keep your teen on track?

According to the Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS), about a quarter of 8th graders in the School District of Philadelphia look as though they are doing just fine in school, and they seem perfectly ready to make the transition to high school. However, less than three-fourths of these students will graduate on time. One in five will fall behind their class or withdraw from school completely. We call them *frustrated students* (see sidebar).

What You Can Do

It's not all bad news. Many students who were not doing well in the 8th grade recovered enough during high school to graduate on time. We call them *rising students*. Let's look at what parents of *rising students* did versus parents of *frustrated students*. What works for parents

THE FRUSTRATED HIGH SCHOOLER

Does fine in in the middle grades but struggles in high school. These 8th graders:

- Earned a C or better in core courses (math, science, English, social studies)
- Attended school at least 80% of the time
- Were not suspended
- Had no unsatisfactory final behavior marks

But Four Years Later...

- Just 70% graduate on time
- 9% remain in school but fall behind
- 10% withdraw from school
- 11% are of unknown status

who help students *get back* on track can work for parents trying to help their teens *stay* on track, too.

Talk To Your Teen About School

- *Rising students* were significantly more likely to have a parent who reported talking to them often—at least twice a week—about what was going on at school.
- It's not enough that parents talk with teachers and counselors. Parents who talk to their teens about school had a much stronger impact on student performance in high school than parents who spoke only to adults (counselors, teachers and other staff) about school.

Community learning briefs like this one provide suggestions for improving children's academic performance.

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How To Help Your Student Stay on Track

Executive Director
Carol S. Fixman

Senior Research Associate
Liza Herzog

Director, Civic Engagement
Harvey Chism

Communications Associate
Diana Rodriguez Wallach

The Philadelphia Education Fund is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education throughout the Philadelphia region. For 20 years, the Ed Fund has been working in partnership with school districts, universities, non-profits and businesses to initiate and implement innovative educational programs, improve teacher quality, engage the community in school reform and conduct research. The Ed Fund is one of the largest of 90 education funds affiliated with the Public Education Network. Visit www.philaedfund.org

Parents who talked about other things with their teens—movies, shopping, work—did not affect educational outcomes. What is important is not just that parents and teens talk, but that they talk *about school*. Talking directly with your teen—and not just talking *about* your teen with other adults—is also important.

Do something when teens struggle

■ *Rising students* were much more likely to report that, if they received a bad grade in school, their *parents' reactions mattered*.

■ *Rising students* were three times more likely than frustrated students to say that when they struggled in a class, a parent participated in homework assignments.

There are many ways to help with homework. Even if you are less confident about your ability to do the work itself, you can help your teen explore the work in an effective way—ask about the work, help with

organization, keep your teen motivated and on task.

Many factors contribute to student success. What parents do with their teens could make the difference between a frustrating high school experience and a successful one.

Even if you believe that your teen is doing “just fine” in school, talk often about school, express that school performance matters to you, and contribute to the homework process.

The Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS), a project of the Philadelphia Education Fund, followed more than 2000 students in Philadelphia public schools from the summer after their 8th grade year (1996-1997) until three years after expected graduation. During that time, researchers repeatedly interviewed students and parents, gaining their perspective on the teens' high school experience.

Philadelphia Education Fund

7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
T# (215)665-1400
F# (215) 864-2494

The Philadelphia Education Fund's Community Learning Briefs are designed to keep parents, families and communities central to the academic success of our young people.

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