

❖ **Listening to Students on What Motivates Them—Students from the Anchorage, Alaska Region Discuss School “Turn Ons” and “Turn Offs”**

Karen Pittman, Merita Irby of the International Youth Foundation, and Alaskan High School Students, Summer Institute 1999, Girdwood, Alaska

As one of the most well-regarded thinkers about constructing supportive environments for youth, Karen Pittman has developed nine principles of “full investment and full involvement” for American youth. One of the nine principles speaks directly to what schools must provide for “young people as recipients *and* as active agents in their own development and that of their communities and society.” Schools, school districts, and state education agencies can foster increased student motivation by developing processes for listening to student voices on issues relevant to their needs and success. There are too few forums for their active participation with adults to listen to them, to advise them, and to assist in reversing problems of diminished motivation and disengagement.

Alaskan high school students from various academic, economic and background experiences effectively articulated specific events and practices that both promoted *and* discouraged successful learning. Their participation at the Summer Institute underscored the need to establish formal mechanisms for listening to students on what motivates them and enables them to shape a motivating school environment. The student focus was on “relationships” and the necessity for assuring they are effective as one condition for academic success.

■ **CONTINUED CCSO REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Council members benefitted greatly from these experts and their perspectives from each of the three lenses. On the basis of the Summer Institute presentations and discussion, the Council will continue work as follows:

1. Urge each chief state school officer to establish and/or continue regular processes for discussion with students about educational policies which affect them and steps to assure schools are motivating positively. This may include, also, setting recommendations for local school districts and school student advisory procedures.
2. Continue analysis of longitudinal data relating school conditions to “student connectedness” and academic achievement and recommend actions on the findings.
3. Continue analysis of the impact of the increasing number of high stakes tests on student performance, drop out rates and motivation to achieve at higher levels with recommendations on findings.
4. Develop a set of indicators and associated materials to promote supportive and nurturing school environments which promote improved student achievement.
5. Undertake analysis of the ways teacher and staff preparation and professional development programs prepare personnel to understand the impact of student-adult relations and “connections” students have with their schools on student achievement.

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**A STATEMENT OF
THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF
STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS**

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■ INTRODUCTION

Student success in education requires the right combination of challenging standards, opportunities for learning to achieve those standards, *and* student motivation to be successful. During the past few years, there has been extensive focus given to establishing challenging standards and the quality of the school offerings which will enable all students to meet them. There has not been equal attention given to an understanding of what is motivating our students to success or, perhaps more importantly, what is missing or undermining the opportunities and leading so many students to drop out, opt out, or perform under their potential.

As part of this year's Council priority topic, *Students Continually Learning*, a special focus has been given to better understanding student motivation and its relationship to school success from the perspective of the students.

The Council's inquiry was given attention during the CCSSO Summer Institute in Girdwood, Alaska, convened August 1999. Council members examined student motivation through three lenses. The first was through the findings of a powerful study called *The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)*. Second was through discussion of high stakes testing and whether the impact of such tests, on balance, generates stronger student motivation to achieve standards or creates disincentives to stay enrolled and keep working. Third was through conversation about constructive and supportive environments for youth with a panel of students who shared their experiences, frustrations about and aspirations for the characteristics of schools which would be highly motivating. These presentations and discussions opened inquiry on the importance of the topic and next steps for the Council and states. Brief summaries are provided below.

■ THREE LENSES ON STUDENT MOTIVATION

❖ School Connectedness—Considering the Social World of the Student

Discussion with Dr. Clea Sucoff, Summer Institute 1999, Girdwood, Alaska

Students have their own social worlds—environments that shape and influence the choices they make about their education for today and tomorrow. School is a major part of that environment and the characteristics of the school powerfully determine whether students feel “connected” to it and to the adults associated with it.

The issues of “connectedness” among high school students are empirically captured in the *National Longitudinal Study of the Adolescent Health (Add Health)*. Add Health data show that while personal characteristics and the home environment are important in protecting adolescents from risk or placing adolescents at risk, the school environment makes a significant difference on the student's actions. The data show that feelings of connectedness to school and feeling that other students are not prejudiced toward them are more important to student motivation than school-related characteristics, such as class size, and teacher training. Students who have low grades and who are held back experience greater levels of emotional distress, increased substance abuse, more involvements with violence, and earlier sexual activity. The single factor that matters most to adolescents is whether they feel the school provides an atmosphere where students are fairly treated, close to one another and a part of the school community. The importance of the findings is that school authorities and policy-makers can influence these school characteristics, thereby, affecting motivation and achievement.

❖ High Stakes Tests and Student Motivation—What are the Incentive Effects for Students?

Discussion with Dr. John Bishop, Summer Institute 1999, Girdwood, Alaska

John Bishop and colleagues find that schools having low student expectations produce patterns of

limited motivation for high school students to do well academically. They assert setting challenging standards produces higher levels of work and achievement.

The incentive effects of such high stakes tests among students, however, is under debate. Opponents of such tests argue they will result in higher drop-out rates. Those in favor of such tests believe that teachers will demand more and raise both the standards and their own expectations of students' abilities. They also will expect that students will study/work harder to graduate from high school better prepared to enter college or the workforce.

Bishop has found that external examinations—exams developed by states or districts, rather than by the teachers for their own classrooms—actually foster teacher/student collaboration to help students succeed. Members of a class band together and work collaboratively with their teachers toward the goal of high individual, class-wide, and school-wide examination pass rates when the test is “external.”

Bishop's data comparing states/schools with high stakes exam requirements in the 1980s and the early 1990s show the following:

States with high stakes tests did not have lower percentage enrollment rates or lower graduation rates. States that did require more courses to graduate did have lower percentage enrollment rates.

Graduates from high schools with high stakes tests were more likely to enter and continue in college. Students with scores in the lower $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of the test score distribution showed a greater probability to enter and continue college.

Case studies of ten schools that moved to requiring all students to take certain Regents Examinations in New York State in the early 1990s found that students at risk of low performance actually were provided much more attention and tutoring by school staff than prior to the new requirement.