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Bridging Systems of Opportunity: A Collaborative, Cross-Sector Approach to Re-Engaging Disengaging & Disengaged Youth Across K–12, Community, Technical/Vocational, and Higher Education Pathways

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Abstract

This study examines youth disengagement through a collaborative, cross-sector research framework that integrates K–12 education, community systems, technical/vocational education, and higher education partnerships. Focusing on a sample of approximately 400 high school students in Pinellas County, Florida, who are being identified as at risk of disengagement, this research investigates the social, academic, and environmental factors that contribute to disconnection from educational and workforce pathways.

Using a structured Qualtrics-based questionnaire administered in partnership with school districts and community stakeholders, the study analyzes patterns related to school climate, family dynamics, disciplinary experiences, and perceptions of future opportunities. Findings are expected to demonstrate that youth disengagement is not solely an individual phenomenon, but rather a systemic issue shaped by institutional practices, socio-economic contexts, and limited access to inclusive pathways across educational systems.

This research advances a collaborative and inclusive model of inquiry that centers youth voice while leveraging partnerships among schools, municipalities, and higher education institutions. The study contributes actionable recommendations, including the development of integrated re-engagement frameworks, expansion of technical and vocational pathways, and implementation of culturally responsive and community-informed interventions.



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The findings hold significant implications for educational policy, practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration, offering a scalable model for addressing disengagement and promoting equitable access to lifelong learning and workforce opportunities.

Keywords: Collaborative research; Disengaged youth; Educational pathways; Equity; Workforce development; Youth engagement, Inclusion, Youth Empowerment