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Education's Next Horizon Releases New Research On Dropout Prevention

Education's Next Horizon has released a new research report that tells what high school students think about programs aimed at keeping them on track to graduation. The study, *Student Perceptions of Graduation Support Programs in Louisiana High Schools*, presents findings of a statewide survey taken by over 2,000 tenth grade students in the fall of 2012.

"The study shows that we not only need more supports like tutoring and high-quality mentoring, we need to make students more aware of these programs and find ways to increase student participation," said Julio Galan, President and Board Chair of Education's Next Horizon. "Another very important finding of the study relates to career planning. More than half of the students surveyed said they did not have, or did not know if they had, an academic plan for graduation--a requirement of state law. We believe that the issue here is even greater. While more than 80% of the students reported that earning a college degree is very important, it's evident that we need to provide more information about careers and post-secondary opportunities."

This and many other revealing facts from students have been documented in a newly released publication. Major findings of the study are:

- Fifty percent of the respondents reported not participating in mentor or advisory experiences offered at their school. It is not clear how many of those students would benefit from mentoring.
- Of the mentor options, school counselors, teachers, and administrators were offered most by schools. Likewise, respondents reported that these types of mentors were the most beneficial.
- Multiple respondents indicated that they did not perceive counselors as a source of support. Written comments indicated this was largely due to the counselors not having time to meet with students about graduation concerns.
- Of the mentor options, adult mentors and community volunteers were offered least often by schools. Adult mentors also were identified by respondents as the least beneficial.
- Student leadership, career coaching, and tutoring were identified most positively as support activities that contributed to a better school experience.



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- Most respondents reported that the presence of a caring adult was important to their academic success.
- Respondents reported feeling more comfortable talking with their teachers about education and career plans, than talking with their counselors about these matters. High counselor workloads may limit the availability of counselors to form relationships with students. Conversely, if counselors are mostly associated with dealing with behavior and discipline issues, students may feel uncomfortable approaching them.

"Findings of the study have implications for state and district funding of dropout prevention support programs and for the design and scope of specific interventions," said John Warner Smith, Education's Next Horizon CEO. "This is particularly true for proven dropout prevention strategies like mentoring and the role that teachers and counselors play in keeping students on track. Although the ratio of guidance counselors to students is much too low, teachers are doing an excellent job filling the void. Students are just as comfortable talking to them about personal matters and careers. As much good as teachers do, their help in inspiring and guiding our children is an underrated resource."

The research study was done for Education's Next Horizon by the Picard Center for Lifelong Learning at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The project was supported by the Louisiana Association of United Ways, Entergy Louisiana, Capital One Bank, Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation, ExxonMobil, State Farm, Emprint-Moran Printing, and Unisource.

For additional information on Dropout Prevention go to www.ednexthorizon.org.