

Youth Experience & Aspirations

**What can adolescents
teach us about high school?**

2
EDITION



**The voices
of adolescents
offer valuable
insights for
designing
schools that
will serve
students,
educators,
everyone.**

**Young people
need schools
they can believe
in, so they can
invest in their
learning, identify
their aspirations,
and create
pathways to
success.**

**How can
we empower
young people
to contribute to
conversations
about education?
How can we
encourage adults
to listen deeply
to young people?**

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



01

Young people need engaging, high-quality learning environments in order to grow. What features should be included in these environments? What roles will adolescents play in creating them?



02

What do young people think about the schools currently available to them? Are schools giving them opportunities to build the skills and knowledge they need to realize their goals for the future?



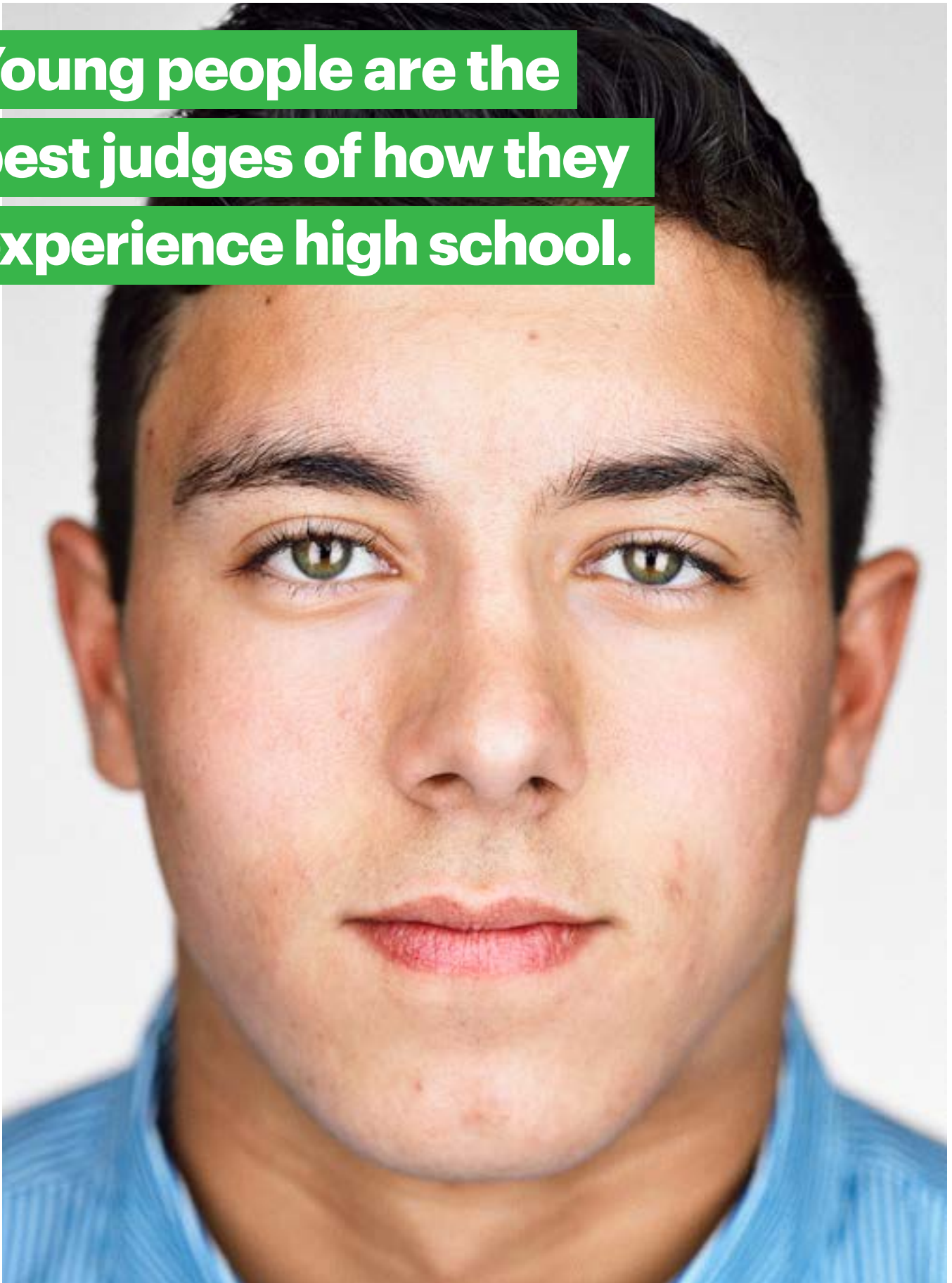
03

Where, besides school, are young people in the community learning? What types of experiences are available? What patterns are present? What do young people say about what they learn from these experiences and why they value them?

**LISTEN
AND
LEARN**

FACT 04

**Young people are the
best judges of how they
experience high school.**



Youth perspectives must inform all aspects of high school design.

Listening to young people’s authentic perspectives, positive or negative, are incredibly important for anyone designing or redesigning a high school. After all, they’re the ones our schools must serve!

Adolescents feel empowered and involved when adults authentically engage them in the decisions that affect their lives. So what are you waiting for? Go out and talk to young people. A really good way to start is by visiting a local community center to find relevant and unique perspectives. Invite young people to reflect on occasions when learning has been deep and rewarding for them. Ask them about experiences they wish had been better or more fulfilling.

Be sure to seek out the opinions of those whose voices aren’t often heard, including young people who have dropped out of school, disengaged students, and struggling students. Their experiences will help you see what’s missing from high school today, and what needs to change.



TRAVIS J. BRISTOL
Research & Policy Fellow
at Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education



Think About →

What do adolescents think of their schools? What experiences inform their views? What do they imagine an engaging learning environment would look and feel like?



Start with a conversation. Try asking young people about their vision for the future, the things they care about, their dream high school. Think about their true needs—and how you might inspire them to stretch their ambitions.

+ What kind of future do you see for yourself?

+ What kind of career do you want to pursue?

+ Who are the role models you admire most?

+ Tell me about something you’re really interested in right now.

+ What is something you would love to teach?

+ How do you define success for yourself?

+ If you could build a school that was specifically designed for how you learn, what would it look like? Sound like? Feel like?

+ How would your dream high school better prepare you for a college or career?

Degrees of Youth Participation

We can learn from young people in a range of ways. UNICEF shares a visual that describes the eight levels of youth participation, from nonparticipation to child-initiated decision making (page 8).



Just Ask the Students

The Future Project asked NYC high school students how they’d change high school. Here’s what they said.



Youth Organizing for Change

How can adults use youth experience and aspirations to guide school decisions? The Forum for Youth Investment offers materials to help young people play meaningful roles in community change as well as education policy and advocacy.



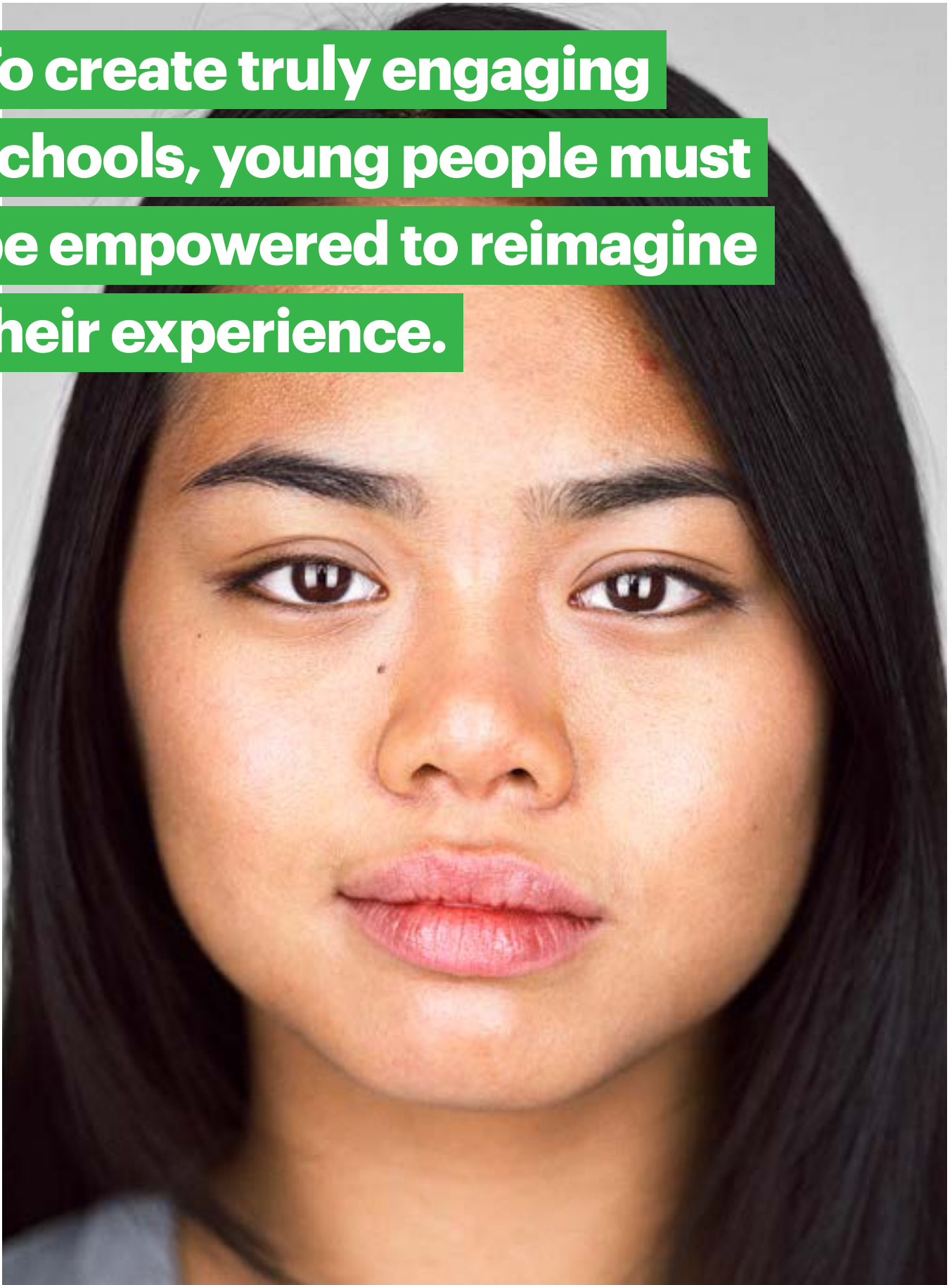
I’m First

This online community supports first-generation college-going students, and nurtures the aspirations of high school students who will be.



FACT 05

To create truly engaging schools, young people must be empowered to reimagine their experience.



Let's open up opportunities for young people and their families to contribute.

Each year since 2009, thousands of students across the country have participated in the Gallup Student Poll, which asks students in grades 5 through 12 about their engagement with school, hopes for the future, entrepreneurial aspirations, and career and financial literacy. Key findings from the 2016 Report:

- + Students who are hopeful and engaged fare better in such outcomes as academic performance and attendance.
- + Students in middle and high school are less engaged in school than younger children.
- + Few students get to do what they do best every day.
- + When students feel like they have opportunities to do what they do best, they perceive their school as more successful.
- + Many young students, but few older students, feel surrounded by caring adults at school.
- + Engagement and hope are linked to students' plans after high school.
- + Entrepreneurial aspiration wanes for high school students.
- + Involvement in extracurricular activities boosts positive outcomes for students.

The survey results clearly show that disengagement is a serious problem for U.S. high school students. Less than a third of 11th graders are engaged with school, compared with nearly three-quarters of 5th graders. Only one in four 11th graders says that adults at their school really care about them, compared with two out of three 5th graders.

Can we change this picture? Research shows schools can help increase student engagement and resilience by encouraging strong relationships among students and by promoting positive connections between staff and students, and between school and home. Students also gain from participating in clubs, organizations, and other groups, and from activities that allow them to cultivate a sense of competence and self-efficacy.

When young people have a voice in improving education, the result is stronger schools and more engaged students. When families and caregivers are also involved, the impacts are even greater.

Think About →

Where in the community do adolescents collaborate with adults to accomplish a shared goal? What types of behaviors do you see? How might students and adults work together to improve schools?

"All students are entitled to pursue opportunities which can have a positive effect on the world beyond their classroom, and receive academic support where such opportunities develop their sense of civic responsibility and knowledge. Students may partake in such projects which aim to solve contemporary issues and propose such projects as experiential or independent learning endeavors as eligible for school credit."

STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS
Student Voice

We the Students

What do our students deserve in school and as individuals? The Student Bill of Rights was developed by the students at Student Voice. Read more and join the movement!



Youth Engagement and Equity

Ronald Ferguson, Heather Weiss, and their collaborators share six principles that can help us engage youth and their families in an inclusive, equitable way.



Building Student Resilience

Students' experiences beyond the classroom inform and impact their experiences within the classroom. Child Trends shares some ideas and strategies for building resilience in our students.



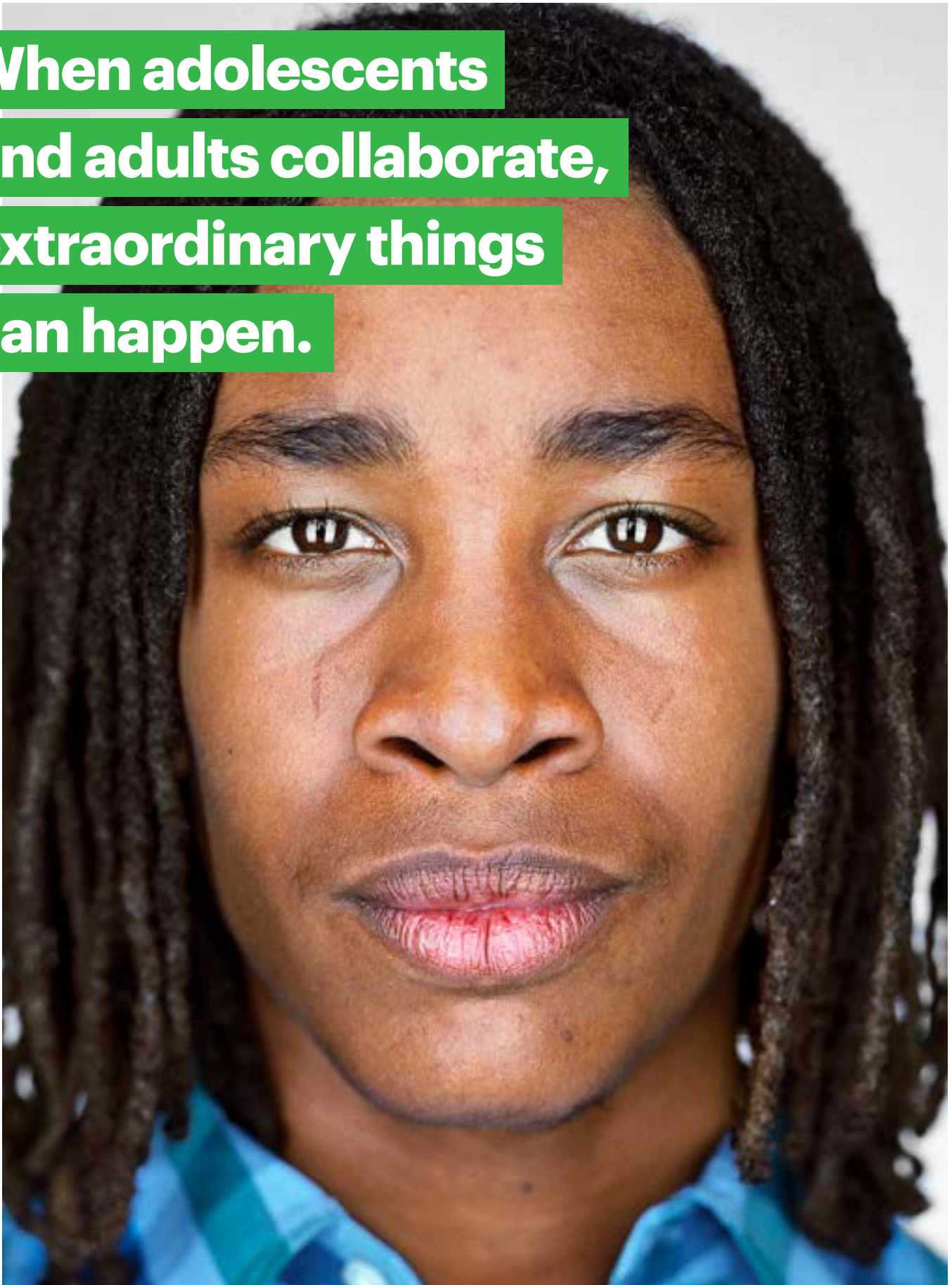
Student Polls

Each year, Gallup polls thousands of students across the U.S. about their hopes, well-being, and engagement. Find out here what they said in 2016.



FACT 06

**When adolescents
and adults collaborate,
extraordinary things
can happen.**



We need to work together to create magic.

Young people need ongoing, consistent support from adults. They need engaging activities that give them a sense of responsibility and allow them to actively contribute to their own lives. When young people and adults collaborate to solve problems, extraordinary things can happen. Experiencing positive relationships with adults helps students build confidence and resiliency as they set goals and make contributions. When they help design their own education, they uncover new needs to address—and imaginative ways to address them.

Collaborative magic can happen in school, after school, or in the community. At the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia, young people engage with professional artists to complete individual projects and large-scale works in highly visible public places. Through the Multnomah Youth Commission, students in Portland, Oregon work with city and county leaders to improve civic policies that affect youth. Y-PLAN, a project at UC Berkeley's Center for Cities + Schools, gives young people the chance to work alongside city officials to co-design urban planning initiatives such as improving transportation systems and neighborhood safety.

Students develop confidence and motivation when they know their work is taken seriously and has an impact. "I want my younger brothers and sisters to grow up in a better place than I did," says Esther, a 12th grader from Richmond, California. "Working on the Y-PLAN project lets me make a change—not just for me, but for everyone else."

Think About →

Who are the young people most in need of better schools in your community? How can you identify them? How can schools better serve their needs?



"I'm here to tell you that magic can be taught... You teach it by allowing people to go into those spaces where the magic is happening. If you want to be an aspiring teacher in urban education, you've got to leave the confines of that university and go into the hood. You've got to go in there and hang out at the barbershop, [attend] that black church, and [view] those folks that have the power to engage, and just take notes on what they do... If we could transform teacher education to focus on teaching teachers how to create that magic, then poof—we could make dead classes come alive, we could reignite imaginations, and we [could] change education."

CHRISTOPHER EMDIN

Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, Science, and Technology at Teachers College, Columbia University

Inside the Minnow Tank

Girls pitch ideas to a panel of amazing women through a project created by high school students at Iowa BIG.



What Students Expect from their Schools

Schools expect a lot from their students, but what about students' expectations for their schools? Watch this video on 10 expectations students have for their schools, created by Leaving to Learn.



Human-Centered Design

Wondering how to design with and for students? Check out this easy-to-use Field Guide to Human-Centered Design, created by the design firm IDEO.



d.school Design Methods

Learn from Stanford d.school, its design-thinking methods for interviewing, prototyping, and reframing with these "mixtapes."



Students' perspectives are key to rethinking high school

As you think through what needs to be done to transform high school, it's essential to have extensive conversations with adolescents in your community.

Talk to them. Listen to them. To the extent possible, co-create with them. You need to build an environment of mutual trust, where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings and sharing their insights openly and honestly. Seek out young people beyond your usual circle.

To find students who are willing to talk, try reaching out to adults they trust. Speak with teachers and school leaders. Talk to youth mentors, coaches, afterschool providers, and youth services workers. The education system has a lot to learn from groups that serve young people outside school, such as YMCAs, community centers, arts and athletics programs, congregations, and Boys & Girls Clubs.

GET INSPIRED



Youth-Led Radio

What would young people put on the radio if they ran the station? Listen live to the official Youth Radio App, and read more about this national media model.



Mural Arts Program

The Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia connects young people to professional artists and public art projects, from independent, small-scale pieces to large-scale collaborations.



The New York Times Learning Network

Check out the student opinion blog on the New York Times' Learning Network, where students are invited to give their opinions on current news.



Latino and Latina Voices

A collection of poems, essays, photography, and videos representing the voices of Latino and Latina youth.



Great Questions from StoryCorps

Change can begin with stories. StoryCorps offers tools and ideas to help people interview each other in an authentic way.



Spoken Word in the Classroom

Spoken word helps students express themselves. Watch this Edutopia video about Youth Speaks, an organization that teaches young people about writing and speaking.



SCHOOLS
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