# **DISCUSSION GUIDE**





# STREET KNOWLEDGE 2 COLLEGE





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Street Knowledge 2 College is part of American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen, a national public media initiative made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to help communities across the country address the high school dropout crisis.

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#### **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

This guide is designed to support meaningful dialogue among educators, community leaders, students, and parents who care about youth at risk for not graduating from high school.

To spark and extend discussion on key issues facing such youth, *Street Knowledge 2 College* (*SK2C*) offers 15 mini-documentaries that explore an alternative high school in South Central Los Angeles that seeks to redirect youth from the "school-to-jail track" to community leadership and graduation. These mini-docs are appropriate for use in both community screenings and classroom settings.

By combining the stories of *SK2C* with thought-provoking discussion, you can raise awareness and understanding about the dropout crisis in the United States, policies and practices that undermine student success, and strategies that strengthen communities by helping young people develop leadership skills and graduate.

Street Knowledge 2 College is proud to be a part of public media's **AMERICAN GRADUATE: LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN** initiative (<a href="http://www.americangraduate.org">http://www.americangraduate.org</a>), which seeks to effectively use media to increase community understanding of the dropout crisis, and to bring people together to develop and implement local solutions.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE DROPOUT CRISIS

The good news: The United States is on track to meet the national goal of a 90% graduation rate by 2020.

While this news is promising, there is much work left to do. **America loses one out of five young people to the dropout crisis each year**. That's nearly one million school-aged children in the U.S. who do not graduate high school with their peers. For African-American and Hispanic students, the graduation rate is *less than 69 percent*. Also at risk are students who are poor, those with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

Disciplinary problems can also increase the likelihood of dropping out of school. Data on school suspensions from more than 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools reveal that administrators suspended one in nine students in the 2009-2010 school year, and usually for minor infractions of school rules, such as violating the dress code. An eight-year longitudinal study in Florida found that a single suspension in ninth grade doubled a student's risk of dropping out of school.

Receiving a high school diploma is an important step in preparing a young person to live an independent, secure and happy life and is an essential component of America's economic competitiveness to create a more educated, innovative workforce. Compared to dropouts, high school graduates earn more money, generate more jobs in the economy, are less likely to engage in criminal behavior, have better health, and are more likely to vote and volunteer. Dropping out makes it harder for young people to succeed in life, results in the loss of hundreds of billions of dollars in economic productivity, and generates enormous social costs.



You can find more statistics and research on the high school dropout crisis at the American Graduate Research Center: http://www.americangraduate.org/about/research-center.html

#### Sources:

America's Promise Alliance. "Building a Grad Nation." http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx

UCLA Civil Rights Project. "Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools." <a href="http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools</a>

UCLA Civil Rights Project. "Summary of New Research Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research to Policy." <a href="http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/summary-of-new-research-closing-the-school-discipline-gap-research-to-policy">http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/summary-of-new-research-closing-the-school-discipline-gap-research-to-policy</a>

# WHO SHOULD WATCH AND DISCUSS SK2C?

The dropout crisis affects everyone due to its impact on families, the economy, crime, and demand on social services. Finding and implementing solutions will require bringing together people from all parts of the community, including:

- Policymakers
- Educators
- PTA
- Business leaders
- Public media partners
- Parents
- Students
- Organizations focused on the needs of youth and dropout prevention
- And more

#### HOW TO ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY SCREENING

*SK2C* can be a valuable resource to spark discussion in community or classroom settings about helping high school students stay on the path toward graduation. The following recommendations will help you to maximize the effectiveness of your screening:

#### The Value of Partnerships

Successful events are best organized with the help and support of others in your community. A screening of *SK2C* offers the opportunity to collaborate with partners and build working relationships that can make a difference long after the screening is over. Ideally, you will work with your community partners to plan the screening, set the agenda, and promote the event to their networks. If your facility is limited, a community partner might also host the event. In addition, a community partner may be a great source for a discussion facilitator. After the event, you can keep partners and screening participants engaged by cross-promoting activities via social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and by collaborating on future initiatives.

Through the American Graduate initiative, public media stations in more than 30 states are working directly with community partners to join forces and coordinate action to help keep





students in school. To sync up with these efforts, use the "Find Out More About What Is Happening in Your State" map at: <a href="http://www.americangraduate.org/become-a-champion/find-your-local-station.html">http://www.americangraduate.org/become-a-champion/find-your-local-station.html</a>

American Graduate has also partnered with more than 800 local organizations that work to improve graduation rates. To identify these groups in your community, please see the map of "Local Champions and Partner Organizations" at: <a href="http://www.americangraduate.org/become-a-champion/connect-with-partners.html">http://www.americangraduate.org/become-a-champion/connect-with-partners.html</a>

# Tips for a Successful Screening

#### Size Matters

Consider how large you want your event to be. Does your video presentation equipment limit the number of people who can watch the films? How will size impact the level of discussion afterward? What type of facility will you need to ensure everyone's comfort?

#### **Be Comfortable**

Make sure the temperature of the room is neither too hot nor too cold. Provide signs that make it easy for people to find both the room for the event and the restrooms. Ensure that there is enough seating for everyone. Consider how much light will be needed during both the screening and discussion portions of the event. Make arrangements for translators, sign language interpreters, etc., as needed.

# **Get Help**

Recruit some volunteers to help with the event. Your partner organization(s) may be a good source of manpower. The event will run more smoothly if you have a team or committee to assist with publicizing the event, setting up, greeting attendees, handling the audiovisual needs of the event, serving as timekeeper, cleaning up, etc. We recommend that you invite someone (e.g., educator, religious leader, human resource professional, community leader) to facilitate the discussion portion of the event so that you can focus on logistics.

#### Look at the Time

Decide what date and time of day will work best for you and those you want to attend the screening. Be sure to also allow enough time to promote the event.

# **Spread the Word**

Develop a strategy in collaboration with your partners to promote the screening using a variety of communication methods, such as social media, posters, paid media, email, newspapers, partner newsletters, school announcements, etc.

#### **Check Your Equipment**

Make sure your audiovisual equipment is functioning properly before people arrive at the event. Have a backup plan in case something goes wrong.





#### **Provide Refreshments**

In addition to your organized discussion, give attendees the opportunity to interact informally to discuss what they've seen and learned and to network with one another. Setting up a table with something to eat and drink is a natural way to allow this to happen.

# **Strategies for Facilitators**

## Organize the Room

Work with the host of the event to ensure that the physical arrangement of the room will encourage the type of discussion you seek. Consider whether a portable microphone is needed to be certain that everyone can hear what is said.

# **Be Prepared**

This guide contains background information on the issues raised in the minidocumentaries and thought-provoking discussion questions. Be familiar enough with this material so that you can keep the dialogue moving, make smooth transitions to new topics, and listen to participant responses without being preoccupied with what should happen next.

# **Keep the Focus Local**

High school dropout rates are a nationwide crisis, but the best place for people to make a difference is in their own community. Gather local data on the problem and share it during your event to provide context and areas of focus for the discussion. You can obtain local and state graduation data by contacting the related education agency, by using *Education Week's* "Graduation Rates Map" (<a href="http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/">http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/</a>), or by referencing the materials provided by the American Graduate Research Center (<a href="http://www.americangraduate.org/about/research-center.html">http://www.americangraduate.org/about/research-center.html</a>). Familiarize yourself also with local school district documents that outline the code of conduct for students and school discipline strategies. During the discussion, invite participants to share local stories and brainstorm local solutions. Provide information about local volunteer opportunities so attendees have concrete ways to get involved right away.

#### **Establish Ground Rules**

Make it clear how people should indicate when they want to speak. Encourage people to listen carefully as well as share their points of view. Don't interrupt others. Try to understand one another. Show respect to everyone in attendance.

# **Know Your Audience**

Are those at the screening already familiar with the dropout crisis in your community? Do they have related experiences they can share? How well do audience members know each other? We recommend devoting some time to introductions at the beginning of the screening. For example, ask people to state their name and explain what they hope to get out of the event. For large screenings, participants could introduce themselves before contributing to the discussion.





# **Involve Everyone**

Allow as many opportunities for participation in the discussion as you can. Ask how people feel about what they saw in the film or about what someone has said. See if an attendee can provide an example to support another's point. Move away from a person who makes a comment so he or she will speak up and outward, drawing everyone into the conversation. Don't let one person dominate the discussion.

## **Capture Important Ideas**

Reinforce good points by paraphrasing or summarizing them. Assign someone to be in charge of writing key ideas on a chalkboard or flip chart so you can focus on what people are saying. Review or refer back to these ideas at appropriate points in the discussion.

# **Determine Next Steps**

Summarize ideas shared in the discussion about how the community can help students stay in school. Are there groups present that have common ground for taking action? What will participants do with the knowledge they gained during the screening and discussion?

# **Evaluate the Experience**

Provide an opportunity for attendees to give feedback on what happened at the screening. This can be done orally or anonymously in writing. You might ask questions like:

- O What did you learn from participating in this screening?
- O What will you do with what you've learned?
- Who did you meet at this screening that can help you accomplish your goals related to the dropout crisis?
- o Who else do you know who would be interested in helping with this issue?
- o If you could have changed one thing about this screening, what would it be?

#### Where to Get the Video

To watch the entire SK2C series, visit <a href="http://www.pbs.org/streetknowledge">http://www.pbs.org/streetknowledge</a>.

# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

# The "School-to-Jail Track"

"Zero tolerance" and similar policies governing school disciplinary actions call for automatic punishments for certain student behaviors, rather than having school administrators apply their judgment to individual situations and scale punishments based on the severity of the issue. As a result, offenses that in the past might have been handled with a call home or a trip to a school counselor (e.g., dress code violations, being late for school, a tussle in the hallway) instead are handled as criminal behavior by police and result in students being ticketed, sent to court, incarcerated and otherwise interacting with the juvenile justice system. Criminalizing these types of misconduct in schools has created a so-called "school-to-jail track" or "school-





to-prison pipeline."

Data on school suspensions from more than 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools show that administrators suspended one in nine students in the 2009-2010 school year, and usually for minor offenses. Students from minority and high poverty backgrounds are more likely to be suspended, at a higher frequency, for a longer duration, and for more minor offenses. Excluding students from school for disciplinary reasons is directly related to lower attendance rates, failing grades, repeat offenses, and can set students on a path of disengagement from school that keeps them from receiving a high school diploma. On the street without a degree, youth find few options and frequently get involved in criminal behavior, which puts them at risk of injury, death, going to prison, or for some, getting deported. Many dropouts who were introduced to the juvenile justice system by their school over minor offenses feel they were "pushed out" of school, rather than it being their choice to "drop out."

A number of efforts around the U.S. are seeking to prevent and address issues caused by the school-to-jail track. In Colorado, a law was passed to stop unnecessary referrals to law enforcement and to reduce racial disparities in school disciplinary decisions. States such as Illinois and Wisconsin provide professional development and other training as part of their Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) networks. Cities such as Chicago and Oakland use "restorative justice" discussion techniques to peacefully resolve conflicts and teach students non-violent strategies for handling problems. In 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District put in place a School Climate Bill of Rights that limits law enforcement involvement in school discipline, and bans suspensions for "willful defiance," an offense that included many minor infractions and accounted for nearly half of California suspensions in the 2011-2012 school year. For additional information on school-to-jail interventions, please see the Related Resources section of this guide.

#### Sources:

America's Promise Alliance. "Building a Grad Nation." http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx

UCLA Civil Rights Project. "Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools." <a href="http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools">http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools</a>

UCLA Civil Rights Project. "Summary of New Research Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research to Policy." <a href="http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/summary-of-new-research-closing-the-school-discipline-gap-research-to-policy">http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/summary-of-new-research-closing-the-school-discipline-gap-research-to-policy</a>

# South Central Los Angeles

SK2C focuses on schools, teachers, leaders, students, and families in the South Los Angeles community. Approximately 750,000 people live in the 28 neighborhoods that make up this section of Los Angeles. Based on the 2000 U.S. Census, about 55% are Latino, 38% are African American, and there are small percentages of people who identify as "White," "Asian," or "Other." Only 8.2% of residents age 25 and older have a four-year college degree. About 50% of those 25 and older do not have a high school diploma. The neighborhoods in South Los Angeles also struggle with the highest rates of violent crimes per capita in Los Angeles. For the most up-to-date crime statistics on this area, please see the maps and reports at Crime L.A. (http://maps.latimes.com/crime/).





Source:

Los Angeles Times. "South L.A." http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/region/south-la/

# FREE L.A. High School

Founded in 2007, FREE L.A. High School serves as an alternative school for youth ages 16 to 24 who have been suspended or expelled from other educational settings, for youth returning home from incarceration, or for those who were discouraged in traditional schools and left. As part of the school curriculum, youth are trained and gain experience as community leaders who can organize social justice campaigns, influence public policy development, assist with transformative justice programs (to heal from violence and to prevent future violence), and mobilize peers and families to bring about positive changes in their communities. The school was founded by the Youth Justice Coalition, a group that organizes youth, families, and allies to reform policies and institutions that contribute to the "school-to-jail track," as well as to widespread violence and corruption in the community. FREE L.A. High School meets all California State Requirements for Graduation.

#### Sources:

The Youth Justice Coalition. "FREE L.A. High School." http://www.youth4justice.org/yjc-high-schools/free-l-a-high-school

The Youth Justice Coalition. "Mission and History." http://www.youth4justice.org/about-the-yjc/history

#### WATCH AND DISCUSS

SK2C provides a series of 15 mini-documentaries that explore the lives of students and others at FREE L.A. High School, a unique, community-organized alternative high school in South Los Angeles. FREE L.A. High School works to get youth off the "school-to-jail track" and engage them in community leadership.

Filmed between January and June 2012, the *SK2C* mini-docs can be used to spark discussion on a variety of topics, including the "school-to-jail track," coping with trauma, community organizing, and more.

In this guide, discussion questions are grouped both by video clip and by theme. It is recommended that you begin with the Before You Watch activity to focus the group on challenges in your local community. Then, watch and discuss the video clips that are most relevant to your situation.

## **Before You Watch**

To prepare your audience for watching and discussing the video clips, first provide context on the dropout crisis in the United States using information from the Overview of the Dropout Crisis section of this guide. Be sure to also localize the problem with district and state graduation data, which can be obtained from the related education agency or by using





Education Week's "Graduation Rates Map" (<a href="http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/">http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/</a>).

Ask participants to explain why your area has the dropout rate that it does. What are the stories of the people behind the issue? What factors lead young people to stop going to school?

# **Discussion Questions by Video Clip**

The following mini-docs (filmed in 2012) feature students and others associated with FREE L.A. High School, an alternative program in Los Angeles for students 16 to 24 who have been suspended or expelled from other educational settings, for youth returning home from incarceration, or for those who were discouraged in traditional schools and left.

It is not necessary to watch all of the video clips or to ask every question during your screening. Rather, choose the ones that best support your goals.

# Educate To Liberate (length: 4:35)

Tanisha Denard was jailed on truancy charges and pushed out of her public high school. She worked to finish her diploma at FREE L.A. and now she is a school leader and mentor. Discuss:

- What obstacles do the students in the video face in their community? How do those compare with the challenges of students in your area?
- What is the "school-to-jail track?" (See the Background and Related Resources sections of this guide for more information.) Do you know anyone who has interacted with the juvenile justice system as part of a school disciplinary issue?
- What community needs have been met by the establishment of FREE L.A. high school? Does your community have similar needs? If so, how should those be addressed?
- What impact did FREE L.A. have on Tanisha Denard, shown in the clip? What difference can a school like FREE L.A. have on the community? Would such a school make sense in your area? Why or why not?
- In the video, Kim McGill describes public education as a way "to liberate yourself and others." What does she mean by that? How would you describe the purpose of public education?

# The Evolution of Brandy Brown (length: 5:21)

Brandy Brown's life changed when she returned to high school at FREE L.A. after dropping out. Now she's jumping into civic life and community organizing, with her first-ever trip to the California State Assembly. (Note: Brandy is the daughter of Ms. Brown in the *SK2C* clip, *Come Talk to Ms. Brown*.)

#### Discuss:

- Identify the key events in Brandy's story, including why she dropped out of school in the ninth grade (father was sick), why she went to juvenile hall at age 16 (for vandalism and assault with a deadly weapon), how she dropped out of school again when she was 17 after her brother was killed, and how she ended up enrolled at FREE L.A. High School. In what ways did her community support her progress both in school and as a person? How did it hold her back?
- How would your school have handled a troubled student like Brandy?





- How does your school and community help those who have experienced trauma?Do
  you know anyone with a story of struggle that is similar to Brandy's? If so, what type of
  support did that person receive, if any? What was the outcome?
- Brandy says that she didn't used to care about other people's feelings, but now she does. Why do you think she changed? What difference has it made?

# Each One, Teach One (length: 4:23)

Chrystal Dixon, a former high school drop-out and single mom, introduces potential new students to FREE L.A. High School's unique programs.

#### Discuss:

- What goal did Chrystal have from the time she was young? How has that goal evolved?
- What type of approach does Chrystal believe is necessary when working with students at FREE L.A? Do you agree or disagree with her point of view? Explain.

## South Of The Ten (length: 3:37)

SK2C co-producer and co-director Claudia Gómez shares what South Los Angeles life is like through her own eyes.

#### Discuss:

- The video says that Claudia had problems in school and was "pushed out." What does that mean? How is that different from "dropping out." Do you know anyone who feels "pushed out" of school? If so, what can be done to help that person?
- What are Claudia's hopes and fears for both her young daughter and herself? How do
  you think her community has shaped those feelings? What are your hopes and dreams?
  How have your experiences and your community influenced those ideas?

#### With Her Own Eyes (length: 3:45)

Leslie, a former high school drop-out, explores her world through art, photography, and activism.

#### Discuss:

- Why did Leslie drop out of high school? How did she end up at FREE L.A? How is her story different from some of the other students featured in SK2C?
- In the video, Leslie explains that she uses her camera to document the people around her, the things she likes, and the adventures she goes on in L.A. Describe or draw what you imagine her pictures would show if she documented her journey from dropout to graduation. How might a dropout in your community document that process?

# A Conversation With Cris Carter (length: 4:45)

FREE L.A. High School student Cris Carter had been cycling in and out of school and correctional facilities for a couple of years before enrolling in FREE L.A. High School. He was shot and killed about a month after talking to *SK2C* co-producer Claudia Gómez in this interview.

#### Discuss:

- How did Cris get involved with a gang? What would you have done in his situation? Are young people at risk of joining gangs in your community? Why or why not?
- Why is FREE L.A. High School an important educational option for someone like Cris?
   What would young men like him do if an alternative school like that was not available?





- What options does your community provide for someone like Cris?
- What was your reaction to the news of Cris's death? How did watching his interview influence how you felt about Cris?

# The Peace Builder (length: 4:33)

In a neighborhood where violence is a sad fact of everyday life, Jose Solis, a former high school drop-out, helps keep the peace.

#### Discuss:

- What was your reaction to the altar in FREE L.A. High School? Why do you think you had that response?
- What is the difference between a security person and a peace builder? What would the job description for each say?
- What is restorative justice? (See the Background and Related Resources sections of this guide for more information.) How does it compare to other disciplinary strategies?
- How did Jose get students to cooperate with him? Describe his approach. Why did it work? Would his methods be successful in your area? Why or why not?
- What does your school or community do to "keep the peace?" What can be improved?
   How?

# Henry's Suit (length: 5:25)

Henry is a former high school drop-out who got his diploma and started working as a community organizer and peace-keeper. Claudia Gómez takes her video camera to follow Henry from South Los Angeles to downtown for his last day of work as an intern in City Hall. Discuss:

- How did Henry's environment encourage him to think more about what was happening outside of school than about his studies?
- What barriers do students in your community face in their efforts to build a successful future?
- How did Henry's outlook evolve? What brought about this change?
- What difference did the suit make for Henry? How are students in your area encouraged to achieve their goals?
- What reaction did you have when you learned that Henry had been shot? Why do you think you reacted that way? How does your response compare to other shootings that you have heard about?

# Come Talk to Ms. Brown (length: 6:25)

Elaine Brown is a parent who knows what is like to lose a child. When a FREE L.A. High student is shot and killed, Ms. Brown steps in to help. (Note: Ms. Brown is the mother of Brandy in the *SK2C* clip, *The Evolution of Brandy Brown*.)

Discuss:

- How did Ms. Brown turn her grief from the death of her son into something positive?
- Ms. Brown asked the school to let her daughter Brandy work at her own pace, and Brandy eventually graduated. How did that accommodation help Brandy to succeed? How do these types of accommodations help struggling students in your community?
- Ms. Brown says that when she sees a student getting out of hand, she invites them to "come talk to Ms. Brown." How might this approach lead to better behavior by that





- student in the future? Compare and contrast this method with school disciplinary measures in your area.
- Ms. Brown volunteers weekly at FREE L.A. High School. How do parent volunteers make a difference in your school? How can strong home-school connections prevent students from dropping out?

Two Extra Seconds (length: 4:19)

Jennifer Rivera has been a dropout and has endured being homeless. Now she's worked her way through Free L.A. High School to get her diploma. She's reaching for a better life — by busting just a little extra effort.

#### Discuss:

- Why did Jennifer drop out of high school? What supports in her community helped her to get back on track? How does your community encourage high school dropouts to begin working on their education again?
- One of Jennifer's teachers encouraged her to "fill those two extra seconds" and give just a little bit more effort. How has Jennifer put this advice to work in her life? In what ways is her hard work paying off? How can you "bust out just a little more effort?"

The Teacher (length: 4:12)

Mr. Martin is a math teacher with high standards. He shares why he loves teaching, and what he has learned by working with the students at FREE L.A. High School. Discuss:

- What are the challenges and opportunities with having students at different academic levels in the same classroom? How do teachers at your school manage the needs of students with varying abilities? In what ways can this process be improved?
- What does Mr. Martin enjoy the most about his job? Why? How does this compare with the teachers you know?
- What is the connection between setting expectations for students and their performance? How do expectations and achievement play out in your community?
- Besides teaching math, how does Mr. Martin contribute to the FREE L.A. community?

Fears and Hopes (length: 4:45)

FREE L.A. High School students share what scares them most, and what gives them the most hope.

#### Discuss:

- Before watching this clip, predict what the fears and hopes would be for students at FREE L.A. High School. Then afterwards, compare people's predictions with reality. How do they compare? How would you account for any differences?
- What fears and hopes do the youth in your community have? How do you know? How can public safety and education address their needs?

Trauma (length: 4:07)

The FREE L.A. High School community copes with the violent death of a student, an all-too-frequent occurrence.

#### Discuss:

- How can traumatic experiences impact a young person's education?
- What types of trauma do youth in your community experience? How does your





community support youth and families who have experienced trauma? What more should be done?

Chrystal's Voice (length: 4:08)

Chrystal, a former high school drop-out, discovers the power of her community and her own voice.

#### Discuss:

- What motivated Chrystal to go back to school after she had her baby?
- How does your community reach out to support teen mothers? What educational programs are available to them? What improvements can be made?
- What about the FREE L.A. High School program helped Chrystal to "find her voice?"
- What type of future do you envision for Chrystal? What informs your prediction?

Making Films In Your Own Community (length: 2:58)

SK2C co-producer and co-director Claudia Gomez shares what she has learned about her community and herself through documentary filmmaking. Discuss:

- How might creating videos about your community help others?
- What types of videos about your community already exist? What messages do they send? Whose perspectives are represented? Whose are missing?
- If you were going to produce a video about your school or community, what would it show and tell?

# **Discussion Questions by Theme**

The following questions are provided as potential prompts to help facilitators guide a themebased discussion about the stories and issues presented in the mini-docs. It is not necessary to discuss every theme or watch all of the video clips. Feel free to choose those that will best meet your goals.

# **Community Organizing**

- As part of the curriculum at FREE L.A. High School, students participate in community organizing activities to change conditions in their area. Kim McGill of FREE L.A. said, "Everyone's a leader, and if people have the opportunity to lead, then they have to find their voice in that leadership." How might this curriculum approach be especially meaningful to the student population at FREE L.A? How can developing leadership skills in students help them to achieve their goals? How are student leaders cultivated in your area?
- What skills and knowledge are the students developing as they participate in community organizing activities? How will those benefits help youth after they graduate?
- In what ways are the community organizing activities done at FREE L.A. similar to and different from service learning or other programs available at traditional schools? How





do they compare to school curricula in your area?

 How do the advocacy activities at FREE L.A. make the school more relevant to the community? How can strengthening this school-community connection improve the graduation rate in your area?

# Related video clips:

- Educate to Liberate
- The Evolution of Brandy Brown
- With Her Own Eyes
- Chrystal's Voice

# **Alternative Education Programs**

- As you watch the video clips, what observations do you make about FREE L.A. High School? What makes it unique? What is positive? What can be improved?
- What are the alternative educational programs like in your community? How could the community better support these programs? If no such programs exist, how could some get started?
- Do you consider the students in the video clips successful? Why or why not?
- What strategies at FREE L.A. keep students engaged in school? What lessons from their stories can be applied in your community?

#### Related video clips:

- Educate to Liberate
- The Evolution of Brandy Brown
- Each One, Teach One
- With Her Own Eyes
- Henry's Suit
- Two Extra Seconds
- The Teacher
- Chrystal's Voice

# **Coping with Trauma**

- How can traumatic experiences influence a student's ability to stay in school? How were
  the students in the video clips able to move forward? What strategies do students in
  your area use to cope with trauma?
- Some FREE L.A. students had previously dropped out of traditional schools after experiencing traumatic events, but then stayed in school at FREE L.A. after the trauma of fellow students getting killed. What about the FREE L.A. atmosphere kept them on a





path to graduation despite these challenges? What lessons can be learned from their experiences and applied to your community?

- How do adults in your community offer support to youth who have experienced trauma?
   What types of training might improve these efforts?
- Is violence a mental health or a criminal justice issue? Explain your response.
- What is restorative justice? (See the Related Resources section of this guide for more information.) How can this approach to peace building also help people heal from the harm caused by a traumatic experience? Is restorative justice something that would work at the schools in your community? Why or why not?
- Some experts believe that the young people in some urban neighborhoods are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on the level of people returning from war. How might these circumstances impact a school's approach to discipline when students misbehave?

# Related video clips:

- The Evolution of Brandy Brown
- South of the 10
- Come Talk to Ms. Brown
- Two Extra Seconds
- Fears and Hopes
- Trauma

#### The "School-to-Jail Track"

- What is the "school-to-jail track?" (See the Background and Related Resources sections
  of this guide for more information.) What types of policies are behind the "school-to-jail
  track?" (e.g., zero tolerance, truancy laws, etc.) What impact has the "school-to-jail
  track" had on the students at FREE L.A. High School? Is the "school-to-jail track" an
  issue in your community? Why or why not?
- Youth affected by the "school-to-jail track" often feel that they were "pushed out of school," not that they "dropped out." Do you agree with how they describe their situation? Why or why not?
- A 2013 report describes how researchers examined data from more than 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools and learned that one in nine students was suspended in the 2009-2010 school year, and usually for minor infractions of school rules. How do schools in your area deal with disciplinary issues like dress code violations, not turning off a cell phone when asked, or fist fights? At what point in the discipline process are students brought in contact with police and the juvenile justice system? Is the current approach to discipline appropriate? Explain.





 What interventions can be used to end the "school-to-jail track?" (See the Related Resources section for examples and case studies of strategies used in Los Angeles and other communities.) Should any of these steps be taken in your area? Why or why not?

# Related video clips:

- Educate to Liberate
- The Evolution of Brandy Brown
- South of the 10
- A Conversation with Cris Carter
- The Peace Builder

#### TAKE ACTION

After discussing the stories and issues featured in the SK2C videos, consider the following activities:

- Summarize ideas shared in the discussion about how the community can better help students stay in school. Develop an action plan for making at least one improvement and implement it.
- Mobilize students to identify issues and organize social justice campaigns, influence
  public policy development, or otherwise bring about positive changes in the community.
- Put together a training seminar for educators in your school district that teaches how to better support students who have experienced trauma.
- Create your own SK2C-style videos that tell the stories of students in an alternative school in your area. Hold a community screening and talk about what more can be done to keep students on a path towards graduation.
- Research and analyze statistics related to school disciplinary practices in your district.
   What patterns do you see? Which disciplinary practices seem to support student success? Which ones don't? Discuss your findings with school administrators and make data-driven recommendations for improvements.



#### **RESOURCES**

# **Coping with Trauma**

# Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15377903.2012.695766#.UjxUC8asim4
This article gives details of this intervention for students who have experienced a traumatic or violent event and have symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

# Responding to Students with PTSD in Schools

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3287974/

This article outlines strategies for supporting students who have gone through a traumatic experience.

#### Trauma and Grief Resources

http://healthinschools.org/en/School-Based-Mental-Health/Trauma-and-Grief-Resources.aspx

The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools provides a series of articles, tip sheets, and links to help students heal from traumatic events.

#### The "School-to-Jail Track"

# Dignity in Schools Campaign

http://www.dignityinschools.org/

The DSC unites parents, youth, educators and advocates in a campaign to promote local and national alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment and removal.

# Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools

http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools

This 2013 report breaks down data from more than 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools to show that one in nine students was suspended in the 2009-2010 school year, and usually for minor infractions of school rules. Data is also disaggregated by race, gender, English learner, and disability status.

# PBS Newshour: Juvenile Education: Inside a Confined World

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/american-graduate/jan-june12/richardross\_02-02.html

Take a look at images inside juvenile detention centers. Photographer and researcher Richard Ross documented more than 300 such facilities. He shares his images and perspective in this video report.

# Summary of New Research Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research to Policy

http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/events/2013/summary-of-new-research-closing-the-





#### school-discipline-gap-research-to-policy

This 2013 summary of 16 new research studies describes how school suspensions are typically administered, the related disparities, alternative interventions, and policy recommendations to improve disciplinary outcomes.

## **Tavis Smiley: Education Under Arrest**

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/tsr/education-under-arrest/

This special investigation by Tavis Smiley focuses on the impact that "zero tolerance" policies have had on students who have been sent from school to the juvenile justice system for minor offenses.

#### School-to-Jail Interventions

# **Echo Parenting and Education**

http://www.echoparenting.org/

This organization in Los Angeles is an example of a community group that seeks to strengthen families and communities by providing training for parents in classes, discussion groups, and more. The focus is on nonviolence and engaging with children through empathy and connection.

# **Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track**

http://safequalityschools.org

This site provides resources to help students, parents, educators, law enforcement, and activists come together to bring about school disciplinary reform.

#### Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

http://www.pbis.org/

This site provides resources to support schools in their efforts to implement campusbased disciplinary practices with demonstrated success in improving both student social behavior and academic performance.

#### Restorative Justice: A Working Guide for Our Schools

http://healthyschoolsandcommunities.org/Docs/Restorative-Justice-Paper.pdf

This guide explains the approach of restorative justice in schools and discusses how it can improve relationships, personal responsibility, problem-solving, and the school community.

# **School Climate Bill of Rights**

http://safequalityschools.org/pages/success-stories

In 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District passed a youth-driven, new discipline policy that pushes back its "zero tolerance" practices by banning suspensions for "willful defiance," an offense that accounted for nearly half of California suspensions in the 2011-2012 school year and often included punishment for minor offenses. The Bill of Rights also minimizes law enforcement involvement in school discipline.





# The Smart School Discipline Law

http://www.padresunidos.org/smart-school-discipline-law

This page describes and links to a 2012 law that passed in the Colorado State Assembly to stop unnecessary referrals to law enforcement and to reduce racial disparities in school disciplinary decisions. It is an example of how legislation might be used to address the "school-to-jail" track.

# **Dropout Data**

#### American Graduate Research Center

http://www.americangraduate.org/learn/research-center.html

This data hub provides the latest statistics and research on the high school dropout crisis.

# **Building a Grad Nation**

http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx
This 2013 update of "Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic" presents a comprehensive graduation research report, case studies, and more.

# **Education Week's Graduation Rates Map**

http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/

This map tool provides local and state graduation data.

# **Everyone Graduates Center**

http://www.every1graduates.org/

This organization seeks to analyze the data that gets at the roots of the dropout crisis, provide tools and models that communities can use to address the issue, and builds local capacity to implement solutions.

# **Related History**

# **Los Angeles Walk Out**

http://video.pbs.org/video/2365053309/

This 11-minute video clip tells the story of Mexican-Americans living in Los Angeles in 1968 who walked out of their schools to protest discriminatory educational practices. It could provide an interesting historical comparison between this walk out and the community organizing activities done by students at FREE L.A. High School today.





#### **CREDITS**

Street Knowledge 2 College is directed and produced by Jennifer Maytorena Taylor of Specific Pictures in collaboration with members of the Youth Justice Coalition and students and organizers at FREE L.A. High School, who have worked as crew members, artists, and creative partners in telling their own stories.

Claudia Gomez, who works as an organizer and mentor with the Youth Justice Coalition and FREE L.A. High, is the lead community co-producer. Cinematographer Sandra Valdes shot the main interviews, and Amatus composed the theme music.

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