NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

Youth Engagement Now: Fresh Tools & Strategies to Power Meaningful Connections

May 6, 2025

NTACT:C – CBI – Content Session

Today's Session Will…

- **Explore ways to engage young adults with disabilities**
  - As a self-advocate to help inform work at a systems level
- **Showcase practical takeaways that you will be able to use in work with students starting tomorrow**
  - Ways to help young adults create their vision for the future
  - The Youth Engagement Now (YEN) Project

What comes to mind when you think of the concept of youth engagement?

How Involving Youth Impacts Them

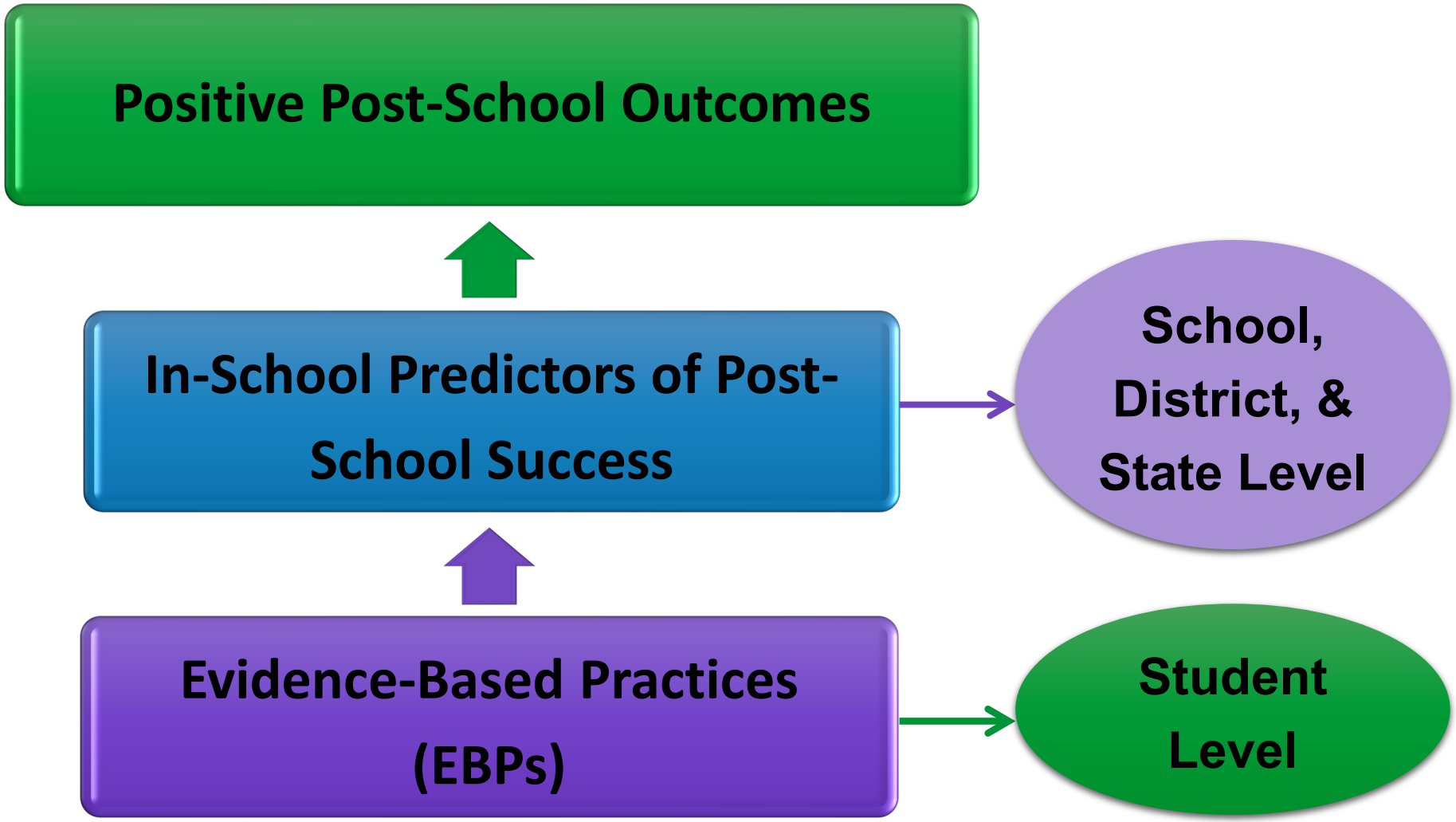
- **Preparation**. Young people need to be effectively prepared and empowered to make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives.
- **Support**. Young people should have customized services and a network of supportive relationships that meet their needs and promote a healthy transition to adulthood.
- **Opportunity**. Young people should be provided with an array of life opportunities that promote optimal growth and development. These include experiential learning; healthy risk-taking; and participation in normal everyday activities that contribute to social confidence and positive identity formation.

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative: Youth.gov

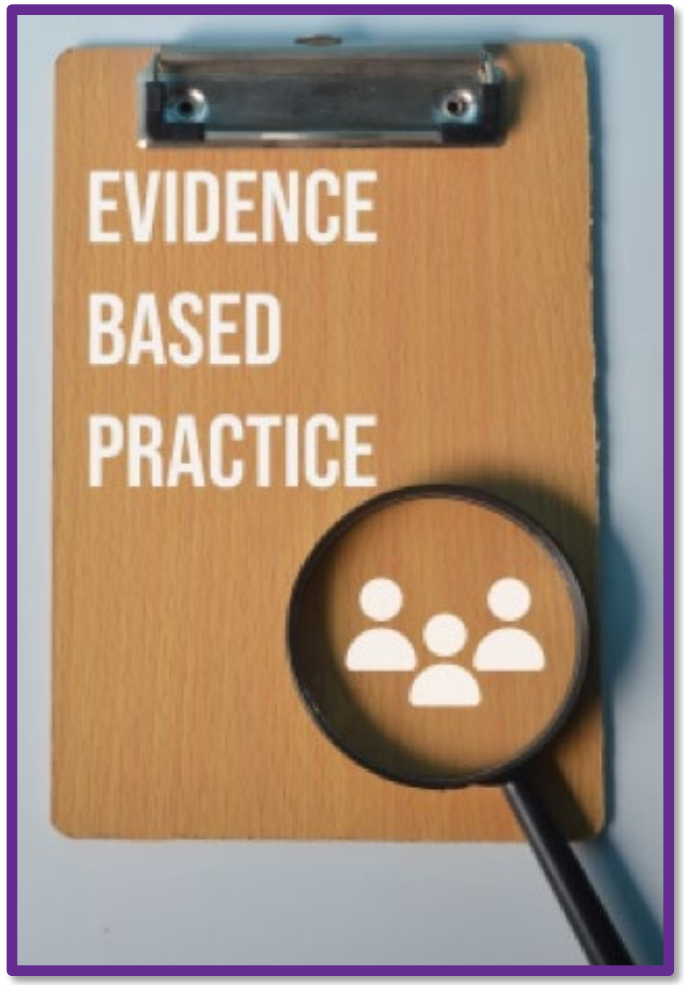
How Youth Involvement Could Enhance Your Organization

Video: The Importance of Youth Engagement (YouTube)

EBPs & Predictors to Support Post-School Success



Why Do YOU Care About Evidence Based Practices and Predictors?



- ESSA (2015), WIOA (2014), and IDEA (2004) each note the expectation of the use of scientific and/or research-based, and/or evidence-based and promising practices
- When school personnel use **practices that research has shown to be effective**, students perform better (Cook et al., 2008)
- School personnel need trustworthy resources that tell them what (transition) practices have the “best available evidence” or “best **level** of evidence”

Youth Engagement Predictors by Outcome Area

Predictors/Outcomes	Education	Employment	Independent Living
• Program of Study		X	
• Self-Advocacy/Self-Determination	X	X	
• Self-Care/Independent Living	X	X	X
• Social Skills	X	X	
• Student Support	X	X	X
• Transition Program	X	X	
• Travel Skills		X	
• Career Technical Education	X	X	
• Work Study		X	
• Youth Autonomy/Decision-Making	X	X	

Building Understanding

Youth Need to Understand

- What the plan is for their future
- Their disability, how it impacts them, and ways to explain it to people
- What supports they need in a given environment
- The importance of self-advocacy.
- How they choose to provide input and feedback is up to them.

Parents Need to Understand

- Entitlement vs. Eligibility
- Anyone can be a part of the IEP Team
- Life continues past graduation
- Eventually they will not be here anymore to support their child
- Any step forward is progress
- Plans change constantly

An Adult Ally …

IS:

- Someone who *chooses* to support the goals *of the youth*
- Coming from a place of trust
- Someone who believes in the youth
- Someone who knows the youth
- Someone who uses their unique knowledge set to guide the youth

IS NOT:

- In "charge" of the youth's goals
- Someone who gives orders
- Someone who coddles the youth
- Overly involved **or** uninvolved
- Someone who belittles the youth perspective

Tips for Creating a Youth Engagement Initiative

Establish a Solid Foundation

- Before engaging youth, ensure the initiative has a clear structure.
- Identify who will mentor the youth, define their roles, and set specific goals for what the organization hopes to achieve.
- Determine where youth leadership can be integrated within existing systems and identify opportunities for growth.
- Establish a timeline for implementation and assess organizational readiness.
- Clarify the purpose of youth engagement, its alignment with broader goals, and prioritize regions or areas to focus on.

How to structure youth engagement

- Provide everyone with a goal.
- Set boundaries, based on available resources
- Require inclusion of everyone
- Allow for choice and flexibility
- Be open minded
- Don’t throw away discussions you have with youth.

Nothing about us without us

- **Include Youth Voice Early and Often**: Actively invite youth with disabilities to share their experiences, needs, and goals during planning, program development, and decision-making processes—not just during implementation.
- **Prioritize Youth-Led Solutions**: Empower youth with disabilities to lead projects, trainings, and peer groups, reinforcing their expertise and recognizing them as co-creators, not just participants.
- **Shift from Advocacy *For* to Advocacy *With***: Parent Centers and educators should partner with youth, ensuring their perspectives guide advocacy efforts, rather than speaking on their behalf.
- **Ensure Accessible and Equitable Participation**: Create inclusive spaces that accommodate a variety of communication styles, access needs, and cultural backgrounds so all youth can engage meaningfully.
- **Build Leadership Pathways**: Support skill-building opportunities and mentorship that prepare youth with disabilities to take on leadership roles within Parent Centers, advisory councils, and educational systems.

Resource Allocation and Logistics

- Determine how youth will be compensated for their time and contributions.
- Plan how the organization will fund the youth engagement initiative.
- Assign specific roles to people within the organization to ensure clear accountability.
- Establishing a Supportive Team

Youth as Leaders, Contributors, and Team Members

- At the core, having youth in leadership and team roles within the organization requires the organization to value that in everything, everyone has something to teach, to learn, and to contribute.
- If you are implementing a youth leadership and engagement opportunity to check a box it isn't going to be successful. You must want it, and need it, or it will not be effective, and youth must feel wanted and needed.
- Youth engagement needs to be seen as something that has the potential to enhance your team/organization.

Engagement From a Youth Perspective

Youth don’t want to be there just for the sake of being there, to fill a seat or spot, for which an entity has decided, they need a young person.

- Youth want to contribute.
- They want to be of service.
- They want to be valued and valuable.
- Nothing will make your youth engagement effort fail faster than not giving youth a real reason to commit, a chance to make a difference, an opportunity to thrive.
- Youth engagement strategies for youth/young adults.

Commitment and Purpose

- Begin by asking if your organization is fully committed to making youth leadership and engagement a meaningful and integrated part of its culture.
- This initiative must be seen as essential, not as a requirement to fulfill or a box to check.
- Youth engagement will only thrive if your organization is ready to invest in it as a core value, comparable to any other principle the organization holds dear.

Our Story: The Inspiration for YETI

Empowering the Next Generation

NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

What is YETI?

1. National advisory group of young adult leaders with disabilities.
2. Supported by NTACT:C & RAISE to shape self-advocacy and leadership.
3. Engages youth in training, technical assistance, and resource development.
4. Strengthens leadership skills and honors lived experiences.
5. Provides a model for effective youth engagement at state & local levels.

The Foundation of YEN Website

- Anchored in **Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation**
- Youth Led, youth driven initiative focused on creating:
  - Practical youth engagement tools and resources to support parent centers and transition focused state teams engage young adults in their work.
  - The goals is to help organizations go from, we want to do youth engagement, to we CAN do youth engagement

How to Navigate the YEN Site

Activity: Explore the Youth Engagement Tools (https://yen.transitionta.org/)

Use your own device to explore the YEN website

Review the following sections and pick one that stood out the most:

Foundations

Leadership

Collaboration

Then we will discuss

Questions

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