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The Unconvinced Generation

Despite dropout warnings, youth aren't listening

The Sept. 24 commentary by Ruben Navarrette, "Who pays attention to alarming drop out rates?" asks an obvious question. With the alarming rates of dropouts locally, few but The Star's editors keep the topic on the minds of the public.

Navarrette joins those who, over the last 60 years, have tried to reason, warn, plead, and even threaten youth to stay in school. Pointing out health, lifestyle, and employment factors, along with incarceration numbers, year after year, and messages on TV and radio, buses, billboards, as well as lectures, sermons, or crying parents, attempt to convince students to get their diploma.

This is not just an American problem. According to the International Journal on School Disaffection, this is a global phenomenon. Schools are simply not connecting with students. Japan's "school refusers" have quit public schools and formed their own. Aboriginals in Australia have a 25 percent graduation rate. The working class, minorities, or the disaffected in the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Colombia, Zambia, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, South Africa and most countries express their alienation from their public schools with their non-compliance or by dropping out.

My point is it's not that young people are not aware of the messages. Yet, the 2006 Schott Foundation's report of incredibly low state (Florida, 31 percent) and district (Indianapolis, 21 percent) graduation rates for black males imply these youth are not persuaded this is true. After decades of hearing this slogan, "You've got to have an education," evidently, they remain unconvinced.

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