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# COMMUNITY DIALOGUE GUIDE

# Background

One out of four adults in California is a high school dropout. Capital Public Radio's documentary production unit spent 5 months looking at the crisis through the lives of four young people from the Central Valley. The San Joaquin Valley has some of the highest dropout rates in California. Five years ago a national study reported that 3 of the 4 traditional high schools in Stockton were "dropout factories" where more than 50% of freshman did not complete their senior year. There's been improvement since then, but low-income, African-American, Native-American and Latino students still drop out at higher rates than their White and Asian school mates.

High school dropouts will have harder times getting jobs and earn much less than those who graduate and go on to higher education. Dropouts are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex, taking drugs, joining gangs and committing crimes than high school graduates. On average dropouts will be more likely to use public assistance and public health programs. Dropouts will be more likely to spend time in jail. The stories in **Class Dismissed** reveal what's at stake for their future and the future of all Californians.

Capital Public Radio produced **Class Dismissed** as part of the multimedia documentary series **The View From Here**. CapRadio is committed to raising the voices of everyday people responding to change in their lives and the challenges of our times through excellent public media and community engagement.



A diverse group of San Joaquin County schools, community organizations, and government agencies collaborated with Capital Public Radio on **Class Dismissed**. These community partners worked with journalists to inform radio broadcasts, bring youth together to create and share their own stories on the issue via the **RView209 blog** ([rview209.tumblr.com](http://rview209.tumblr.com)), and participate in a live **Insight** talk show on the topic. Now the partnership is facilitating a series of community dialogues to listen and learn from one another's experiences, strengthen community ties, and engage in local problem-solving. Community partners include Asian Pacific Self Development and Residential Association, San Joaquin Building Futures Academy, Community Partnership for Families of San Joaquin, Fathers & Families of San Joaquin, Family Resource and Referral Center, Lao

Family Community Empowerment, People and Congregations Together, The One Program, San Joaquin County Probation, and the Teen Impact Center.

All stories and materials created through the project are available on the **Class Dismissed website** ([capradio.org/classdismissed](http://capradio.org/classdismissed)).

# Getting Started

## ABOUT

This guide will help you facilitate a dialogue session on the connection between high school dropout and community well-being. It was co-created by Capital Public Radio and community partners and is designed to help you to prepare and lead an engaging session that benefits your organization and community. We recommend that you follow the suggested duration and format to make the dialogues consistent, meaningful, and effective across San Joaquin County.

## DURATION

90 minutes or 2 hours, pick one and design the ideal format.

The community dialogues are designed to be 90 minutes, though they can be longer or shorter. Ideally, they are co-facilitated by an adult-youth team.



## MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

You will need the following items for each 209Talks community dialogue:

- Snacks and drinks
- Name tags
- Sign in sheets, clipboard, and pen
- Easel, flipchart, markers, and tape
- Pens (enough for all participants; different ink colors would be ideal)
- Reflection/Action sheets (enough for all participants)
- Local Initiatives Resource Guide (approximately 15 copies)
- Discussion Guide (1 copy for each facilitator)
- Dialogue Tracking Form (1 per dialogue)
- Flyers promoting the next dialogue
- Class Dismissed postcards

# Getting Started

## BEFORE THE EVENT

Every dialogue is different. Facilitator(s) will want to consider:

- How can this dialogue support your organization's goals?
- Who is your audience and what is motivating them to attend this event?
- How much time do you have for the dialogue? (2 hours is ideal)
- How much time do you have for each of the activities? (it's good to plot it out)
- Look at the 209Talks webpage. What themes do you want to explore?
- Look at the 209Talks webpage. Which stories do you want to play?
- Will you need someone to translate the audio stories or group discussion?
- Who can bring a smartphone to help take photos at the end of the session?
- Who will be responsible for gathering "data" and reporting?

(see Next Steps below)



## TIPS

- Plan your dialogue as part of a meeting, get together, or activity that is already scheduled through your organization.
- Reach out to community members you'd like to engage more or get more involved in youth and community well-being.
- Identify someone to co-facilitate with you and work together in advance to review this guide, decide who will lead which activity, and how you can support one another during the session.
- After a community dialogue, participants tend to feel fired up. So it's good to have suggestions about next steps, either through your organization or other community initiatives (see downloadable Local Initiatives Resource handout).

# Facilitation

Playing and discussing stories about youth dropout may generate a wide range of opinions, beliefs, and experiences. As the facilitator, you'll want to create a space in which people feel comfortable sharing and listening to each other's stories, feedback, and ideas. Here are some tips:

## PREPARE YOURSELF

You don't need to be an expert on the content themes but it is useful to be able to state why you (or your organization) are doing the dialogue and point people to where they can get more information about the issues raised in the stories you play. Feel free to send them to the **Class Dismissed website** ([capradio.org/classdismissed](http://capradio.org/classdismissed)) for the full stories of the media pieces they heard, plus statistics and resources.

It's also a good idea to prepare in advance by listening to the stories you plan to share, process your own reactions, read through this guide and the discussion questions posted on the **209Talks webpage** ([capradio.org/209talks](http://capradio.org/209talks)), and gather basic information about the issues raised in media pieces you play. See the page

10 for a list of clips, times, and story descriptions.

## PREPARE THE GROUP

During group discussion, it's important that people feel safe to speak their minds. It can help to engage the group in laying down some ground rules for the session. Here are some examples, but feel free to work with the group to create your own:

- We'll show each other mutual respect and kindness. We recognize that everyone is exploring important but potentially challenging ideas.
- We'll avoid generalizations about groups of people: My experience is not everyone else's experience.
- We'll use "I" statements (I feel...I think...I believe...I hear...) as a way of avoiding saying something that will devalue someone else's perspective.
- If someone else's beliefs make us uncomfortable, we'll say so, but in a respectful and thoughtful way. We'll challenge the ideas and not the person.
- We'll show empathy toward one another—we are here to make our community a better and healthier place for everyone.
- We'll use "one mic" which means when one person is talking, give them your attention by not interrupting. Listen attentively.
- We'll keep what's said in the room confidential to encourage honest discussion.



# Facilitation

Remember to have fun and enjoy getting to know your neighbors. Sometimes people get wrapped up in emotion and the conversation can get heated, but that usually means someone cares deeply about the issue. Take a moment to acknowledge the experiences in the room that make this an important discussion for everyone and remind participants of the ground rules and goals (see below). Then, begin again.

## TIPS

- Encourage everyone to participate. Factors like age, ethnicity, income levels, language and familiarity with a topic can influence how comfortable people feel about sharing their reactions. Keep this in mind and actively engage everyone!



- Pay attention not only to what the speaker is saying but also to the emotions behind their words and to what may be most important for them.
- If a lot of people show up, you may want to break people into smaller groups to discuss the stories they've heard and what it means to them and report out their thoughts to the full group.
- Talk about the difference between "dialogue" and "debate." In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and actively listening to each other.
- Be prepared for audience members who might strongly disagree with each other. This can be a great opportunity for people to hear different viewpoints, but you should help

keep the conversation on track and make sure everyone stays positive and respectful. (You can remind folks of the ground rules and goals again).

- Stay neutral. Your job is to guide a group's dialogue without taking sides.
- If you are asked something that you can't answer about the Class Dismissed project, tell people that they can email questions to [209Talks@gmail.com](mailto:209Talks@gmail.com).

# Dialogue Session

Ok. Ready to go? Here is our suggested sequence of activities for conducting the dialogues. We've listed a suggested time for each activity so that the session is a total of 90-minutes (not counting set up and clean up). Feel free to adapt wording, exercises, or timing!

## SET UP

Arrive, set up chairs and tables, set out food and materials, test equipment, and do any other preparations for the dialogue—including doing a role play if you have time!



## WELCOME & ICE BREAKER – 10 MINUTES

Once people are seated and ready to start, welcome them to the 209Talks Community Dialogues. Introduce yourself, say something about the organization you are with, and what motivated you to organize this community dialogue on high school dropout. Then lead a brief icebreaker exercise so people can get a sense of who is in the room.

For example, have people go around the room and:

- Say their name and one word that describes young people in San Joaquin County.
- Say their name and why school dropout is an important issue to them.

## GOALS & AGREEMENTS – 10 MINUTES

Tell people about the Class Dismissed documentary project and why your group got involved in it to set the context (see beginning of this guide for ideas). Then share the goals for the dialogue. You may want to write them on a flipchart.

- To raise awareness about the causes and impacts of school dropout.
- To listen and learn from one another's experiences.
- To identify steps we can take to address the issue.

After that, give the group an overview of the activities you'll be doing in the session to achieve the goals. Then engage the group in laying down some agreements for the group conversation so that it remains comfortable and respectful (see Prepare the Group above for ideas!). Ask the group for 2 -3 of their ideas and write on a flipchart. Then add some of your own (or vice versa—share yours and ask for additions).

# Dialogue Session

## PLAY AUDIO CLIPS & DISCUSS – 40 - 45 MINUTES

(15 minutes for 3 themes or 20 min for 2)

Pass out the Reflection/Action sheets and pens. Explain that they can use the side that says “what do these stories get you thinking about” to jot down or draw ideas while they listen to the audio clips. Select the first theme you want to engage the group in discussing from the **209Talks webpage** ([capradio.org/209talks](http://capradio.org/209talks)) and introduce it. Play a few stories from that theme. Pick a few discussion questions from the 209Talks webpage that you think your group will find most interesting to get the conversation started. When appropriate, move on to the next theme you want to explore with the group—playing a few stories and engaging them in discussion using questions from the 209Talks webpage.



## REFLECTION & DEBRIEF – 10 MINUTES

Use the following questions to engage the group in thinking about what they heard and said during the dialogue. Write their ideas down on a flipchart, using their words. Let them know they can refer to the notes they jotted down on the Reflection/Action sheet.

- What are you taking away from the stories and conversations we've had?
- What can we do to help address the issues we've discussed?

## COMMITMENTS – 10 MINUTES

Ask the group to turn to the sheet you passed out to the side that says “Here is what I will do to support youth health and well-being in my community”. Invite them write down 1 – 2 things they will do to address the issues we've discussed. Encourage them to draw, use colors and be creative. Give examples to spark their thinking:

- I will be friendlier to youth on my street who I know are struggling.
- I will listen more to what young people are saying in school or at home.
- I will volunteer with a program that helps keep youth safe and more able to attend school.

# Dialogue Session

## NEXT STEPS & THANKS – 10 MINUTES

Ask if a few people would share 1 thing they plan to do to address this issue. Thank the group for their time and attention and share why you think this dialogue has made a difference. Point out the list of local initiatives we've created if they want to add their contact info to hear more about efforts to support youth and community well-being.



Invite them to post their Action sheets on the wall or, better yet, stay a few minutes to take photos of themselves with their sheet to contribute to the 209Talks photo gallery online. Let them know that the photos will help inspire others and document our work. Ask anyone with a smartphone to help take the photos. Ask people to send the largest file size they can. Help them take photos—both the reflection side and the action side—and email them to 209Talks@gmail.com. Remember that close up shots are best for a photo gallery.

## CLEAN UP & DOCUMENTATION

- Fill out the Dialogue Tracking Form (see 209Talks)
- Take photos of the flipchart notes.
- Take photos of the Reflection/ Action sheets
- Collect the following materials to provide to Jesikah Maria Ross by email, mail, or in person. Contact her to make arrangements: 209Talks@gmail.com.
  - Sign in sheet
  - Dialogue Tracking form
  - Flipchart notes from the Reflection & Debrief
  - Reflection/Action sheets
  - Photos taken at the event
- Consider what went well and what you'd change for the next dialogue.
- Rearrange chairs and tables as needed and clean the room.

# CELEBRATE!

# Themes & Stories

## **DROPPING OUT** *Different reasons why youth drop out*

Lack of Time	1:04	Dropped out to care for father; now back in school at YouthBuild.
In My Shoes	0:50	Dropped out to support brother by selling drugs; now in probation.
Austin's Story	1:57	Dropped out from lack of family support; "caught in the struggle".
Why Give Up	0:55	Different reasons youth dropout--from school struggles to home life.

## **LIFE LESSONS** *How people who dropped out made it back into school and why*

Life's Lessons	2:30	Being molested leads to drugs, gangs, dropout; education is important.
Jose's Experience & Advice	1:33	Dropped out to work in the fields; back to school and parents are proud.
Don't Settle	2:08	Witnessed murder and dropped out; now back to school and motivated.
So Many Doors	0:51	Former dropout and mother of 10 gets GED; education opens doors.
Education	1:02	School vs. work; decided between money now or better job in the future.

## **SCHOOL** *Different experiences with school*

Morgan's HS Experience	1:11	Mainstream school not for everyone; advice on finding the right school.
High School	0:35	In a big school it's hard to be noticed.
No Connection	0:18	Lack of connection with teachers is a problem.
Judgment	0:37	Different kinds of challenges students face in school.
Teen Pregnancy	0:16	A pregnant teen is bullied at school and wants to drop out.
Making Mistakes	2:21	Gang members want to go to school and get help, but it's not easy.
Graduation Day	1:31	A teacher's perspective on what schools do to help kids graduate.
Motivation	1:58	Different youth voices on what motivated them to stay in school.

## **FAMILY** *How family situations impact the likelihood of staying in school*

Austin's Story	1:57	Dropped out from lack of family support; "caught in the struggle".
Rview209	1:12	The impact of not have a father at home.
Nothing Down	0:36	How to stay strong when family members discourage you.
Encouraging	0:37	A brother's view on why his sibling should stay in school.
Family First	2:19	The Webb family talks about the importance of graduating.
Gotta Push Kids	0:29	A pastor's perspective on why to push kids to stay in school.

## **TEEN PREGNANCY & PARENTING** *Challenges teen parents face and advice from other young parents*

Teen Pregnancy	0:16	A pregnant teen is bullied at school and wants to drop out.
Motivation for Moms	2:22	Motivational messages for young moms to go to school.
Don't Settle	2:08	Trauma leads to dropout but a daughter motivates going back to school.
My Friend's Story	0:45	After having a child, young woman gets diploma and is now in college.
Tynisha's Dropout Experience	1:16	How boys are distraction and why it's helpful to listen to teachers.

## **GANGS, DRUGS, & CRIME** *How dropping out relates to crime and safety*

Preventing Crime	1:06	The importance of youth staying in school and off the streets.
Street is School	0:28	A young gangster feels he learned more skills on streets than in school.
Process	0:32	Overcoming life as a gangster doesn't happen overnight; it's a process.
Negative to Positive	0:27	When released from jail went back to school and graduated.
Life's Lessons	2:30	Being molested leads to drugs, gangs, dropout; education is important.

# Themes & Stories

## **ADVICE FROM YOUTH** *Words of encouragement and support from those who've been there*

The Voice in the Mirror	1:57	A message to young women about self-respect and education.
Motivation	1:16	What motivates youth to stay in school.
The Light	0:22	A message of hope for youth thinking of dropping out.
Promise It Will Be Worth It	0:53	Truancy and transferring schools create challenges that can be overcome.
Roots 101	0:37	Words from someone in and out of jail and school.
My Sister's Story	1:44	Advice from sister not to drop out like she did; pregnant; drugs
Aaron	4:15	Growing up poor was hard; advice to youth, parents in similar conditions.

## **SUCCESS STORIES** *Youth who've overcome obstacles to graduate*

Helping Hands	1:24	Almost dropped out; had to provide for siblings, now in college.
Negative to Positive	0:27	When released from jail went back to school and graduated.
My Friend's Story	0:45	Dropped out as a pregnant teen, returned to school, is now in college.
I Did It So Can You!	1:44	Trouble/drama at school but changed point of view and graduated.
Life Struggles	3:05	Dropout got into drugs, juvenile hall; now has a GED; moving forward.
Against the Odds	1:10	Told he'd be a statistic; about to get diploma from YouthBuild.

# CREDITS

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*We adapted some of the ideas we found in their wonderful discussion guides.*

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209TALKS COMMUNITY  
PARTNERS

