# The Overlooked Student Audit

Twelve honest questions to find the students your school is losing before they're gone. Ten minutes. One pen. No jargon.

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Research-led. Relationship-driven. Future-focused.

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

# Cracks are accidents. These were decisions.

I spent years working with young people inside South Carolina's juvenile justice system. I sat with them, their parents, their judges, and their teachers. Here's what I learned that changed how I look at every school I walk into now.

None of those students fell through the cracks. Cracks are accidents. What happened to them was a series of decisions. A suspension here. An unreturned phone call there. A schedule change nobody explained. A teacher who noticed something and figured someone else would handle it. By the time a student is gone, a dozen adults had a moment where they could have reached out. Most didn't know it was the moment. Almost none of them were bad at their jobs. They just weren't looking at the right things.



This audit is about finding those moments while they're still in front of you.

I built it from the questions I ask when a school brings me in. They're the same questions whether I'm sitting with a superintendent, a principal, or a teacher on their prep period. Some of them will feel almost too simple. Answer them anyway. They work because they're not about your mission statement or your strategic plan. They're about your building on a Tuesday.

Two promises before you start. First, nothing in here will ask you to buy anything, launch anything, or form a committee. Second, nobody sees your answers but you. This isn't an evaluation. It's a mirror. And a mirror only works if you actually look.



## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Read each question. Don't score yourself. There's no rubric here and no passing grade. Just circle the ones that sting a little. The sting is information. The ones you circle are where your work is. When you finish, page five will tell you what your circles mean and give you three moves you can make this week.

THE AUDIT

# Check what stings.

## WHAT STUDENTS WALK INTO

*CLIMATE & FIRST MOMENTS*

**01** Can every adult in your building name the students who eat lunch alone? STINGS

**02** When a student walks in late, is the first thing they hear a question or a consequence? STINGS

**03** Do your hallways and classrooms show evidence of who your students actually are, or who the school wishes they were? STINGS

**04** If a student had a terrible night at home, who in your building would know by second period? STINGS

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY STRUGGLE

*DISCIPLINE & SUPPORT*

**05** Pull your suspension list from last semester. How many names appear more than once? STINGS

**06** When a student fails a class, does anyone ask them what happened, or does the grade do all the talking? STINGS

**07** Does your discipline process end with the consequence, or does it end with a plan? STINGS

**08** When a student returns from a suspension, an absence, or a placement, is there a re-entry conversation, or do they just reappear in the seating chart? STINGS

# Check what stings.

## WHO'S WATCHING

*BELONGING & TRUSTED ADULTS*

**09** Name your five most disengaged students. Now name one adult in the building each of them trusts. Could you do it? *STINGS*

**10** Do students in your building get noticed for improving, or only for excelling? *STINGS*

**11** When was the last time a struggling student was asked what school could do differently, and someone wrote the answer down? *STINGS*

**12** If a student stopped showing up tomorrow, how many days would pass before someone called home who actually knows them? *STINGS*

NOTES

YOUR RESULTS

# What the checks are telling you.

If you checked three or more, you're not failing. You're normal. Every school I've ever worked with, including the ones I led, would circle at least three. The difference between schools that keep their students and schools that lose them isn't perfection. It's whether anyone is looking. You just looked. That already puts you ahead of most buildings in the country.

## WRITE IT DOWN

*THE THREE QUESTIONS THAT STUNG THE MOST, IN MY OWN WORDS*

**1**

**2**

**3**

## DO THIS MONDAY

### 1. Run the "one trusted adult" check.

Take question 09 to your next staff meeting. Put your most disengaged students' names on the board and ask staff to write their own name next to any student they have a real relationship with. The blank spaces are your map. Assign one adult to every blank space. That's the whole intervention.

### 2. Read your repeat suspension list out loud.

Question 05. Print it. Read the names in your leadership meeting. Those students aren't discipline problems. They're your school's most reliable data on what isn't working. Pick one name and ask a different question this time: what does this student need that we haven't tried?

### 3. Add ten minutes to every return.

Question 08. No student comes back from a suspension or a long absence without one adult sitting with them for ten minutes first. Not to lecture. To ask three things: What happened? What do you need? Who do you want in your corner? Write down the answers.

NOTES

ONE MORE THING

# If it stung, that's not a reason to feel bad. It's a reason to call.

I wrote a book about education inside South Carolina's juvenile justice system. It's built from interviews with the young people themselves, and with the parents, judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys around them.

**I made it free to read, because the students it's about were never going to buy it.**

FEATURED PUBLICATION | FREE TO READ

## Getting Out of South Carolina's Juvenile Justice System: Education for Young Incarcerated Offenders

Lived Places Publishing, 2024. A ground-level look at how education, community programs, and reentry preparation shape what comes next for justice-involved youth.

READ THE FULL BOOK FREE

And if this audit stung more than you expected, this is exactly the work I do with schools, districts, nonprofits, and colleges. Program review. Trauma-informed practice. School climate and safety. Reply to the email that brought you here, or reach out below. I read every message.

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