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School disaffection, truancy, absenteeism, grade retention and early school leaving are among the most pressing and challenging issues to be tackled by education systems. One of the ways explaining the occurrence of the aforementioned phenomena is the theoretical concept of school engagement. School engagement has been shown to have a multidimensional nature (OECD 2003, Fredricks et al. 2004, Finn 1989, 1993, Johnson et al. 2001). The definitions usually comprise behavioural, cognitive and psychological or emotional components (Fredricks et al. 2004). It is proved that there is a reciprocal link between low achievement in school and school disengagement (OECD 2003, Fredricks et al. 2004, Motti-Stefanidi et al. 2015), and that active participation in school activities may be a protective factor against school failure and early school leaving (Finn 1993). What is more, the school engagement lays in foundation of educational success (Newman 1992, Motti-Stefanidi et al. 2015) and subsequently successful educational decisions and trajectories (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro 2002, Masten et al. 2006). Despite the existence of many studies on school disengagement we believe that thorough understanding of this phenomenon would be incomplete without taking into account the perspective of the actors most involved in the process, i.e. the teachers, educators, pedagogues and the students themselves. In the light of subsequent editions of PISA, “the Polish students case” might be particularly interesting as their educational outcomes are constantly improving but school engagement understood as a sense of belonging to school and students’ positive attitudes toward school and education are visibly decreasing (OECD 2003, 2013). The text will concentrate on the qualitative and quantitative data obtained within the RESL.eu project in general and vocational upper secondary schools, second chance schools and alternative learning arenas. The analysed centres are situated in Warsaw, in the city area affected by the high level of youth unemployment and, on the other hand, lower academic outcomes of students measured by final exam results in comparison with other Warsaw’s districts. The paper will discuss possible reasons, mechanisms and processes influencing youth school (dis)engagement. It will also confront the views of pupils and staff from upper secondary schools and alternative learning arenas on the role of school activities, teachers, peers and family in (not) keeping young people in school.

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