

The following report on the nation's dropout problem is from the Indiana Department of Education web site (URL: www.doe.in.gov/sservices/pdf/sao_drop-out_consequences.pdf)

Consequences of Dropping out of School

Introduction

In 2003, 1.1 million 16–19 -year-olds and 2.4 million 20–25-year-olds did not have a high school diploma and were not enrolled in school, for a total of 3.5 million. Most of these youth, at best, are headed for a life of sporadic employment and low wages. For them, establishing a stable family and raising children who can make it in our society and economy can be problematic.¹

Consequences for those students who drop out of school may include:

Economic

- In 1971, male dropouts earned \$35,087, falling to \$23,903 in 2002, a decline of 34.7%.²
- In the same period, the earnings of female dropouts fell from \$19,888 to \$17,114.²
- Recent dropouts will earn \$200,000 less than high school graduates and \$800,000 less than college graduates, in their lives.³
- Dropouts make up nearly half the heads of households on welfare.⁴

Unemployment

High percentages of young dropouts are either not employed or are not even in the labor force.⁵

Engagement in High-Risk Behaviors

The rate of engagement in high-risk behaviors such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide has found to be significantly higher among dropouts.⁶

Incarceration

Dropouts make up nearly half the prison population.⁷

Driver's License / Employment Certificate

A driver's license or a learner's permit may not be issued to an individual less than 18 years of age who is considered a dropout. A driver's license, or learner's permit, may be revoked, and an employment certificate revoked or denied, if a student drops out.⁸

Cost to Society

Over 25 years to 30 years, a dropout student can cost a community as much as \$500,000 in public assistance, health care, and incarceration costs.⁹

References

1. Paul E. Barton. *One Third of a Nation* p. 40. Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, 2005.

Economic:

2. Paul E. Barton. *One Third of a Nation* p. 41. Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, 2005.

3. Wendy Schwartz *New Information on Youth Who Drop Out* p. 1. KidSource. URL: www.kidsource.com/

4. *Ibid.* p. 3.

Unemployment

5. Civil Rights Project. *DROPOUTS* Harvard University. Civil Rights in Brief.

Engagement in High Risk Behaviors

6. E. Gregory Woods *Reducing the Dropout Rate*. School Improvement Research Series, p.2

Incarceration:

7. Civil Rights Project. *DROPOUTS* Harvard University. Civil Rights in Brief.

Driver's License

8. IC 9-24-2 Sec.1 (a) A driver's license or a learner's permit may not be issued to an individual less than 18 (18) years of age who meets any of the following conditions: Is considered a dropout under IC 20-33-2-28.5 (b) (1) driver's license or learner's permit; and employment certificate will be revoked or denied

IDOE Student Services Administrative Manual, 2005.

Cost to Society

9. Indiana's Education Round Table, p. 17, 2003.

California Dropout Research Project
An Affiliated Project of the University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute
UC Santa Barbara | Gevirtz Graduate School of Education
Policy Brief 15 (Reprinted With Permission)

Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research

Russell Rumberger and Sun Ah Lim

California and the nation are facing a dropout crisis. About one-quarter of all students who enter the ninth grade fail to earn a diploma four years later. To address this crisis requires a better understanding of why students drop out.

Dropouts themselves report a variety of reasons for leaving school, but these reasons do not reveal the underlying causes. Multiple factors in elementary or middle school may influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and performance in high school prior to dropping out.

To better understand the underlying causes behind students' decisions for dropping out, we reviewed the past 25 years of research on dropouts. These studies analyzed a variety of national, state, and local data. In any particular study it is difficult to demonstrate a causal relationship between any single factor and the decision to quit school. But a large number of studies with similar findings does suggest a strong connection.

The research review identified two types of factors that predict whether students drop out or graduate from high school: (1) factors associated with individual characteristics of students and (2) factors associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities.

Individual Predictors

Individual factors that predict whether students drop out or graduate from high school fall into four areas: (1) educational performance, (2) behaviors, (3) attitudes, and (4) background.

Educational Performance. The research literature has identified several aspects of educational performance as strong predictors of dropping out or graduating:

- Test scores and grades in high school.
- Academic achievement in both middle and elementary school (with grades a more consistent predictor than test scores).
- Non-promotional school changes (student mobility) during middle and high school.
- Retention (being held back one or more grades) in elementary, middle, and high school.

Behaviors. Research has shown a wide range of behaviors that predict dropout and graduation. One of the most important is student engagement. This includes students' active involvement in academic work (e.g., coming to class, doing homework). It also includes the social aspects of school (e.g., participating in sports or other extracurricular activities).

Research consistently finds that high absenteeism—one specific indicator of engagement—is associated with higher dropout rates. Misbehavior in high school and delinquent behavior outside of high school are both significantly associated with higher dropout and lower graduation rates. In addition, drug or alcohol use during high school is associated with higher dropout rates. Teenage parenting and childbearing increase the odds of dropping out. Having friends who engage in criminal behavior or friends who have dropped out also increases the odds of dropping out, with such associations appearing as early as the seventh grade.

Finally, a number of studies have found that students who work more than 20 hours a week are significantly more likely to drop out.

Attitudes. Much research has explored the relationship between student achievement and a wide range of student beliefs, values, and attitudes. But far less research has explored the links between these factors and dropping out. The dropout literature has generally focused on a single indicator—educational expectations (how far in school a student expects to go)—and has found that higher levels of educational expectations are associated with lower dropout rates.

Background. A number of student background characteristics—including demographics and past experiences—are linked to whether students drop out or graduate. Dropout rates are generally higher for males than for females. And they are higher for Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans than for Asians and Whites. Yet these differences may be related to other characteristics of students and characteristics of their families, schools, and communities.

Some studies have found that second generation students (one parent foreign-born), especially Latino students, have higher graduation rates than either first generation (foreign born) or third generation (native-born students and parents). Higher English language proficiency also lowers the odds of dropping out.

One past experience—participation in preschool—has been the subject of extensive, rigorous research. It has been shown to improve school readiness and early school success. But it also affects a wide range of adolescent and adult outcomes, including high school completion, crime, welfare, and teen parenting.

Institutional Predictors

Research on dropouts has identified a number of factors within students' families, schools, and communities that predict dropping out and graduating.

Families. Three aspects of families predict whether students drop out or graduate: (1) family

structure, (2) family resources, and (3) family practices.

Students living with both parents have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates compared to students living in other family arrangements. More important, changes in family structure, along with other potentially stressful events (such as a family move, illness, death, adults entering and leaving the households, and marital disruptions) increase the odds of dropping out.

Students in homes with more family resources—as measured by parental education, parents’ occupational status, and family income—are less likely to drop out of school. A number of parenting practices—sometimes referred to as social resources or social capital—have been shown to reduce the odds of dropping out, including:

- Having high educational aspirations for their children.
- Monitoring their children’s school progress.
- Communicating with the school.
- Knowing the parents of their children’s friends.

Finally, students are more likely to drop out if they have a sibling who dropped out.

Schools. Student and family characteristics account for most of the variability in dropout rates. But about 20 percent can be attributed to four characteristics of schools: (1) the composition of the student body, (2) resources, (3) structural features, and (4) policies and practices.

Research finds that the odds of dropping out are lower in schools with more advantaged students. But the effects appear to be indirect, through the association with other school characteristics.

Research does not find that school size has a consistent effect on dropout and graduation rates.

Attending a Catholic high school improves the odds of graduating. Yet studies have also found that Catholic and other private schools lose as many students as public schools. Students attending private schools typically transfer to public schools instead of dropping out.

Relatively few studies found significant effects of school resources on dropout and graduation rates, at least in high school. But strong evidence shows that small classes (15:1) in grades K–3 improve high school graduation rates.

School policies and practices in high school do matter. Students are less likely to drop out if they attend schools with a stronger academic climate, as measured by more students taking academic courses and doing homework. On the other hand, students are more likely to drop out in schools with a poor disciplinary climate, as measured by student disruptions in class or in school.

There does not appear to be a consistent effect of exit exams on dropout rates, although more recent high school exams appear to lower high school completion rates.

Additionally, requiring students to attend school beyond age 16 leads to lower dropout and higher completion rates.

Communities. Communities play a crucial role in adolescent development along with families, schools, and peers. Population characteristics of communities are associated with dropping out, but not in a straightforward manner. Living in a high-poverty neighborhood is not necessarily detrimental to completing high school. But living in an affluent neighborhood is beneficial to school success. This suggests that affluent neighborhoods provide more access to community resources and positive role models from affluent neighbors.

Summary and Implications

The review yielded valuable insights:

- (1) No single factor can completely account for a student's decision to continue in school until graduation. Just as students themselves report a variety of reasons for quitting school, the research literature also identifies a number of factors that appear to influence the decision.
- (2) The decision to drop out is not simply a result of what happens in school. Clearly students' behavior and performance in school influences their decision to stay or leave. But students' activities and behaviors outside of school—particularly engaging in deviant and criminal behavior—also influences their likelihood of remaining in school.
- (3) Dropping out is more of a process than an event. For many students, the process begins in early elementary school. A number of long-term studies tracked groups of students from preschool or early elementary school through the end of high school. These studies identified early indicators that could significantly predict whether students were likely to drop out or finish high school. The two most consistent indicators were early academic performance and academic and social behaviors.
- (4) Contexts matter. The research literature has identified a number of factors within families, schools, and communities that affect whether students are likely to drop out or graduate from high school. They include access to not only fiscal and material resources, but also social resources in the form of supportive relationships in families, schools, and communities.

One implication of this review is that there are a variety of leverage points for addressing the problem of high dropout rates. Intervention in preschool and early elementary school is clearly warranted. High quality preschool programs and small classes in early elementary school improve high school graduation rates. Such programs are also cost-effective—they generate two to four dollars in economic benefits for every dollar invested.

But there are other leverage points as well. Even high school is not too late—both targeted programs serving a limited number of high-risk students and comprehensive school reform models have been proven to increase graduation rates and are also cost-effective.

Article From *Central Heights Bugle*

Teen Dropout Works Two Jobs

With teeth chattering in the cold breeze, Teresa Orlon braves the pre-dawn chill as she walks from her car to the back entrance of the Good Eats Diner. At 5 a.m., she is starting her workday, ready to greet the hungry workers from the nearby food processing facility.

Teresa works full-time as a waitress at the Good Eats and has done so for almost a year. She had to pay her rent and make ends meet since she dropped out of Central Heights High School in the middle of her junior year.

“A lot of people say a dropout is someone who is lazy and afraid of work,” Teresa tells the Central Heights Bugle, “but I say look at the two jobs I go to five and sometimes six days a week. I also walk dogs in my neighborhood for extra money.”

All told, Teresa estimates that she works between 50 and 60 hours a week. The earnings that do not go toward her rent or expenses go into her savings account. She even helps her parents with their finances from time to time.

Her story is becoming more and more common throughout the state and in Central Heights. Recently released statistics by the state office of education show that between 26 and 35 percent of the state’s teenagers have dropped out of high school.

“The bell has just been rung,” says Mitchell Gardfrey, superintendent of Central Heights Schools District, “and we can no longer hide our heads in the sand.” When asked why this phenomenon is occurring, Gardfrey replies, “The state education budget gets slashed each and every year. Students often cannot get basic math or history textbooks, let alone an arts or music program to keep them mentally stimulated and interested.”

The budget is only part of the problem, say several education experts. “Our studies show that parents of dropouts are often themselves unemployed,” says Jolene Tanaka, professor of sociology at State University. “It takes the teenager’s income just to help parents stay on their feet, especially in economic downturns like the one we are experiencing.”

Tanaka led the team of experts that looked at the state’s dropout issue over the last five years. What that team has found is that the numbers of dropouts in the current teenage generation have steadily increased in that time while the average yearly income of the last generation has decreased slightly. Furthermore, workers are now experiencing large-scale layoffs.

“Many teenagers today sit in class feeling very distracted, anxiously wondering what they can do to help their parents out in tough times,” Tanaka explains.

In his latest book *Ten Things Our Kids Always Do Wrong*, popular psychologist and author Norton Ganden attributes the dropout problem to other factors entirely. Citing advertisers, the movie industry, television and cable programs, and musical artists who have all been poking fun at school for decades, he writes that few children take school seriously anymore.

Ganden points to unacceptable dropout rates that occur even when the economy is strong. He writes that the dropout problem is caused by “a mainstream musical culture that praises drugs and the easy dollar over scholarship, widespread video game-induced euphoria that edges out athletics and hard work, and parents who simply never ask their kids what they did in school today.”

Superintendent Gardfrey dismisses Ganden’s arguments. “That sounds logical and nice, but where is the evidence?” he asks. “The fact is that with the budget cuts, many kids feel disconnected from school and quit.”

Teresa Orlon says she didn’t feel a part of Central Heights High. She now regrets that she quit, because her job prospects are not great. “I was lucky to get the waitress job, but if I want a better paying job, I will have to go back to school. I don’t know when I’ll be able to do that.”

What Students Who Have Dropped Out Say

Various scientific surveys and interviews have been done with dropouts. Here are a few of the results:

Top Ten Reasons 10th Graders Dropped Out: 2002–2004

	Percent
1. Missed too many school days	44
2. Thought it would be easier to get GED	41
3. Getting poor grades / failing school	38
4. Did not like school	37
5. Could not keep up with schoolwork	32
6. Got a job	28
7. Was pregnant*	28
8. Thought couldn't complete course work requirements	26
9. Could not get along with teachers	25
10. Could not work at same time	22

*Females only

Source: Education Longitudinal Study, 2002 (ELS 2002)
Cited in Rotermund, Susan. "Why Students Drop Out of High School: Comparisons from Three National Surveys." California Dropout Research Project. Statistical Brief Number 2, May 2007. URL: www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/

Top Five Reasons for Dropping Out: Ages 16–25

	Percent
1. Classes were not interesting	47
2. Missed too many school days	43
3. Spent time with people not interested in school	42
4. Too much freedom / not enough rules in life	38
5. Was failing school	35

Source: Bridgeland, John M., John J. Dilulio Jr., & Karen Burke Morison. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises (2006). URL: www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf

What Dropouts Believe Would Improve Students' Chances of Staying in School

	Percent
Opportunities for real-world learning (internships, service learning, etc.) to make classroom more relevant	81
Better teachers who keep classes interesting	81
Smaller classes with more individual instruction	75
Better communication between parents & school, get parents more involved	71
Parents make sure their kids go to school every day	71
Increase supervision at school: ensure students attend classes	70

Source: Bridgeland, John M., John J. Dilulio Jr., & Karen Burke Morison. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises (2006). URL: www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf