

High School Dropout: A Quick Stats Fact Sheet

By Maggie Monrad, National High School Center at AIR

Each year almost one-third of public high school students fail to graduate from high school.¹ The high school dropout problem is a crisis for the United States, in part because it impacts not only individuals and their education, but also because the economic and social costs are so dramatic. Globally, the United States ranks seventeenth in high school graduation rates and fourteenth in college graduation rates among developed nations.² Domestically, the nation and its communities suffer from a lack of productive workers and higher costs associated with incarceration, health care, and other social services.³ As the 21st century United States moves towards an increasingly global economy, more individuals are discovering that higher levels of education are critical to their own and their nation's ability to compete and thrive – in fact, about 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs will require some postsecondary education.⁴ Understanding the magnitude of the dropout problem and the forces that impact dropout rates is critically important to developing dropout prevention strategies.

Who drops out?

- Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education estimated that approximately one million students drop out every year.⁵
- High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages, have higher rates of public assistance, are more likely to be single parents, and have children at a younger age.⁶
- Every school day 7,000 U.S. students leave high school never to return.⁷ In 2004, approximately 3.8 million 16- through 24- year olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential, such as a GED.⁸
- Based on calculations per school day (180 days of school, seven hours each day), one high school student drops out every nine seconds.⁹
- The dropout rate for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities is approximately twice that of general education students.¹⁰
- Research has confirmed that the lowest-performing readers are most at risk of dropping out of high school. Those achieving in the lowest quartile are 3.5 times more likely to drop out than students in the next highest quarter of academic achievement, and 20 times more likely to drop out than top-performing students.¹¹

Race/Ethnicity/Socioeconomic Status

- Male students are consistently eight percent less likely to graduate than female students, and the gap is as large as 14 percent between male and female African-American students.¹²

- Among minorities, only about 52 percent of Hispanic students and 56 percent of African-American students will graduate in four years, compared with 78 percent of white students.¹³
- High school students from low-income families (the lowest 20 percent) were six times more likely to drop out than students from higher income families. Ultimately, about one half of all dropouts never receive a high school credential.¹⁴

Students with Disabilities Aged 14 and Older Who Dropped Out, by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Group who Dropped Out
American Indian/Alaska Native	52.2%
Black	44.5%
Hispanic	43.5%
White	33.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	28.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), 2003. These data are for the 50 states, DC, Puerto Rico and the four outlying areas. This is based on a cumulative 12-month count.

Impact: Crime

- Approximately 75 percent of state prison inmates and 59 percent of federal inmates are dropouts. Moreover, dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school completers to be imprisoned at some point during their lifetime.
- Estimates indicate that approximately 30 percent of federal inmates, 40 percent of state prison inmates, and 50 percent of persons on death row are high school dropouts.¹⁵
- Raising the high school completion rate one percent for all men ages 20- through 60- would save the US \$1.4 billion annually in crime related costs.¹⁶ Each class of high school dropouts costs the U.S. economy more than \$8 billion in incarceration expenses and lost wages *per year*.¹⁷ If the male graduation rate was increased by only five percent, the U.S. could save \$7.7 billion a year through reducing crime related costs and increasing earnings.¹⁸

Impact: Economy

- A single 18-year-old dropout earns \$260,000 less over a lifetime and contributes \$60,000 less in federal and state income taxes. Combined income and tax losses for one cohort of 18-year-olds who drop out is \$192 billion which is 1.6 percent of the GDP.¹⁹ America loses more than \$26 billion in federal and state income taxes each year from the 23 million high school dropouts aged 18 to 67.²⁰

- Almost 1.3 million students didn't graduate from US high schools in 2004, costing more than \$325 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetimes.²¹ The Alliance for Excellent Education has estimated that the more than 12 millions students who will drop out over the next decade will cost the nation \$3 trillion dollars.²²

Unemployment and Earnings for Full-time Wage and Salary Workers Age 25 and Over, by Educational Attainment

Unemployment Rate in 2005 (Percent)	Education Attained	Median Weekly Earnings in 2005 (Dollars)
1.6	Doctoral degree	\$1,421
1.1	Professional degree	1,370
2.1	Master's degree	1,129
2.6	Bachelor's degree	937
3.3	Associate degree	699
4.2	Some college, no degree	653
4.7	High-school graduate	583
7.6	Some high-school, no diploma	409

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor. (2006, May). *Occupational employment and wages, May 2005*. Washington: Author. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.toc.htm>

Impact: Personal Income and Employment

- A male high school graduate who works until age 65 will earn, on average, nearly \$333,000 more than a dropout; a worker with some college will earn \$538,000 more. According to a recent report published by Teachers College at Columbia University, male high school graduates earn up to \$322,000 more over the course of their lifetimes than dropouts, while college graduates earn up to \$1.3 million more.²³ In total, there is more than \$309 billion lost wages over the students' lifetimes.²⁴
- In 1964, a high school dropout earned 64 cents for every dollar earned by an individual with at least a high school degree. In 2004, the high school dropout earned only 37 cents for each dollar earned by an individual with more education.²⁵
- The median income of high school dropouts aged 18 and over was \$12,184 in 2003. By comparison, the median income of those aged 18 and over who completed their education with a high school credential (including GED) was \$20,431.²⁶

Endnotes

- ¹ Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006, March). *The silent epidemic: perspectives of high school dropouts*. Washington: Civic Enterprises, LLC. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from <http://www.civcenterprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>
- ² Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2006). *Education at a glance*. Paris: Author.
- ³ Bridgeland et al., 2006.
- ⁴ Alliance for Excellent Education. (n.d.). *The crisis in American high schools*. Washington: Author. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.all4ed.org/whats_at_stake/CrisisInHighSchools.pdf
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Education. (2007, March 12). *Prepared opening statement for U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings before the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education* [speech]. Washington: Author. Retrieved May 8, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2007/03/03122007.html>
- ⁶ Swanson, C. (2004, December 9). *Setting the stage for a national dialogue: Graduation rates and NCLB*. Presented at the Alliance for Excellent Education Graduate Rate Symposium, The National Press Club, Washington, DC. Retrieved May 8, 2007, from www.all4ed.org/publications/MeasuringGraduationToMeasureSuccess/ChrisSwansonPowerPoint.ppt
- ⁷ Alliance for Excellent Education. (n.d.). *The crisis in American high schools*. Washington: Author. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.all4ed.org/whats_at_stake/CrisisInHighSchools.pdf
- ⁸ Laird, J., DeBell, M., & Chapman, C. (2006, November). *Dropout rates in the United States: 2004*. Washington: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007024.pdf>
- ⁹ Reimer, M., & Smink, J. (2005). *Information about the school dropout issue: Selected facts & statistics*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.dropoutprevention.org/stats/statDocs/School_Dropout_Facts-2005.pdf
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.
- ¹² Education Week. (2006, June 22). *Diplomas Count: An essential guide to graduation policy and rates*. Bethesda, MD: Author. Retrieved May 8, 2007, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2006/06/22/index.html>
- ¹³ Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.
- ¹⁴ American Youth Policy Forum. (n.d.). *Every nine seconds in America a student becomes a dropout: The dropout problem in numbers*. Washington: Author. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WIT_ninseconds.pdf
- ¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2002). *Correctional populations in the United States, 1998* (NCJ-192929). Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Wise, R. (2007, June). "Systems of support for high school improvement." Presented at the National High School Center Summer Institute, June 11-13, 2007, Washington, D.C. Retrieved August 31, 2007, from <http://www.betterhighschools.org/summerinst/SI2007SystemsofSupport.asp>
- ¹⁸ Wise, R. (2007, April 24). "NCLB reauthorization: Modernizing middle and high schools for the 21st century." Testimony presented at the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.
- ¹⁹ The Campaign for Educational Equity. (2005, October 24-25). *The Social costs of inadequate education*. Findings presented at the First Annual Teachers College Symposium on Educational Equity, Columbia University. Retrieved May 8, 2007, from http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/3082_SocialCostsofInadequetEducation.pdf
- ²⁰ Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.
- ²¹ Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006, March 1). *High school dropouts cost the U.S. billions in lost wages and taxes, according to Alliance for Excellent Education* [Press release]. Washington: Author. Retrieved May 8, 2007, from http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr_022806.html
- ²² Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.
- ²³ Wise, R. (2007, April 24). "NCLB reauthorization: Modernizing middle and high schools for the 21st century." Testimony presented at the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.
- ²⁴ Wise, R. (2007, June). "Systems of support for high school improvement." Presented at the National High School Center Summer Institute, June 11-13, 2007, Washington, D.C. Retrieved August 31, 2007, from <http://www.betterhighschools.org/summerinst/SI2007SystemsofSupport.asp>
- ²⁵ Rouse, C. (September, 2005). *The labor market consequences of an inadequate education*. Prepared for the Equity Symposium on "The Social Costs of Inadequate Education" at Teachers' College, Columbia University.
- Laird, J., DeBell, M., & Chapman, C. (2006, November). *Dropout rates in the United States: 2004*. Washington: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007024.pdf>