



Dropout Prevention
An EPI Research Brief

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Tons of paper and thousands of gallons of ink, not to mention countless digits and bytes, have been devoted to the study of dropouts – much of it focused on the causes of dropping out of school and the complex factors that contribute to that decision. Despite the intensity of this investigation, little has changed, except that the consequences of dropping out have become much more dire.

According to a recent US Department of Education (USDOE) publication, *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide*, “Each year more than half a million young people drop out of high school, and the rate at which they drop out has remained the same for the last 30 years, even as spending on education has increased significantly. For society as a whole, helping young people stay in and complete high school is a worthwhile objective. Dropouts typically earn less than graduates: the average earnings difference is estimated to be \$9000 a year and \$260,000 over the course of a working lifetime. The economic consequences of dropping out may continue to worsen as jobs for low-skilled workers dry up. Dropouts contribute only about half as much in taxes as do high school graduates. They draw larger government subsidies in the form of food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare payments. They have a dramatically increased chance of landing in prison, and they have worse health outcomes and lower life expectancies.” (Dynarski, et. al., 2008).

The reasons that students drop out of school are complex and, in the eyes of many educators, intractable. A good summary of these reasons is drawn from long-term research on high school dropouts compiled by the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, a nonprofit group that tracks the status of youth in Georgia and advises legislators and policy makers on youth issues. Their paper, [*Underlying Causes of High School Dropout*](#), recognizes key factors from all aspects of students’ backgrounds.

Socioeconomic Background. National data show that students from low-income families are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of school than are children from middle-income families, and 10.5 times more likely than students from high-income families.

Disabilities. Students with disabilities are also more likely to drop out. The National Transition Study estimates that as many as 36.4% of disabled youth drop out of school before completing a diploma or certificate.

Race-ethnicity. Hispanics and African Americans are at greater risk of dropping out than whites, with Hispanics at a greater risk of dropping out than either white or African American students. Nearly 40% of Hispanics who drop out do so before the eighth grade.

Academic Factors. National research also indicates that academic factors are clearly related to dropping out. Students who receive poor grades, who repeat a grade, or who are overage for their class are more likely to drop out.

Absenteeism. Students who have poor attendance for reasons other than illness are also more likely to drop out. Clearly, students who miss school fall behind their peers in the classroom. This, in turn, leads to low self-esteem and increases the likelihood that at-risk students will drop out of school.

Occupational Aspirations. Young people's perceptions of the economic opportunities available to them also play a role in their decision to drop out or stay in school. Dropouts often have lower occupational aspirations than their peers.

Six Predictive Factors. The following individual-level factors are all strongly predictive of dropping out of high school:

- Grade retention (being held back to repeat a grade)
- Poor academic performance
- Moves during high school
- High absenteeism
- Misbehavior
- The student's feeling that no adult in the school cares about his or her welfare.

What Reasons Do Young People Give for Dropping Out?

According to a National Longitudinal Study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, here is a summary of the key reasons why 8th to 10th grade students dropped out:

School related:

- Did not like school (51%)
- Could not get along with teachers (35.0%)
- Was failing school (39.9%)

Job related:

- Couldn't work and go to school at the same time (14.1%)
- Had to get a job (15.3%)
- Found a job (15.3%)

Family related:

- Was pregnant (51.0%)
- Became parent (13.6%)

- Got married (13.1%)

Grim Data, Discouraged Educators

This summary raises two important issues about studying the causes of dropout behavior.

- (1) The factors often identified in such studies are not usually alterable by school personnel. Lists of factors such as ethnicity, family structure and mobility, and teen pregnancy discourage educators who feel that even their best efforts may be doomed by social and economic circumstances beyond their control.
- (2) Self-report data on reasons for dropping out may be uninformed, unreliable, or self-serving. It is akin to asking a heart disease victim why she has cardiac disease. If she is unwilling to accept any personal responsibility for her illness, or is ignorant of the links between lifestyle and heart disease, she may attribute her condition to inherited, and therefore unalterable, factors rather than the lifestyle choices she makes.

More recent work in the field, however, has identified clusters of variables that can be modified to improve school outcomes. (Dynarski, et. al., 2008). Generally, these dropout related factors form three major groupings:

Academic Skill Deficits. Usually the result of poor basic skills, student academic deficits become more obvious as they move through the school system, often culminating with failure on high stakes tests or in key courses at the secondary level. This creates an endless cycle of remediation, failure, and boredom that leads to poor academic self esteem and renewed efforts by failing students to escape from the school as soon as possible.

Social and Economic Pressures. Generally seen as the most pernicious cluster of issues, this ranges from lack of family support for education to family economics that depend on students' earnings or child care responsibilities, to other issues (e.g., divorce, mobility, immigration status) that interfere with a student's ability to attend to school requirements.

Lack of Adult Guidance and Mentoring. Many students come from families with long histories of school failure and dropping out, so they do not have access to either role models or good advice for school success. Often, these students are isolated by economics, social status, or geography from communities in which they might encounter non-family role models as well; many of the adults they encounter in impoverished communities are struggling with the economic and employment consequences of their own school failure and are poorly equipped to give effective guidance for school success.

While still daunting, this kind of clustering of factors enables school personnel to create interventions that have some promise of changing the trajectory of many students headed for almost certain school failure and dropping out. Rather than belaboring the difficulty

of the task, the rest of this paper is devoted to a study of these interventions and how they can be used in schools to improve student success and reduce dropout behavior.

A Focus on Action

Newer research has focused on the reasons for dropping out of school *and* strategies that mediate those conditions and improve the chance of student success. A good example of this research is a recent, comprehensive study of dropouts and the reasons they leave school published by John Bridgeland and his colleagues (2006) with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. *The Silent Epidemic* reports a study of focus groups and interviews with 467 ethnically diverse men and women, ages 16-25, who had dropped out of school. The study focuses on communities with low graduation rates – and includes urban, suburban and rural settings. The complete report provides detailed information and strategies that promise to aid schools in dropout prevention. Because this report is so comprehensive and the results so clear, the Executive Summary (pp. iii-vi) is presented here in almost its entirety.

“This survey of young people who left high school without graduating suggests that, despite career aspirations that require education beyond high school and a majority having grades of a C or better, circumstances in students’ lives and an inadequate response to those circumstances from the schools led to dropping out. While reasons vary, the general categories remain the same, whether in inner city Los Angeles or suburban Nebraska.

Why Students Drop Out

There is no single reason why students drop out of high school. Respondents report different reasons: a lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academic challenges; and the weight of real world events. But indications are strong that these barriers to graduation are not insurmountable.

Nearly half (47 percent) said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. These young people reported being bored and disengaged from high school. Almost as many (42 percent) spent time with people who were not interested in school. These were among the top reasons selected by those with high GPAs and by those who said they were motivated to work hard.

Nearly 7 in 10 respondents (69 percent) said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard, 80 percent did one hour or less of homework each day in high school, two-thirds would have worked harder if more was demanded of them (higher academic standards and more studying and homework), and 70 percent were confident they could have graduated if they had tried. Even a majority of those with low GPAs thought they could have graduated.

Many students gave personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32 percent) said they had to get a job and make money; 26 percent said they became a parent; and 22 percent said they had to care for a family member. Many of these young people reported doing reasonably well in school and had a strong belief that they could have graduated if they had stayed in school. These students also were the most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.

It is clear that some dropouts, but not the majority, leave school because of significant academic challenges.

- **Thirty-five percent said that “failing in school” was a major factor for dropping out;** three out of ten said they could not keep up with schoolwork; and 43 percent said they missed too many days of school and could not catch up.
- **Forty-five percent said they started high school poorly prepared by their earlier schooling.** Many of these students likely fell behind in elementary and middle school and could not make up the necessary ground. They reported that additional supports in high school that would have made a difference (such as tutoring or after school help) were not there.
- **Thirty-two percent were required to repeat a grade before dropping out and twenty-nine percent expressed significant doubts that they could have met their high school’s requirements for graduation even if they had put in the necessary effort.** The most academically challenged students were the most likely to report that their schools were not doing enough to help students when they had trouble learning and to express doubt about whether they would have worked harder if more had been expected of them.

As complex as these individual circumstances may be, for almost all young people, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement; attendance patterns are a clear early sign.

- **Fifty-nine to 65 percent of respondents missed class often the year before dropping out.** Students described a pattern of refusing to wake up, skipping class, and taking three hour lunches; each absence made them less willing to go back. These students had long periods of absences and were sometimes referred to the truant officer, only to be brought back to the same environment that led them to become disengaged.
- **Thirty-eight percent believed they had “too much freedom” and not enough rules.** As students grew older, they had more freedom and more options, which

led some away from class or the school building. It was often too easy to skip class or engage in activities outside of school.

For those students who dropped out, the level of proactive parental involvement in their education was low.

- **Fifty-nine percent of parents or guardians of respondents were involved in their child's schooling**, with only one-fifth (21 percent) "very" involved. More than half of those parents or guardians who were involved at all were involved mainly for discipline reasons.
- **Sixty-eight percent of respondents said their parents became more involved only when they were aware that their child was on the verge of dropping out.** The majority of parents were "not aware" or "just somewhat aware" of their child's grades or that they were about to leave school.

In hindsight, young people who dropped out of school almost universally expressed great remorse for having left high school and expressed strong interest in re-entering school with students their age. As adults, the overwhelming majority of poll participants (81 percent) said that graduating from high school was important to success in life.

- **Three-fourths (74 percent) said that if they were able to relive the experience, they would have stayed in school** and 76 percent said they would definitely or probably re-enroll in a high school for people their age if they could.
- **Forty-seven percent would say that not having a diploma makes it hard to find a good job.** They wished they had listened to those who warned them of problems associated with dropping out, or that such voices had been more persistent.

What Might Help Students Stay in School

While there are no simple solutions to the dropout crisis, there are clearly "supports" that can be provided within the academic environment and at home that would improve students'

chances of staying in school. While most dropouts blame themselves for failing to graduate, there are things they say schools can do to help them finish.

- **Improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work:** Four out of five (81 percent) said there should be more opportunities for real-world learning and some in the focus groups called for more experiential learning. They said students need to see the connection between school and getting a good job.

- **Improve instruction, and access to supports, for struggling students:** Four out of five (81 percent) wanted better teachers and three fourths wanted smaller classes with more individualized instruction. More than half (55 percent) felt that more needed to be done to help students who had problems learning, and 70 percent believed more tutoring, summer school and extra time with teachers would have improved their chances of graduating.
- **Build a school climate that fosters academics:** Seven in ten favored increasing supervision in school and more than three in five (62 percent) felt more classroom discipline was necessary. More than half (57 percent) felt their schools did not do enough to help students feel safe from violence. Seven in ten (71 percent) said their schools did not do enough to make school interesting.
- **Ensure that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school:** While two-thirds (65 percent) said there was a staff member or teacher who cared about their success, only 56 percent said they could go to a staff person for school problems and just two-fifths (41 percent) had someone in school to talk to about personal problems. More than three out of five (62 percent) said their school needed to do more to help students with problems outside of class. Seven in ten favored more parental involvement.
- **Improve the communication between parents and schools:** Seventy-one percent of young people surveyed felt that one of the keys to keeping students in school was to have better communication between the parents and the school, and increasing parental involvement in their child's education. Less than half said their school contacted their parents or themselves when they were absent (47 percent) or when they dropped out (48 percent).

Policy Pathways

The stories, insights and reflections from this student survey and the focus groups reveal the importance of the student voice in the discussion about what must be done to improve high school graduation rates and to prepare struggling students for successful futures. The students have spoken. It is time for us to respond. To help these students succeed, we need:

- **Different schools for different students.** Instead of the usual "one-size fits all" school, districts should develop options for students, including a curriculum that connects what they are learning in the classroom with real life experiences and with work, smaller learning communities with more individualized instruction, and alternative schools that offer specialized programs to students at-risk of dropping out. Teachers should have high expectations for their students and try different approaches to motivate them to learn.
- **Parent engagement strategies and individualized graduation plans.** Schools and teachers should strengthen their communication with parents and work with

- them to ensure students show up and complete their work and develop graduation plans that are shared with parents.
- **Early warning systems.** Schools need to develop district-wide (or even state-wide) early warning systems to help them identify students at risk of failing in school and to develop mechanisms that trigger, and ensure there is follow through on, the appropriate support for the students. One clear step relates to absenteeism. Every day, schools should have a reliable list of the students who failed to attend school and should notify parents or guardians immediately and take appropriate action to ensure students attend school and have the support they need to remain in school.
 - **Additional supports and adult advocates.** Schools need to provide a wide range of supplemental services or intensive assistance strategies for struggling students in schools – literacy programs, attendance monitoring, school and peer counseling, mentoring, tutoring, double class periods, internships, service-learning, summer school programs, and more – and provide adult advocates in the school who can help students find the support they need. Schools also need to provide appropriate supports to students with special needs, such as pregnant women and students with disabilities, and enhance their coordination with community-based institutions and government agencies.” (Bridgeland, 2006, pp. iii-vi)

What Works...And How Well?

A unique study, *Dropout Prevention*, conducted by the Institute for Education Sciences at the US Department of Education and provided by the What Works Clearinghouse (Dynarski, et. al., 2008), reviewed the research evidence for each type of dropout prevention strategy, and evaluated each strategy’s potential to improve school completion rates.

In a section of the report titled “Recommendations and Corresponding Levels of Evidence to Support Each,” they assess the promise of three types of interventions: diagnostic, individually targeted, and school-wide. Although they explain that no single intervention is likely to produce strong outcomes by itself, several of these strategies may interact with one another to magnify their effects for students. To illustrate, diagnostic data systems, by themselves, will not help reduce the dropout rate very much. However, diagnostic systems, combined with targeted academic interventions, are likely to improve the outcome of the academic help given to an individual student who is in danger of failure and dropping out.

Category 1: Diagnostic

1. ***Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out.*** States, districts and schools should develop comprehensive, longitudinal, student level databases with unique IDs that, at a minimum, include data on

student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement. Data should be reviewed regularly, with a particular emphasis before the transitions to middle school and high school. **Probable Impact: Low**

Category 2: Targeted Interventions

2. *Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out.* Adult advocates should have an appropriate background and low caseloads, and be purposefully matched with students. Adequate training and support should be provided for advocates. **Probable Impact: Moderate.**
3. *Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance.* Help students to improve academic performance and reengage in school. This should be implemented in conjunction with other recommendations. **Probable Impact: Moderate.**
4. *Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.* Students should establish attainable academic and behavioral goals and be recognized when they accomplish them. Schools can teach strategies to strengthen problem-solving and decision-making skills, and partner with community-based agencies to provide students with supports to address external factors affecting social and behavioral interactions. **Probable Impact: Low**

Category 3: Schoolwide Interventions

5. *Personalize the learning environment and instructional process.* A personalized learning environment creates a sense of belonging and fosters a school climate where students and teachers get to know one another and can provide academic, social, and behavioral encouragement. **Probable Impact: Moderate.**
6. *Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.* Engagement can be increased by providing students with the necessary skills to complete high school and by introducing students to postsecondary options. **Probable Impact: Moderate.**

School Practices That Raise Achievement

In *Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground* (2005), the Education Trust reported on a study of four “high impact” high schools, those that serve a largely poor, minority population, but which produce results well above state averages for achievement, graduation, and college attendance. Representing both urban and rural environments, these schools share a number of characteristics that distinguish them from schools producing only “average impact” or below.

The most important feature of this report is that it tends to focus on actions the principal can take at the school level to make substantial improvements for struggling students. Certainly some of these actions are easier than others, and some require an abundance of leadership courage, but, according to this research, all are linked to improving success and educational opportunities for the most challenged high school youth. The table below shows how high impact high schools differ from average impact schools on eleven key leadership domains.

High Impact and Average Impact School Practices

	High Impact School Practices	Average Impact School Practices
Teacher Placement	Principals are more likely to consider student achievement data to determine which classes teachers will be assigned. They review and analyze achievement data, observe teachers' strengths and weakness to ensure struggling students get the teachers who can best accelerate learning.	Principals are more likely to assign teachers to classes based on teacher preference and seniority. For example, department heads often teach only honors and AP classes, while struggling students are taught by less experienced teachers.
Support for New Teachers	Support for new teachers is structured and focuses on curriculum and instruction. New teachers are given model lesson plans, are paired with veteran teachers who teach the same class, and given opportunities to observe master teachers.	Support for new teachers tends to focus on personal support. For example, new teachers meet with administrators to chat about how things are going. The focus is on teacher motivation, rather than helping teachers to develop skills to better serve their students
Hiring Practices	Principals work within the district system, but aggressively and proactively identify and recruit highly qualified teachers. They may conduct informal interviews and urge good candidates to apply through the district. They may even raid other school faculties, looking for good teachers who will support the school's culture.	Principals tend to feel constrained by district procedures and do not feel empowered to work creatively with it. They tend to take the list of candidates provided by the district and choose the "best of the bunch" from among them, seldom recruiting teachers that they think might be a good fit.
Support for Students	Student support programs tend to be mandatory and are triggered by assessments that signal the student is struggling – participation in the programs is not an option.	Student support programs tend to be voluntary –students and parents are notified of availability of help, but the decision to participate is generally left up to them.
Early Warning Systems	Schools have "early warning" systems to catch students before they fail. Counselors analyze	Schools tend to offer support after students have failed a course – e.g. getting an "F" in a course may result

	<p>seventh- and eighth grade student test scores for entering ninth-graders to identify students who are struggling. Identified students are assigned to a variety of supports, including mandatory summer school, freshman academy classes, or afterschool tutoring.</p>	<p>in participation in a computerized skill-acquisition course</p>
<p>Grade Level Support</p>	<p>If possible, academic support programs for students are not remedial, but support concurrent grade-level courses, which allows students sufficient time over four years to complete the college preparatory sequence of courses.</p>	<p>Academic support services for students tend to be remedial in nature. Struggling ninth-graders are placed in remedial courses, delaying access to grade-level work, thus limiting the time available to students to take the necessary sequence of college-preparatory courses.</p>
<p>Use of Time</p>	<p>Students who arrive behind in ninth grade spend more time in courses with substantial reading than do students who are proficient. Administrators also act vigorously to protect time by limiting announcements over the PA system to emergencies, prohibiting students from being pulled from class except for emergencies, and requiring instruction to be "bell to bell."</p>	<p>Administrators tend to consent to intrusions into academic time, such as announcements calling students to the office and early release for athletes.</p>
<p>Use of Data</p>	<p>Principals tend to be hands-on when it comes to analyzing data. They use data to actively supervise and oversee teacher and student performance. Principals institute formal methods of analyzing data with teachers to determine course content, strengths and weaknesses. Principals may review each student's transcripts to ensure correct placement or to recognize students who have improved performance.</p>	<p>Principals tend to rely on teachers and departments to use data to monitor student performance and are not as involved in the analysis. At one school, for instance, the principal copied data for teachers and asked them to analyze it, but did not work directly with departments to sort out the reasons behind student achievement or how to improve results.</p>
<p>Class Sizes</p>	<p>Administrators tend to make class sizes smaller for struggling students, even if this means larger class sizes for honors and AP classes.</p>	<p>Class sizes are relatively uniform, with no proficiency level having smaller classes than another.</p>
<p>Consistency</p>	<p>Teachers collaborate to ensure that course content is consistent no matter who is teaching.</p>	<p>Teachers work on their own to determine class content.</p>
<p>Standards</p>	<p>Teachers use standards and assessments to monitor their teaching. In courses that have no</p>	<p>Teachers use standards and assessments minimally.</p>

	<p>external standards and assessments, teachers may create them to ensure that students are getting the instruction they need.</p>	
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(Source: Robinson, et. al., November, 2005)

In [The Power to Change](#), also from the Education Trust (2005), three schools that have been remarkably successful in fostering achievement for low-performing students are profiled in detail. Despite variations in student bodies, locations (New York, Massachusetts, and Washington), and programs, the report identifies four bedrock principles that provide a foundation for all of the schools' innovations and initiatives.

- 1) They start with the data. The administrators in these schools – and many of the teachers as well – can rattle off their school's data with ease. That is because to them data are not mere numbers collected for accountability purposes but human stories. Data help them identify the child whose reading score shows that without careful help and instruction he will lead a life of dependency and insecurity. Data reveal to them the teacher who is expert in teaching statistics and probability but hasn't figured out how to teach measurement. Data tell them when a program they have instituted is having the effect they intended or whether it wasn't worth the time put into it. Data, in other words, is information about people that is used with meticulous care.
- 2) They focus on instruction. The people in these schools know that their students are dependent upon them for good instruction, and they pay attention to what they teach and how. Good instruction is recognized, and weak instruction is identified for improvement. Elmont has made this almost an art form, with a comprehensive system of observations and recommendations for improvement. In addition, they make sure that students who need extra time and extra instruction get it– before school, after school, during lunch, on the weekends.
- 3) They find ways to connect students to adults in the building. At Granger this is done through the use of an advisory system; at University Park, it is done through the intimacy of a very small school in which everyone knows everyone else; at Elmont it is done with the deliberate use of clubs, sports, and after-school activities. The three schools may accomplish this task differently, but they all make sure that students are known by adults who care about them and their progress.
- 4) They organize themselves around the belief that all students can and will learn. They all take seriously what the principal of University Park Campus School says: "We have the power to change things."

Beating the Odds Against Success

In New York City, thirteen schools routinely “beat the odds” and bring 9th graders to timely graduation and college enrollment by attending to core principles that, by now, are beginning to look very familiar. Detailed descriptions of these schools and their programs are presented in the full report, but all of them are directly related to these core principles, quoted from *Beating the Odds* by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. (Ascher and Maguire, 2007)

Academic Rigor

Standards for curricular rigor and student work across all disciplines are shared by all faculty in the schools, and Advanced Placement courses and/or opportunities to earn credit at nearby colleges are available to all students. Rigor is further reinforced through a culture of mutual respect between adults and students, including ground rules for both academic effort and behavior.

Networks of Timely Supports

The schools meet with students in advisories and conduct regular reviews of student transcripts to track students’ academic progress, credit accumulation, and areas of need. They also employ a range of timely short-term interventions, from communicating with parents or guardians to afterschool tutoring, Saturday school, and lunchtime classes to enable students to revisit skills, master curriculum components, and practice for tests.

College Expectations and Access

The schools make clear to entering ninth graders that the next four years will involve disciplined academic work directed to graduation and college or another form of postsecondary education necessary to their chosen career. Prominent visual and physical space is devoted to college going. Schools are staffed with full- or part-time college counselors, and annual college and career fairs and visits to colleges are big events for students. Parents are involved in college planning through workshops on testing, college requirements, and financial aid. Relationships with local community-based organizations provide an array of critical resources, from student internships to help with college essays.

Effective Use of Data

Although administrators believe they can do better in this area, school- and district generated data are used to track student progress, identify student weaknesses and strengths, provide feedback on curricula, and shape academic interventions. Some of the schools also attempt to keep track of where graduates go to college and how well they do.

The Big Four

Clearly, the “big four” strategies identified early in this report are seen again and again in research on dropout prevention and mitigation:

- A rigorous, engaging curriculum that is connected to students’ lives and futures and is designed to keep the students on grade level and progressing toward graduation.
- High quality instruction provided by teachers who believe in the potential of every student to succeed and who help students develop a positive vision for their own educational future.
- A competent, compassionate mentor and advisor who can help students successfully negotiate the schooling process and minimize the effects of social and economic conditions on their school performance.
- Targeted academic and social interventions that are planned on the basis of accurate diagnostic and accountability data.

A Sense of Urgency

Every nine seconds, a student drops out of school in the U.S. The individual and social costs of this catastrophic waste of human potential are staggering. According to Charles Stayton, writing for the [American Youth Policy Forum](#), “three-quarters of state prison inmates and 59% 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. Raising the high school completion rate 1% for all men ages 20-60 would save the US \$1.4 billion annually in crime-related costs.”

“Dropouts earn less and require greater public assistance than high school completers. Compared to 11% for high school graduates, 25% of dropouts were unemployed for a year or more during the four year span of 1997-2001. Between welfare benefits and crime, dropouts create an annual estimated cost of \$24 billion to the public. The US would save \$41.8 billion in health care costs if the 600,000 dropouts in 2004 were to complete one more year of schooling.”

In addition to this nation’s ethical and legal commitments to assure that every student has a good shot at a successful future, a very practical problem now looms large: the current conditions are not sustainable in a competitive global economy. But while the problem is national, and has global consequences, it is increasingly clear that the solutions are local – they must come from the thoughtful and competent people who work with high risk kids in schools every day. Beyond rhetoric, and in very practical terms, through their efforts with some of the most challenging students in the system, teachers and principals will truly shape the future of their communities and nation.

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Programs and Resources

These research reports, cited in this paper, also have excellent examples and descriptions of successful dropout prevention and recovery programs and practices.

1. [*Beating the Odds: How 13 NYC Schools Bring Low-Performing 9th Graders to Timely Completion and College Enrollment.*](#)
2. [*Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide \(NCEE 2008–4025\).*](#)
3. [*Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground: How Some High Schools Accelerate Learning for Struggling Students.*](#)
4. [*The Power to Change: High Schools that Help All Students Achieve.*](#)

Other Resources

[The American Youth Policy Forum.](#)

This group, which is devoted to enhancing the quality of life and education for young people, has a tremendous library of materials on dropout prevention and recovery.

[The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.](#)

This is the mother lode for dropout prevention research, programs and materials. Be sure to look carefully at their “15 Strategies” for dropout prevention – all very clear and based on good research. Also, consider purchasing two of their most helpful books:

- *Helping Students Graduate: A Strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention* by J. Smink and F.P. Schargel
- *The Principal's Role in Dropout Prevention: Seven Key Principles* by S.W. Edwards and R. Edwards

[National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities.](#)

This center, a branch of the National Dropout Prevention Center, was formed to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities through knowledge synthesis, technical assistance, and dissemination of interventions and practices that work.

[What Works Clearinghouse.](#)

From the US Department of Education, Institute for Education Studies, this clearinghouse provides high quality materials about programs and practices based on scientific research.



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