

Silent Crisis: Large Numbers of Youth Are Not Completing High School

Today's high schools are not graduating all students -- with the skills they need for today's economy.

According to Diplomas Count, a June 2006 Education Week report, 30 percent of 9th graders fail to finish high school with their peers -- an estimated 1.2 million U.S. students from the class of 2006, and most of them are members of minority groups.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2006/06/22/index.html?levelId=2300> [1]

In "One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities," the Education Testing Service's Policy Information Center finds that the nation's high dropout rates are rising in all but seven states and that more students are dropping out between ninth and tenth grades. The report identifies key factors accounting for the wide range of completion rates among the states and documents a steep decline in federal investment in second-chance programs, from about \$15 billion in the late 1970s to about \$3 billion today.

http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/onethird.pdf [2]

Nationally, about 68 percent of students who enter 9th grade will graduate in four years – but rates in southern states are much lower, according to a new study by the Civil Rights Project. In this region the graduation rates for minority youth and all youth in poverty rarely exceed 50 percent.

http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/dropouts_south05.php [3]

A recent Communities in Schools survey finds that only one in ten Americans believe the high school dropout problem is a crisis. Most associate high school dropouts with economic and social problems but underestimate how many dropouts there are and underestimate the percentage of young prison inmates who failed to complete high school.

<http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/cisnet/21786/> [4]

It is estimated that there are 3.8 million youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school—roughly 15 percent of all young adults. Since 2000 alone, the ranks of these non-engaged young adults grew by 700,000, a 19 percent increase over 3 years. (Kids Count Data Book, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004)

<http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/essay.htm> [5]

Nationwide the overall graduation rate for the class of 2001 was 68 percent, with nearly one-third of all public high school students failing to graduate. (Who Graduates? Who Doesn't?, Urban Institute, 2004)

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410934> [6]

When the results are broken down by race and ethnicity, more than 75 percent of white and Asian students completed high school with a diploma. Graduation rates for black, American Indian and

Hispanic students are closer to fifty-fifty -- 50, 51, and 53 percent respectively. Graduation rates were also substantially lower for students educated in highly segregated, socio-economically disadvantaged, and urban school systems. (Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis, Urban Institute and Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2004)

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410936> [7]

Only half of the nation's minority students graduate from high school along with their peers. For many groups-Latino, black, or Native American males-graduation rates are even lower. As states hasten to institute higher standards and high-stakes tests in the effort to raise student achievement, this situation is likely to worsen, particularly among minority students. Yet this educational and civil rights crisis remains largely hidden from public view.

<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hepg/dropoutsinamerica.html> [8]

Between seventy-five and eighty percent of the four million current 14 year olds will graduate high school with a regular degree. Approximately twenty-eight percent of these youth, a little over a million, will go on to obtain a bachelors degree. Another thirty percent will complete 1-3 years of college. However, between 20 and 25% will dropout of high school -- nearly as many as those who obtain a BA. (Wald, M and T. Martinez, "Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year-Olds," 2003)

<http://www.youthtransitions.org/pub/Connectedby25.htm> [9]

Event dropout rates represent the percentage of students who drop out of high school each year. During the 1970s and 1980s, event dropout rates improved, but rates remained unchanged for all income groups during the 1990s. During the 12 months ending in October 2001, high school students from low-income families (the lowest 20 percent) dropped out of school at six times the rate of their peers from high-income families. About 11 percent of students from low-income families dropped out of high school, whereas 5 percent of middle-income students and 2 percent of high-income students did so. (The Condition of Education 2004 in Brief, Indicator 10, p. 11)

<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/> [10]

The national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 71%. For white students the rate was 78%, while it was 56% for African-American students and 54% for Latino students. (Jay P. Greene, High School Graduate Rates in the United States, Manhattan Institute, Black Alliance for Educational Opportunities, April, 2002)

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm#14 [11]

To keep the economy strong and competitive, America needs every high school student to graduate with skills needed for work or higher learning.

More than 1.2 million students didn't graduate from U.S. high schools in 2004, costing the nation more than \$325 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity. The Alliance for Excellent Education has a state by state chart showing the losses over a lifetime to each state and the District of Columbia.

http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr_022806.html [12]

Between 1997 and 2001, more than a quarter of all dropouts were unemployed for a year or longer, compared with only 11 percent of those with a high school diploma or GED. (Wald, M and T. Martinez, "Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year-Olds," 2003)

<http://www.youthtransitions.org/pub/Connectedby25.htm> [13]

Youth who drop out of high school are at very high risk of long-term disconnection, including those who later get a GED. While the majority of high school dropouts do manage to eventually connect with the labor force, the great majority experience long periods of unemployment. One study that followed a large group of high school aged youth from 1979 until 1992 found that eighty percent of all those without a high school diploma were unemployed for at least a full year; half were disconnected from the labor force for 3 or more years between their 18th and 25th birthdays¹⁸. More recently, in 2000, a time of very low unemployment, only slightly over half of all dropouts were employed at any given time. (Wald, M and T. Martinez, "Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year-Olds," 2003)

<http://www.youthtransitions.org/pub/Connectedby25.htm> [14]

In this decade, the number of 20-24 year olds searching for jobs and training opportunities will increase by 21 percent, and the skill levels required for those jobs will be higher than in the past. (American Youth Policy Forum, 2001)

<http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2001/fb013001.htm> [15]

At a time when our country's economic growth is more dependent than ever on an educated and skilled workforce, the largest projected population increases are among the demographic groups with the greatest percentages of vulnerable youth (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, Access Denied: Restoring the Nation's Commitment to Equal Educational Opportunity).

<http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=2427> [16]

Increasing minority students' participation in college to the same percentage as that of white students would create an additional \$231 billion in GDP. (Anthony P. Carnevale and Richard A. Fry, Crossing the Great Divide, 2000).

<http://www.ets.org/research/dload/CrossingDivide.pdf> [17]

It costs Michigan employers \$330 million to \$1.15 billion annually to correct the shortcomings of workers who leave high school without basic skills. (Greene, The Cost of Remedial Education, 2000)

<http://www.educationreport.org/article.asp?ID=3025> [18]

Six million students throughout America are currently at risk of dropping out of school. High school dropouts are unable to enter the workforce with the necessary skills to meet the demands of the nation's global economy. American business currently spends more than \$60 billion each year on training, much of that on remedial reading, writing, and mathematics. (Alliance for Excellent Education factsheet)

<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/Economy%20Factoids%20for%20Website.doc> [19]

Students who don't complete high school today face enormous odds in the workforce.

Among those over 25 years old who failed to complete high school or receive a GED, 55% report no earnings in the 1999 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census compared to 25% of those with at least a high school degree or GED. For people reporting any earnings the median income for those who left school without a high school diploma or GED is \$15,334 compared to \$29,294 for people with at least a high school degree or GED. (Jay P. Greene, High School Graduate Rates in the United States, Manhattan Institute, Black Alliance for Educational Opportunities, April, 2002)

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm#14 [20]

In 1973, 36 percent of Americans in skilled blue-collar and related fields had not finished high school, while just 17 percent had some college or a degree. By 1998, only 11 percent of Americans in skilled blue collar and related careers had not finished high school, while 48 percent of such workers had some college or a degree. (Carnevale 2001, as quoted by Alliance for Excellent Education).

<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/Economy%20Factoids%20for%20Website.doc> [21]

Nine out of ten of the 11,000 youth in adult detention facilities have, at best, a ninth-grade education (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001, From the Prison Track to the College Track).

<http://www.jff.org/jff/kc/library.0228> [22]

During 2001, only 55% of young adult dropouts were employed as opposed to 74% of high school graduates, 81% of those completing some college and 87% of four-year college graduates (Andrew Sum et al, Left Behind in the Labor Market, 2002)

<http://www.nupr.neu.edu/2-03/jobless.html> [23]

Of the estimated 5.5 million disconnected youngsters [not working and not in school] in 2001, 43 percent were dropouts. (Andrew Sum et al, Left Behind in the Labor Market, 2002).

<http://www.nupr.neu.edu/2-03/jobless.html> [24]

Some education reforms encourage schools to push struggling students out instead of keeping them enrolled.

The increasing reliance on zero tolerance policies can push students out of school and into the juvenile justice system for the kinds of discipline infractions that used to be dealt with as a purely school matter. (The Dropout Crisis, Jobs for the Future, 2004).

<http://www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0232> [25]

The emphasis on standards and accountability, high school exit exams, and other reforms has brought some unintended consequences – incentives that discourages schools from doing what it takes to keep low-performing teens enrolled and few incentives to track or re-engage students when they drop out. (Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis, Urban Institute and Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2004)

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410936> [26]

A uniform standard for measuring graduation and drop-out rates will help schools and communities measure their progress and their challenges.

On May 26, 2006 Maryland became the first state in the union to adopt a law designed to enact the governors' compact on calculating graduation completions and dropouts. Maryland's new law can serve as a model for other states to implement the promise of the compact to establish procedures to collect accurate, honest data based on a standard 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. <http://mlis.state.md.us/2006rs/bills/hb/hb0071t.pdf> [27]

Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became federal law in January 2002, high school graduation rates have gained an increasingly important place in educational policy circles. The federal law for the first time requires that high schools and school systems be held accountable in a meaningful way for graduation rates as well as performance on academic assessments. This important step in the evolution of federal accountability has generated a considerable amount of debate over a variety of issues including: the state of the nation with regard to this key measure of educational fitness; graduation levels among particular student subgroups (such as historically disadvantaged minorities); the ways in which states are implementing graduation rate accountability required under the law; and even the best methods for measuring graduation rates. (Who Graduates? Who Doesn't?, Urban Institute, 2004) <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410934> [28]

Accurate, reliable information about how many of the nation's children are not completing high school -- and who these children are -- is critical. Without it, policymakers and school administrators are unable to effectively assess school quality, determine school progress, and propose reforms to improve outcomes.

<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/MeasuringGraduationToMeasureSuccess.html> [29]

It would seem to be a simple question of either having a diploma or not, but educators, researchers and policymakers throughout the country have long debated the exact definition of a dropout and exactly how dropouts should be counted. Some use enrollment figures to reach their conclusions, while others rely on population surveys from the U.S. Census. Some include GED recipients in their high school completion rates; others do not. Some account for the large influx of immigrants into public schools, and some do not. Some keep close tabs on transfer students; many do not. (Lucy Hood, High School Students at Risk: the Challenge of Dropouts and Pushouts, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2004)

http://www.carnegie.org/pdf/challenge_dropouts.pdf [30]

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) finds a national high school completion rate of 86% for the class of 1998. The discrepancy between the NCES' finding and this report's finding of a 71% rate is largely caused by NCES' counting of General Educational Development (GED) graduates and others with alternative credentials as high school graduates, and by its reliance on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts. (Jay P. Greene, High School Graduate Rates in the United States, Manhattan Institute)

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm#14 [31]

The GAO Says DOE Could Do More on Accounting for Graduation Rates
The Government Accountability Office reports on steps to improve the accuracy of measuring high school graduation rates. GAO says the Department of Education could do more to help states better define graduation rates and improve the accuracy of the data.

<http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d05879high.pdf> [32]

Whatever It Takes

Every nine seconds in America, a youth becomes a drop out. Research indicates that many see value in finishing school, and would do so if they felt it possible. What can educators, policymakers, and community leaders do to reconnect out-of-school youth? This American Youth Policy Forum report looks at effective efforts in 12 communities, including charter and alternative schools for kids who have already left school; a partnership among a school district, community college, and local organizations; and a year-round school with ties to local businesses that offers courses in high-demand skills.

<http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf> [33]

The American Youth Policy Forum Issue Brief on the dropout crisis has a good overview and identifies key programs at the federal, state and local level that are taking the lead in dropout recovery. <http://www.aypf.org/projects/briefs/DropoutPreventionRecovery.htm> [34]
Current estimates put the number of youth who are not in school, do not have a diploma, and not working at 3.8 million. These youth need access to high quality alternative education and training opportunities to equip them to compete in today's labor market. In "An Overview of Alternative Education" Laudan Y. Aron of the Urban Institute looks at policies and funding streams that could serve to bring to scale alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school youth.

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411283_alternative_education.pdf [35]

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