

Psych Savvy

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SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION

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Adapted from Canter, A. Caroll S. (Eds). (1998). National Association of School Psychologists *Helping Children at Home and School* . School Dropout Prevention. Hale, F. and Canter, A.

WHAT ARE THE PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL COSTS OF DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

A school dropout is likely to earn one-half as much as a high school graduate. They are three times more likely to live in poverty in comparison to persons who complete their high school education. Over the course of a person's lifetime, each year's dropouts will cost \$200 billion dollars in lost earning and tax revenue.

WHAT FACTORS AFFECT THE DECISION TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

Poor academic performance is the biggest factor in a students' decision to dropout of school. Poor grades and low test scores may increase student frustration and reduce motivation to stay in school. Students who have been retained in a grade are three times as likely to dropout of school than non-retained students.

Poor behavioral adjustment is prevalent in students who dropout. Challenging behaviors may date back to primary grades. It is essential teachers and parents work together to assist students in learning to cope with behavioral expectations of the school setting.

Truancy and tardiness occur in higher rates with students who eventually dropout of school. Respond to attendance issues as an early warning sign of poor school involvement.

Negative attitudes toward school are another risk factor. Dropouts, are often students who perceive the school as non-supportive or irrelevant.

Families can have a powerful effect on student achievement and motivation both positive and negative. Parents, who perceive schools negatively, have minimal involvement with school and place little value on attendance and achievement can contribute to a child's decision to discontinue schooling. Having an older sibling who is a dropout greatly increases the probability the younger one will quit school as well.

Social isolation and lack of involvement in school based activities are more often reported by dropouts. They may be more likely to be involved with community based activities instead of with classmates.

Rigid school policies can be a contributing factor in dropout rates. Schools with rigid retention policies, heavy emphasis on competency testing, and perceived “unfair” discipline practices tend to have high dropout rates. Large class size, high teacher turnover, low teacher expectations for student performance and perceived lack of support for students with academic and behavior problems are related to decisions to quit school.

Communities can contribute to the decision to stay in school or not. Employment opportunities for unskilled workers can discourage school attendance. Communities that value education and encourage school-community partnerships are more likely to establish programs that maintain student engagement in school. Supports for ethnic minorities and low income students can greatly influence school completion.

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND TEACHERS DO?

Set goals with your son or daughter to identify what he/she wants to get from the school experience. Shift the focus from blaming to identifying barriers (home, school, personal) to those goals. Discussing ways of overcoming obstacles rather than complaining or quitting can help to motivate school performance.

Encourage school involvement through regular attendance and at least one extra-curricular activity at school or with a group of classmates. Taking part in school activities help students feel a part of their peer group and important to the school. Extra curricular involvement increases student motivation to perform academically in order to participate. Teens must have something positive to look forward to in terms of kinship needs. If they can't meet these needs in the school setting they will find other ways of doing so; perhaps in less desirable settings.

Consider alternatives within and outside the local school district. Would one of ASD's alternative programs or optional schools better match your students' goals and strengths? Parents and teachers should speak with the school psychologist or school counselor to investigate alternative settings for the students' learning. When considering an alternative program, have the *student* initiate calls for information, arrange visits and complete the forms. It is important for students to assume important personal responsibilities when they are asking to be treated as an adult.

Consider realistic post-secondary goals. Work with students to identify their interests, strengths, and marketable skills. “If the desired vocation requires college, identify the steps to accomplishing those goals. If technical training or a community college is more appropriate, identify the steps to entering those programs.

Consider a GED. Students can study for this exam through community education programs and independently. Locally, Nine Star has programs to help students attain their GED. Remember to stress to all students that the diploma or GED is only the **first** step in completing their education. Learning is a life-long activity and many careers require continuing education.

Identify special needs by consulting with school personnel to determine if the student may have learning, emotional, or behavior problems that interfere with learning.

Resources

Gausted, Joan (1991). *Identifying potential dropouts.* Eugene, OR **ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (ERIC No. Ed 339093).**

Martin, M. Y Waltman-Greenwood, C. (Eds.). (1995). *Solving your child's school related problems.* New York: HarperPerennial.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993). *Reaching the goals, Goal 2: High school completion,* Washington. D.C. : Author (ED 365 471).

National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University, 205 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29634-5111; (803) 656-2599; <<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>>