Why Do Youth Drop Out?
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Nevada has a serious problem with student dropout. Nine percent of Nevada’s teens are high school dropouts (Nevada Department of Education, 1998). This alarming number ranks Nevada as one of the worst states in the nation for youth dropout (Kids Count, 1998).

Who drops out?

While any student is at risk of dropping out, some students seem to be more likely than others to dropout. Researchers have found that youth who dropout are more likely than their peers to be:

- learning disabled;
- lower academic achievers;
- Hispanic- or African-American;
- class repeaters;
- employed in entry level jobs;
- lower socioeconomic status;
- from single parent families (Roderick, 1993)

Researchers also have found that students who attend large schools or schools with high student/teacher ratios are more likely to dropout (McNeal, 1997).

School dropout is a problem that has increasingly significant societal consequences. The importance of a high school education as a minimum standard for employment has dramatically increased over the past fifty years. Researchers have found that youth who dropout have: lower lifetime earning levels, higher unemployment, and a greater likelihood for criminal involvement (McNeal, 1997). Economists also have found that increased dropout rates are associated with lower tax revenues and increased expenditure for government assistance programs (Rumberger, 1987). Most importantly, dropping out can prevent a youth from reaching his/her fullest potential.
Why do students dropout?

Although knowing which students dropout is important, understanding the reasons why students leave school can help us to prevent dropping out from occurring in the first place. There are two major theories of why students dropout (Finn, 1989).

Frustration self-esteem model. This model suggests that as youth progress through their student careers they might have failures. These failures increase a student’s likelihood of having a lower school-related self-esteem. This lower self-esteem leads to a frustration with school and eventually to dropping out (see below).

Frustration self-esteem model
Unsuccessful → Reduced → Dropout
school performance Self-esteem

Participation-connection model. This model suggests that as youth actively participate in school the more likely they are to feel a sense of connection to school. The greater a student’s sense of connection to school is, the less likely he or she is to dropout (see below).

Participation-connection model
- Extracurricular activity involvement.
- Active participation in classroom.
- Decision-making in the classroom.
- Etc.

What do dropouts say about why they dropped out?

A recent U.S. Department of Education study questioned youth who dropped out and asked them, “What reasons were important in your decision to dropout?” (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Percent of dropouts who agreed this was a reason</th>
<th>Percentage of male dropouts who agreed with this reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not like school</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get along with teachers</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get along with students</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was suspended too often</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not feel safe at school</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt I didn’t belong</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not keep up with school work</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was failing school</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn’t work and go to school at the same time</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to get a job</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to support family</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was pregnant</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends dropped out</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, students stop attending school for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, a youth’s decision to dropout is influenced by his/her own personal history of interaction with school. Dropout is a process that begins early in childhood and comes to a head in adolescence. Parents and teachers need to work together to develop long-term strategies to prevent youth dropout.

What can parents and teachers do to prevent dropout?

Teachers
- Understand that students learn in different ways and at different paces. In order to reduce student frustration with school, teachers should work toward allowing the students to learn using their own style and pace.
- Classroom lessons should be participatory, involving students in the exploration and presentation of subject matter (Finn, 1989).
- Students should also be encouraged to get involved with extracurricular activities. Any involvement in prosocial activities can ultimately discourage a youth from leaving school (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).
- Teachers and parents should work closely together as a team for the success of the student. This work should not begin only when there is a problem.

Parents
- Emphasize the value of education and its importance in getting a good job. This emphasis should begin early on and continue throughout a student’s school career.
- Monitor your child’s school progress. Parents should have a way of knowing if their child is completing assignments, missing school, failing classes, or losing interest in school.
- Help stop early school failures. If a child is not doing well in a subject, get him/her extra help to improve his/her skills. Early school success can keep a struggling student positive about school.
- Discourage your child from using substances (tobacco, alcohol, and drugs). Early substance use can contribute to higher absenteeism, lower grades, and a gradual dislike of school.
- Since pregnancy is one of the leading reasons teenage girls dropout, parents should take care to educate their children about abstinence, sex, and birth control. In addition, many teenage pregnancies involve males over 21 years of age. Parents should monitor when their children go out and with whom.
- Take parenting classes if you feel you need help in parenting your child. If in need of parenting education courses, parents can contact: Families Back in Control @ (702)455-5295, a parent education program that has classes on parenting adolescents.

References