The Bottom Line
School Dropout Information

Table 1: Event dropout rates, % of all dropouts, and % of population of 15- through 24-year-olds who dropped out of grades 10-12, by background characteristics.

Characteristics	Event dropout rate (%)	# of dropouts in thousands	% of all dropouts	% of population
Total	5.0	519	100.0	100.0
Sex				
Male	4.6	243	46.8	51.1
Female	5.4	276	53.2	48.9
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	4.0	274	52.8	66.1
Black, non-Hispanic	6.5	106	20.4	15.7
Hispanic	7.8	105	20.2	12.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.0	25	4.8	4.7
Family Income				
Low	11.0	160	30.8	13.9
Middle	5.0	295	56.8	56.7
High	2.1	65	12.5	29.4
Region				
Northeast	4.0	76	14.6	18.2
Midwest	3.9	98	18.9	24.1
South	4.8	178	34.3	35.1
West	7.1	168	32.4	22.5

From: Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999. National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 2001.

Notes:

- Over the past quarter of a century, the percentage of students dropping out of school each year has stayed relatively unchanged.
- Low income is defined as the bottom 20% of all family incomes for the year; middle income is between 20% and 80%, and high income is the top 20% of all family incomes.
- Family income serves as a good indicator for the other social and economic factors that are likely to be related to a young adult's decision to stay in school.
- There was a decline in dropout rates for all income groups in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, event dropout rates for low-income youth approached 10% in 1989. Since 1990, dropout rates for low-income youth have fluctuated between 11% and 13%.

Table 2—Percentage of 15- through 24-year olds who dropped out of grades 10-12 in the past year, percentage of 16- through 24-year olds who were dropouts, and percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds who completed high school by race/ethnicity: October 1999

Dropout and completion rates	Total	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander
% of youth ages 15-24 who dropped out of grades 10-12, October 1998 to October 1999	5.0	4.0	6.5	7.8	5.0
% of youth ages 16-24 who were dropouts in 1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6	4.3
% of youth ages 18-24 who were high school completers in 1999	85.9	91.2	83.5	63.4	94.0

From: Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999. National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 2001.

Method of High School Completion

Approximately 76.8% of the 18- through 24-year-olds who were not enrolled in high school held regular diplomas (high school graduation rate). An additional 9.2% had completed high school by taking a high school equivalency test such as the GED.

Economic Penalties for Dropping Out

- High school dropouts are about three times as likely as those who have finished high school to slip into poverty from one year to the next.
  (*Current population survey microdata.* (1989-1998). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

- Five years after acquiring a GED with a score on the exam that was just passing, the average earnings of a 21- to 26-year-old white, non-Hispanic, adult was about $11,000 in 1995—less than the poverty level for a family of three that year.
  (Murnane, R. J., & Tyler, J. H. (May 3, 2000). The increasing role of the GED in American Education. *Education Week on the Web.* www.edweek.org)

- Between 1973 and 1997, the average hourly wage (adjusted for inflation) of high school dropouts fell 31%.
  (*Kids count data book.* (2000). Annie E. Casey Foundatio n.)

- Average annual earning by educational level: 1992-1993
  - High school dropout $12,809
  - High school graduate, no college $18,737
  - College graduate/Bachelor's degree $32,629
  - College graduate/Master's degree $48,635
  (*Education attainment in the Un ited States: March 1993 and 1992.* U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office)

What Dropouts Say

In 1990, tenth-grade dropouts were asked to identify the reasons they left school. The reasons they gave are listed below:

Reasons	Total	Male	Female
School related:			
Did not like school	51.2	57.8	44.2
Could not get along with teachers	35.0	51.6	17.2
Could not get along with students	20.1	18.3	21.9
Was suspended too often	16.1	19.2	12.7
Did not feel safe at school	12.1	11.5	12.8
Was expelled	13.4	17.6	8.9
Felt I didn't belong	23.2	31.5	14.4
Could not keep up with school work	31.3	37.6	24.7
Was failing school	39.9	46.2	33.1
Changed school, didn't like new one	13.2	10.8	15.8
Job related:			
Couldn't work and go to school at same time	14.1	20.0	7.8
Had to get a job	15.3	14.7	16.0
Found a job	15.3	18.6	11.8
Family related:			
Had to support family	9.2	4.8	14.0
Wanted to have family	6.2	4.2	8.4
Was pregnant	31.0	__	31.0
Became parent	13.6	5.1	22.6
Got married	13.1	3.4	23.6
Had to care for family member	8.3	4.6	12.2
Other:			
Wanted to travel	2.1	2.5	1.7
Friends dropped out	14.1	16.8	11.3

(U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: First Follow-up Study, 1990.)

Attendance and Truancy
Poor attendance best predicts whether students will drop out.

Dynarski, M., & Gleason, P. (1999). *How can we help? Lessons from federal dropout prevention programs.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Students who have been held back and are "over-age for grade" are most likely to be truant. Likewise, so are students misplaced in special education or enrolled in low-level classes.

Wheelock, A. (2001). Fighting Truancy: What Works? What Doesn't? *SouthCoast Today* (online). Available: www.s-t.com/daily.

Who's At Risk

According to Wells (1990) these situations put youth at risk:

School Related	Student Related
Conflict between home/school culture	Poor School Attitude
Ineffective discipline system	Low ability level
Lack of adequate counseling	Attendance/truancy
Negative school climate	Behavior/discipline problems
Lack of relevant curriculum	Pregnancy
Passive instructional strategies	Drug Abuse
Inappropriate use of technology	Poor peer relationships
Disregard of student learning styles	Nonparticipation
Retentions/Suspensions	Friends have dropped out
Low expectations	Illness/disability
Lack of language instruction	Low self-esteem/self-efficacy
Community Related	**Family Related**
Lack of community support services or response	Low SES
	Dysfunctional home life
Lack of community support for schools	No parental involvement
High incidences of criminal activities	Low parental expectations
Lack of school/community linkages	Non-English-speaking home
	Ineffective parenting/abuse
	High mobility

Duttweiler, P.C. (1995). *Effective strategies for educating students at risk.* Clemson SC: National Dropout Prevention Center.

Behind the Data

NDPC research and experience indicates that there are additional reasons why students drop out, including the following:

- Lack of academic achievement
- School's failure to meet students' learning needs
- School attendance and discipline policies
- Mental health issues
- Health problems and nutrition
- Abusive/disruptive home life
- Community gang influences
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Behavior and discipline problems
- Juvenile court
- School's failure to handle discipline appropriately
- Family criminal behavior/arrests

Additional Resources

National Dropout Prevention Center
www.dropoutprevention.org

National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students
www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/At-Risk

Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR)
www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar