

Why Do Students Drop Out?

Even though high school completion rates have continually increased during much of the past 100 years, dropping out of school persists as a problem that interferes with educational system efficiency and the most straightforward and satisfying route to individual educational goals for young people.

Reasons Reported in Representative Studies

Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013) present data from multiple nationally representative studies (spanning more than 50 years) regarding reasons students drop out of high school. A look at the top ten reasons from each study is presented in the table below; however, for a complete discussion, please see the original article at <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/3/4/2158244013503834>

Note that questions asked, age groups analyzed, and numbers of students surveyed varied from study to study (database to database), so caution should be taken in making comparisons across years and studies.

Top Ten Ranked Reported Reasons for Dropping Out, from Nationally Representative Studies and Databases

2006 ^a	Freq (%)	Causes	1992 ^b	Freq (%)	Causes	1990 ^c	Freq (%)
<i>Missed too many school days</i>	44		<i>Did not like school</i>	43		<i>Did not like school</i>	51
<i>Thought it would be easier to get GED</i>	41		<i>Was failing school</i>	39		<i>Was failing school</i>	40
<i>Was getting poor grades/failing school</i>	38		<i>Could not keep up with schoolwork</i>	31		<i>Could not get along with teachers</i>	35
<i>Did not like school</i>	37		<i>Found a job</i>	29		<i>Could not keep up with schoolwork</i>	31
<i>Could not keep up with schoolwork</i>	32		<i>Was pregnant</i>	27		<i>Was pregnant</i>	31
<i>Was pregnant</i>	28		<i>Felt I did not belong</i>	24		<i>Felt I did not belong</i>	23
<i>Got a job</i>	28		<i>Could not work and go to school at the same time</i>	23		<i>Could not get along with students</i>	20
<i>Thought could not complete course requirements</i>	26		<i>Could not get along with teachers</i>	23		<i>Was suspended too often</i>	16
<i>Could not get along with teachers</i>	25		<i>Got married</i>	21		<i>Had to get a job</i>	15
<i>Could not work at same time</i>	22		<i>Was suspended/expelled from school</i>	16		<i>Found a job</i>	15
n=663			n=724			n=1,088	
1980 ^d	Freq (%)	Causes	1979 ^e	Freq (%)	Causes	1972 ^f	Freq (%)
<i>School was not for me</i>	33		<i>Disliked school</i>	29		<i>Poor study habits</i>	67
<i>Had poor grades</i>	33		<i>Work</i>	10		<i>Teachers did not help me enough</i>	62
<i>Offered job and chose to work</i>	19		<i>Pregnant</i>	10		<i>School does not offer courses I like</i>	52
<i>Married or planned to get married</i>	18		<i>Got married</i>	8		<i>Courses are too hard</i>	49
<i>Could not get along with teachers</i>	15		<i>Poor grades</i>	7		<i>Poor teaching</i>	49
<i>Was pregnant</i>	11		<i>Expelled/suspended</i>	7		<i>Do not feel a part of school</i>	48
<i>Had to support family</i>	11		<i>Home responsibilities</i>	6		<i>Find it hard to adjust to school routine</i>	48

<i>Expelled or suspended</i>	9	<i>Financial reasons</i>	4	<i>Worried about money problems</i>	41
<i>Wanted to travel</i>	7	<i>School too dangerous</i>	1	<i>Parents aren't interested in my education</i>	39
<i>Did not get into desired program</i>	6	-	-	<i>Family obligations (other than money problems)</i>	34
n=2,289		n=1,567		n=134	

Causes	1966^g	Freq (%)	Causes	1955^h	Freq (%)
<i>Other</i>		35	<i>Got married</i>		34
<i>Had to work</i>		17	<i>Did not like school</i>		26
<i>Marriage</i>		13	<i>Wanted to go to work</i>		26
<i>Could not afford college</i>		10	<i>Was not doing well in my studies</i>		23
<i>Disliked school</i>		9	<i>Financial difficulties at home</i>		16
<i>No particular reason</i>		5	<i>Enlisted in the Armed Forces</i>		15
<i>Pregnancy</i>		4	<i>Other</i>		12
<i>Lack of ability</i>		3	<i>Became pregnant</i>		10
<i>Military service</i>		3	<i>Always wanted to quit as soon as I could legally</i>		8
<i>Family obligations</i>		<1	<i>The job I wanted did not require more schooling</i>		6
n= 4,347			n=220		

Source: Doll, Eslami, & Walters (2013).

^aFrom "Table 10. Education Longitudinal Study (2002) Ranked Reason for Dropout in 2006 by Student Dropouts," (Dalton, Glennie, Ingels, and Wirt, 2009). ^bFrom "Table 7. National Education Longitudinal Study (1988) Ranked Reasons for Dropout in 1992, From 10th to 12th Grade by Student Dropouts," (McMillen and Kaufman, 1993). ^cFrom "Table 6. National Education Longitudinal Study (1988) Ranked Reasons for 8th- to 10th-Grade Dropout in 1990 by Student Dropouts," (McMillen and Kaufman, 1993). ^dFrom "Table 5. High School and Beyond Study (1980) Ranked Reasons for Sophomore Dropout in 1980 by Student Dropouts by Peng," (Peng, 1983). ^eFrom "Table 4. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience (1979) Ranked Reasons for Dropout by Rumberger," (Rumberger, 1982). ^fFrom "Table 3. National Longitudinal Study of High School Class of 1972 Ranked Reasons for Things That Interfered With Education for Students Who Dropped Out, According to Gender," (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics). ^gFrom "Table 2. National Longitudinal Study of Young Women and Young Men (1966) Ranked Reasons for Dropout by Student Dropouts," (Bureau of Labor Statistics). ^hFrom "Table 1. Explorations in Equality of Opportunity (1955) Ranked Reasons for Dropout by Student Dropouts," (Eckland, 1972).

Push, Pull, or Falling Out Factors

Included in the Doll et al. (2003) article is an interesting analysis of whether the reasons presented are considered "push," "pull," or "falling out" factors. The following briefly presents an explanation.

Jordan et al. (1994) explained pressures on students of *push* and *pull* dropout factors. A student is *pushed out* when adverse situations within the school environment lead to consequences, ultimately resulting in dropout. . . . [S]tudents can be *pulled out* when factors inside the student divert them from completing school. . . . Watt and Roessingh (1994) added a third factor called *falling out* of school, which occurs when a student does not show significant academic progress in schoolwork and becomes apathetic or even disillusioned with school completion. It is not necessarily an active decision, but rather a "side-effect of insufficient personal and educational support" (p. 293).

Primary Source:

Doll, J. J., Eslami, Z., & Walters, L. (2013, October-December). Understanding why students drop out of high school, according to their own reports: Are they pushed or pulled, or do

they fall out? A comparative analysis of seven nationally representative studies. *SAGE open*, 3(4). doi: 10.1177/2158244013503834

With References to:

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Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2005b). *NLS handbook: 2005. Chapter 6: NLS of mature and young men*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/nls/handbook/2005/nlshc6.pdf>

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Watt, D., & Roessingh, H. (1994). Some you win, most you lose: Tracking ESL dropout in high school (1988-1993). *English Quarterly*, 26, 5-7.