

# The Role of Parents in Dropout Prevention

## Strategies that Promote Graduation and School Achievement

### Introduction

Students who drop out of school face a difficult future. They are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, and/or impoverished. For students with disabilities, the risks are intensified. Their dropout rate is about 40 percent, which is more than twice that of their peers without disabilities. However, families can play an important role in making sure their student with or without disabilities graduates. Staying involved in your teen's life during middle school and high school is critical. This Brief provides information and practical tips to help you do this.

### Students who do not earn a high school diploma are more likely to:

- face unemployment
- live in poverty
- be incarcerated
- earn half as much annual income as a high school graduate
- have children at an early age
- use illicit drugs, tobacco, or both
- be overweight

*Source: Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003*

### Risk Factors for Dropping Out

Identifying students who are most likely to drop out is not a precise process. Some students with no risk factors leave school, and some with many risk factors complete school.

Although risk factors are not precise predictors, parents should be aware of them. More importantly, they should become involved or seek assistance if they repeatedly see risky behaviors such as skipping school, failing classes, having significant discipline problems, or being involved in illegal activities.

### Students with disabilities are at greater risk of dropping out if:

- they have been held back a grade
- they are older than the other students in their grade
- they have limited English proficiency
- they have family or economic problems

(Dynarski & Gleason, 1999; Wells, 1990; Williams Bost, 2004).

Among students with disabilities, students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (EBD) and students with learning disabilities (LD) are at greatest risk of dropping out (*Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Wagner, 1995; Wagner & Cameto, 2004; Wagner et al., 1991*).

## Why Do Youth Drop Out?

When youth drop out of school, it isn't always an intentional decision. Many say they simply stopped going to school one day and no one objected. Some youth may drop out because they have problems with teachers, dislike school, or receive low grades. Other youth, however, leave school because of problems not directly related to academics, such as financial needs, family caretaking responsibilities, employment, or pregnancy. Others drop out because they think that principals or teachers wanted them to (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004; Williams Bost, 2004).

## Consequences

Most students who drop out have not fully considered the consequences and typically are not prepared for what happens to them afterward. Although they are not finished maturing physically and emotionally, these adolescents often face the challenging transition to independent living and adulthood without the benefit of adult guidance, support systems, or services. As a result, they are more likely to face poor job prospects, experience lifelong dependence on social service systems, use illicit drugs, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and become teen parents (*Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003; American Youth Policy Forum, 1998; Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003; Harlow, 2003*).

## Family Involvement and School Completion

Family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and success. The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement is the extent to which his/her family encourages learning. Success is more likely if the family communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for the student's education and future career and becomes involved in his/her education. Middle school and high school students whose parents remain involved tend to:

- make better transitions
- maintain the quality of their work
- develop realistic plans for their future
- have higher graduation rates
- advance to postsecondary education

(*Clark, 1993; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2004; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Williams Bost, 2004*).

## **When families are involved, students are more likely to:**

- earn high grade-point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales,
- enroll in more challenging academic programs,
- pass more classes and earn more credits,
- attend school regularly,
- display positive attitudes about school,
- graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary programs, and
- refrain from destructive activities such as alcohol and drug use and violence.

Source: National Parent Teacher Association, 2001

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