

WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

March 2006

Site of the Month

The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, a report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was released yesterday. The highly anticipated report looks at why students drop out of school and what schools and communities can do to prevent students from dropping out.

Dropouts, ages 16 to 25, either participated in four focus groups or were interviewed regarding their school experience. Most of the dropouts regretted dropping out of school—74 percent would have stayed in school if they could do it over again and 76 percent would re-enroll as long as they could attend school with students their own age. Since dropping out of school, only 11 percent had returned and graduated from high school.

Participants in the study gave many different reasons for dropping out of school, the most common ones were “classes were not interesting” (47 percent), “missed too many days and could not catch up” (43 percent), “spent time with people who were not interested in school” (42 percent), “had too much freedom and not enough rules in my life” (38 percent), and “was failing in school” (35 percent). The authors of the report grouped the many reasons into the following clusters: academic environment, real life events, lack of personal motivation, and external sources of motivation and guidance.

Additional findings revealed that:

- ◆ Most of the parents were not aware that their child was going to drop out of school.
- ◆ Teachers had low expectations of students even though students had high expectations for themselves—70 percent of the dropouts felt they could have graduated from high school.
- ◆ Fifty-nine to 65 percent of the dropouts missed class often the year before dropping out.
- ◆ Sixty-eight percent of the dropouts believed that schools could help students stay in school by keeping students from skipping classes.
- ◆ Forty-seven percent of the dropouts felt that not graduating from high school makes it difficult to find work.

The report also gives recommendations for improving students' chances of staying in school. These recommendations are from the dropouts themselves and from the authors of the report. From the dropouts' perspective, they'd like to see:

- ◆ Opportunities for real-world learning to make classroom more relevant
- ◆ Better teachers who keep classes interesting
- ◆ Smaller classes with more individual instruction
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- ◆ Better communication between parents and school, get parents more involved
- ◆ Parents make sure their kids go to school every day
- ◆ Increased supervision at school to ensure students attend classes

The authors recommend:

- ◆ Improving teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work
- ◆ Improving instruction and access to supports for struggling students
- ◆ Building a school climate that fosters academics
- ◆ Ensuring strong adult-student relationships within the school
- ◆ Improving the communication between parents and schools

In addition, the authors suggest discussion about raising the dropout age to 17 or 18. According to the report, Nevada students can legally drop out of school at age 17; at age 14 and excused by board of trustees: 14 if work is necessary for own or parents' support.

The *Silent Epidemic* is available online at: <http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>.

Rennae Daneshvary, PhD
Nevada KIDS COUNT