

## Using Occupational and Employment Information to Address the Dropout Crisis

The United States is on the cusp of an economic and educational crisis. Today's complex job market requires workers to have more education and skill than ever before. Global competition demands that our nation produce individuals who are technologically literate, academically proficient, and capable of adapting to a diverse and changing workplace. The demand for workers with postsecondary education and professional or technical certifications is growing steadily. In addition, today's workers must have the self-management skills and the knowledge that will enable them to be successful career managers.

To remain competitive, the United States must ensure that all young people are successful in high school and are prepared with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to thrive in life after high school. Too often, however, this is not the case. In the US, each year some research suggests that **over 3.8 million young people** leave the education system before receiving a high school diploma. This figure includes not just the students commonly calculated in dropout rates (grades 10-12), but those students who dropout before they even get to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. One-third of today's ninth graders will be among those without high school diplomas four years from now. For African American, Latino, and Native American youth, the dropout rate is significantly higher.

The focus on high school dropout rates is not new. *The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act)*, P.L. 105-332, uses graduation rates as an accountability measure for vocational and technical education. *The No Child Left Behind Act*, P.L. 107-110, requires states to use graduation rates as a performance measure, or secondary indicator, for public high schools. A myriad of state and local policies also are in place to address this issue. **However, more needs to be done.**

### The Economic Impact

In addition to significant social and personal costs, the economic costs of high school dropouts are astounding. ***The United States loses \$192 billion, or 1.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)***, annually as a result of 18 year olds who do not complete high school.

High school dropouts account for almost half of the heads of households on welfare, 75% of the population in state prisons and 59% of the individuals incarcerated in federal prisons. In today's workplace, only 40% of adults who dropped out of high school are employed, compared to 60% of adults who completed high school and 80% for those with a bachelor's degree. Moreover, high school graduates, on the average, earn \$9,245 more per year than high school dropouts.

### The Role of Occupational and Employment Information

Young people drop out of school for a variety of reasons some of which are outside the control of the school system. However, there are many specific interventions that will stem this problem. Many students indicate that their main reason for leaving high school is that they do not see the relevance of school to their aspirations. One way to significantly improve graduation rates is to engage students in making a strong connection between academic attainment and future success in life.

Occupational and Employment Information, authorized under Section 118 of the Perkins Act, provides the resources that students and adults use to identify their career interests, match the academic requirements to those choices, and identify education and training options. Processing this information allows students to find meaning in their high school participation. **And, research shows it is effective.**

Students with access to quality career information resources and programs:

- Earned higher test scores on the ACT exam;
- Demonstrated better classroom attendance, as much as 93.9% at Zapata High School in Texas;
- Participated in significantly more Advanced Placement classes, and
- Enrolled in more early graduation programs.

Students who make the connection between their academic coursework and future goals are more likely to graduate from high school, complete postsecondary education and succeed in the workplace. ***Increasing the high school completion rate by just 1 percent for all men ages 20-60 would save the U.S. up to \$1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.***

***It is an economic imperative that funding for Occupational and Employment Information be sufficient to reach all students.*** In every state and territory, occupational information and services engage students, create future possibilities, and connect education with future success. When students are engaged and goal-oriented, they are more likely to complete high school and pursue postsecondary education. An investment in Occupational and Employment Information translates into increased academic achievement for students, reduced unemployment rates for workers, and improved economic growth for our nation.

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