

Dropout Prevention: Parents Play a Key Role

For students with disabilities, the national school drop-out rate is a staggering 37.6 percent¹—more than twice that of their peers without disabilities.² For some minority students with disabilities, the drop-out rate goes as high as 50 percent.³ For students with emotional or behavioral disabilities it soars to 61 percent.⁴ Such statistics have made school completion one of the nation's most high profile issues in special education.

What can parents do to make sure their children with disabilities stay in school and graduate? Be involved. Indeed, research shows that one of the most essential strategies for promoting school completion and achievement is family involvement.

When families remain involved in their children's middle school and high school education, students are more likely to attend school regularly, have a positive attitude about school, earn higher grades, score higher on standardized tests, graduate from high school, and enroll in post-secondary programs. Those successes matter in the long run. High school graduates typically earn twice as much as people who don't have a diploma or equivalency.⁵

By comparison, the outlook for students who drop out of school looks bleak. These young adults on average earn half as much as high school graduates. They also are more likely to use illicit drugs and tobacco, have children at an early age, live in poverty, and become incarcerated.

In their middle school and high school years, teens want and need more privacy and independence. The challenge for parents is to find a balance between encouraging independence and providing and enforcing the guidelines teens still need in order to stay focused on school and their future.

The high school diploma is the most basic credential needed for adult success. Youth may not realize how much they need that diploma. Parents, however, can help them keep their “eyes on the prize.”

Everyday Strategies that Help Teenagers Succeed

For Parents of Middle School Students

- Let your child know how important education is to his or her future.
- Clearly convey the idea that graduation from high school is a family expectation.
- Set aside time every day for homework, and make sure that your child completes his or her assignments. Find out if your school district has a homework hotline students can call for help.
- Talk to your child about school problems and achievements every day. Praise good behavior. Help your child use problem-solving skills to address difficult situations at school.
- Know your child's friends and their families.
- Let teachers know that you want to be contacted immediately if your child has problems with homework.
- If your child is struggling, seek help. Parents and other adults can reduce the likelihood of dropping out if they help youth cope with their problems.

For Parents of High School Students

- Maintain contact with your child's teachers throughout high school.
- Monitor school attendance. If your child is skipping school, it may be a warning sign that he or she is having trouble.

- Help your child explore career options and understand the connection between education and future success.
- Encourage your child to seek out extracurricular activities. These activities help youth to develop positive relationships, cultivate new interests, feel like they are part of a group, and achieve success outside of the classroom.
- Encourage youth to find a summer or part-time job, volunteer in the community, or participate in work-based learning programs at school. Such hands-on experiences let youth apply academic skills and can lead to many positive outcomes, such as increased self-esteem and later job success.
- Help your child use his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and the transition planning process to tie the education program to future goals.
- Keep track of the credits and classes your son or daughter needs in order to graduate and be accepted into a postsecondary program or be qualified for employment in a particular field.

When There's a Problem

If your child is not doing well or is beginning to have behavioral problems in school:

- Discuss your concerns with your child's IEP team. Request a functional behavioral assessment to identify effective strategies to address problem behaviors.
- Consider hiring a tutor if your child has fallen behind.
- Meet directly with the teacher if you think a personality clash may be at the root of the problem. Try to determine if the issue is a simple misunderstanding or if a transfer to a different classroom would be beneficial.
- Monitor your child's school performance. Periodically check in with your child's teachers to find out how things are going.
- If you think your child may have a problem with drugs or alcohol, contact a health care provider, counseling or psychology service, substance abuse help line, or other such organization for information and advice.
- Consider alternative school settings. If you, your child, and the IEP team conclude that the IEP goals cannot be reached in the current school environment, ask for help to identify appropriate alternative settings. Options include alternative schools, career academies, charter schools, magnet schools, general educational development (GED) programs, and work-based learning programs.

Resources

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
ncset.org

National Dropout Prevention Center
dropoutprevention.org

PACER Center
PACER.org

References

¹Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education (2006). 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Washington DC: Author.

²Child Trends (2004). "High School Dropout Rates," *Child Trends Databank*, Washington DC: Author. Retrieved June 14, 2006 www.childtrendsdatabank.org/pdf/1_PDF.pdf

³OSERS (2006).

⁴OSERS (2006).

⁵Green, J.P. (2002) "High School Graduation Rates in the United States," *Civic Report 27*. New York, NY: The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Retrieved June 19, 2006 from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm#13