

# Fast Facts

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## *Improving High School Graduation Rates*

### *What —*

In this brief, “Improving High School Graduation Rates,” the significance of high school dropout trends and programs which aim to prevent students from leaving school before graduation are thoroughly examined. In particular, the brief examines characteristics of those who drop out of high school and the reasons they discontinue their schooling early. The brief then highlights direct intervention programs, efforts which are primarily aimed at reaching at-risk students and helping them through school. Finally, holistic, school-wide reform efforts and their connection to dropout prevention are considered.

### *Why —*

The Diplomas Count 2008 report asserts that 6,829 students are lost from high schools in the United States *each day*; Indiana alone is responsible for 127 of those students. “Loss” in the context of the Diplomas Count 2008 report is defined as students failing to graduate with a standard high school diploma within four years. The Alliance for Excellence in Education published a report indicating that “households headed by a high school graduate accumulate ten times more wealth than households headed by a high school dropout.”

### *How —*

Relationships, relevance, and rigor are known as the new three R’s of education reform. Research consistently indicates that a lack of at least one of these factors plays a large role in a student’s decision to leave school. While some students indicate leaving high school for personal reasons such as financial hardship, becoming a parent, or caring for another member of their family, these same students also indicate that they might have stayed if they had received more support from adults in the school, bolstering the premise that strong school relationships are a key component of improving graduation rates.

### *Recommendations —*

- Educators should establish programs which identify at-risk and struggling students early, ideally in middle school or no later than the student’s freshman year of high school.
- State legislation, such as the laws enacted in Indiana, help to encourage large scale change, but for true change to occur, the three R’s must be embraced at the level of individual school communities.
- It is impossible to improve student satisfaction in education without listening to students first. Student input should be highly regarded and instructional strategies should be formed accordingly.
- The pervasive engagement gap must be addressed. Schools must make a commitment to deeply and equally engage all students.

To read this Education Policy Brief, go to:  
<http://ceep.indiana.edu/>