

## TRUANCY FACT SHEET

### Background

In 2001, nearly 1.5 million U.S. teens between the ages of 16 and 19 were not in school and did not graduate from high school, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT project, which tracks data relevant to the well being of U.S. children. The problem is worse in large cities, where the number of unexcused absences can range from 2,000 to 4,000 a day.

Why do so many students choose to drop out of school? The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Urban Education cites the following factors:

### School-related factors:

- Dislike of school in general or in particular a new school
- Inability to get along with teachers and/or other students
- "Not fitting in" at school
- Failure, getting poor grades or inability to keep up with schoolwork (only 18% of those surveyed passed their last year of school)
- Disciplinary problems, including suspension or expulsion

### Personal factors:

- Having a family to support and/or trouble managing both school and work
- Marriage, pregnancy or becoming a parent (one-third of those surveyed were pregnant when they left)
- Having friends who dropped out of school
- Desire to travel
- Drug or alcohol problems

### Family or community factors:

- Pressure to miss school in order to help the family with health or financial needs
- Abuse, neglect and/or family management issues
- Lack of family support and devaluing of education
- Negative role models
- Safety issues, such as violence in or near the home or school

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DROPPING OUT BEFORE GRADUATION

The long-term economic impact of dropping out of school before graduation is dramatic. As reported in a 2004 report in *The Future of Children* (Vol. 14, No. 1), over the course of a lifetime college graduates make \$900,000 more than graduates of high school; individuals with even some college training earn \$500,000 more than high school dropouts.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network provides the following facts about the economic impact of dropping out of school:

- High school graduates earn \$143 more per week than high school dropouts. College graduates earn \$336 more per week than high school graduates.
- High school dropouts are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates.
- Graduating from high school will determine how well you live for the next 50 years of your life.
- High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed as those who completed four or more years of college.
- Dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison and death-row inmates. Eighty-two percent (82%) of prisoners in America are high school dropouts.

A 2002 Census Bureau report shows the average income for full-time, year-round workers with a high school diploma (\$30,400) is 30 percent higher than a person's without a high-school diploma (\$23,400).

### **WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO**

The 2004 Kids Count Data Book, published by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, reports that the most successful schools for at-risk adolescents share certain common traits:

1. The student population is small, so that students can form close relationships with mentoring adults.
2. The educators are demanding, and there are high expectations for both students and teachers.
3. The staff promotes innovative and creative curriculum and instruction.
4. School administrators and teachers view parents and community members as partners in their work with students.

### **What can individual staff members do?**

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children suggests how teachers, administrators and staff can directly and indirectly affect student attendance as well as students' desire to attend school:

- Make students and their families feel welcome. Greet them when they arrive. Post signs in their native languages. This communicates to both parents and students that they are valued members of the school community.
- When a student is absent, immediately talk to a family member by personal phone call during the day or evening.
- Let students know that when they are not in school, they are missed. Talk to them about why they were gone, and if there is anything you or the school can do to help.
- Reward and recognize good attendance, not just perfect attendance. Post signs and announcements on the school Web site, in libraries and in community centers.
- Create an environment of mutual respect in which students are comfortable speaking up. When students are afraid of being ridiculed or criticized by either teachers or other

students, or if they are afraid of making mistakes, they are less likely to want to come to school or do schoolwork.

- Seek referrals to other agencies or district support when students face challenging family problems.
- Provide high expectations for all students. Help them focus on their strengths, and challenge all children to work to their full potential. This is especially important for children of diverse cultures, who in the past may have encountered teachers who had low expectations of them.
- Don't rely on rewards as the only strategy for increasing attendance. Research shows a rewards-only approach produces mixed results.
- Create learning opportunities for students to work together – either during whole-group or small-group lessons, or with peer tutoring. Research indicates that this encourages students' motivation and engagement.

#### References:

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation (<http://www.aecf.org/>)
2. Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Urban Education (<http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/>)
3. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>)
4. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (<http://www.nwrel.org/>)
5. The Future of Children (<http://www.futureofchildren.org/>)