

What is the relationship between students who drop out and their environment?

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Abstract

This research examines the school dropout rate, including the impact of low academic achievement and social implications upon those who dropout. Interviews from school professionals and parents highlight the correlation these individuals may see between low academic achievement and social experiences with the dropout rate. In addition to discussing the implications of dropout rates, the research discusses potential solutions to the problem, including ways school professionals may improve the learning environment. The findings indicate that an engaging and motivating environment will improve the outcome for high risk students to stay on track for graduation. Withdrawal from academic engagement as well as lack of involvement in the school setting are both indicators of school dropout. The research suggests that moving away from a 'one size fits all' mentality into a personalized education system will have a positive impact on student success. Excellent schools foster the developmentally responsive environment that high-risk students need in order to continue a trajectory toward excellence.

Background/Context

The findings in this study are derived from members of the education community, parents of students enrolled in the public education system, and published authors of literary journals. In the literary review, the trends of student retention are very supportive of students building relationships with adult figures in their academic environments. Personal research does agree with this trend and the need for students to feel self-worth and success in their academic performance.

Findings

Assertion: Lack of engagement in the educational setting is a predictor of school dropout.

Engagement in the school setting involves both academic engagement and extra-curricular involvement. Students who engage themselves in a social atmosphere outside of the classroom show success in the academic performance. "If students are engaged at school and with learning, they should not only graduate but also demonstrate academic and social competence at school completion" (Christenson & Thurlow). Educators who redefine success and represent themselves as positive role models in the education field demonstrate to all students that each have the potential for success. Changing the perception of success and helping students recognize that they can succeed, even if it does not mimic the success their peers, motivates students to strive toward success and receiving their diploma.

Assertion: Student resiliency promotes academic success and improved motivation.

When a student's life circumstances transpire into academic failure, there needs to be a social atmosphere that compensates for their struggle to succeed in the academic setting. One method to improving success rates of students is to look at their resiliency. Students who are considered to be at-risk and are on the road toward dropout need to demonstrate resilient behaviors that increase their motivation to succeed academically. A student's resiliency multiplies when they are able to recognize how their choices impact their academic success; when students adjust their actions and recognize they have control of their success, they stray from the path leading to drop out.

Assertion: Supporting students through personalized education influences academic success.

Changing the expectation of success and how we define academic success is the first step to supporting individuals in their educational environment. An intervention such as "...the 'personalization' of education – striving to understand the nature of academic, social, and personal problems affecting students and tailoring services to address individualized concerns – is an essential component" (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). All students learn differently; schools cannot adopt a 'one size fits all' mentality when educating their youth. An adjustment of expectations of success, and how we define success in the academic environment can impact the academic success of students. "I would like to see kids' success measured by growth, not the same expectations for all kids (such as standardized testing). We should celebrate all students' growth throughout the school year" (Thomas, Parent). Implementation of personalized teaching has the ability to achieve all of these goals set out by educators in the community.

Literature Cited

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Methods

The research is qualitative and includes semi-structured interviews from educational professionals in the community: Wendy Larson (District Superintendent), Kristin Patterson (Educational Assistant), Alyssa Meyer (Eight Grade Teacher), Andrea Thomas (Parent of Current Students), _____ (Parent of Recent Graduate). All interviewees received their education from a public school and are at minimum, high school graduates. The research took place in a rural town, where the current graduation rate is 96% of an average class size of 250 students.

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