

Issue Brief

Out of School Youth & Truancy in Trenton

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The drop out rate for students in the United States has declined over the past three decades; however, disparities exist regarding race, income, and foreign-born status.¹

- As of 2012, the first-ever national Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate crossed a major threshold of 80 percent.²
 - **According to the GradNation report, only 58 to 70% of low-income students across twenty-one states successfully graduate high school.**
 - **In 2012, only 76% of Latino students and 68% of black students received their diploma.**
 - Foreign-born students were found to have a dropout rate of 16% in 2011.³
 - The overall increase in graduation rates has been attributed to the closing of so-called “dropout factories,” which are typically high-minority schools that graduate less than 60% of students. As of 2012, these dropout factories enrolled approximately 23% of African American students nationwide, down from 50% in 2002.⁴
- According to Civic Enterprises and America’s Promise Alliance, 6.7 million (17%) youth, ages 16-24 are not in school or work.⁵
- Each new high school graduate confers a net benefit of \$127,000 to taxpayers over his or her lifetime.⁶ There is a return of \$1.45 for every \$3.55 for every dollar of investment in education, depending on the intervention strategy that is used.

The U.S. would gain **\$45 billion** in extra tax revenue and reduced public health, crime and justice, and welfare payments costs by cutting 20-year-old high school drop outs in half.

In New Jersey, the state recently began calculating the graduation rate based on more accurate federal standards.

- New Jersey’s adjusted four-year graduation rate was 89.2% in 2014.⁷
- **In 2012, New Jersey graduated 86% of its students; however, only 75% of its low-income students received their high school diploma, compared to 90% of mid- and upper-level income students.**⁸
- **According to New Jersey education officials only 79% of Hispanic and 76% of black students graduated high school, compared to 93% of their white peers.**

About **41 percent** of inmates in states and federal prisons have less than a high school education.

Increasing the high school completion rate of men ages 20 to 60 would save the U.S. as much as **\$1.4 billion** per year in criminal just costs.

The City of Trenton recently began utilizing a more accurate measurement system for calculating graduation rates.

- **Trenton’s graduation rate was found to be 52.95% in 2014.**
 - These numbers reflect the average graduation rate among Daylight Twilight High School (14.3%), Trenton Central High School (67.2%), and Trenton Central High School West (83.8%)
- In 2011 only 22% of students that began ninth-grade graduating via the HSPA four years later.

POLICY & FUNDING

National

The U.S. Department of Education establishes policies on federal aid for education, and distributes and monitors those funds. According to its website, the U.S. DOE collects and disseminates data on America’s schools, focuses attention on key educational issues, and prohibits discrimination, ensuring equal access to education.

- The High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI), also known as the School Dropout Prevention Program, awards discretionary grants to State and local educational agencies to support the implementation of effective, sustainable, and coordinated drop out prevention and re-entry programs.
 - Awards are granted to high schools with annual dropout rates that exceed their state’s average.
- Race to the Top is a competitive grant program designed to reward states that are encouraging education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas.⁹
 - The Race to the Top program gives out \$4.35 billion in competitive grants.¹⁰
 - Four core education reform areas:
 - Adopting standards and assessments to prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace;
 - Building data systems to measure student growth and inform best practices;
 - Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and maintaining effective teachers and administration; and,
 - Turning around lowest-achieving schools.
- The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is the primary aid program for disadvantaged students in the United States.¹¹ The act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills in order to receive federal school funding. The act does not establish a national achievement standard; rather, states set their own standards for their students.
 - Schools that receive federal funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in test scores each year. If the scores are poor consecutively, steps are taken to improve the school.

The United States Department of Education has a budget of **\$68 billion**.

It spent a little over **\$48.8 million** on its **High School Graduation Initiative**, also known as School Dropout Prevention Program, in FY 2012.

- In FY 2011, the department spent \$48.9 million.
- In FY 2010, it spent \$50 million.

State

The state statutes regarding truancy, and education in general, can be found in section 18A. The following acts are applicable to the dropout and truancy issue:

- It is the responsibility of all parents or guardians to ensure that their child is regularly attending school between the ages of six and 16 (18A:38-25).
- Any child between the ages of six and 16 who are repeatedly absent from school and whose parent or guardian is not able to get them to go to school will be deemed truant and a juvenile delinquent (18A:38-27).
 - Any attendance officer who finds a truant youth will take that child to his or her parent or guardian or to the school (18A:38-28).
 - The attendance officer has full police power to enforce the provisions of the truancy law and may arrest without warrant a vagrant or habitually truant child (18A:38-29).
 - The county commissioner will appoint a county attendance officer(s) to work in every district if the majority of school boards deem it necessary and in the best interest of the schools (18A:38-34).
- Each board of education is responsible for developing, adopting, and implementing policies and procedures regarding attendance of students in the public schools within the district (6A:16-7.8).
 - Including, at minimum:
 - Expectations and consequences on lateness;
 - Expectations and consequences on attendance to school and classes;
 - Definition of unexcused absence
 - For up to four cumulative unexcused absences, the school district is required to make a reasonable attempt to notify the parents of each unexcused absence prior to the next school day; conduct an investigation to determine cause of each unexcused absence, including contact with the parents; develop an action plan in consultation with student’s parents to address pattern of unexcused absences; and, cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities, as appropriate.
 - For up to 10 unexcused absences, the school district will make a mandatory referral to the court program required by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts.

Trenton

Trenton's truancy policy includes eight steps:¹²

1. Monthly report is generated containing a list of students who have missed at least 10% of possible school days. Parents are contacted via mail, a phone call, or a home visit based on this list.
2. An attendance officer visits the home of the student if attendance does not improve.
3. If a student's name is found on the next monthly attendance bulletin, an attendance officer conducts a second house visit. At this time, an attendance officer delivers an official notice to the parent outlining his or her responsibilities in ensuring their child attends school.
4. If attendance does not improve, an attendance referral is set up arranging parent conferences with school administrators at the school level.
5. If attendance does not improve, a five-day legal notice is delivered to parents. This notice informs parents that if their child is not in school within five days, the issue will be elevated to the court level.
6. If attendance still does not improve, a subpoena is issued to the parent.
7. A judge hears the case and hands down a judgment and consequence.
8. If required, a judge may issue a bench warrant for the parent.

The Trenton School District had total budget of approximately **\$298.8 million** in Academic School Year 2012-2013, \$43.1 million of which came from grants and entitlements, and \$13.5 million of which came from the federal government.

MODEL PROGRAMS

City Connects

City Connects is a school-based model that identifies the strengths and needs of every student and links each child to a tailored set of intervention, prevention, and enrichment services in the school or community.¹³ The program aims to address the in- and out-of-school factors that impact students' academic, social-emotional, family, and physical well being.

City Connects, formerly Boston Connects, is active in 62 sites across Boston and Springfield, Mass.; New York City; and Ohio (public and private schools). Based at the Center for Optimized Student Support at Boston College's Lynch School of Education, City Connects also works with Catholic schools.

City Connects uses the existing structures of schools and the resources of community agencies to deliver tailored supports and enrichment opportunities for students. City Connect School Site Coordinator reviews each students' strengths and weaknesses in the a variety of areas, and then coordinates individualized support plans that connects students and their families to prevention, intervention, and enrichment opportunities. City Connect uses a database to track student outcomes during and after the program.

Students who received the intervention had higher report card grades from third to fifth grades, as well as higher standardized test scores. The study also indicated students continued to have higher scores after the intervention ended.

Reconnecting Youth

Reconnecting Youth (RY) is a school-based prevention program that helps youth at risk of dropping out. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in its Model Program Guide have labeled the program "Promising."¹⁴ The program has three main goals:

1. Increase school performance;
2. Decrease drug involvement; and,
3. Decrease emotional distress.¹⁵

The RY curriculum consists of 75 lessons that are typically offered as a semester-long, for-credit class by an RY trained teacher/facilitator who works well with at-risk youth. The curriculum three components:

1. Five focuses: Getting Started, Self-esteem Enhancement, Decision Making, Personal Control, and Interpersonal Communication.
2. Student involvement in healthy social activities that increase their bonding to school.
3. School Crisis Response Plan prepares school staff members to identify and respond to students who are suicidal, and to respond, if necessary, with post-suicidal intervention strategies. The RY Response Plan is necessary as many high-risk youth experience depression and suicide-risk behaviors.

According to the program's website, RY has had significant effects on its program participants.¹⁶ The program reports a 35% reduction in dropout rates, a 50% reduction in hard drug use, a 75% reduction in depression and hopelessness among its students, and an 80% reduction in suicidal behaviors.

The OJJDP reports that the RY intervention program retained significantly more potential dropouts at 74% compared to the regular school program at 61%.¹⁷ The study also showed that the RY program had a significant positive impact on students' drug use and familial conflicts.

Positive Action

Positive Action is a school-based, integrated and comprehensive program that is designed to improve academic achievement; school attendance; and problem behaviors such as substance use, violence, suspensions, disruptive behaviors, dropping out, and sexual behavior.¹⁸ It is also designed to improve parent-child bonding, family cohesion, and family conflict.

Positive Action has materials for schools, homes, and community agencies.¹⁹ All materials are based on the same unifying broad concept (one feels good about oneself when taking positive actions) with six explanatory subconcepts (positive actions for the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional areas) that elaborate on the overall theme. All the components and their parts can be used separately or in any combination and are designed to reinforce and support one another.

The program components include grade-specific curriculum kits for kindergarten through 12th grade, including: drug education kits; conflict resolution kit; sitewide climate development kits for elementary and secondary school levels; counselor's kit; family kit; and, community kit.

Positive Action Schools were found to have higher rates of math and language proficiency compared to schools without the program. Similarly, students in positive action schools had higher standardized test scores, less absenteeism, and greater gains in social and emotional skills at a faster rate than comparable students. Finally, Positive Action schools had lower rates of drug and alcohol use by students, and one study by SAMHSA found a 61% reduction of violent behavior among boys.

Endnotes

¹ "Fast Facts," *National Center for Education Statistics*, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16>.

² "Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic." April 2014. *GradNation*, http://gradnation.org/sites/default/files/17548_BGN_Report_FinalFULL_5.2.14.pdf.

³ "Status Dropout Rates." January 2014. *National Center for Education Statistics*, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coj.asp.

⁴ Clozel, Lalita. "National high school graduation rate exceeds 80% for the first time." April 28, 2014. *Los Angeles Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-national-graduation-rate-record-20140428-story.html>.

⁵ "Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth." January 2012, *Civic Enterprises*, http://www.civcenterprises.net/medialibrary/docs/opportunity_road.pdf.

⁶ Levin, Henry and Rouse, Cecilia. 2012. "The True Cost of High School Dropouts." *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/opinion/the-true-cost-of-high-school-dropouts.html>.

⁷ "2014 Adjusted Four-Year Graduation Rates." *New Jersey Department of Education*, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/grate/2014/4And5YearCohort13.pdf>.

⁸ O'Dea, Colleen. "Mapping the Graduating Class of 2013: 'Significant' Gaps Still Remain." June 20, 2014, *NJ Spotlight*, <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/14/06/20/mapping-this-year-s-graduating-class-of-2013-significant-gaps-still-remain/>.

⁹ "Race to the Top Fund." 2013. *United States Department of Education*, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

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¹¹ "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," *United States Department of Education*, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>.

¹² Presentation by Terrance Stokes, Manager of Student Conduct, Office of Student Support, Trenton Board of Education, to the Trenton Prevention Policy Board on December 10, 2014.

¹³ City Connects Website. http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/cityconnects/about/who_we_are.html.

¹⁴ "Reconnecting Youth." 2013. OJJDP Model Program Guide, *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/Reconnecting%20Youth-MPGProgramDetail-413.aspx>.

¹⁵ "RY Program." 2013. *Reconnecting Youth, Inc.*, <http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/programs/reconnecting-youth/>.

¹⁶ "RY Program." 2013.

¹⁷ "Reconnecting Youth." 2013.

¹⁸ Positive Action Websites. <https://www.positiveaction.net>.

¹⁹ "Intervention Strategy: Positive Action." *SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices*, <http://nrpp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=78>.