

School or the Streets

Crime and California's Dropout Crisis

California faces a dropout crisis that poses a significant threat to public safety. An estimated one in three California high school students does not graduate from high school on time. And of the more than half-million Californians who turn 20 each year, 120,000 do not have a high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree.

High school graduates are less likely to turn to crime

High school dropouts are three and one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison. Across the country, 68 percent of state prison inmates do not receive a high school diploma.

According to researchers, a 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent, which would prevent 500 murders and over 20,000 aggravated assaults in California each year.

Proven interventions can improve graduation and dropout rates

Smaller learning communities at high schools with student and family advisors. Implementation of the First Things First program would yield 16 extra high school graduates for every 100 students enrolled. Participation in the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP) program cuts student dropout rates in half.

High-quality preschool. Evidence from two long-term evaluations of the effects of preschool show that participating in high-quality preschool increases high school graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.

Targeted dropout-prevention programs. The Check & Connect program uses monitors to check that high-risk students are in school and connect them to needed services. Ninth grade students not in the program were three times more likely to drop out than participating students.

Increased investments in effective programs are needed in California

California is falling far short of the investment needed to increase graduation rates.

At the high school level, only one California high school is implementing the proven First Things First model; there are no known proven STEP or Check & Connect programs in the state; and the state's promising small learning communities program, the California Partnership Academies, reaches only one in five high schools.

Considering interventions for younger children, hundreds of thousands of low-income children in California do not have access to publicly-funded preschool programs due to long waiting lists and inadequate funding.

Cutting dropouts saves money and lives

California's dropout crisis not only threatens public safety, it also damages California's economy. Dropouts earn less, pay fewer taxes, and are more likely to collect welfare and turn to crime. For each year's worth of dropouts, California suffers billions of dollars in economic losses over time, including \$12 billion in crime costs alone.