American Indian High School Dropout Research - Excerpts

Reducing the Dropout Rate, E. Gregory Woods, School Improvement Research Series, 2002, NWREL

Various ways of calculating the dropout rate reveal different ways of thinking about the issue.

"*Event Rate* indicates the number of students who leave high school each year and is compared with the previous years.

Status Rate, a cumulative rate much higher than the event rate, denotes the proportion of all individuals in the population who have not completed high school and were not enrolled at a given point of time.

Cohort Rate, describes the number of dropouts from a single age group or specific grade (cohort) or students over a period of time.

The high school completion rate indicates the percentage of all persons ages 21 and 22 who have
Completed high school by receiving a high school diploma or equivalency certificate.

As noted by Carson, et. Al (1991), the number of dropouts is not really the issue. The point is that the world has changed, and the system's current employment needs do not tolerate dropout rates that have not changed over the last 20 years.

Risk Factors:

Poor academic performance is the single strongest school-related factor of dropping out (OERI Urban Superintendents Network 1987; Hess, et al. 1987, Wood 1994). The most recent DOE annual dropout report relates that students who repeated one or more grades were twice as likely to dropout than those who had never been held back, and those that repeated more than one grade were four times as likely to leave school before completion.

…It is poverty that is the strongest predictor of dropping out. "When socioeconomic factors are controlled, the differences across racial, ethnic, geographic, and other demographics lines blur." (OEIR Urban Superintendents Network 1987, p. 5.

A common thread which runs through successful dropout prevention programming is that it is student centered. No one structure or set of activities works for all students. A variety of strategies in various combinations should be used to address the entire range of students' needs or factors that alienate them from school.

Research supports the practice of identifying potential dropouts as early as possible and providing intensive intervention to insure early success.

The researchers also noted greater success when programs include supportive services such as day care and opportunities to make up work via summer and night school and correspondence. Effective programs characteristically feature student assistance services to address substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and young parenthood, suicide prevention, and other mental and physical health issues.

Research – Excerpts continued

Ineffective Practices:
State mandated promotion policies. If standards and requirements are raised without support for school improvement and without personal attention to the varied populations of high-risk students and their specific learning requirements, the effect will be to push more young people out of school.

Ability Grouping: Students' self concept suffer as a result of labeling them average or below.

Early intervention without follow-up.

Basic Skills teaching by itself.

Work experiences and on-the-job training with no other interventions.

Grafting additional staff and programs onto existing ineffective structures, e.g. extending the school day or adding more courses.

Increasing the number of attendance officers to cut down on truancy.

"Understanding Dropouts, Statistics, Strategies and High-Stakes Testing," Alexandra Beeatty, Ulric Neisser, William T. Trent, and Jay P. Heubert, Editors, National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D C. , 2000

Retention in Grade:

"The report also documents the considerable evidence that students who are retained in grade (even as early as elementary school) perform less well in school (even when results are controlled for age and number of grades completed) and are significantly more likely to drop out of school.

Hauser further shows that students who are retained in any grade are significantly more likely to drop out of school than those who are not, even when factors such as sex, race and ethnicity, social background, cognitive ability, and other factors are controlled.

Valencia (2000) also argues that retaining students in grade is a very strong predictor of the subsequent choice to drop out of school.

"Dropout toll 32%, costly to Arizona", The Arizona Republic, May 16, 2002

Nearly one in three students who enter high school in Arizona leaves without graduating...The long term costs amounts to $159 million annually in lost personal income and $47.7 million in lost state taxes because graduates have higher earning potential. The State of Arizona cannot afford to continue with the dropout crisis if it expects to economically viable in the future. The study says that nearly 50% of Native American students, 43% of Latinos and 33 % of African-Americans dropout. The rate for Anglos was 24% and for Asians 14%.

"Essentially the public schools in Arizona seem to be hemorrhaging students when you look at the minority enrollments."

Research – Excerpts continued

Dropout Intervention/Prevention in New Mexico Schools with a Special Emphasis on Hispanics and Native Americans," Richard Kitchen, PhD, Diane Torres Velasquez, PhD, University of New Mexico, March 1999

In Introduction to Hispanic and Native American Dropouts in New Mexico
"Though dropout rates vary by community, there is widespread agreement that the dropout problem for Native Americans is serious and complex, rooted in cultural, societal, and social-economic conditions. Among the reasons cited to explain the dropout problem in Indian country include cultural preservation and resistance. (Dehyle, 1992), cultural discontinuity (Reyhner, 1992, Backes, 1993; Garret, 1995) and power relations within schools (Ledlow, 1992; McLaughlin, 1994)

Dehyle (1992) found that maintaining cultural integrity through resistance to schools was an important factor in Navajo and Ute decisions to dropout...Students with strong identities as "Navajo" generally developed in the home and community were more likely to resist the school and attempt to preserve their identity.

Cultural discontinuity, described as "when two worlds collide" (Garrett, 1995, p. 192) has become an increasing common explanation for Native American School dropout, as well as for other language minority students. Dropout is viewed as a result of the intersection of American culture and Native American culture, where the inherent differences lead to conflict, and ultimately to high rates of dropout among minority culture students (Reyhner, 1992)....Ledlow (1992) asserts that the research evidence for cultural discontinuity as an explanation for why students leave school is inconclusive and inadequate. In her work, she cites racism and discrimination against Native American as a more prevalent reason why Indian youth leave school before graduation.

Confronting Discrimination and Poverty in the United States.
Finally, many scholars (see for example Kozal, 1967) have highlighted that minority schools have fewer resources, older facilities, and poorly trained teachers in contrast to white, suburban schools. Clearly society's inequities are mirrored in the schools.

Apple (1996) believes that we must "challenge the social Darwinist assumptions that stand behind so much of our economic system." (p 89) He writes that the poor and unemployed have not earned their plight.   Instead, the economic system, with its

emphasis on profit no matter what the social cost, has generated inequities in society. From this perspective, solutions to the high dropout rates require that we face this economic reality. At the very least, funding formulae for schools should over allocate to poor districts precisely because of the myriad and complexity of problems these districts face (Fine 1991).

Dropout Prevention and Intervention:
Michelle Fine (1991): Fine's work informs us that schools need to be more flexible to recognize adolescents' familiar and community responsibilities, as well as more supportive of students' cultural and linguistic identifies. According to the US Department of Education (1998 b), 77% of the reasons students cited for dropping out of school were school-related problems. The most common reasons students report for leaving school included:

> failure or inability to get along with teachers (68%); dislike of school (46%); inability to get along with other students or felt they did not belong in school (40%); suspended or expelled (25%); and felt unsafe (10%).

Though some of the reasons for dropping out were family or job related, the school-related reasons for dropping out of school were most commonly cited by students. Many students fall behind in their coursework (US DOE, 1998a) and feel defeated in school. Others simply find schools to be unsafe and inhospitable places. (Bingaman 1998).

Research – Excerpts continued

District, State, and National Policies
Policies at the national, state, and local levels can have an effect on whether students stay in school or dropout. Clearly, the state needs to provide dedicated financial support for effective dropout intervention and prevention programs. Senator Bingaman (1998) has also articulated the importance of accurate reporting of dropout statistics. He believes the states should establish policies that would require school districts to provide annual and four-year data on students that could be reported to the public in a comprehensive manner.

Fine (1991) writes that districts committed to decreasing the dropout rate will need time to design and implement new programs, must be allowed the flexibility to change these programs and to make mistakes, and most importantly, will have to commit resources for the long-term for these programs to be effective.

Research and Development:
President Clinton and Secretary of Education Riley have made higher standards a priority in schools. (US DOE, 1998). This strategy may have an undesired impact on traditionally disadvantaged groups such as Hispanics, Native Americans, Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students, and other groups with high dropout rates. Higher academic standards may increase the dropout rate unless concurrent strategies are developed and implemented to support students who are at risk of dropping out. Studies indicate that tougher school standards and grade retention lead to an increased incidence of student dropout (McDill, Natriello & Pallas; 1985, 1986).

Concluding Comments:
Until all children are perceived as being worthy of attention, and essentially worthy of a good education and a good life, school will continue to be a place where certain children are sorted and discarded.