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Public Education Policy And Progress

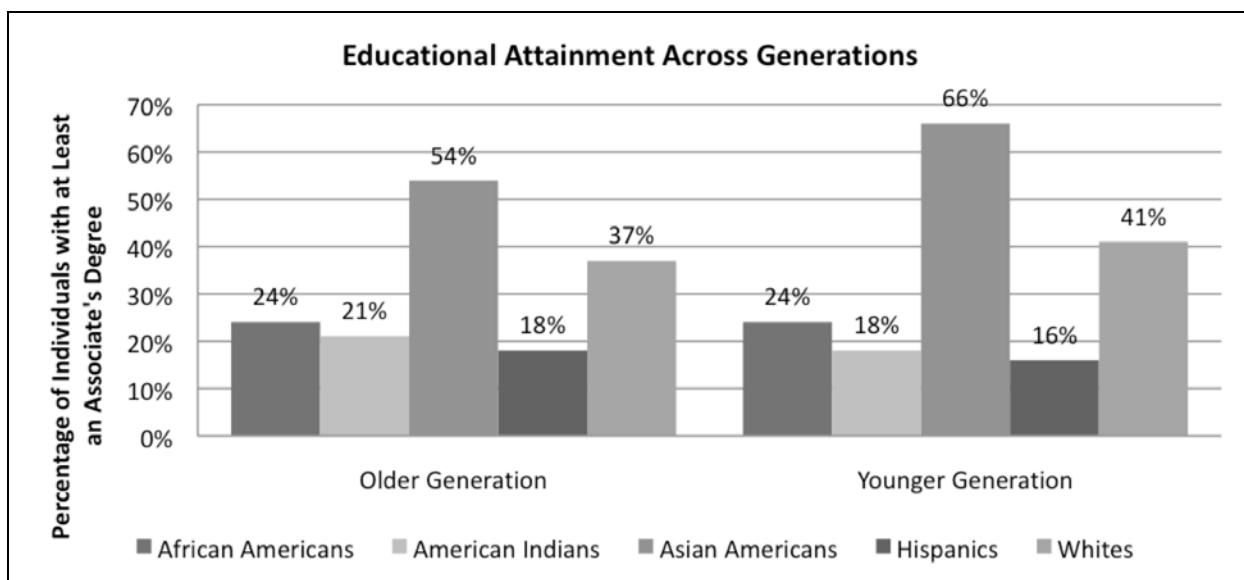


“A TIPPING POINT IN EDUCATION”: Report Finds Educational Attainment of Younger Generations Has Not Increased

A new report from the American Council on Education (ACE) finds that, for the first time, the educational attainment of younger generations is not higher than that of the generations that preceded them. According to the report, *Minorities in Higher Education 2008 Twenty-third Status Report*, 35 percent of young adults aged twenty-five to twenty-nine had at least an associate’s degree in 2006—the same percentage as adults aged thirty or older.

“It appears that we are at a tipping point in our nation’s history,” said **ACE President Molly Corbett Broad**. “One of the core tenets of the American dream is the hope that younger generations, who’ve had greater opportunities for educational advancement than their parents and grandparents, will be better off than the generations before them, yet this report shows that aspiration is at serious risk.”

The report finds that Asian Americans and whites were the only two groups in which educational attainment improved from one generation to the next. Those increases in attainment rates, combined with no improvement for African Americans and decreases for American Indians and Hispanics, result in a widening of the attainment gap, which, as shown in the chart below, has grown quite pronounced.



A Tipping Point in Education

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In a conference call with reporters, **Mikyung Ryu, assistant director of ACE's Center for Policy Analysis and author of the report**, broke down the results by generation, further demonstrating the decline. According to Ryu, 37 percent of the Baby Boom generation (individuals aged 45–64) has attained at least an associate's degree, compared to 39 percent of the first part of Generation X (individuals aged 30–44). However, only 35 percent of the second part of Generation X (individuals aged 25–29) has attained at least an associate's degree.

According to the report, total minority enrollment at the nation's colleges and universities grew by 50 percent, from 3.4 million to 5 million, between 1995 and 2005. The increase in Hispanic enrollment, which grew by 66 percent to more than 1.7 million students, led all racial groups. African American enrollment grew by 46 percent, followed by Asian Americans (37 percent) and American Indians (31 percent). Enrollment among white students grew by 8 percent, from 9.9 million to 10.7 million.

Even with these increases in minority enrollments, a significant enrollment gap remains between races. According to the report, 61 percent of Asian Americans aged eighteen to twenty-four were enrolled in college in 2006, compared to 44 percent of whites, 32 percent of African Americans, and 25 percent of Hispanics and American Indians. During the conference call, Broad attributed the gaps in enrollment to higher high school dropout rates for minorities.

As Ryu explained later in the conference call, completing high school is an important step in qualifying for college. Unfortunately, she added, high school graduation rates for all racial groups have remained flat for the last twenty years and completion gaps remain large. The good news is that a larger percentage of students who do finish high school are enrolling in college. On average, she said, 40 percent of students who complete high school are attending college, compared to 27 percent twenty years ago. The bad news is that racial gaps have widened during that time. But overall, the combination of improved college enrollment and population growth has contributed to record-high numbers of minorities attending college.

The report also identifies what Broad referred to as a “boy problem” during the conference call. As she explained, only 36 percent of young men were enrolled in college in 2006, compared to 44 percent of young women. Other than Asian Americans, young men in every racial group, including whites, are worse off than previous generations when it comes to educational attainment. For women, the pattern is reversed for all races except for American Indians, with the current generation of women outperforming past generations in educational attainment.

When asked how the generational decline in educational attainment could be reversed, Broad identified high school graduation rates as the “most significant point of inflection that we would want to change.” She said that improving high school graduation rates has been “stubbornly difficult to accomplish” but added that high school graduation significantly improves the chances that a student will go on to postsecondary education.

More information on the report is available at <http://tinyurl.com/45rwlc>.

McCain and Obama Discuss Education Reform in Third and Final Presidential Debate

Notable by its relative absence in the first three presidential debates, the issue of education made a brief appearance during the last presidential debate between **Senators John McCain (R-AZ)** and **Barack Obama (D-IL)** when moderator Bob Schieffer asked the first and only question specifically about education:

“The U.S. spends more per capita than any other country on education, yet by every international measurement in math and science competence from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, we trail most of the countries of the world,” Schieffer said. “The implications of this are clearly obvious. Some even say it poses a threat to our national security. Do you feel that way, and what do you intend to do about it?”

To watch the candidates’ answers to the question, go to <http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/politics/2008/10/15/sot.debate3.part3.cnn>. The education question occurs near the 9:40 mark.



BUILDING A HEALTHIER AMERICA: New Report Stresses Importance of Mother’s Education and Family’s Income to Child’s Health

Babies born to mothers with at least sixteen years of education are less likely to die before their first birthdays than babies born to mothers who have not finished high school, according to a new report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Commission to Build a Healthier America. The report, *America’s Health Starts With Healthy Children: How Do States Compare?*, ranks states on infant mortality and children’s health status based on key social factors, such as parental income and education level.

According to the report, infant mortality rates increase as the mother’s education level decreases. For example, the national infant mortality rate is 6.5 per one thousand live births, but the infant mortality rate rises to 7.8 per one thousand live births for babies born to mothers who lack a high school diploma. On the other end of the spectrum, the infant mortality rate is only 4.2 for babies born to mothers who completed sixteen or more years of education. However, the authors note that even that rate exceeds the 3.2 infant deaths per one thousand live births that researchers say should be attainable in every state.

“There is substantial unrealized health potential among children in this country, both for the nation overall and within every state,” says **Susan Egerter, Ph.D., a lead author of the report**. “Many health problems developed during childhood are linked to health problems that occur later in life. While access to medical care is clearly important, there is more to health than good medical care. Income and education matter.”

In some states, the infant mortality rate was higher, by as many as twelve deaths per one thousand live births, for babies born to mothers without a high school diploma. In North Dakota, for example, the infant mortality rate is 5.4 per one thousand live births among babies born to mothers who had at least sixteen years of education. But among mothers without a high school diploma, the mortality rate rises to a whopping 17.2 per one thousand live births. The report also notes that infant mortality rates are higher by up to five deaths per one thousand live births in some states among babies born to mothers who have thirteen to fifteen years of education.

Building a Healthier America

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Turning their attention to a child's health after birth, the authors of the report say that children who live in households without a high school graduate are twice as likely to be in less-than-optimal health as children living with a high school graduate. They are more than four times as likely to be in less-than-optimal health than children living with someone who has completed some college. Currently, about one third of children nationwide live in households where no one has had schooling beyond high school.

According to the report, income levels also play a part in a child's health. It finds that children in poor families (below 100 percent of the federal poverty level) were six times more likely to be in less-than-optimal health than children from higher-income families (at or above 400 percent of the federal poverty level). Additionally, it finds that children from middle-income families (200–399 percent of the federal poverty level) are more than twice as likely to be in less-optimal health.

“The public should not be shocked that children in poor families have worse health than children in better-off families,” said **Paula Braveman, one of the authors of the report**. “However, it will be startling to most people to learn that children in middle-class families have worse health than children in wealthier families.”

The complete report, which contains information for all fifty states and the District of Columbia, is available at http://www.commissiononhealth.org/Documents/ChildrensHealth_Chartbook.pdf.



WARNING SIGNS: Issue Brief Describes Key Indicators That a Student is At Risk of Dropping Out

More students fail the ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and students who are held back in their freshman year are especially likely to drop out, says the National High School Center (NHSC) in its issue brief “Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts.” The brief reviews findings culled from research performed in Chicago; Fall River, MA; and Philadelphia, and outlines for local educators and policymakers the importance of establishing early-warning systems, even helping to guide them in the creation of their own.

Early-warning systems look at several indicators researchers have found to correlate with a student's probability of dropping out. With such a system in place, the idea is that educators can intervene to help struggling students toward the beginning of their high school careers and work to get them on track to graduate sooner rather than later.

The brief finds that course performance and attendance are the strongest predictors of whether a student will complete high school. It cites the Consortium of Chicago School Research (CCSR)'s “on-track indicator” as a powerful gauge of a student's likelihood of graduating. CCSR looked at both credits earned and course grades, classifying first-year Chicago Public School freshmen as on track if they earned at least five full-year course credits and no more than one F in one

semester in a core course. CCSR determined that on-track students were three-and-a-half times more likely to graduate in four years than their off-track classmates. In addition, students with first-semester absences adding up to a week or more (Chicago) and those who were absent frequently in the first thirty days of the school year (Philadelphia) were more apt to drop out and/or fail the ninth grade.

When describing how to establish an early-warning system at the school level, NHSC emphasizes that the data required is routinely available at the school level (e.g., grades, credits earned, and number of absences). It suggests a number of research-based “benchmarks” for schools to follow. For example, a student who misses more than 10 percent of instructional time in a quarter or semester, has one F or more (regardless of whether it is a core course), or has a grade point average (GPA) below 2.0 at the end of his or her first year could be flagged in the database for targeted interventions.

A copy of NHSC’s sample database appears below. Example Student 2, for instance, had poor attendance in the first quarter (Q1) and semester (S1), at least one F, and a GPA below 2.0. These factors persisted over the course of the year, as the third section of the database indicates, so the student was flagged as off track.

Student Report Screen (Semester 1 and Full Year):

| Student Information | | | | Semester Indicators of Risk | | | | | Full Year Indicators of Risk | | | |
|---------------------|------------|------------|-------|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Last Name | First Name | Student ID | Grade | Flag for 20 Day Count Attendance | Flag for Q1 Attendance | Flag for S1 Attendance | Flag for Course Fs | Flag for GPA | Flag for Attendance | Flag for Course Fs | Flag for GPA | Flag for “Off-Track” |
| Example Student 1 | | 1234 | 9 | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | On-Track |
| Example Student 2 | | 5678 | 9 | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Off-Track |
| Example Student 3 | | 9512 | 9 | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | On-Track |
| Example Student 4 | | 7532 | 9 | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | On-Track |
| Example Student 5 | | 6541 | 9 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Off-Track |
| | | | 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | 9 | | | | | | | | | |

Though the indicators described above were the most powerful predictors of graduation across the three districts studied, the brief calls for other districts to analyze patterns and indicators within their own boundaries before implementing their respective systems.

“Districts interested in developing early warning systems should explore the factors (e.g., academic performance, engagement, or social and individual characteristics) that are most strongly associated with whether past students graduated successfully or dropped out,” it reads. “With this information in hand, school systems can move forward and implement data systems

that accurately predict which *current* and *future* students are at the highest risk. This can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of identifying students at risk and targeting dropout-prevention interventions.”

The brief says that states are well positioned to help build and align data systems to track and prevent dropouts because they are already required to do so through the No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education acts. It also states that emphasizing the creation of these systems and “following through with strategic allocation of resources” can help states achieve their graduation rate targets.

To download the full report, please visit

http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/IssueBrief_EarlyWarningSystemsGuide_081408.pdf.



BUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE DROPOUTS?: New Report Examines Ways to Reengage Dropouts and Put Them on a Pathway to a Good Job

Although 30 percent of all young people and 50 percent of minority youth leave high school without a high school diploma, the issue of how to reconnect dropouts to the education system receives far less attention than low graduation rates and dropout prevention. So says *Creating Postsecondary Pathways to Good Jobs for Young High School Dropouts: The Possibilities and the Challenges*, a new report from the Center for American Progress (CAP), which looks at strategies for helping high school dropouts between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four earn postsecondary credentials that will help them land well-paying jobs.

“Without question, many of the millions of youth who have dropped out of school have talent, ability, and aspirations for a better future and can benefit from being connected to a supported pathway to postsecondary credentials,” the report reads. “This tremendous pool of talent and potential, if properly supported and channeled, can help close the skills gap in this country and greatly contribute to our nation’s productivity and competitiveness.”

According to the report, dropouts could land good jobs in past decades at steel mills, assembly lines, and manufacturing plants, but those jobs now require higher levels of education. It cites a Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate that nearly half of the 15.6 million net new jobs that the U.S. economy will produce between 2006 and 2016 will require postsecondary credentials.

The report notes that there are examples of cutting-edge programs that have been successful in reengaging out-of-school youth, but they are often underfunded, overlap rather than reinforce each other, and serve only a fraction of those who need assistance. To improve the impact of these programs, CAP suggests examining the intersection of these programs for innovations that can improve educational and economic outcomes for out-of-school youth.

For example, it calls for accelerating learning and time to credential through the use of credit recovery and dual enrollment programs. Such programs can help students who left school far short of the credits necessary for academic and labor market success make up the credits they need. It also recommends restructuring the activities of dropout recovery, remediation, and youth development programs to make college matriculation a “central goal” of youth employment. It

highlights the YouthBuild program, which successfully incorporates work, community service, and leadership development with online instruction that is supported by an adult education office.

But helping dropouts think about postsecondary education and prepare for its rigors is only the first step. As the report explains, students also need to see a clear pathway to postsecondary occupational credentials and advancement in the labor market in order to ensure that they stay long enough to attain a postsecondary credential. Some tools the report suggests to support this objective include internships and work experiences, mentors, and tangible rewards for learning such as performance-based scholarships. It also calls for support structures to promote postsecondary persistence and completion of credits that help dropouts navigate the financial aid system and balance the demands on their time from work, family, and academics.

CAP also calls for greater alignment across federal elementary and secondary education, adult education, job training, and higher education policies. It says that substantially increased federal resources should be directed to assist states and localities to “bring together secondary, postsecondary, and workforce systems, along with employers, to build the institutional capacity of secondary and postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations” and better address the needs of out-of-school youth. Specifically, it calls for enhanced state and local data management capacity to better track education and labor market outcomes, stronger student support structures, such as academic advisement, and more funding to cover college costs and living expenses for low-income students.

The complete report is available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/10/pdf/postsecondary_pathways.pdf.

Speak Up 2008 Now Underway

Since its inception five years ago, Speak Up, the national online research project facilitated by Project Tomorrow, has collected the views of over 1.2 million students, educators, and parents on key educational issues and shared them with local and national policymakers. It represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, twenty-first-century skills, schools of the future, and science instruction.

The Speak Up initiative has three primary goals: to collect and report on what key education stakeholders think about education, technology and twenty-first-century skills; to raise awareness about the importance of including student, educator, and parent voices in the national and local discussions; and to stimulate new local conversations and support school and community efforts to improve education for all students.

During the initiative, students, parents, teachers, and administrators will be able to join the local and national dialogue about key educational topics and provide their input. The campaign will run until December 19.

To participate in the online survey, visit <http://www.netdayspeakup.org/speakup2008/>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America's six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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