



WHEN GIRLS DON'T GRADUATE WE ALL FAIL

A Call to Improve High School Graduation Rates for Girls

The National Women's Law Center is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1972 to advance and protect women's legal rights. The Center focuses on major policy areas of importance to women and their families, including employment, education, health and reproductive rights, and family economic security.

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WHEN GIRLS DON'T GRADUATE WE ALL FAIL

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 1,000 high school students will drop out with each hour that passes in a school day in America.¹ This means that 30 percent of the class of 2007, or 1.2 million students, were estimated to have dropped out last year.²

The high school dropout crisis has received significant recent attention from researchers, policy makers and the media. It has been widely reported that one in three boys, and nearly 50 percent or more of some racial and ethnic groups of boys, will fail to graduate from high school with a diploma in four years.³ This is an alarming finding that demands prompt remedial action.

What has been generally overlooked, however, is that girls, too, are dropping out of high school at dangerously high rates. In fact, one in four girls overall do not finish high school, and the numbers are worse for girls of color. One in two Native American female students, four in ten Black female students, and nearly four in ten Hispanic female students fail to graduate with a diploma each year.⁴

There are significant costs to be paid by both the individual and the nation as a whole for each and every student who drops out of high school. In general, dropouts face significant challenges to obtaining employment and achieving economic security. Female dropouts are at particular economic risk. As compared to their male peers, girls who fail to graduate from high school have higher rates of unemployment; make significantly lower wages; and are more likely to need to rely on public support programs to provide for their families. With so many students dropping out of high school each year, the aggregate drain on our nation's economy—through foregone income tax revenue and increased public spending—is substantial.

At a time when every hour counts, the dropout rates and educational experiences of female students cannot be ignored. This report therefore focuses on female students who do not complete high school. The report systematically evaluates (I) current dropout rates for female students in the United States; (II) the consequences of dropping out for female students; (III) the factors that put students at risk of dropping out, with a focus on factors that may particularly affect female students; and (IV) recommendations for the future.

I. DROPOUT RATES FOR FEMALE STUDENTS ARE DANGEROUSLY HIGH.⁵

A. Too Many Girls Are Dropping Out of School.

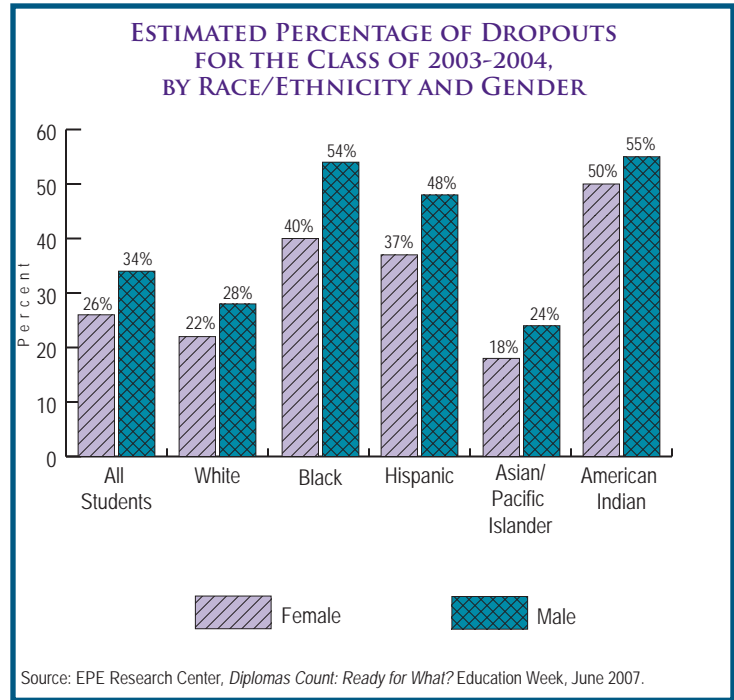
Recent statistics show that overall, an estimated one in four female students will not graduate with a regular high school diploma in the standard, four-year time period.⁶ Over 520,000 of the estimated dropouts from the Class of 2007 were female students.⁷

B. Dropout Rates Are Even More Troubling for Female Students of Color.

The rates are even worse for girls of color: nationwide, 37% of Hispanic female students, 40% of Black female students, and 50% of Native American/Alaskan Native female students failed to graduate in four years in 2004. While girls in each racial and ethnic group fare better than their male peers of the same race or ethnicity, Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native female students graduate at significantly lower rates than White and Asian/Pacific Islander males.⁸

C. Girls Fare Better in Some States than Others.

Dropout rates for female students differ dramatically by state. In the best-performing states for which data are available, such as Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey and Utah, over 80 female students per every 100 will graduate within four years. By contrast, only 59-60 of every 100 girls will do the same in Arizona and Georgia. A full 29



2003-2004 DROPOUT RATES FOR GIRLS, BY STATE

1. Utah	12%	17. Montana	23%	34. Delaware	31%
2. Minnesota	17%	19. Arkansas	23%	34. Mississippi	31%
2. Connecticut	17%	19. Ohio	23%	37. Hawaii	32%
2. New Jersey	17%	19. Vermont	23%	37. Alaska	32%
5. Iowa	18%	22. West Virginia	24%	39. Florida	35%
6. Nebraska	20%	22. Massachusetts	24%	40. Alabama	36%
7. Wisconsin	21%	22. Kansas	24%	40. New Mexico	36%
7. North Dakota	21%	25. Rhode Island	25%	42. Arizona	40%
7. Maryland	21%	26. Indiana	26%	43. Georgia	41%
7. South Dakota	21%	26. California	26%	District of Columbia	*
11. Wyoming	22%	26. Oklahoma	26%	New Hampshire	*
11. Illinois	22%	29. Kentucky	27%	Nevada	*
11. Idaho	22%	30. North Carolina	28%	New York	*
11. Virginia	22%	30. Washington	28%	Oregon	*
11. Missouri	22%	32. Michigan	29%	Pennsylvania	*
11. Colorado	22%	32. Texas	29%	South Carolina	*
17. Maine	23%	34. Louisiana	31%	Tennessee	*

Source: Calculations performed by EPE Research Center, based on National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data.

* Value not calculated because necessary data field(s) not reported in U.S. Department of Education's Common Core Data database or because of very small group size.

percentage points separate the state with the lowest percentage of female dropouts—Utah, with 12%—and the state with the highest percentage—Georgia, with 41%.⁹ An indication of the lack of nationwide attention to the scope of the problem is that the U.S. Department of Education does not report even basic statistics on the percentage of female dropouts for every state.¹⁰

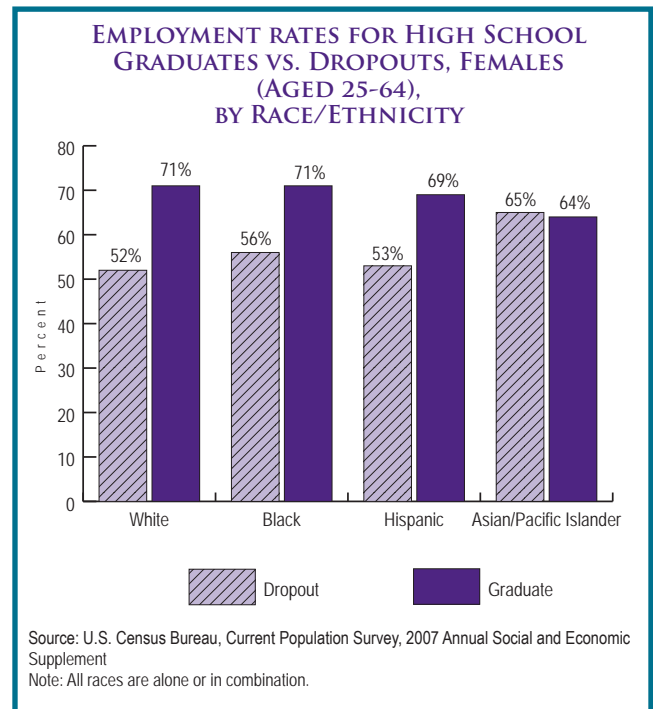
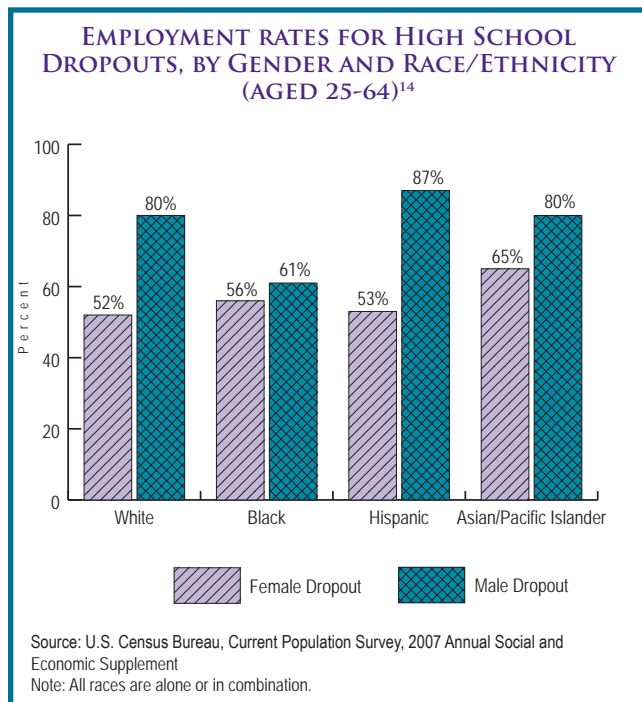
II. ADDRESSING THE HIGH DROP OUT RATE FOR GIRLS IS CRITICAL FOR BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY.

All high school dropouts, of both genders, pay significant costs for their lack of additional education. The economic costs are particularly steep for women, who face especially poor employment prospects, low earnings potential, poor health status, and the need to rely on public support programs. Moreover, because education is so important for girls' economic futures, there are particular societal benefits when girls stay in school.

A. *Dropping Out Seriously Jeopardizes the Future Economic Security and Well-Being of Girls and Their Families.*

1. One in Two Female High School Dropouts Aged 25-64 Is Unemployed.

Across racial and ethnic groups, female dropouts are substantially less likely to be employed than female students who finish high school. Overall, in 2006, 30% of female adults who completed high school were unemployed, compared to 47% of adult females who dropped out.¹¹ Indeed, the more education a woman receives, the more her employment prospects improve; a woman with an Associate's degree or a Bachelor's degree is 1.5 times more likely to be employed than a woman who did not complete high school.¹²



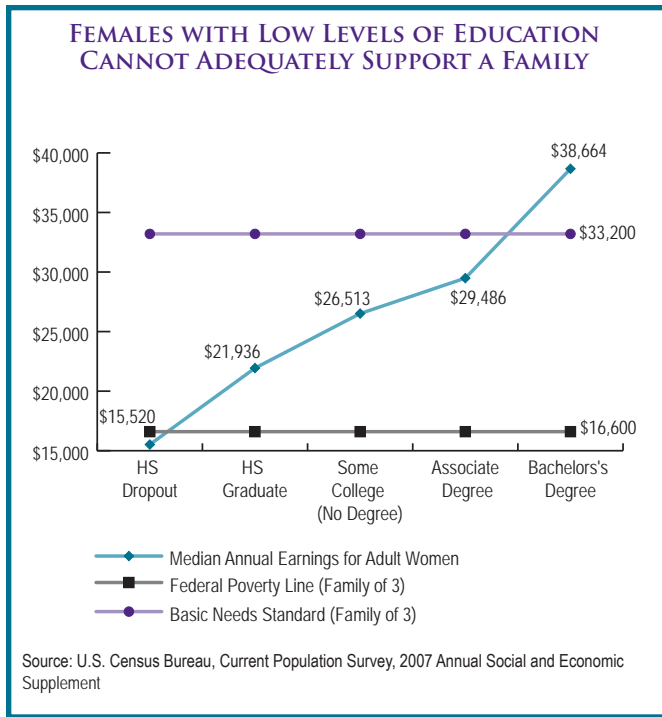
✓ **The Employment Prospects For Female Dropouts Are Worse Than Those of Their Male Counterparts Across Race and Ethnicity.**

Although both male and female high school dropouts have disturbingly high rates of unemployment, females face lower employment rates overall. In 2006, 77% of adult male dropouts were employed, compared to only 53% of their female peers. Moreover, as is shown in the chart below, these disparities persist for every racial and ethnic group. White and Hispanic male high school dropouts, for example, are more than 1.5 times more likely to be employed than White and Hispanic female dropouts, respectively.¹³

✓ **Women In Particular Improve Their Employment Status By Earning a High School Diploma.**

All high school dropouts improve their chances of employment by finishing their high school education. Among Black students, the difference between the employment rates of high school graduates and those of high school dropouts is 15 percentage points for Black women and 14 percentage points for Black men. But for White and Hispanic women, the benefits are even more pronounced than they are for their male counterparts. White and Hispanic females with a high school diploma improve their rate of employment over female dropouts of their race/ethnicity by 19 and 16 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, the rate rises by only six percentage points for White men and four percentage points for Hispanic men.¹⁵

2. Female Dropouts Who Are Employed Are Plagued By Low Earnings.



In 2006, adult women without a high school diploma earned on average only a little more than \$15,500 for the year—over \$6,000 less annually than women with a high school diploma.¹⁶ These low wages leave female dropouts particularly economically vulnerable. Judged against the federal poverty line (FPL), for example, women without high school diplomas earn an average salary about 7% below the FPL for a family of three (\$15,520 vs. \$16,600), while women with high school diplomas earn an average salary about 32% above that level (\$21,936 vs. \$16,600).¹⁷ Moreover, experts suggest that families need incomes of approximately two times the federal poverty measure to meet their basic needs.¹⁸ Measured against this “basic needs” standard, female dropouts fare even worse, earning an average salary almost \$18,000—or about 52%—below a basic needs standard for a family of three (\$33,200). Indeed, it is not until the average woman earns a Bachelor’s degree that she receives wages that put her above this standard.

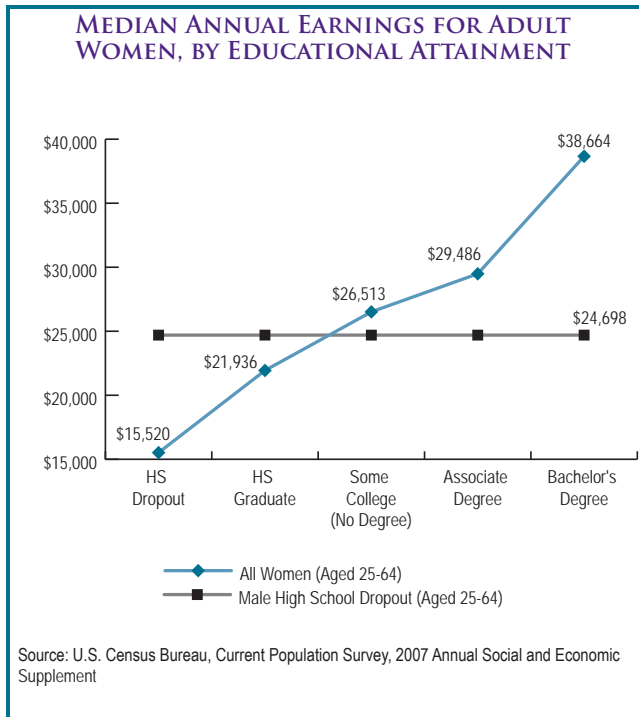
This pattern holds across racial and ethnic groups. For instance, Hispanic female high school dropouts’ incomes, which average \$15,111 per year, are 24% less than those of Hispanic female high school graduates and 57% less than those of Hispanic women with a Bachelor’s degree.¹⁹ Similarly, a Black female high school graduate will earn 48% more, or almost \$7,000, than a Black female dropout, while a Black female with a Bachelor’s degree will earn 166%, or nearly three times, more than a Black female dropout.²⁰

✓ **Female Dropouts Earn Considerably Less Than Their Male Counterparts.**

Males at every level of education make more than females with similar educational backgrounds, but the wage gap between men and women is the highest among high school dropouts.²¹ Female high school dropouts earn far

MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS (ADULTS AGED 25-64) ²⁴			
Female: All	\$15,520	Male: All	\$24,698
Female: White	\$15,561	Male: White	\$25,480
Female: Black	\$14,305	Male: Black	\$21,587
Female: Hispanic	\$15,111	Male: Hispanic	\$21,999
Female: Asian/Pacific Islander	\$19,209	Male: Asian/Pacific Islander	\$21,024

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement



less—only 63% of male earnings or about \$9,100 less annually—than male high school dropouts.²² Asian/Pacific Islander female high school dropouts, the highest-earning subgroup of female high school dropouts, earn less than any racial or ethnic subgroup of male high school dropouts.²³

In fact, it is not until the average woman has some college education that she earns more than the average man without a high school diploma: the average male high school dropout earns \$24,698, or about \$9,100 more than the average female high school dropout and about \$2,800 more than the average female high school graduate. Only after the average woman has some college education does she surpass this level, earning \$26,513.

3. High School Dropouts, Including Females, Have Higher Health Risks And Less Access To Health Coverage.

Higher unemployment and lowered earnings are not the only negative outcomes for high school dropouts; dropouts also struggle with worse health conditions and less access to health coverage to address their needs. For example, adults without a high school diploma are more likely to die prematurely from diseases such as cardiovascular disease (35% of all deaths) and cancer (27% of all deaths).²⁵

Compounding this problem further for high school dropouts is a lack of health insurance. Despite the increased health risks and needs high school dropouts face, young adults without a high school diploma or GED are less likely than adults with more education to have health insurance, undergo preventative health screenings, or exercise regularly.²⁶ High school dropouts also have higher rates of mortality and are more likely to smoke, to be obese, and to engage in heavy drinking than those with more education.²⁷ Insurance coverage improves with higher levels of education: although both high school dropouts and high school graduates have substantial uninsured populations (42% and 24%, respectively), only nine percent of non-elderly college graduates are uninsured.²⁸

4. Some Female Dropouts Are More Likely to Become Pregnant as Teenagers than Females Who Stay in School.

According to a recent study, dropping out of high school increases the risk for some groups of girls of school-age pregnancy leading to a live birth.²⁹ The study demonstrated that 40% of the female dropouts surveyed—about 48% of the Hispanic female dropouts, 34% of the White female dropouts, and 33% of the Black female dropouts—gave birth before age 20.³⁰ Among students who stayed in school, on the other hand, only about 14% of Hispanic teen girls, eight percent of White teen girls, and 24% of Black teen girls gave birth in their teens.³¹ The study found that the difference in rates for White and Hispanic girls demonstrated a strong association between dropping out of high school and subsequent teen motherhood for these girls.³² Moreover, the younger the Hispanic and White females were when they dropped out of school, the higher their risk of becoming pregnant teens.³³ Obviously, the personal hurdles outlined above become even more challenging for female dropouts who have children, particularly if they have children in the immediate aftermath of dropping out.

5. Children of High School Dropouts Are Less Likely to Graduate from High School.

Dropping out of school is a multi-generational problem. Not only are students who drop out of school likely to suffer the personal consequences of dropping out, such as lower lifetime income and worse overall health, but they are also more likely to see their own children drop out of school and suffer the same consequences. In addition, although children are particularly at risk of dropping out themselves in families where one or both parents are high school dropouts,³⁴ the educational level of mothers may make a greater difference. A recent study of female students found that while the daughters of men who graduate from high school are 15% less likely to drop out of school than daughters whose fathers dropped out, the daughters of women who graduate from high school are *one-third* less likely to drop out of school than daughters of women who dropped out.³⁵

B. Keeping Girls in School Serves Broad Societal Goals As Well.

Increasing the number of high school graduates will not only have beneficial individual economic and health consequences; it also will have broader public benefits. Those benefits can in part be measured by the savings to the government that will result from keeping students in school. For the estimated 1.2 million dropouts from the Class of 2007, for example, the nation could gain more than \$166 billion in higher lifetime tax payments were those students to receive their high school diplomas.³⁶ And because employment prospects and wages dramatically improve for those who graduate from high school, governments will save on expenditures that would otherwise have to be made on public support programs for this population.³⁷ For example, in a recent report on California dropouts, researchers concluded that a student who graduates from high school in California saves the federal and state governments together an average of \$168,880 over the course of his or her lifetime, taking into account education expenditures, tax payments, and health, crime, and welfare expenditures.³⁸

1. Society Can Enhance Its Tax Revenues By Helping Dropouts Stay in School.

All levels of government would benefit from the increased tax revenues that would come from increasing the number of taxpayers who graduate from high school. As a result of their higher employment rates and earnings, high school graduates on average pay significantly more in taxes than high school dropouts. According to one study, a Black male high school graduate, for example, will pay 78%, or \$101,741, more in federal and state lifetime income taxes than a Black male high school dropout.

Although female high school dropouts (who are typically employed at lower rates and earn less than men) pay less in taxes than their male counterparts, educating some groups of women could generate a somewhat higher percentage increase in tax payments than educating the same groups of men. For example, a White female high school graduate pays 104%, or \$79,672, more in income taxes than a White female dropout, while a White male high school graduate pays 69%, or \$145,923, more in income taxes than a White male dropout. A Hispanic female high school graduate pays 91%, or \$66,381, more than a Hispanic female dropout, while a Hispanic male high school graduate pays 39%, or \$72,305, more than a Hispanic male dropout.³⁹

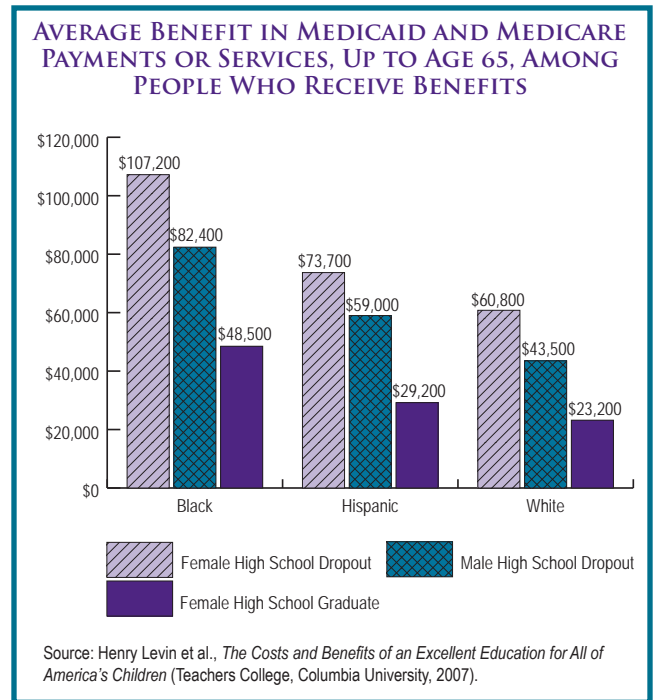
2. Government Can Save In Public Support Programs By Decreasing The High School Dropout Rate.

Reducing dropout rates would also enable governments to save significant amounts in expenditures on public support programs. Over the course of their lives, high school dropouts must rely more upon public support programs, such as welfare programs and public health resources like Medicaid, than high school graduates.⁴⁰ Thus, some researchers estimate that every student who graduates from high school can save states as much as an average of \$40,500 in total public health and \$3,000 in welfare expenditures over his or her lifetime.⁴¹ If the 1.2 million students of the Class of 2007 predicted to have dropped out instead earned their high school diplomas, states could save more than \$17 billion in Medicaid and other expenses for uninsured care alone.⁴²

✓ **States Would Secure Particular Savings in Public Health Support Programs by Reducing the Female Dropout Rate.**

More than 50% of Black women, approximately 35% of Hispanic women, and almost 30% of White women who drop out of school are forced to rely on Medicaid.⁴³ These numbers are significantly larger than those for the women's better-educated peers; only about 20% of Black women, 15% of Hispanic women, and 10% of White women with high school diplomas are on Medicaid.⁴⁴ Moreover, female dropouts are more likely to need assistance from these support programs than their male counterparts; only slightly more than 30% of Black men, approximately 20% of Hispanic men, and 15% of White men who drop out of high school rely upon Medicaid.⁴⁵

The lifetime receipt of Medicaid benefits reflects similar patterns. Across all races, female high school dropouts receive a lifetime average of about \$80,550 in Medicaid and Medicare payments or services. This is approximately \$18,925 more than the average amount received by each male dropout, \$46,925 more than the average amount received by female high school graduates, and \$55,725 more than the average amount received by male high school graduates.⁴⁶



✓ **Society Could Save Significantly on Welfare Programs by Reducing the Female Dropout Rate.**

Achieving higher levels of education is also associated with lower receipt of public assistance payments or subsidies.⁴⁷ This is in part because high school graduates earn higher incomes and lessen their chances of teenage pregnancy or single motherhood, two major criteria for many means-tested assistance programs. One researcher estimates that, compared to a female high school dropout, a female high school graduate is 68% less likely, and a female college graduate is 91% less likely, to receive any type of welfare assistance.⁴⁸ And female high school graduates save the government an average of about \$5,050 in lifetime welfare expenditures from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), housing assistance, food stamps and state-based programs. By contrast, each man who graduates saves the government an average of about \$1,725 in the same lifetime welfare expenditures.⁴⁹

- Having a high school diploma lowers the probability of receiving TANF benefits by 40% and food stamps by 19%;
- Those with at least some college reduce their chances of receiving TANF benefits by 62% and food stamps by 45%.⁵⁰

III. SOME BARRIERS TO STAYING IN SCHOOL ARE PARTICULARLY STEEP FOR GIRLS.

Research studies and surveys have identified a number of factors that place students at a higher risk of dropping out of school. Aside from pregnancy, which has a unique impact on girls, there are also preliminary indications that gender matters in other areas, both with regard to the reasons that a student drops out of school and, potentially, with respect to factors and interventions that may help reduce the risk. The following section outlines some of these risk factors, with a particular focus on the research that has identified barriers to staying in school that may be especially steep for girls.

A. There Are Factors that Put Both Male and Female Students at Greater Risk of Dropping Out.

For a number of reasons, it is difficult to definitively answer why girls—or boys—drop out of school. First, dropping out is a process a student experiences rather than a single, isolated decision.⁵¹ In fact, combinations of reasons may play a role over time. Second, there are limitations to the research methodologies that have been used; for example, while studies often identify risk factors that make students more likely to drop out of school, these risk factors simply show correlation, not causation.⁵² Finally, there has been little research on how a particular risk factor may affect students differently by gender, by race or ethnicity, or both.

Despite these limitations, the available research indicates that a student's individual and family characteristics, his or her attitude toward and experiences in school, and the characteristics of that school influence the chances that he or she will drop out. For example, Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan Native students generally have increased odds of dropping out compared to White students, while Asian/Pacific Islander students have decreased chances.⁵³ And students whose parents are not actively involved in their schooling, provide little supervision, or do not expect their children to continue their education beyond high school are more likely to drop out.⁵⁴

FACTORS CORRELATED WITH INCREASED RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Student & Family Characteristics

- Low socioeconomic status⁵⁷
- Single parent family⁵⁸
- Low level of parental involvement
- Race or ethnicity (Black, Hispanic and Native American students generally have increased odds, and Asian/Pacific Islander students decreased odds, compared to White students)

Student Attitudes Toward & Experiences at School

- Being disciplined at school
- Poor grades⁵⁹
- Irrelevant coursework⁶⁰
- Lack of future educational plans⁶¹
- Negative peer perceptions
- Being held back⁶²
- Frequently changing schools⁶³
- Absenteeism⁶⁴
- Feeling unsafe at school⁶⁵
- Working during school year⁶⁶
- Becoming pregnant or taking on parenting responsibilities⁶⁷

School Characteristics

- Public school⁶⁸
- Low average socioeconomic status of school community⁶⁹
- High levels of minority student enrollment⁷⁰
- High number of students disciplined or held back⁷¹
- A perception that the discipline policy is unfair⁷²

Other studies have shown that negative experiences at school are likely to influence dropout chances. For example, students who are disciplined for misbehaving at school have “significantly higher odds” of dropping out.⁵⁵ Moreover, students who believe their peers *see* them as troublemakers or as poor performers are 50% more likely to drop out.⁵⁶ Researchers also have identified common characteristics, listed in the chart on the preceding page, associated with schools with high dropout rates.

B. Research has Identified Some of the Barriers That Are of Particular Significance for Girls.

While much research has been done about the factors that put students at risk of dropping out, this research has not generally focused on the impact of gender. Where studies mention gender differences, moreover, they rarely examine the interplay between gender and dropping out in detail.⁷³

The paucity of research is a serious problem, in part because the research that has been done suggests that gender does matter in assessing both the reasons that students drop out and the interventions that will be most effective in keeping them in school.⁷⁴ For example, there are findings that suggest that male dropouts overall may leave school more often than female dropouts for disciplinary, academic, or employment reasons.⁷⁵

This section focuses on the available research that addresses barriers and risks that are of particular significance for girls, starting with pregnancy and the parenting responsibilities that some girls face. Even beyond these factors, however, the research suggests that other factors that affect both boys and girls may affect girls in different ways from—and, in some cases, to a greater extent than -- their male peers.

1. Pregnancy and Family Responsibilities Significantly Influence Girls' Ability to Stay in School.

Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities have a significant impact on girls' ability to stay in school. In fact, girls report leaving school, during as well as following their pregnancies, at alarming rates. The following section provides information about girls who have left school for pregnancy—and parenting—related reasons and outlines some of the barriers this population of students may face in continuing their education.

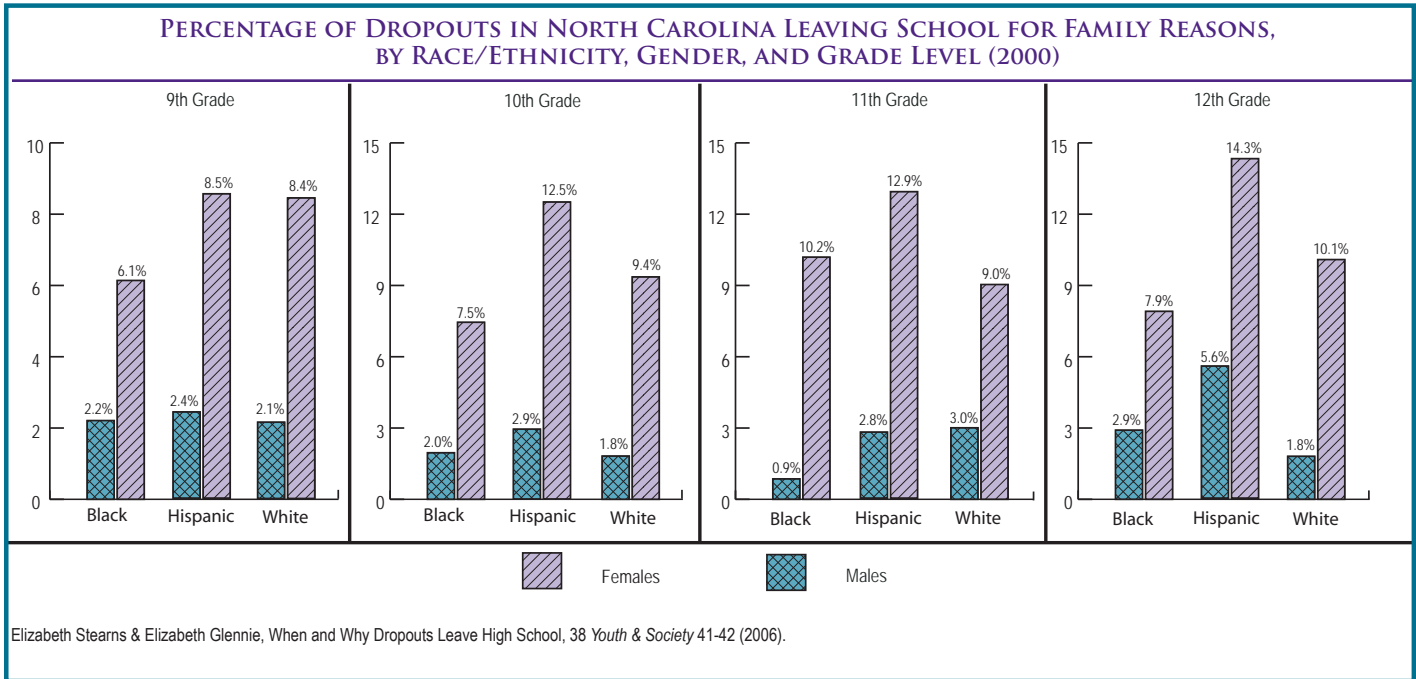
✓ While Not the Majority, A Significant Number of Girls Cite Pregnancy or Parenting as a Reason for Dropping Out.

When asked, one-quarter to one-third of female dropouts say that pregnancy or becoming a parent played a role in their decision to drop out. In a recent survey sponsored by the Gates Foundation, 33% of female dropouts reported that becoming a parent played a major role in their decision to leave school.⁷⁶ In another study, close to 27% of tenth to twelfth grade female dropouts said that pregnancy was one of their reasons for leaving, making it the third most cited behind not liking school and failing in school.⁷⁷ Surveys of pregnant and parenting students have reported comparable findings. For example, a survey of pregnant and parenting young women in New York City's foster care system revealed that 44% left school during their pregnancies.⁷⁸ A national study also found that approximately 30% of teens dropped out following pregnancy.⁷⁹

Available evidence shows, moreover, that pregnancy and parenting responsibilities are more significant factors in the decision to drop out for female than for male students. The Gates Foundation survey, for example, found a statistically significant difference between the number of female and male dropouts—33% compared to 19%—who said that becoming a parent played a major role in their decision to leave school.⁸⁰

This pattern also holds across racial and ethnic lines. A study of dropouts in North Carolina shows that the percentage of male dropouts who left for family reasons from the male subgroup with the highest such percentage was still lower than the percentage of female dropouts who left for family reasons from the female subgroup with the lowest such percentage.⁸¹ Among girls, Hispanics consistently left school for family reasons at higher rates than either their White or Black female counterparts. Additionally, the percentage of Hispanic

females who left for family reasons increased over time, with 8.5% of ninth grade Hispanic females leaving for this reason and over 14% leaving in twelfth grade.⁸²



✓ **Pregnant and Parenting Students Have Been Harmed by a Lack of School Support, Active Discouragement by School Personnel, and Inferior Schools.**

Although it is less clear how or why pregnancy or parenting responsibilities lead a student to drop out, available research suggests that schools make a difference in whether pregnant and parenting students remain in school. According to the Gates Foundation report, for example, those who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent, more than any other group of dropouts, were “most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.”⁸³ In fact, these students were “doing reasonably well in school” and “had a strong belief that they could have graduated if they had stayed.”⁸⁴ Moreover, many pregnant students dropped out because they were “unable to juggle” the demands of school and parenthood and *seemed* unaware of any assistance at their schools that might have helped them ease this burden.⁸⁵

Furthermore, some schools steer or push pregnant or parenting students into alternative schools. New York City, for example, recently announced its decision to close its “P-schools,” alternative schools for pregnant and parenting teens, after a six-month study commissioned by the state’s Education Department and investigations by the New York Civil Liberties Union disclosed instances of school personnel steering or pushing girls into the P-schools. These schools offered their students education “marked by abysmal test scores, poor attendance and inadequate facilities.”⁸⁶ Parenting teens also revealed similar obstacles in other schools in the district. One Brooklyn school, for example, prohibited an eleventh grader from bringing her baby on the school bus, preventing the baby from attending day care.⁸⁷

New York City has committed to take steps to correct these problems and to institute proactive measures to ensure that pregnant and parenting teens can stay in school, but this evidence raises a red flag that schools in other areas of the country are failing to provide the supports necessary for this vulnerable group, comprised largely of girls, to stay in school. Indeed, parties recently settled a lawsuit against Antelope Valley Union

High School and the Los Angeles County Office of Education challenging the school's denial of child care and parenting services unless pregnant teens agreed to transfer to an inferior alternative educational program. Under the terms of the settlement, students must have access to child care and parenting skills instruction without being denied access to classes at their high school.⁸⁸

2. There Are Other Factors That May Create Particularly Significant Barriers for Girls.

The following section highlights three studies that suggest ways in which a girl's gender may have affected her reasons for, or likelihood of, dropping out—a survey of dropouts sponsored by the Gates Foundation;⁸⁹ a study that examined all students who left North Carolina public schools in the 1998-1999 academic year;⁹⁰ and a study that followed Black children in Chicago from first grade through high school.⁹¹ Despite the limitations of the research, the results point to barriers or predictors that may be particularly significant for girls and underscore the need for further gender-based research.

✓ Attendance Rates

The North Carolina study showed a clear relationship between missing school and dropping out for both boys and girls. The extent to which girls and boys leave school for this reason may differ, however. The Gates survey, for example, found that more girls than boys—80% compared to 71%—said missing too many days of school and not being able to keep up with schoolwork were factors in dropping out.⁹² The North Carolina study found that Black and White females are both more likely than White males to leave school for attendance reasons.⁹³

Moreover, wholly independent of the question of whether boys or girls drop out more for attendance related issues, the timing of boys' and girls' absences may differ. For example, the North Carolina study found that Black and Hispanic girls are more likely to drop out for attendance reasons in 9th and 10th grade than they are later in high school, whereas Black boys are more likely to do so in 11th grade than in earlier years.⁹⁴

The reasons for poor attendance may also reflect gender-based differences. For instance, both boys and girls report that they drop out, at least in part, because they do not feel safe at school,⁹⁵ yet the conditions that lead to the safety concerns may differ for female and male students. For example, while sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of school violence clearly create safety concerns for both boys and girls in schools, sexual harassment, in particular, affects slightly more girls than boys. Studies show that 83% of girls and 79% of boys are subjected to sexual harassment in school.⁹⁶ In addition, the impact of sexual harassment also *seems* to be greater for girls—they are more likely than boys to report not wanting to go to school, trying to change seats or to avoid the harasser, and not being able to pay attention or talk as much in class.⁹⁷

✓ Academics

Although the North Carolina study showed that overall, more boys than girls drop out for academic reasons, it also found that more Black and Hispanic girls than boys dropped out for academic reasons in later grades.⁹⁸ For example, among twelfth grade dropouts, more than 11% of Black girls, compared to 7.64% of Black boys, left North Carolina public schools for academic reasons.⁹⁹ Similarly, more than 19% of eleventh grade Hispanic girls left for academic reasons, compared to just over 11% of Hispanic boys of that grade.¹⁰⁰ In fact, this percentage of Hispanic females represented a three-fold increase from the percentage of Hispanic females who left for academic reasons in ninth grade, as well as the highest percentage of students who left for academic reasons at any time.¹⁰¹

While these numbers do not explain how or why academic reasons contributed to student dropout rates, multiple factors likely play a role. For example, in the Gates survey, the same percentage of male and female dropouts—66%—said that failing contributed to their decision to leave school.¹⁰² Within the same survey group, however, more girls than boys—71% as compared to 61%—said that not being able to keep up with

schoolwork was a factor in dropping out.¹⁰³ These survey responses reveal that academic problems may arise not only from difficulty in understanding and completing work, but also from different student reactions to school-based stressors. In addition, of course, the inability to keep up with school work may stem from a host of reasons, such as family obligations or employment, which may differ for boys and girls. Once again, the data point to the need for further gender-based research.

✓ **Rates of Discipline**

As set forth above, high rates of discipline are correlated with high dropout rates for both boys and girls.¹⁰⁴ But the North Carolina study suggests that discipline may affect high school completion for boys and girls in different ways. Although the study found that more boys than girls overall in North Carolina dropped out for disciplinary reasons, it also revealed that more twelfth grade Hispanic females left for disciplinary reasons than any other group of students.¹⁰⁵ In addition, while disciplinary rates for both White and Black girls decreased over time, Hispanic females showed the opposite pattern.¹⁰⁶

This is particularly surprising because Hispanic females had the lowest departure rates due to discipline among all groups of ninth, tenth and eleventh grade dropouts—indeed, no Hispanic females left school for disciplinary reasons in eleventh grade.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the number of Hispanic females leaving because of discipline in the 12th grade skyrocketed to over 14%, surpassing the 11% of Hispanic male dropouts who left for this reason that same year.¹⁰⁸ Although it is possible that this finding was merely an aberration, it also suggests the need for further investigation of the ways in which school disciplinary policies and practices may affect boys and girls, and particularly those of color, differently.

✓ **Family Structure and Rules**

The Chicago study reveals various ways in which family structure, interactions and expectations may have differing effects on the dropout risk for Black boys and girls. For example, while the study found that getting low grades in first grade generally correlated with an increased risk of ultimate dropout, having strict family rules as adolescents compensated for early low grades for female, but not male, students.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the study found that girls who lived in mother-father families, rather than in single-mother families, were more likely to graduate; there was no real difference in graduation rates for boys living in these two types of families.¹¹⁰

IV. EDUCATORS AND POLICY MAKERS CAN DO BETTER.

Recommendations for how to address the dropout crisis abound, ranging from raising states' compulsory school age requirements to creating different schools for different students.¹¹¹ This section focuses on proposals that can help to identify, and reduce girls' dropout rates based on, the particular challenges that they face. Many of the recommendations are likely to help both boys and girls.

Recommendation #1: Conduct More Gender-Based Research.

As noted above, many of the existing studies on the dropout crisis either ignore gender as a variable or fail to explore the reasons for any gender-based differences that emerge. Further research on gender-based differentials is necessary to identify factors that affect male and female students differently, either in type or degree, and to evaluate the most efficacious interventions for different groups of students. Such research should rely on data that are fully disaggregated by sex, by race, and by other relevant criteria, and assessment of any gender-based differences in impact should be part of the rigorous evaluation process for intervention strategies. The federal government should fund gender-based data collection and research.

Recommendation #2: Improve Data Collection on Educational Performance and Graduation Rates.

The limitations of existing research are based, among other things, on the inadequacies of current data collection.

For example, states are not currently required to track graduation rates through a consistent and transparent system that enables interstate comparisons, leading to wide variances in estimates of dropout rates. And data are not now fully disaggregated by gender, race, and disability, as well as by whether the student is an English language learner, an economically disadvantaged student, or pregnant or parenting, making it difficult to track students by subgroups.

To address these limitations, states and the federal government should adopt a common definition of “dropouts” for all data collection, analysis and reporting requirements. States and local governments should also implement identifier systems to enable longitudinal tracking of individual students.¹¹² These systems would benefit all students, but especially students, such as pregnant and parenting teens, who are otherwise likely to fall through the cracks. Currently, there are inadequate data on the number of pregnant and parenting students in schools, the number who graduate, and the type of education they are receiving.¹¹³ The federal government should provide incentives for and fund the development of such data systems.

All reported data must, moreover, be presented in a format that can be fully cross-tabulated—that is, that will allow educators, policymakers and the public to analyze disparities by smaller, more revealing subgroups. For example, cross-tabulation of graduation rate data will allow schools to track the graduation rates of Hispanic girls and compare it to the graduation rates of Hispanic boys or non-Hispanic girls.

Recommendation #3: Increase School Accountability for Dropouts.

Because the No Child Left Behind Act does not set a standard goal for graduation rates or require states to make measurable progress toward that goal, states have incentives to “push out” low-performing groups of students whose test scores threaten to lower schools’ ability to satisfy Adequate Yearly Progress requirements, rather than encouraging those students to persist to graduation. In order to eliminate those incentives, the Act should include a reasonable graduation rate floor as part of the school assessment process, with a rigorous standard for exceptions.

Recommendation #4: Based on the Results of New Research and Enhanced Data Collection, Design Targeted Interventions, Appropriate for Girls As Well as Boys, to Reduce Dropout Risks.

Because the research to date indicates that gender matters in evaluating the reasons that students drop out and the interventions that will be most efficacious in keeping them in school, the enhanced research and data collection recommended by this report will help policy makers and educational personnel to adopt targeted strategies to support boys and girls of all races and ethnicities. Among other things, such strategies must address the need for academically rigorous and engaging coursework; for supporting students in their efforts to make up lost or incomplete schoolwork; for addressing absenteeism based on the reasons that it occurs and the impact it creates on students of different genders; and for modifying the application of discipline policies to minimize the risk that they will lead students to drop out.

Recommendation #5: Provide Additional Support for Pregnant and Parenting Students.

Because pregnancy and parenting responsibilities play a significant role in many girls’ decisions to drop out of school, it is critical that students who face these challenges be given the support they need to continue their educations and fulfill their academic potential, including through enrollment in post-secondary education. First, federal and state education agencies must educate schools and individuals about, and vigorously enforce, laws that protect pregnant or parenting students from discrimination, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972¹¹⁴ and state anti-discrimination laws.¹¹⁵ In addition, pregnant and parenting students should be separately tracked in each school’s graduation and dropout data.

Moreover, federal and state policymakers should require schools, and schools should be encouraged voluntarily, to provide additional accommodations and interventions to help pregnant and parenting students stay and advance in school.¹¹⁶ Schools must commit to taking steps to provide the necessary support for this vulnerable population. Some possible accommodations include:

- offering access to special services, such as social services and child care; classes in parenting skills, prenatal care, and child development; and/or support groups or mentoring programs;¹¹⁷
- authorizing special scheduling and attendance arrangements, such as allowing absences for medical or child care needs, providing at-home tutoring, or permitting schoolwork to be done from home or at night;¹¹⁸
- providing necessary physical accommodations (such as larger desks);
- conducting special outreach efforts to re-enroll students who have already dropped out of school; and
- creating individualized graduation plans for pregnant and parenting students.

Federal and state policymakers should also provide funding and leadership to develop, document, and evaluate a range of dropout prevention program models targeting pregnant and parenting teens, and should develop and support practitioner networks and provide technical assistance to existing programs. These programs must ensure that pregnant and parenting students are offered academically rigorous courses that will enable them to prepare for higher education, as well as the same range of extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to their peers.

Recommendation #6: Ensure that Girls Have Equal Access to Academically Rigorous Career and Technical Education Training for High-Skill, High-Wage Jobs.

Studies of effective dropout prevention initiatives have emphasized the importance of making coursework relevant to students' daily lives. In particular, schools have been successful in reducing their dropout rates where they offer career education programs and make the link between academic work, college success, and careers.¹¹⁹ But girls are currently being denied equal access to career and technical education (CTE) classes that provide training for high-skill, high-wage jobs. Research by the National Women's Law Center reveals that nationally, girls make up 87 percent of students in training for traditionally female (and lower paying) fields, but only 15 percent of those preparing to enter the higher-paid traditionally male fields.¹²⁰

These patterns are in significant part the product of school-based barriers, such as biased counseling, the provision of incomplete information to students on the consequences of their career training choices, or sexual harassment of girls who enroll in nontraditional classes.¹²¹ To address these barriers, federal and state policymakers must increase enforcement of their anti-discrimination laws and evaluate CTE programs to identify and address the obstacles to girls' enrollment in and completion of courses that are nontraditional for their gender. Policymakers and schools should also take proactive steps to encourage girls to pursue nontraditional training.¹²²

Recommendation #7: Protect Students from Sexual Harassment and Bullying.

As discussed above, both boys and girls report that they drop out in part because they do not feel safe at school.¹²³ To address these safety concerns, policymakers should enforce, and provide public education about, existing laws that protect students from harassment, bullying and/or other forms of violence in school.¹²⁴ In addition, policy makers should take the necessary steps, including passing appropriate legislation or *seeking* new interpretations of existing laws, to ensure that schools are held properly accountable for harassment of their students.¹²⁵ Schools must also establish, disseminate and vigorously enforce strong sexual harassment policies and procedures for complaining about harassment.¹²⁶

Recommendation #8: Ensure That Girls Have Equal Access to After-School Programs, Including Athletics Programs.

A number of studies have shown that after-school programs improve graduation rates and academic achievement. It therefore is critical that all students have full access to after-school programs, including athletics. Unfortunately, thirty-five years after Title IX was enacted, girls are still not being treated fairly in sports programs. While girls comprise 49% of the students in the nation's high schools, for example, they receive only 41% of the opportunities to play sports; further, girls' teams continue to be subjected to a host of inequities in the facilities, support, coaching, and publicity they receive.¹²⁷

Thus, schools must ensure that girls have equal opportunities to participate in sports and that their teams are treated equitably when they are allowed to play; the Department of Education and state enforcement agencies must proactively enforce these fundamental nondiscrimination requirements. Congress should also pass legislation that would require high schools, like their post-secondary counterparts, to maintain and report data on the gender breakdown of their athletics teams and the treatment of and expenditures for those teams.¹²⁸

Recommendation #9: Ensure that Students Know to Whom and How They Should Report Sex Discrimination.

The federal and state governments should enforce Title IX's requirement for schools to appoint, and broadly publicize information about, a Title IX coordinator, and adopt an anti-discrimination policy and a grievance procedure to address any sex discrimination complaints. Such personnel and procedures will help schools identify and remedy problems, such as those discussed above, that may discourage some girls from staying in school, including the demands of pregnancy/parenting, discrimination in career education, sexual harassment, and inequities in athletics.

CONCLUSION

As efforts to remedy the high school dropout crisis progress, the educational experiences and dropout rates of female students must be recognized and understood. American girls are dropping out of high school at nearly the same rate as boys, and at significant cost. Female dropouts earn significantly lower wages than male dropouts, are at greater risk of unemployment, and are more likely to need to rely on public support programs.

Moreover, studies suggest that barriers to high school graduation affect girls and boys in different ways and that some risk factors—particularly those related to pregnancy and parenting—are significantly more burdensome for female students. Further gender-based research and the incorporation of that research into dropout intervention strategies will be vital to improving girls' graduation rates.

With the future economic security of so many young women and their families at risk, educators, researchers and policymakers cannot afford to ignore the demonstrated particularities of girls' educational experiences. Our young women deserve no less.

REFERENCES

1 This calculation is based on the EPE Research Center's estimated number of dropouts for the 2006-07 school year (1.23 million), the average number of school days in a year (180 days), and the average length of a school day (6.5 hours). EPE Research Center, *Diplomas Count: Ready for What?* Education Week, June 2007 (finding that each year, 1.23 million students in the U.S. fail to graduate high school); Elena Silva, *On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time* Education Sector Reports, Jan. 2007 (citing the average length of a school year in the U.S. as 180 days and the average length of a school day as 6.5 hours).

2 See EPE Research Center, *supra* note 1 (national graduation rate is 69.9% based on data from 2003-04 school year); see also Henry Levin et al., *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children* 5 (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2007), available at http://www.cbcse.org/media/download_gallery/AGGREGATE_REPORT_v7.pdf (“[T]here is reasonable agreement on the high school graduation rate for public school students...we can conclude with reasonable confidence that roughly three out of every ten students will fail to graduate from high school on time.”).

3 See EPE Research Center, *supra* note 1.

4 *Id.*

5 See Appendix for a discussion of the methodology used to calculate dropout rates in this report.

6 See EPE Research Center, *supra* note 1.

7 NWLC calculation based on the EPE Research Center's estimated graduation rate for females (72.7%) multiplied by the number of female students in 9th grade in 2003-2004 as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. EPE Research Center, *supra* note 1; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/>.

8 EPE Research Center, *supra* note 1.

9 *Id.*

10 See National Center for Education Statistics, *supra* note 7.

11 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. PINC-03. Educational Attainment--People 25 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings in 2006, Work Experience in 2006, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex. All persons with zero income were counted as unemployed.

12 *Id.*

13 *Id.*

14 *Id.*

15 *Id.*

16 *Id.*

17 *Id.*; Department of Health and Human Services, The 2006 HHS Poverty Guidelines, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/06poverty.shtml>.

18 The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) has argued for the use of a standard near two-times the federal poverty measure. See, e.g., Jared Bernstein, *Work, Work Supports, And Safety Nets: Reducing the burden of low-incomes in America* 2-3 (Economic Policy Institute, Oct. 2007).

19 U.S. Census Bureau, *supra* note 11.

20 *Id.*

21 *Id.*

22 *Id.*

23 See *id.* for earnings data.

24 See *id.* for earnings data.

25 Mitchell D. Wong et al., *Contribution of Major Diseases to Disparities in Mortality*, 347 New Eng. J. Med. 1585, 1586-88 (2002).

26 See Alliance for Excellent Education, *Fact Sheet: The Impact of Education on Health and Well-Being*, Nov. 2003, available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/FactSheets.html>.

27 D. Cutler and A. Lleras-Muney, *Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence* 1-4 (NBER, Working Paper, National Poverty Center Conference, 2006).

28 Kaiser Family Foundation, *Health Insurance Coverage in America: 2005 Data Update*, May 2007, <http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/2005DataUpdate.pdf>.

29 Jennifer Manlove, *The Influence of High School Dropout and School Disengagement on the Risk of School-Age Pregnancy*, 8 Journal of Research on Adolescence 187-220 (1998).

30 *Id.* at 201.

31 *Id.*

32 *Id.* at 205, 210. Note: the difference between the percentage of Black females who became pregnant during school and those that became

pregnant after dropping out of school was not statistically significant, and therefore dropping out of school was not associated with subsequent pregnancy for these teens.

- 33 *Id.* at 207.
- 34 *E.g.*, Pete Goldschmidt & Jia Wang, *When Can Schools Affect Dropout Behavior? A Longitudinal Multilevel Analysis*, 36 *Am. Educ. Res. J.*, Winter 1999, at 725.
- 35 Dawn M. Upchurch & James McCarthy, *The Timing of a First Birth and High School Completion*, 55 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 224, 230 (April 1990).
- 36 Henry Levin et al., *supra* note 2, at 9. NWLC calculation based on an estimated average of \$139,100 in extra lifetime tax payments and a total of 1.2 million dropouts from the Class of 2007.
- 37 *Id.*
- 38 Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin, *The Economic Losses from High School Dropouts in California* 61-62 (California Dropout Research Project, Aug. 2007).
- 39 *See* Levin et al., *supra* note 2. NWLC calculations based on Table 3.2 and Table 3.3.
- 40 *See id.* at 9.
- 41 *Id.* at 12, 16.
- 42 Alliance for Excellent Education, *Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment*, Nov. 2006, available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/HandW.pdf>.
- 43 *See* Levin et al., *supra* note 2, at 10.
- 44 *Id.*
- 45 *Id.*
- 46 *Id.* at 12 (averages based on the dollar amounts listed in Table 6).
- 47 *Id.* at 15.
- 48 *See* Belfield and Levin, *supra* note 38, at 29.
- 49 *See* Levin et al., *supra* note 2, at 16 (averages based on the dollar amounts listed in Table 11).
- 50 *Id.* at 15.
- 51 Shane Jimerson et al., *A Prospective Longitudinal Study of High School Dropouts Examining Multiple Predictors Across Development*, 38 *J. of School Psychol.* 525, 542 (2000); *see also* Bridgeland et al., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts 8 (Civic Enterprises, 2006)* (noting that before a student drops out “there are clear warning signs for at least one to three years” that they “are losing interest in school”); *see also* Margaret E. Ensminger & Anita L. Slusarcick, *Paths to High School Graduation or Dropout: A Longitudinal Study of a First-Grade Cohort*, *Soc. of Educ.* 95, 110 (April 1992) (noting that the processes leading to drop out were established early in students’ school careers).
- 52 Interviews and surveys with dropouts largely depend on how questions are framed and whether they allow students to choose only one or multiple reasons for dropping out. It is also often unclear how, if at all, these reasons may interact with one another. These types of research results depend on the questions researchers initially ask, whether they examine a national or a local sample of students, and the timeframe under which they observe students, such as a retrospective examination of students’ experiences from eighth to tenth grade versus a longitudinal study that follows students from first grade through high school.
- 53 Valerie Lee & David Burkham, *Dropping Out of High School: The Role of School Organization and Structure*, 17-18 (Dec. 2000), available at http://inpathways.net/dropping_out.pdf (explaining that compared to White students, Black students were “more likely” to leave school between tenth and twelfth grades, while there was no relationship between Hispanic ethnicity and dropping out). But some research suggests race is not predictive of dropping out after controlling for other factors such as a student’s socioeconomic status. *E.g.*, Pete Goldschmidt & Jia Wang, *supra* note 34, at 724 (concluding that Black students were, after controlling for all other factors, significantly less likely to drop out early than Whites but equally likely to drop out later in high school.); Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School: A Multilevel Analysis of Students and Schools*, 32 *Am. Educ. Res. J.* 583, 605 (Fall 1995) (observing no difference in eighth to tenth grade drop out rates between Black and Hispanic students as compared to White students after controlling for SES); *Cf.* Russell W. Rumberger & Scott L. Thomas, *The Distribution of Dropout and Turnover Rates among Urban and Suburban High Schools*, *Soc. of Educ.* 39, 54 (Jan. 2000) (finding that after controlling for family and academic background, Asian/Pacific Islander students were 56% less likely to drop out between ten and twelfth grades, Black and Hispanic students had the same odds as White students, and Native American students had 94% greater chance of dropping out as compared to White students).
- 54 *See* Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 10 (concluding that dropouts whose parents were not involved in school “were more likely” to drop out from grades eight through ten); *see also* Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 603 (finding that students with less parental supervision had a 34% greater chance of dropping out between grades eight to ten).
- 55 *See* Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 608 (misbehavior increased chances of dropping out for White and Black 8th to 10th grade students but not for Hispanics).
- 56 *Id.* at 604.

- 57 *E.g.*, Lee & Burkham, *supra* note 53, at 18; Russell W. Rumberger & Scott L. Thomas, *supra* note 53, at 54 (noting that students from low-SES families were about twice as likely than students from average-SES families to drop out between grades ten and twelve, while students from high-SES families were half as likely).
- 58 *E.g.*, Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 726; Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 603-605 (“[S]tudents from single-parent families have significantly higher odds of dropping out even after controlling for socioeconomic status.”).
- 59 *E.g.*, Lee & Burkham, *supra* note 53, at 18 (finding that dropouts who left between grades ten and twelve had a math average below C as compared to about a C+ average for non-dropouts); *see also* Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 604 (students’ academic performance in eighth grade predictive of dropping out).
- 60 *See* Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 4 (noting that 69% of dropouts said they did not feel motivated or inspired to work hard).
- 61 Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 604 (eighth graders who only expected to graduate from high school were almost 7 times as likely as those who expected to pursue post-secondary education to have dropped out before finishing the tenth grade.)
- 62 *Id.*; Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 731.
- 63 *E.g.*, Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 608 (moving schools predicted dropping out for Blacks and Whites, but not for Hispanics). *But see* Elizabeth Stearns & Elizabeth Glennie, *When and Why Dropouts Leave High School*, 38 *Youth & Society* 41-42 (2006) (finding that among public school dropouts in North Carolina, moving most disrupted Hispanic s’ educational experience, with about 20% of boys and girls leaving ninth grade because they moved).
- 64 Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 608 (eighth graders who were absent 25% of the time or more were 3 or 5 times more likely to drop out than other students). By contrast, moderate absenteeism—missing three or four days over the past four weeks—increased the odds of dropping out for White and Hispanic students but not for Black students. *Id.* at 608. *See also* Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *Gates Foundation Dropouts Survey* (Sep./Oct. 2005)(finding that 75% of dropouts said that missing too many days and not being able to catch up played a role in their decision to leave school).
- 65 Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 607.
- 66 *E.g.*, Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 725-26 (finding that working 20 hours or more a week increases the odds that a student will drop out, particularly between grades eight through ten).
- 67 Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 6 (26% of all respondents and one-third of surveyed young women said that becoming a parent was a major factor in their decision to leave school).
- 68 Russell W. Rumberger & Scott L. Thomas, *supra* note 53, at 56; Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 726 (noting that students attending private middle schools, both secular and non-secular, have decreased odds of dropping out and this positive impact is “about twice as pronounced” at the high school level). Whether a school is private or public, generally “has the largest impact in explaining differences in dropout rates between schools.” *Id.*
- 69 *See* Lee & Burkham, *supra* note 53, at 19 (in a national study of schools situated in metropolitan areas, the dropout rate for tenth to twelfth graders at schools comprised of low-SES students was nearly six times higher than in schools attended by high SES students).
- 70 Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 611-12 (students in high-minority schools are 57% more likely to drop out, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and ethnicity); Robert Balfanz & Nettie Legters, *Locating the Drop Out Crisis: Which high Schools Produce the Nation’s Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?* (CRESPAR, Sep. 2004), available at <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report70.pdf> (schools in which minority students comprise the majority are “five times more likely” to fail to promote 50% or fewer freshmen to senior status on time); but *see* Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 728 (concluding that a school’s racial enrollment had no impact on students dropping out between grades 10 and 12).
- 71 Student misbehavior and a school’s tendency to hold students back are both factors that increase dropout rates, but misbehavior has a greater impact on older high school students while the holding-back policies have a greater impact on 8th, 9th, and 10th graders. Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 727.
- 72 Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 613 (eighth grade students who thought their school’s discipline policy was fair were 21% less likely to drop out by tenth grade).
- 73 Additionally, because most studies do not disaggregate data, it is difficult to tell whether a factor may influence a certain group of girls of one race or ethnicity differently than their peers. For example, family responsibilities may impact Hispanic teens differently than White teens.
- 74 *See, e.g.*, Goldschmidt & Wang, *supra* note 34, at 724-725 (finding that, *ceteris paribus*, girls are significantly more likely to drop out than boys); Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 605 (“[W]hile girls overall have similar dropout rates as boys, girls with similar attitudes, behavior, and academic performance as boys have higher dropout rates.”); William Velez, *High School Attrition Among Hispanic and Non-Hispanic White Youths*, 62 *Soc. of Ed.* 126, 131 (Apr. 1989)(finding that among tenth to twelfth grade dropouts, female Chicanos, Cubans, and Puerto Rican students were more likely to leave school and that non-Hispanic white girls also had higher drop out rates than boys, but to a lesser degree); Anne K. Driscoll, *Risk of High School Dropout among Immigrant and Native Hispanic Youth*, 33 *Int’l. Migration Rev.* 857, 868 (Winter 1999) (observing that in a study of Hispanic students, being male was negatively associated with dropping out early from high school).
- 75 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 46. “Family reasons” includes pregnancy, marriage, and caring for children.

- 76 Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 6.
- 77 National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 1994* at 17, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs96/r94/r9410a.asp>. The survey allowed dropouts to choose more than one reason for dropping out of school. Given that the 1996 changes to welfare require young mothers to attend school and live at home to receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), it is difficult to compare dropout reasons due to pregnancy before and after this change.
- 78 *Educational Neglect: The Delivery of Educational Services to Children in New York City's Foster Care System* (Advocates for Children, New York, NY), 2000, at 42-43, available at <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/pubs/2005/fostercare.pdf>.
- 79 Manlove, *supra* note 29, at 200. This study revealed dropout rates differed by race or ethnicity, with 39.5% of pregnant Black teens dropping out following a pregnancy, compared to 28.3% of White and 27.8% of Hispanic teens. The study's definition of "drop out" was broad, thereby potentially capturing chronic absences as well. "Drop out" was defined as being absent for four weeks or more consecutively for reasons not due to accident or illness, according to the school, home or both. *Id.* at 195-196. *But see* Dawn M. Upchurch and James McCarthy, *supra* note 35, at 226-30 (examining the order in which women graduated, dropped out of school, or gave birth, and concluding that pregnancy was "not predictive" of subsequent drop out, as teens who gave birth while in high school had a greater probability of graduating rather than dropping out regardless of race or ethnicity, and that teen mothers' chances of graduating were "very similar" to teens who did not give birth while in high school).
- 80 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *supra* note 64.
- 81 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 41-42.
- 82 *Id.*
- 83 Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 6.
- 84 *Id.*
- 85 *Id.*
- 86 Julie Bosman, *New York's Schools for Pregnant Girls Will Close*, N.Y. Times, May 24, 2007.
- 87 *NYCLU Gives Schools Chancellor Levy An 'F' For Failing to Stop Discrimination Against Pregnant and Parenting Girls who are Trying to Stay in School* (New York Civil Liberties Union, New York, N.Y.), March 2002, available at <http://www.nyclu.org/boe032702.html>. The New York Civil Liberties Union also found similar results when testers, pretending to be pregnant and in good academic standing, called 28 New York City high schools to inquire about admissions. Although each tester expressed a desire to attend, three schools refused admission to the testers outright; two schools "strongly pressured" callers to enroll in a P-school; and seven others offered the option of P-school with varying degrees of pressure. *Survey of New York City High School Admissions Practices Regarding Pregnant and Parenting Teens* (New York Civil Liberties Union, New York, N.Y.), Dec. 2000, available at http://www.nyclu.org/rrp_p_survey.html.
- 88 Karen Maeshiro, *Pregnant Students Gain in Settlement*, Los Angeles Daily News, October 17, 2005.
- 89 Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51.
- 90 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 37. Researchers used data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction that classified students' reasons for dropping out into six categories: academic problems, disciplinary problems, employment, family reasons, and attendance reasons.
- 91 Ensminger & Slusarcick, *supra* note 51, at 95-113.
- 92 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *supra* note 64.
- 93 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 41-42, 46 (among 9th through 12th grade boys and girls of every racial or ethnic group, attendance was by far the most common reason for dropping out).
- 94 *Id.* at 41-42.
- 95 *See Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing and Sexual Harassment in School* (American Association of University Women), 2001, at 8, available at http://www.aauw.org/research/girls_education/hostile.cfm (noting that equal numbers of boys and girls—18%—say they "are afraid some or most of the time that someone will hurt or bother them at school.").
- 96 *Id.* at 20.
- 97 *Id.* at 32; *but see id.* at 29 (noting that boys are more likely not to tell anyone that they have been sexually harassed.)
- 98 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 41-42; *see also* Ensminger & Slusarcick, *supra* note 51, at 101-105 (observing a relationship between poor math grades in first grade and dropping among Black boys in Chicago).
- 99 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 41-42.
- 100 *Id.*
- 101 *Id.*
- 102 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *supra* note 64.
- 103 *Id.*

- 104 See Russell W. Rumberger, *Dropping Out of Middle School*, *supra* note 53, at 608 (misbehavior increased chances of dropping out for White and Black 8th to 10th grade students but not for Hispanics).
- 105 Stearns & Glennie, *supra* note 63, at 41-42.
- 106 *Id.*
- 107 *Id.*
- 108 *Id.*
- 109 Ensminger & Slusarcick, *supra* note 51, at 105.
- 110 *Id.* at 103.
- 111 See Bridgeland et al., *supra* note 51, at 14, 16.
- 112 Gary Orfield et al., *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis* (The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, The Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, & The Civil Society Institute, 2004).
- 113 Wanda Pillow, *Teen Pregnancy and Education: Politics of Knowledge, Research and Practice*, 20 *Educ. Policy* 59, 64-65 (2006).
- 114 Federal regulations implementing Title IX clarify that a pregnant student may not be removed from her school or otherwise excluded from educational activities unless it is her choice. Even if she chooses an alternative education setting, the education she receives there should be equal or comparable to that which non-pregnant students receive. 34 C.F.R. § 106.40. Despite this very clear mandate, there is evidence that schools are violating the law.
- 115 See, e.g., Cal. Educ. Code §§ 200, 201, 220, 221.5 & 230 (under California law, pregnant and parenting students may not be excluded from any academic, extracurricular, research, occupational training or other program or activity; furthermore, schools receiving state funding have an affirmative obligation to combat sex discrimination and other forms of bias); see also D.C. Code §§ 1-2502(17), 1-2520, 1-2532 (prohibiting not only discrimination based on pregnancy or parenthood, but also specifically prohibiting practices that are neutral but have a discriminatory effect).
- 116 One such bill has been passed in Illinois—the Ensuring Success in School Act—which provides a good model for other states. See 105 Ill. Comp. Stat. 5/2-3.142 (2007).
- 117 In Oregon, eight new high school-based child care centers and teen parent programs were started between 2003 and 2006. According to the state's Department of Education, there are 104 teen parent programs at high schools across the state, 71 of which offer child care. Oregon law requires teen parents to attend school in order to receive government social services. Paris Achen, *Dropout Prevention*, *Mail Tribune*, Jan. 29, 2007.
- 118 Arizona “allows teenage mothers to be on ‘home instruction’ for up to six weeks after delivery and counted present for classes if they receive instruction for four hours a week during this time.” Jessica Robertson, *Program Allows GC Teen Moms to Graduate*, *The Baytown Sun*, Feb. 6, 2007.
- 119 E.g., Adria Steinberg et al., *Addressing America's Dropout Challenge: State Efforts to Boost Graduation Rates Require Federal Support* 15 (Nov. 2006), available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/11/pdf/hs_grad_report.pdf.
- 120 Nationally, girls make up 87 percent of students in traditionally female fields and only 15 percent of those in traditionally male fields. *Tools of the Trade: Using the Law to Address Sex Segregation in High School Career and Technical Education* (National Women's Law Center, Washington, D.C.), 2005, at 2, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/NWLCToolsOfTheTrade05.pdf>.
- 121 *Id.* at 9-14.
- 122 See *id.* at 26 for a comprehensive list of strategies.
- 123 See generally *Hostile Hallways*, *supra* note 95.
- 124 See generally 20 U.S.C. § 1681; see also *Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School Dist.*, 524 U.S. 274 (1998) (schools can be found out of compliance with Title IX if they fail to take appropriate steps to remedy teacher-to-student harassment); see also *Davis v. Monroe County Bd. of Ed.*, 526 U.S. 629 (1999) (schools have an obligation to address complaints of student-to-student sexual harassment); Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-1005(b)(1)(1997)(requiring every school and district to enforce policies on sexual harassment and requiring schools and districts to enforce policies ensuring student safety during school hours at school-sponsored activities).
- 125 See H.R. 3809, 108th Cong. (2004); see also *L.W. v. Toms River Reg'l Schs. Bd. Of Educ.*, 189 N.J. 381 (N.J., 2007)(interpreting New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination as requiring a more protective standard for harassment than the standard required under Title IX).
- 126 See *Do the Right Thing: Understanding, Addressing and Preventing Sexual Harassment in Schools* (National Women's Law Center, Washington, D.C.), 1998.
- 127 See generally *The Battle for Gender Equity in Athletics in Elementary and Secondary Schools* (National Women's Law Center, Washington, D.C.), June 2007, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/Battle%202007.pdf>; see also *Barriers to Fair Play* (National Women's Law Center, Washington, D.C.), 2007, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/BarriersToFairPlay.pdf>.
- 128 H.R. 901, 110th Cong. (2007); S. 518, 110th Cong. (2007); see also *Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act* (National Women's Law Center, Washington, D.C.), Aug. 2004, available at http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/EADAFactsheet_June%2007.pdf.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

NUMBER OF DROPOUTS

At present, there is no consistent, uniform system for tracking or computing nationwide graduation rates. As a result, any study of the dropout problem must rely on estimates, rather than precise calculations, of how many students are dropping out of school. Estimates vary depending on several factors: (a) whether researchers use a sample survey to derive an estimate for the total population of dropouts or rely on administrative data like individual school records or statewide records; (b) whether students who fail to graduate in four years are considered dropouts or are considered graduates if they receive their diploma after six or seven years; and (c) whether students who complete alternative certificates such as the GED are considered high school graduates.

The dropout rates presented in this report are based on Dr. Christopher Swanson's Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) methodology. The CPI uses school enrollment data to predict the probability that a student will graduate, using the average rate of success of groups of students in progressing from ninth grade to tenth grade, from tenth grade to eleventh grade, from eleventh to twelfth grade, and from twelfth grade to graduation, at the district and state level.¹ Dr. Swanson's CPI methodology allows for comparison across districts, states and years, and it is considered the most accurate method for estimating graduation rates by several leading experts.²

The CPI does not count GED holders as high school graduates, for several reasons. First, research suggests that the life outcomes of GED recipients are far more similar to those of high school dropouts without GEDs than to those of high school graduates. In addition, graduation rates evaluate the performance of schools. If GED holders are counted as graduates, this overrates the schools that failed to graduate these students in the first place.³

DATA BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

The concepts of race and ethnicity are in transition in American society and in the statistics that measure them. Since this report draws upon a combination of data from a variety of sources, there is incomparability across data systems. Additionally, within a given data system, changes in race standards result in incomparability across time, making it difficult to perform trend analyses. For purposes of simplicity, this report presents race and ethnicity data in the following categories: White, Black, Native American/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic. For information on the racial and ethnic categories actually used by cited authors, and for information on what these categories include in each study, please refer to the original sources.

EMPLOYMENT RATES AND EARNINGS DATA

All data used to calculate employment rates and earnings are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly survey of approximately 50,000 households conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The survey has been conducted for more than 50 years. The sample is scientifically selected to represent the civilian noninstitutional population.

Specifically, the data used for this report are derived from the CPS 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. In all cases unless otherwise noted, the findings are applicable for adults aged 25-64. In addition, in all cases when findings are disaggregated by race, each racial category includes all members of that race "alone or in combination." This means that each racial category includes all those who identified themselves as falling within that racial category, either alone or in combination with other racial categories. In addition, each racial category includes those who identified themselves as of Hispanic origin. For example, the White, alone or in combination category includes those who identified themselves as White, as White multi-racial, and those who identified themselves as White or as White multi-racial and of Hispanic origin. The "Hispanic" category includes all persons who identified themselves as of Hispanic origin, regardless of their race.

The remaining data in the report were drawn from the work of other researchers. Their methodologies are available in their cited works.

REFERENCES

- 1 C. Swanson and D. Chaplin, *Counting High School Graduates When Graduates Count 19-20* (Education Policy Center, Urban Institute, 2003).
- 2 Gary Orfield et al., *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis 9* (The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, The Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, & The Civil Society Institute, 2004).
- 3 J. Greene and M. Winters, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002 11* (Education Working Paper No. 8, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2005).



11 Dupont Circle NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
202.588.5180 ▪ 202.588.5185
www.nwlc.org