

## *High School Dropouts: An Issue for the Individuals and the Country*

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### **Abstract**

In order to address this pressing issue of high school dropout rates in the United States, this paper will examine the “push” and “pull” factors leading to this phenomenon. “Push” factors include graduation requirements and related educational policies put in place that affect a student’s ability to graduate . Social factors that influence graduation rates such as family, friends, peers and the labor market conditions are “pull” factors (Warren, 2010). In order to understand “push” “pull” effects, a methodological analysis is presented that examines different alternates that could help address the issue (Warren, 2010). The paper compares different options for the country to consider and implement in order to increase graduation rates while maintaining a quality education.

- 1.Ease the transition from 8th to 9th grade
- 2.Increase the Compulsory School Attendance Age (CSAA)
- 3.Collaboration within the district to implement programs and steps to address the issue of high school graduation

The analytical focus of the paper will be on the common good and how each option will affect the common good of the country. Each of the alternatives is addressed in this paper from the point of view of the interests of the nation, the economy, and least priority given to the individual’s freedom, with the highest consideration given to that alternative that best meets the needs of the common good.

Keywords: education, high school graduation

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## **Introduction**

Education has played a vital role in the history of the United States. It has been a topic of public interest from the beginning of the country's formation as demonstrated in 1785 during the U.S. Continental Congress (Kober, 2007). It was a policy issue of tremendous importance to our Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson, and it continues to be an issue of primary importance to the U.S. public due to the effects of a quality education on both individuals and the collective country (Kober, 2007). Education also prepares the youth to be more productive at work, as well as teaching them how to become productive citizens (Obama, 2013). In order for the country to stay on top of the global economy it must educate students to become productive citizens and live fulfilling lives (Kober, 2007).

High school dropout rates become an issue of producing a less productive citizenship as well as reduced skills in the workforce, consequently hurting the national and global economy (Rumberger, 1987). Dropout rates increase the number of individuals who rely on public assistance, draining the national and global economy and decrease the life satisfaction of the individuals (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010).

In order to address the pressing issue of high school dropout rates this paper will examine the "push" and "pull" factors leading to the phenomenon (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). "Push" factors include graduation requirements and related educational policies put in place that affect a student's ability to graduate (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). "Pull" factors are the social factors that influence graduation rates such as family, friends, peers and the labor market conditions (Warren, 2010). In order to understand "push" "pull" effects, a methodological analysis is presented that examines different alternatives that can help address the issue (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). This paper compares three different options for the country to consider and implement in order to increase graduation rates while maintaining a quality education.

1. Ease the transition from eight grade to ninth grade
2. Increase the Compulsory School Attendance Age (CSAA)
3. Collaboration within the district to implement programs that address factors contributing to dropout rates

The analytical focus of the paper will be on the common good and how each option will affect the common good of the country. Personal freedom, also a core value of our country, is important, but will not weight as heavily due to the students being minors. The common good takes precedence because the interests of the collective nation is most important. Persuading students to stay in school would be the ideal solution when correlating it with personal freedom, because this allows students to have the right to choose. Ultimately, the common good takes priority and will be perused through means of coercion, such as taking legal action in order to keep students in school, if needed.

## **Background**

Data can help illustrate trends associated with high school dropouts and the effects on the nation. For example those who are more educated are more likely to participate in the country's democratic system and be more responsible citizens. This would be

expected to lead to a decrease in crime as more people become fully invested in society. It has been shown that disadvantaged students only have a 55% chance of graduating from high school (Swanson, 2004). Students considered to be disadvantaged are economically disadvantaged and/or those students who are a part of a minority group (Swanson, 2004). In 2002 only about 71% of high school students graduated from high school with a regular diploma (Greene & Winters, 2006). Of the students who graduated, about half of the eligible African America and Hispanic students who made it to the ninth obtained their high school diploma (Greene & Winters, 2006). The phenomenon continues to be a concern because it can affect the individual and the nation due to the correlation between education and productive citizenship.

### **“Push” “Pull” Factors and High School Dropouts**

There are several “pull” factors affecting a student’s achievement in school. Household income, parental involvement (Condron, 2011), and self-motivation (Randolph, Fraser, & Orthner, 2006) are a few factors. Families with a higher income contribute more money to their children’s education and are more likely to demand a higher educational outcome (Colburn, 7 Horowitz, 2003). Because they can afford to do so, households with higher incomes are also more likely to send their children to enriching summer programs (Colburn & Horowitz, 2003). Parents who are more involved tend to be college educated which results in a higher economic status and correlates with their children scoring higher on exams (Colburn & Horowitz, 2003).

A parent’s involvement can affect the outcome of the students’ educational attainment, but so can the students’ self-motivation (Randolph, Fraser, & Orthner, 2006). Students who are motivated and actively involved in their school and in extracurricular activities are less likely to dropout (Randolph, Fraser, & Orthner, 2006). In the case of extracurricular activities there are two “pull” factors affecting the likelihood of a student participating in the activities (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). The factors are self-motivation and family income. Students living in low-income households are least likely to take part in extracurricular activities, perhaps due to time and/or money commitments that are required (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010).

While “Pull” factors can have a great effect on a student’s likelihood of graduating, there are “push” factors that also affect a student’s education. Organizations have been established to help create new policies to better our educational system. The U.S. Department of Education, policies such as No Child Left Behind, and standardized testing are all examples of “push” factors.

### **Decreased Life Satisfaction**

Not completing high school has shown to not only negatively affect the country but also the individuals and the individual’s life satisfaction. Dropping out of high school has proven to correlate with lowered self-esteem as well as drug use (Vallerand, Fortier & Guay 1997). It also results in an increased likelihood of participating in risky behavior, as well as an increased probability of suffering from mental health illnesses (Liem, Lustig & Dillon, 2010). Those who do not complete high school also report they were less satisfied with their life (Rumberger, 1987). High school dropouts

also have an average lower income when compared to incomes of high school graduates (Rumberger, 1987).

### **How It Affects the Country's Economy**

Non-high school graduates are more likely to be unemployed compared to those who graduate from high school or obtain an equivalent to a high school diploma such as a GED (Rumberger, 1987). This results in non-high school graduates being at a higher risk of becoming reliant on public assistance programs (Kaufman, Alt, M.N., & Chapman, 2004). During a high school dropout's life time it is estimated that each individual will cost the country's economy an additional \$240,000 due to their estimated reliance on welfare, Medicare, Medicaid, lower tax contributions and increased crime rates (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewallRamani, 2011).

#### ***Individual's life satisfaction and effects on nations economy***

- 1. "Forgone National income ;*
- 2. Forgone tax revenues for support of  
government services;*
- 3. Increased demand for social services;*
- 4. Increased crime;*
- 5. Reduced Political participation;*
- 6. Reduced intergeneration mobility;*
- 7. Poorer levels of health."*

*Taken from: Russell W. Rumberger, "High School  
Dropouts: A Review of Issue and Evidence,"  
Review of Educational Research 57, no. 2 (1987):  
114-115.*

### **Methodology- Literature Review**

There are several factors affecting the individual's decision to drop out of high school. In order to obtain a better understanding of why students drop out of high school and the reasons leading up to this decision, it is apparent through literature reviews that there are many factors or reasons behind the decision. The "push" "pull" factors affecting high school dropout rates provide a basis to categorize and better understand the reasons leading to the decision to drop out (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). An examination of several case studies and a literature review helps to understand what solution would be most beneficial in decreasing high school dropout rates while also considering the "push" "pull" factors in place (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010).

The alternatives will be analyzed on the basis of whether they are a "push" or "pull" factor and how effective, politically feasible and administratively feasible they are (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). Effectiveness is weighed the highest, in considering the alternatives. An alternative is evaluated on effectiveness based on the outcomes it produces in decreasing high school dropout rates. Political feasibility is the next factor considered. It is analyzed through two lenses: will political stakeholders, who create

policy back up the alternative, and is it politically possible to fund the program. Administrative feasibility has the least weight when considering the alternatives.

The analysis in this paper is focused solely on what can be done in high school to decrease high school dropout rates, as well as what can be done to help incoming high school freshman. Many factors also having “push” or “pull” effects on high school dropout rates will not be considered in the analysis of this paper (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). Some factors include the family’s parenting style, as well as the effects and implications early childhood education has on dropping out of high school. The effects changing legislation and course requirements has on the dropout rate were not addressed. Future research and analysis will need to be done on these separate topics to determine if legislative actions can help.

### **Criteria**

The criteria used to evaluate each of the alternatives are 1) effectiveness, 2) administrative feasibility and 3) political feasibility. The evaluation of effectiveness will be assessed through the effect the alternatives have in decreasing the dropout rate in the schools, districts, and states the alternatives have been implemented in. Political feasibility is important in making several changes due to the support needed by appointed officials in order for new policy and/or procedures to be carried out. Administrative feasibility is important because the school administration will need to enforce and/or carry out new policies. There also needs to be enough staff for this to happen.

### **Transitioning into 9<sup>th</sup> Grade**

During the first year of high school many “push” “pull” factors have already taken place and will continue to take place that affect a student’s success in school (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). Ninth grade year can help educators determine students at a high risk or dropping out. Freshman have the most missed classes resulting in lower grade point averages (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The ninth grade is also the first year many students are faced with the pressure of completing their coursework with what their school considers a passing grade (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Many times students are not faced with these requirements before they reach high school. When they reach high school their low performance is many times a result of not being fully prepared to take on the coursework (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). For these reasons how successful the transition into the ninth grade year can be used to determine the likelihood of a student graduating.

The “pull” factors affecting the students’ performance in school are the social aspects affecting their high school experience (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). A student’s transition time from middle school to high school can be a time in which the student feels lonely and disconnected (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Other concerning factors for students that can affect their academics are the transition from a small middle school to a new experience in a larger high school. In addition there is the possibility of being bullied by older students (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

With these “push” “pull” concerns there are a few things that can take place to help address both issues (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). First there should be collaboration

between middle and high school teachers (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The educators should discuss the curriculum and come up with a plan that can better address the students' academic needs (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Providing incoming freshman with a map of the school building, and a meet the teacher night can help elevate some of the social concerns the students may have (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

There are schools that have implemented a ninth grade transition program. These programs provide students with items such as a map of the school building meet the teacher night and courses such as High School 101 in order to teach time management skills (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). There are also programs known as "freshman academies" (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). These academies are isolated from the larger school and have one goal in mind, to help ninth grade students become acquainted with the work load expected of them before they take part in the big high school atmosphere and are integrated into courses with upperclassmen (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Schools that implement such measures see an improvement in attendance and academic success (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Easing the transition from eight to ninth grade has shown to be beneficial for students. On average a high school with a ninth grade transition program has an 8% dropout rate in comparison to a 24% average dropout rate for a school without a transition program (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Schools that have created a freshman academy have shown a significant improvement in attendance rates and a decreased course failure in the ninth grade (MaCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). A transition program school would be most politically feasible due to the low cost of implementation, and the impact on decreasing the dropout rate. A freshman academy many times requires its own building or wing, therefore demanding more resources to be used in creating the academy decreasing it's politically and administrative feasibility.

### **Collaborating within the District**

Collaboration within the district can influence on a students' academic success and high school completion. There is a need for collaboration between the middle and high school teachers to better prepare students for the struggles of high school. Collaboration within the district can help a student's transition into high school which could ultimately affect the dropout rate. In Colorado, the state has increased collaboration efforts to decrease dropout rates and has seen a 0.8% increase in graduation rates in two years (Malcaver & Groginsky, 2011).

The new collaborative efforts have just begun and future improvement is expected. In order for it to be politically feasible there must be consistent collaboration within the school district and stakeholders. The increase in hours in order for collaboration to occur could be costly. This is a fairly new initiative and its complete effectiveness is not yet seen, but it shows movement toward the right direction.

### **Increasing the Compulsory School Attendance Age (CSAA)**

Increasing the Compulsory School Attendance Age (CSAA) can be another "push" factor affecting the dropout rate (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). "Pull" factors affecting

when a student decides to drop out of high school are the rules and structure imposed on the student (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). Students who have dropped out of high school report they had little structure in their life influencing their decision to drop out (Landis & Reschly, 2011). Increasing the compulsory school attendance age to 18 can help decrease the dropout rate by requiring students to stay in school no matter what “pull” factors outside of school are influencing their decision (Landis & Reschly, 2011; Warren, & Hamrock, 2010).

Increasing the compulsory school attendance age to 18 would be difficult due to controversy and its feasibility. The “pull” (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010) factors affecting the decision of CSAA is the message that school is not important (Landis & Reschly, 2011). Others argue that students should not be forced to stay in school due to the added cost the district will incur (Landis & Reschly, 2011). Raising the required age of staying in school would be very costly due to the administration needs resulting from the increase in the number of students staying in school. Much of the information on the cost to the state if the CSAA is increased is empirical. The state of Maryland put forth their own initiative and raised the required school attendance age costing the state an additional \$200 million (Landis & Reschly, 2011). This information suggests that increasing the CSAA is not politically or administratively feasible.

### **Solution/Conclusion**

Providing a transition program has proven to be the most effective in decreasing the dropout rate as seen in schools that have implemented the program. It is also the least expensive of the alternatives. In the transition program many “pull” factors such as new anxieties students may have when entering high school were answered but the “push” factor concerning the curriculum was not addressed (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). The transition program brought to light the fact that many times students are unprepared academically to handle high school coursework. Collaborative efforts within the district in creating a curriculum that would address the issue could be beneficial. Future research is needed to see the impact a collaborative effort between middle and high school educators would have on decreasing the dropout rate.

While collaborative efforts within districts and stakeholders alone have proven to be effective it is a fairly new program that has many possibilities for a bright future but its effects are minimal in comparison to the time and effort put into collaborating. In Colorado where the initiative was used, some improvement was shown (Malcaver & Groginsky, 2011). Increasing the CSAA is unlikely to occur across the board due to the high cost and minimal positive effects expected because students can decide to dropout once they reach the legal age. The increase in age simply keeps the youth in school longer.

A transition program combined with a collaborative effort within the school district tackling both “push” and “pull” factors could be the answer to the dilemma of decreasing high school dropout rates (Warren, & Hamrock, 2010). Only time will tell if the implementation of these and other programs will or will not be effective. One thing is certain, change needs to occur because the country will one day rely on the youth and they need to have the skills to carry out fulfilling lives and be productive citizens in order for the United States to stay on top of the global economy.

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