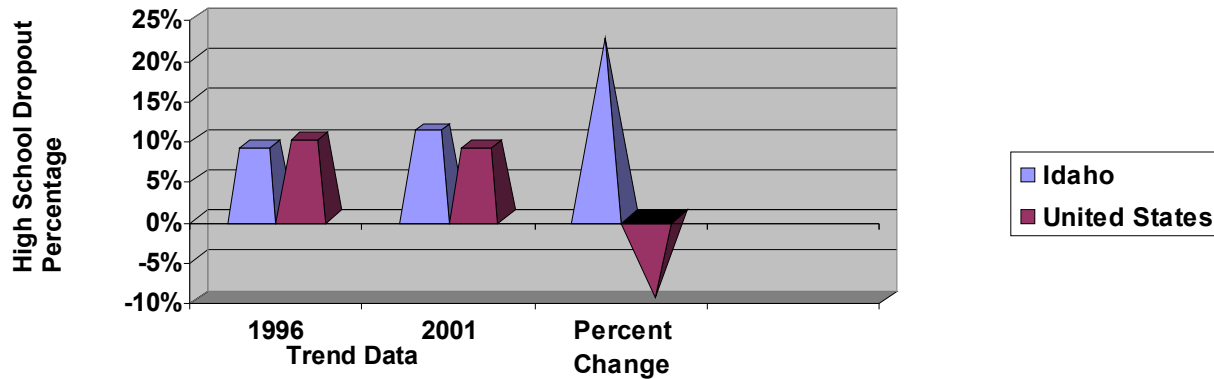


A Psychological Analysis of High School Dropouts in Idaho and America

Research from the Kids Count 2004 Data Book Online shows Idaho’s high school dropout rate in 2001 at 11%, compared to 9% in the United States overall. In comparison, Idaho’s dropout rate in 1996 was 9% and the nation’s was 10%. In five years, Idaho’s change percentage was 22%, and the nation’s was -10%. (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count, 2004).



A simple analysis of this data suggests that Idaho is heading in the opposite direction that it should be. If this trend continues over the next five years, results will be devastating to our economy in Idaho. Without a high school education, untimely limitations are placed on young individuals, such as poverty and broken family dynamics that may otherwise be prevented by the completion of high school and furthermore, earning a college degree. Research shows that in 2000, male and female college graduates earned \$42,292 and \$32,238 respectively, while male and female high school dropouts earned \$19,225 and \$11,583 respectively (Education Week on the Web, 2004). Where a large emphasis is placed upon a family’s annual income to determine where they fit into society, this data is helpful in pointing out the value of education.

Psychological research can help us understand some of the causes of the problems with high school dropouts. Some examples of predictive variables for school dropout are, “lack of books and other reading materials in the home, level of schooling of the parent of the same gender, low grades in school, teen pregnancy’ prior academic failure, prior use of cigarettes, marijuana, and other illicit drugs, aggressive behavior, absenteeism, course failure, and peer influences, the number of school-to-school transitions in grades K-12, and school size” (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004).

One common theme in the research is a family’s socioeconomic status. In one study, students of lower socioeconomic status had a dropout rate four times higher than that of students of a higher socioeconomic status (Education Week on the Web, 2004). If a child has grown up in poverty, their chance for school success is greatly reduced. Reasons contributing to this could be their inability to advance in their classes due to family stresses. According to Dr. Linda Anooshian, “Rates of childhood poverty in 2000 were significant predictors of reading below grade level for kindergartners in 2004 ($r = .65$) as well as significant predictors of the average percentage of kindergartners, first graders, and second graders reading below grade level in 2004 ($r = .63$) (Anooshian, 2004). These correlations could be reliable predictors for a child’s performance throughout their entire K-12 education experience. In addition, lack of tangible items such as clothes, books, pens, and pencils could make it difficult to have a positive school experience. The effects of these difficult factors could easily lead to a child’s decision to drop out of school because they may feel isolated and embarrassed.

Family dynamics should also be taken into consideration when discussing a child’s ability to succeed in school. Parents who are involved with their children’s schoolwork and extracurricular activities teach their children valuable lessons about a positive sense of self, motivation to succeed, and the importance of doing well in school. These lessons are paramount

for a child to learn at the high school age, in order to carry those helpful skills onto college and beyond. If a family experiences a large amount of economic stress, the quality of relationships is influenced between parents and their children (Anooshian, 2004). Lack of involvement with family is damaging to a child in that without those close relationships, they may be forced to struggle through their school years alone, which can lead to isolation as well as failure.

A student's relationship with school administration, such as teachers, is often very different than their relationships at home. This is an area that schools could focus on in order to keep the students active and interested in their education and career goals. The relationships that students have with their teachers can contribute to their sense of attachment to school, which is a key determinant of success and retention. Furthermore, a motivating factor for a student to stay in school is their personal development. If teachers are able to make the connection between the high school curriculum and the students' future plans, a successful student is more likely to be the outcome (Dunn, et al. 2004).

Taking into consideration the two items mentioned herein, socioeconomic status and family dynamics, it is important to point out the relevancy of educational programs in high schools, such as Campus TRiO, as a positive approach to the effort of a solution to the high school drop out trends in Idaho and the United States as a whole. It is critical for school administrators, educators, educational programs such as Campus TRiO, and families to be involved in this matter in order to offer our children the chance to achieve the highest of accomplishments during their lives, which only *begins* with a high school diploma!

References

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