

For SROs, Educators & Administrators

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**Legal Decisions Affecting
Safety & Student Rights**

Reducing Dropout Rates

**Drug Impairment:
Do You Know The Signs?**

Keeping the Light of Hope Alive

All Children can Achieve in School with Support

By Elizabeth Koller, Executive Director, Perspectives on Growth and Development, Inc.



A special message from the U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan:

Dear JOSS Readers:

It is our moral obligation to give our children the very best education possible. I believe that every child can learn and every school can succeed. But as we all know, there are many kids who have little hope in their lives. They come from broken homes. They don't have enough to eat. They are surrounded by gangs. They don't have enough caring adults in their lives who help them learn to read or be there when they need them.

For these kids, it sometimes must feel like society is "piling on." And educators don't know which additional hurdle or barrier might be the one where the child says "I've had enough," and they drop out and give up.

Our challenge and responsibility is to ask, "What does this child need?" and to see what can be done to improve what is going on in the classroom, and out of it, to help those children early in life to stay on track and in school.

We need more collaboration. We need to improve and coordinate services for our youngest children and older youth—to create a network of support centered around the school. We need to ensure there is a way for youth who dropout to re-enter school, to make sure our schools are safe, and to ensure educational stability for all children.

We need to examine how we can better coordinate the efforts in federal agencies. The Department of Education is

working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies. I'm calling on those of you on the state and local level to do the same.

As educators, we also need to focus on our primary mission of creating environments where learning is the primary focus. In Chicago, my most successful school improvement strategy was to completely turn around schools. We would hire new school leaders and teachers, who brought with them new strategies to focus on student learning. The renewed focus on academics created safe learning environments. In one school, the number of violent incidents fell so drastically that auditors went out to inspect. They couldn't believe the principal was reporting accurate numbers. The auditors found a different school, one that was safe because of the learning environment created by the new team.

We won't succeed without educators like you. We need people with your passion and commitment to make sure students are in safe and exciting learning environments every day. You are the people who understand that if we are serious about breaking the cycle of social failure, we must improve our schools to ensure children get the best education available to them.

—Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education

U.S. Mayors Dedicated To Youth Education

Mayors from 1,201 cities are represented in the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) convening annually to create a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. Their main function is to “promote the development of effective national urban/suburban policies,” relying on each other’s experiences in developing best strategies for various critical issues including student dropouts.

Tom Cochran, CEO, and Executive Director, USCM wants to share with JOSS readers their commitment to youth: “Mayors know how critically important good schools are in promoting the economic development, vitality and image of their cities. Many mayors have expressed a desire to become more involved in local education issues, policies and programs because they understand the consequences for their city if student performance stagnates and a large number of young people drop out of high school.”

“Education is a key issue mayors have used to improve public perceptions of their cities. Mayors have issued calls to improve their cities’ school systems as a way to unify citizens to solve problems that affect every resident, whether or not they have school-aged children. Make no mistake: mayoral involvement in education and school-related issues make a difference, no matter what level of input they have. This includes being an advocate for improvement, as well as partnering with and supporting the school system to make necessary changes.”

Atlanta Mayor Reaches Out To Dropouts

Mayors across the nation are taking the school dropout issue seriously by going door-to-door visiting the homes of students who left school, and talking with the family to encourage the child to return to school. One inspiring example is Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta who launched, in 2005, the Mayor’s Youth Program (MYP) and raised \$1.9 million dollars providing financial assistance for over 1,000 Atlanta public high school seniors, each year, to fulfill their dreams.

She relates, “These students had ambition that, many times, exceeded what they deemed realistic. Dreams of becoming a scientist, dancer, nurse, doctor, or an executive, the dreams that to you and I

are not so far fetched, but for many of these young people, it seems unattainable.” Students ready to dedicate time in meeting with Franklin and MYP staff receive daily living skills guidance and ongoing support to help make their dreams come true!

“There is nothing more rewarding and important than working with a young person to help them develop a plan for their next stage in life. Students want and need help. Atlanta flourishes because of the strong and active partnerships between government and our civic and corporate communities. Most communities have the ability and resources to promote and cultivate the success of our young people – we just work to connect students with the knowledge and resources.” - Mayor Shirley Franklin

Atlanta’s Success Story

The MYP program has completed its fourth year with some university graduates beaming with pride! One such touching success story is Shatoya Hinkle who demonstrates that encouragement and hope can guide youth to believe in and achieve their dreams!

Hinkle was the first child of ten siblings to graduate from high school and at times felt that education was never a priority though she remained determined to further her studies.

She states, “Because of this (MYP) program, I can say that I know what it’s like to have your name placed on the dean’s list in college, because of this program I actually went to college, I received the opportunity to travel the states, my college tuition and fees were paid for my first three years in college, because of this program I am a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc, I now hold a Bachelors degree in Biology and graduated loan free and will continue to strive for a higher education. I owe it all to my counselors for their inspirational and motivational words, my parents for believing in me when I didn’t believe in myself, but primarily to Mayor Shirley Franklin. It was her vision that paved the way for graduating seniors to further their education. I am a product of that vision, and I am ready for life and the obstacles it bring.”

Shatoya wants to share words of encouragement to high school students: “To my fellow peers, always remember



Risk Factors by School Level

There is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out of school. Dropping out is not an event, it is described as a long process of disengagement with contributing factors that build and compound over time. CIS and NDPC reviewed numerous studies and highlighted significant risk factors broken out in the three school levels:

Elementary School: low achievement, retention/over-age for grade, poor attendance and low socio-economic status.

Middle School: social attitude of: peer group and social behaviors, low achievement, retention/over-age for grade, poor attendance, low educational expectations, low socioeconomic status, high family mobility, low educational expectations, low contact with school and lack of conversations about school.

High School: high number of work hours, parenthood, low socio-economic status, poor attendance, low educational expectations, low commitment to school, no extracurricular participation, misbehavior, low socioeconomic status, low education level of parents, not living with both natural parents.



there is no room for excuses, because excuses are tools of incompetence that builds monuments of nothingness, and those who specialize in them, will seldom succeed at anything.”

Deputy Shelton Helps Students

Deputy SRO Jennifer Shelton, Forsyth Sheriff’s Office, has worked with at-risk students to keep them in school even to the point of helping with the child’s dysfunctional family issues. She related one story of a young man who ignored her support and ended in prison. Speaking with him before he went to prison, he said, “I would give anything to go back and listen! Now it is too late to turn back time.” Currently, he is using his life to spread the word of his experiences and to help kids listen.

Understanding Shelton’s efforts to help him, he said, “I know how it feels to pour your heart out to kids that are looking at trouble and they don’t listen to a word you say, but you see it coming.” Shelton asked him what it might take to get these kids to really listen; he said “keep trying.”

“Never give up trying to reach a child!” says Deputy Shelton.

“The Silent Epidemic”

In 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation issued its report, “The Silent Epidemic,” documenting America’s three and a half million dropouts ages 16 to 25 who did not have a high school diploma, and as a result have little hope for a successful future. They are far more likely than their peers to be unemployed, live in poverty, experience chronic poor health, depend upon social services, and go to

STAY IN SCHOOL

You cannot drop out and start to play
 You are the future
 Think about people that do not have money...
 Then think of you
 They’d think you lucky!
 School gives us faith for the future
 You’ll learn, teach and even grow
 Stay in school and rule your future!

A poem written earlier this year by Sophia Okoli, a fifth grade student at H. B. Rhames Elementary School, speaks from her heart with a message for all young people to stay in school to achieve their dreams!

jail. Half of all prison inmates are high school dropouts.

Five Basic Needs

Communities In Schools (CIS), founded by Bill Milliken in 1977, represents the nation’s largest dropout prevention organization, working in more than 3,200 K-12 public schools, with nearly one million youth receiving direct support. Between 80 and 90 percent of the tracked students show improvement in academic achievement, attendance, behavior and promotion to the next grade level.

1. A personal, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult.
2. A safe place to learn and grow.
3. A healthy start & a healthy future.
4. A marketable skill to use upon graduation.
5. A chance to give back to peers and community.

“Educators, no matter how dedicated, already have too much to do – they can’t be social workers, big brothers and sisters, career counselors and hall monitors, all at the same time. It is up to the community to provide the safety net of nonacademic services that will give students these five basics. If you are motivated by loving kids, you can overcome any obstacle – not only theirs, but your own, following the adage, ‘You gain your life by giving it away,’ which as anyone will tell you who has mentored a young person, adults get more out of the relationship than they could ever put in it.”

“If we allow the dropout crises to continue, it will lead to both economic and moral bankruptcy in this country.”

*--William Milliken,
 Communities In Schools*

Milliken is an advocate for disenfranchised youth and one of the foremost pioneers in the movement to connect schools with community resources to help troubled students graduate and succeed in life.

He states that before kids can focus on academic success, they have to have these five basic needs:

Dropout Risk Factors

Dr. Jay Smink is the executive director of the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC), established at Clemson University in 1986. NDPC is a national resource for sharing solutions for student success through its clearinghouse function, active research projects, publications, and professional development activities.

“Dropping out almost always is the result of a long process of disengagement that sometimes begins before the child enrolls in kindergarten,” according to Smink. A study sponsored by CIS and NDPC, *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs* reports dropping out of school is

related to a variety of factors in four areas: individual, family, school, and community.

“There is no single risk factor that can accurately predict if a student will drop out, but there are 25 significant risk factors in the individual and family domains. The more risk factors that become evident for a student, the greater the likelihood that student will eventually drop out of school.” Smink believes that, “Communities do not have a full appreciation of the high school dropout crises as it impacts the quality of life in their community, terming it an economic development issue.”

Helping Youth Succeed

During an interview with Dr. Richard Wong, executive director of the American School Counselor Association, he spoke on behalf of K-12 school counselors saying, “School counselors believe education of the total child involves academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning. By addressing these three areas, school counselors’ help students overcome barriers to learning and progress toward overall student success and to balance and relate the relevance of what a student learns to everyday life and blend the academic measures with the emotional health. Every school-based adult leader is part of the ‘school team’ in helping youth succeed!”

“In low-income and immigrant homes, in particular, students may be needed to provide child care for younger siblings or work at after-school jobs to help support the family. It’s widely accepted that students who work more than 30 hours per week exhibit decreased academic performance. Yet, some students simply have no choice. Students knowing they cannot pass standardized examination feel their only option is to dropout. Compounding this is the fact that many parents may not value education because they themselves had a limited education. Celebrating 90 percent of students graduating, means we are accepting 10 percent who will not.”

Setting Attainable Goals

Dr. Laurel Thompson, director of Student Support Services, School Board of Broward County, FL, states, “School social workers are committed to removing barriers that prevent students from achieving at their maximum potential. Unless students enter school prepared

mentally and psychologically to learn then teaching will be in vain. Students are faced with such challenges as homelessness, mental health issues, and financial difficulties; to name a few, that rob them of the ability to focus and achieve.”

“School social workers with their unique skills and ability are strategically placed to positively impact the school district’s graduation rate. The recommended approach to addressing this issue is in the fostering of a true collaboration between the home, the school and the community in providing the infrastructure to fully support the student and family in achieving the desired goal – high school graduation.”

“School social workers use a strength-based approach, such as ‘Brief Solution-Focused Therapy,’ in counseling students and their families, building on past successes and helping students to set attainable future goals.” The start of the school year may bring students with unprecedented stressors which Thompson suggests caution when questioning students as there may be serious emotional wounds which are best handled by mental health therapists.

“Poor people bear the burden of our failure to create an equitable public education system.”

--President Jimmy Carter

“Post a Dream”

The Honorable Glenda A. Hatchett, National CASA spokesperson encourages parents to write the child’s dreams on a paper and post it in their room, being the first thing the child sees every morning and the last thing they see at night. She said it “encourages them to focus on their dreams by giving these children something that they can be powerful over and help them shift from being victims to being victorious.”

Some time ago, guests on the Oprah Show talked about the benefits of a “Dream Board.” The board would be covered with clippings of pictures, words or drawings of everything the person

wanted and should be looked at daily. This might seem silly at first, however, considering studies reporting the impact negative television images have on behavior, the board of pictures may help an at-risk child to dream!

Editor’s Closing Notes

With gratitude to: U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan for his letter to JOSS readers, and to the many others leaders of youth I interviewed. There were a few shared core perspectives and opinions: the importance of schools building relationships, not only with students but with communities and families; understanding that dropping out is a gradual process of disengagement; and emphasizing the importance of helping youth to dream! The start of the school year may present school leaders with unprecedented and troubling student issues. The intent of my article is to inform JOSS readers of the dedication leaders at the US, state and local level as well as some school-based professionals, in addressing the dropout crisis, to reenergize schools to “build a collaborative problem solving team.”

Ms. Elizabeth Koller

is the founder and Executive Director of Perspectives On Growth And Development, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing an educational understanding of the child and adolescent brain.



Resources

Mayor’s Youth Program of Atlanta
www.mayorsyouthprogram.org

Nat’l Dropout Prevention Center
www.dropoutprevention.org

Communities In Schools
www.CISnet.org

Report, “The Silent Epidemic”
www.gatesfoundation.org

Nat’l Association for Self-Esteem
www.self-esteem-nase.org

Book: *The Last Dropout: Stop the Epidemic!*, authored by Bill Milliken

Education Research Center
www.edweek.org