



The Sobering Truth about High School Dropouts in Florida

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Florida ranks second in the nation in the prevalence of “dropout factories” – with **49% of our high schools promoting fewer than 60% of their students.** (Balfanz & Legters, 2008)

Based on current estimates, without comprehensive intervention strategies, **about 1 million of Florida’s students currently enrolled in public elementary, middle, and high schools will not graduate with their peers.**

How are dropouts impacting us?

- Annual losses in federal and state income taxes for America’s estimated 23,000,000 high school dropouts aged 20-67 **probably exceed \$50 billion – an amount equal to the U.S. Department of Education’s annual discretionary expenditures.** If lost Social Security contributions are added, the loss rises to **\$80 billion** (Rouse, 2005).
- 75% of State prisoners across the country do not have a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003).
- Florida taxpayers spent over **\$2.7 Billion** on the State prison system in 2007 – and it is not enough: “Without a change of direction, Florida is expected to reach a peak of nearly 125,000 inmates by 2013. Based on that projection, the state will run out of prison capacity by early 2009 and will need to add another 16,500 beds to keep pace.” (Warren, 2008, p. 10)
- While one in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 is behind bars, the figure is one in nine for black males in that age group (Warren, 2008).
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), 55% of adult dropouts are not employed.

We have learned a great deal about what has been called the “silent” epidemic. We know that dropping out of school is a process rather than a single event. Children live in families, go to school in communities

and spend time with their peers – all of these influence the process of dropping out AND all may be meaningful places for intervention to promote academic success. Through an evidence-based approach to integrated service provision, students from even the most challenging of circumstances can achieve.

The nature of the dropout problem is no longer a mystery. Research is readily available to show us **WHO** drops out of school and **WHY**. The appropriate question now is whether or not we have the collective **WILL** to invest in the solutions.

This paper examines the scope of the problem and presents evidence-based solutions. Many of the resources needed are *already in place* and available to support students and schools in crisis.

The Scope of the Dropout Problem

According to the EPE Research Center (2007), less than two-thirds of Florida’s public high school students graduated with their peers in 2004:

- 61% of all students
- 66% of white students
- 59% of Hispanic students, and
- 47% of African American students

Estimates produced by these researchers suggested that male students were worse off than their female counterparts:

- About 62% of White males,
- less than 54% of Hispanic males, and
- fewer than 42% of Black males graduated on-time with Florida’s Class of 2004.

Failing to graduate from high school impacts outcomes across domains, including health, employment, economic well-being, and dependence on social assistance. The dropout problem is expensive to corporations and community members, and it is not new. Our nation has been experiencing a crisis in education for over 20 years (Sum & Harrington, 2003).

On the surface, things may have appeared better than they were. The National Center for Education Statistics, or NCES, reported that 87% of students graduated in 2001 (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004). This estimate may not accurately reflect actual graduates. NCES estimates blended public and private school graduates, while completely excluding institutionalized populations. In 2005, governors in all 50 states signed the Graduation Counts Compact – agreeing to a common method for calculating high school graduation rates (NGA, 2006).

The definition of a “high school completer” has varied widely – states have included GED completers, other certificate completers, and students who reported the intention to pursue a GED in the future (Greene & Winters, 2005). Research has illuminated that, based on expected earnings and future economic success, completing a regular high school diploma is more rewarding than dropping out and obtaining a GED (Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Murnane, Willett, & Boudett, 1995; Ou, 2008; Rouse, 2005; and Tyler, 2003).

More Reliable Estimates of Completion

Concerns about the accuracy of NCES estimates motivated researchers to scrutinize the graduation estimates. Researchers at the Urban Institute and Manhattan Institute developed variations of the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI). In essence, the CPI is applied by (1) estimating the number of students entering 9th Grade for the first time in a given year, (2) accounting for that cohort’s single-year promotion rates across each of the subsequent 3 years of high school, and (3) using the number of regular diploma recipients to derive an estimate of 4-year graduates (See EPE Research Center, 2007; Greene, 2002; and Swanson, 2004 for further details).

Researchers have adapted the CPI to account for population shifts and the apparent “bulge” in 9th grade enrollment reflecting non-promoted students (Haney, Madaus, Abrams, Wheelock, Miao, & Gruia, 2004). These variations of the CPI have produced similar findings (Greene & Winters, 2006; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; and Swanson, 2004).

NCES now estimates the “Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates,” which reflects that percentage of high school students who graduate on time by dividing the number of who graduate with regular diplomas by the number of students in the incoming freshman class 4 years earlier (Seastrom, Hoffman, Chapman, & Stillwell, 2007).

US High School Completion Estimates:

- **75%** 2004 Avg. Freshman Graduation Rate, NCES (Seastrom, Hoffman, Chapman, & Stillwell, 2007)
- **69.9%** 2004 CPI Graduation Rate (EPE Research Center, 2007)
- **70%** 2003 CPI Graduation Rate, Manhattan Institute (Greene & Winters, 2006)

Bottom Line: Between one-quarter and one-third of US public school students can expect to miss graduating with their peers.

All students are not alike. To better understand disparities in educational attainment, researchers examined completion rates by background and racial

characteristics. The picture is particularly bleak for minority and marginalized students.

Table 1. US Graduation Rates by Race or Ethnicity

Student Ethnicity	EPE Research Center (Class of 2004) ¹	Manhattan Institute (Class of 2004) ²	Harvard Civil Rights Project (Class of 2001) ³
All Races	69.9%	70%	68%
Asian/Pacific Islander	80.2%	72%	76.8%
White, Non-Hispanic	76.2%	78%	74.9%
Black, non-Hispanic	53.4%	55%	50.2%
American Indian/AK Native	49.3%	N/A	51.1%
Hispanic	57.8%	53%	53.2%

Sources: ¹EPE Research Center, 2007; ²Greene & Winters, 2006; ³Swanson, 2004.

Students who live in families with the most limited access to tangible resources or who experience few strong, supportive relationships with caring adults are among those most likely to drop out of traditional academic settings (NCES, 1999).

Balfanz and Legters (2004 & 2007) analyzed the effectiveness of high schools by estimating high school promoting power – twelfth grade enrollment divided by 9th grade enrollment three years earlier. High schools having promoting power of 60% or less were deemed “Dropout Factories.”

Nearly 80% of US high schools that produce the highest number of dropouts, or have the lowest promoting power, can be found in just 15 states:

- Arizona
- California
- Georgia
- Florida
- Illinois
- Louisiana
- Michigan
- Mississippi
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Texas

(Balfanz & Legters, 2004)

Florida has the second highest proportion of “dropout factories” in the nation – with 171 of our 352 high schools (49%) promoting fewer than 60% of their students. (Balfanz & Legters, 2007)

Graduation rates for students who attend school in high poverty, racially segregated, and urban school districts lag from 15 to 18 percent behind their peers (Swanson, 2004). Districts far more likely to have low HS graduation rates (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004):

- are characterized by high poverty,
- are located in central cities, or
- have high percentages of minority students, students with disabilities, or English language learners.

Educational Success is Related to Better Health

According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2004), dropouts have worse health than graduates:

- The death rate (all causes) for adults with less than 12 years of education was more than 2.5 times higher than the rate for those with at least 13 years of education.
- Adults with less than 12 years of education were nearly 5 times more likely to die of HIV-related diseases than those with at least 13 years of education

The Centers for Disease Control reported that teen girls performing at the lowest levels in basic reading and math were 5 times more likely to give birth over a 2-year high school period than high performing teen girls (Grunbaum et al., 2004). Higher levels of parents' educational attainment have been positively related to better health outcomes for their children, including a lower rate of infant mortality and fewer low birth weight babies (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002).

Education Leads to Less Government Assistance

According to Adair (2001), government assistance goes to:

- **About 25%** of adults with no HS diploma
- **10%** of adults with a HS diploma, and
- **5%** of adults with some college

Welfare costs per person drop sharply as educational attainment increases, and the largest boost in welfare savings "occurs when educational attainment increases from high school dropout to high school graduate" (Vernez, Krop, & Rydell, 1999, p. 22). These researchers calculated that helping a female student stay in high school created estimated annual welfare savings of:

- **\$422** for a non-Hispanic white woman
- **\$627** for her Mexican counterpart, and
- **\$835** for a native-born black woman

Educational Success and Employment Success

Educational attainment is closely related to employment. Completing a high school diploma increases employment opportunities.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008):

- **57%** of adult dropouts are not employed, while
- **40%** of adults who completed high school and
- **23%** of those with a bachelor's degree are not employed

The BLS (2006) reported the 2005 *Unemployment Rate* for African American high school dropouts aged 25 and older was 14.4%, compared to 3.5% for African Americans with at least a bachelor's degree. Perhaps more staggering is the fact that fewer than 40% of African American dropouts were in the labor force – compared to 82% of African Americans with at least a Bachelor's degree (BLS, 2006).

Educational Success and Economic Success

As educational attainment increases, average yearly earnings increase. In 2000, the median earnings for African American females with a high school diploma and no college was \$20,000 less than the median earnings for their peers with a bachelor's degree or higher (NCES, 2003). Donald (2001) estimated that the difference in annual earnings between high school diploma recipients and non recipients was \$9,425 per year. Greene (2002) suggested the difference in median annual income between HS diploma earners and dropouts was closer to \$14,000.

Over the course of a lifetime, earning gains for completing a high school diploma compared to dropping out total about \$300,000 (Employment Policy Foundation, 2004). Each of these non-completers contributes about \$60,000 less in state and federal income taxes (Rouse, 2005).

Annual losses in federal and state income taxes for America's estimated 23,000,000 high school dropouts aged 20-67 probably exceed \$50 billion – an amount equal to the U.S. Department of Education's annual discretionary expenditures.

If lost Social Security contributions are added, the loss rises to \$80 billion (Rouse, 2005).

Education is critical to secure America's future global competitive edge. An educated workforce positions communities and corporations for economic vitality. US businesses spend more than \$60 billion annually on training, much of that on remedial reading, writing, and math (National Association of Manufacturers, 2001).

More Education leads to Fewer Criminal Arrests

High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than graduates to be arrested in their lifetimes (Catterall, 1987). Dropouts are over-represented in US Prisons.

Prisoners who did not complete high school represent (Harlow, 2003):

- 75% of state prisoners
- 59% of federal prisoners
- 69% of local jail inmates
- 83% of state inmates 24 or younger
- Nearly 50% of drug offenders in state prisons

Annual state prison operating costs per inmate average \$22,650 nationally (Stephan, 2004). With over 972,000 dropouts (75% of all state prisoners) in state prisons in 2003:

US tax payers spent over \$22,000,000,000 to incarcerate dropouts in state prisons.

This estimate does not account for other related costs, such as costs of these crimes to victims and their families or associated court costs.

The Problem In Florida

For the 2006-2007 school year, the Florida Department of Education reported an annual high school dropout rate of 3.3%, though the reported high school graduation rate was 72.4%. Other estimates of Florida high school completion rates are consistently below national averages:

- 72.4% 2006-2007 Graduation Rate (FLDOE, 2008)
- 66.4% 2004 Avg. Freshman Graduation Rate, NCES (Seastrom, Hoffman, Chapman, & Stillwell, 2007)
- 61% 2003-2004 Graduation Rate (EPE Research Center, 2007)

Older estimates of Florida High School Graduation Rates reflect similarly low proportions:

- 61% 2002-2003 Graduation Rate (Greene & Winters, 2006)
- 63.1% 2001-2002 High School Completion Rate (Warren, 2005)
- 53.0% 2000-2001 Graduation Rate (Swanson, 2004; Orfield, et al, 2004)
- 52% 2000-2001 Graduation Rate (Haney et al., 2004)

Disparities across student subgroups evident across the nation are present in Florida. Under-represented

populations are over-represented among dropouts and non-completers.

Table 2. FL & US Graduation Rates by Ethnicity

Student Ethnicity	FL DOE (Class of 2007) ¹	EPE Research Center (Class of 2004) ²	Manhattan Institute (Class of 2003) ³	Urban Institute (Class of 2001) ⁴
All	72.4%	60.5%	61%	53.0%
White, Non-Hispanic	81.0%	66.0%	69%	57.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	83.2%	82.2%	N/A	79.9%
Amer. Indian/ AK Native	74.7%	N/A	N/A	47.9%*
Black, non-Hispanic	58.7%	46.7%	50%	41.0%
Hispanic	66.0%	59.0%	53%	52.2%

¹Florida Department of Education, 2007; ²EPE Research Center, 2007; ³Greene & Winters, 2006; ⁴Swanson, 2004.

As sobering as these statistics appear, most researchers estimate that high school graduation rates were significantly worse for male students.

According to the Urban Institute:

- about 53% of White males
- fewer than 45% of Hispanic males &
- fewer than 35% of Black males graduated on-time with Florida's Class of 2001 (Swanson, 2004)

Table 3. FL Graduation Rates for Males, by Ethnicity

Student Ethnicity	EPE Research Center (Class of 2004) ¹	Manhattan Institute (Class of 2003) ²	Urban Institute (Class of 2001) ³
All Males	56.1%	58%	47.3%
White, Non-Hispanic	62.1%	66%	52.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	79.2%	N/A	73.9%
Amer. Indian/ AK Native	N/A	N/A	34.9%*
Black, non-Hispanic	41.5%	46%	34.9%
Hispanic	53.7%	49%	44.9%

¹EPE Research Center, 2007; ²Greene & Winters, 2006; ³Swanson, 2004. * Moderate Coverage - Rate covers between 50% - 75% of student population.

The challenges faced by our students most at-risk for dropping out are complex. A comprehensive and developmental lifespan approach to supporting school success and youth development must be sensitive to individual differences among students, while sufficiently effective to promote success – there are no “cookie-cutter” approaches for addressing all student needs across Florida’s vastly distinct communities.

The Magnitude of Realizing the CIS Mission

Who’s At Risk? All students are vulnerable to some factors and stresses that increase their risk for dropping out of school. Researchers (Greene & Winters, 2006) estimated that about 39% of Florida’s public school students can expect not to graduate with their peers. If these estimates are correct and conditions remain as they are, we can expect that

Over 1 million of Florida’s students currently enrolled in public elementary, middle, and high schools will not graduate with their peers.

Using the more optimistic 72.4% (Class of 2007) Graduation Rate cited by the Florida Department of Education (2006), over **700,000** students currently enrolled in Florida’s public elementary, middle, and high schools will fail to graduate with their peers.

Academic failure is not the only risk facing Florida’s youth. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice’s (2005) *2006 Program Accountability Measures Report* summarized costs of completion for 158 of Florida’s residential juvenile justice programs. According to this report, Florida’s DJJ system processes over 150,000 referrals annually, with over 10,000 juveniles entering residential treatment.

The average cost per completion of Florida’s DJJ residential programs – not counting school board funding – was over \$34,600 per juvenile (ranging from \$5,943 to \$226,104). About 80% (**over \$51 million dollars**) of federal funding received by DJJ in FY 2003-04 was spent on residential and correctional facilities for offending juveniles (FL DJJ, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, Harlow (2003) found that 83% of state inmates 24 or younger had not completed high school. As of January, 2000, the State of Florida paid about \$51 per day, or over \$18,600 per year, to keep a single adult inmate in prison (Stephan, 2004).

What are we investing in? Prisons.

Taxpayers in Florida pay about \$51 per adult inmate per day

10,000 Juveniles enter residential treatment annually at a cost ranging from \$5,943 to \$226,104 PER juvenile. 83% had not completed high school

Investing more to help these students graduate would cost far less

When the Florida Legislature funded the Communities In Schools of Florida State Office at \$1,250,000 for FY 2007-2008, the CIS network leveraged these dollars to \$13.4 million through public/private partnerships, grants, and contributions to support our work in helping Florida’s most vulnerable and at-risk students stay in school.

Promoting academic success and healthy youth development seems a wise and cost-effective alternative to continuing to pay the higher costs of allowing at-risk youth to leave school poorly equipped. Increasing our capacity to serve more of Florida’s severely at-risk youth is a challenge we must face. The future of Florida depends on our success.

Knowing the scope of the problem and the long-term impact, ***“What Steps Will We Take to Address the Dropout Crisis and Increase the Graduation Rate in Florida?”***

The Communities In Schools Model

With more than 30 years of success, the Communities In Schools Model for Community-Based Integrated Student Services was developed to integrate community and school resources in a coordinated manner. Key components of the CIS Model include:

- **Site Coordinator:** presence of a dedicated on-site coordinator who implements a comprehensive dropout prevention plan
- **School and Students Assessments:**
 - Comprehensive school and student-level needs assessment
 - Community asset assessment and identification of potential partners
- **Service Plan:** Annual service plans for school-level prevention and individual intervention strategies
- **Mix of Effective Prevention & Intervention Strategies:**
 - Appropriate combinations of widely accessible prevention services and resources for the entire school population and coordinated, targeted and sustained intervention services and resources for individual students with identified risk factors
 - Brokered and direct service provision
- **Refinement:** Data Collection, Monitoring and Adjusting service

These components have been applied and refined in the field for over 30 years (and most recently clarified in our Total Quality System standards – based on a mix of internal data analysis and organizational development research).

The Greatest Proximate Cause [for a high school to become a dropout factory] is that there is a fundamental Miss-Match between the Number of Students in Need of Academic and Social Supports in a High School and the Human Resources and Know How Available to Help

(Belfanz & Legters, 2007)

CIS connects students in need with those resources needed through a mix of prevention and intervention derived from the Public Health model. Belfanz and Legters (2007) adapted this model to dropout prevention – indicating that School-wide **Prevention** efforts should reach 75% or so of the problem behaviors including poor attendance AND **Intensive Intervention** efforts involving specialists (counselors, social workers, tutors) should target the 5% to 10% who need more clinical types of support. These numbers correlate to the proportions defined by the CIS Total Quality System for fully implemented CIS sites.

Evidence-Based Practice: Communities In Schools contracted with the National Dropout Prevention Center to clarify Risk Factors (by grade and by domain [individual, family, school, and community] and Effective Programs/Practices for reducing the Dropout Problem (full report is available from our website). Risk Factors are central to Needs Assessments. Effective Programs and Practices are essential to Service Planning and Implementation.

Third Party Evaluation: Preliminary Findings: Though still in the early stages, preliminary findings from an independent 3rd-party rigorous evaluation of the CIS model for Community-Based Integrated Student Services (CBISS) are robust:

- **Communities In Schools** is one of a small number of dropout prevention programs **proven to keep kids in school.**
- **Communities In Schools** is the **only** dropout prevention program in the nation **proven to increase graduation rates,** graduating students on time with a regular diploma.
- The ***CIS Model for integrated student support services correlates more strongly with school level outcomes*** than service provided without integrated student supports.
- When implemented with fidelity, ***the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of***

students reaching proficiency in 4th and 8th grade math and in 4th and 8th grade reading.

At the local level, Communities In Schools Affiliates cultivate the model to be recognized as CIS. Local Affiliates are responsible for six core functions

- Community Partnerships
- Resource Development/Fund Raising
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Managing and Developing CIS Sites
- Providing and/or Brokering Quality Youth Programming and Services
- Data Collection, Evaluation and Reporting

The effective execution of these core functions establishes CIS affiliates as **the** provider of the highest quality community-based integrated student services with stable operational infrastructures for long-term sustainability.

**Sustaining Change:
The Critical Role of CIS State Offices**

CIS State Offices provide support to state networks of local affiliates through six core functions:

- Statewide Partnerships and Resource Development
- Marketing and Communications
- Statewide Network Management and Development
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Data Collection and Evaluation
- Statewide Advocacy and Productive Government Relationships

In 2004, CIS National Office's evidence-based strategic planning processes illuminated several critical points:

- CIS is one of the largest networks serving at-risk youth in America
- CIS appears to be the largest organization integrating schools and the community
- Most CIS local affiliate growth has been driven by CIS State Offices
- Effective CIS State Offices help insure the financial and political health of Affiliates in their State Networks

CIS STATE OFFICES ARE ESSENTIAL

Local CIS affiliates covered by an effective CIS State Office were twice as likely to remain operational over the 1993-2002 period than CIS affiliates in states with no CIS State Office

CIS State Offices exist to grow and support the success of each local CIS affiliate in serving students, families, schools, and communities for generations. CIS State Offices support collaboration by enlisting broad and representative board participation from early childhood educators and agencies, state education agency leaders, leaders of faith-based institutions, corporate partners, and community college or university administrators.

CIS State Offices work with local leaders in building affiliates that will be supported through local dollars. This critical design feature helps ensure sustainability. While schools see dozens of programs come and go each year, a sound CIS affiliate sustains itself and is able to assist schools “for the long haul.”

Communities In Schools of Florida

Communities In Schools of Florida is positioned to promote state-level and community-based efforts to combat the dropout crisis. Since 1984, CISFL has proven itself as a conduit for connecting child-serving agencies, businesses, institutions of higher learning, and families with students in the schools and communities across the state.

In 2006-2007, the CIS network was comprised of:

- 13 operational local affiliates
- 227 school sites
- 318,070 students have access to services and are enrolled in schools in which CIS has a presence
- 28,831 are connected with services through CIS

CIS of Florida local affiliates mobilize a variety of resources to promote student academic success across the state, including:

- tutoring or academic support
- mentoring services
- literacy training
- social supports

Effective collaboration at the state and community levels is the core mission of CIS. Supporting students in setting and achieving high expectations cannot be overemphasized. CIS affiliates promote healthy youth development, including resilience, despite risk factors, through the following strategies:

- delinquency or violence prevention,
- career development or employment training services,
- leadership skills training,
- college exploration, application, scholarship or other support for secondary education.

How could we more powerfully serve middle and high school students with research-based

strategies and have a more effective impact on the graduation rate? We need:

- More state dollars to support operations at the state and local level
- More school-based site workers/case managers
- More alternative school sites
- More corporate partnerships working in the arena of funding workforce development
- More paid Full-time and Part-Time CIS staff
- More public awareness of the problem of high school dropouts
- A campaign directly aimed at students

What limits us from serving more students and replicating in more communities? The CIS state office needs more funding and greater staff capacity to effectively execute our mission. Additional dollars are needed to “seed” replication efforts across Florida communities seeking to grow an effective CIS affiliate. Now is the time to invest in the Communities In Schools mission – to promote success in school and in life for all of Florida’s young people.

The CIS of FL Network includes 13 local affiliates across 14 counties:

- CIS of Broward County Inc.
- CIS of Bradford County
- CIS of Gadsden County
- CIS of Hillsborough County Inc.
- CIS of Jacksonville, Inc.
- CIS of Leon County, Inc.
- CIS of Miami, Inc.
- CIS of Nassau County, Inc.
- CIS of Northwest Florida
- CIS of Okeechobee County Inc.
- CIS of Palm Beach County, Inc.
- CIS of Putnam County, Inc.
- CIS of St. Johns Co, Inc.

“Communities In Schools should be expanded to all Florida school districts to ensure that the full range of community and business resources are available in classrooms.”

- Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s (2003) *New Cornerstone* – a 3-year research, policy, and leadership development study generated to enhance Florida’s competitiveness in the global marketplace.

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