

Achievers For Life

The Dropout Crisis

Nearly 30% of all ninth graders in the U.S. fail to finish high school within four years. While it is not known how many will go on to earn a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), it is clear that their lifetime earnings will be less than those of students who graduated from high school. According to 2002 data provided by the U.S. Census, dropouts will earn \$270,000 less than high school graduates over their working lives. A young adult without a high school diploma or GED cannot continue his or her education, or enter the military.

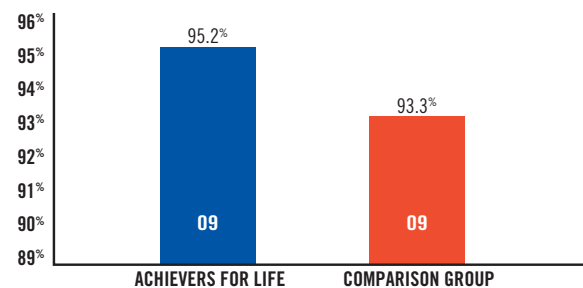
The success of every student impacts us all. For the 33% of former Duval County high school students who have dropped out of school, the future is anything but rosy. Minus a diploma or GED, young dropouts are much more likely to be unemployed than their peers and to stay jobless longer, especially during an economic downturn. Education is the single most important factor in predicting a life of poverty, with almost 24% of adults who lack a high school diploma living below the poverty threshold nationwide.

High unemployment and poverty correlate strongly with elevated crime rates. And it all comes back to education: Today in Florida, nearly 75% of inmates are high school dropouts. Their failure has a high price tag, not only for victims of crime, but also for taxpayers who must foot the bill for incarceration expenses – to the tune of \$25,000 per year per inmate. Add that to cash and in-kind benefits that a dropout may need to survive and lost tax revenues when he or she fails to become self-sustaining, and the average high school dropout will cost taxpayers more than \$292,000. Dropouts during the 2008 year alone represent a \$1.2 billion loss to Northeast Florida’s economy over the course of their lifetime.

The causes of dropping out are interrelated and the process of dropping out occurs over a long period of disengagement from school. Students are frequently retained in third, sixth, and ninth grades which are critical grade transitions. Research indicates that high school is too late to prevent students from dropping out and that early intervention is critical.

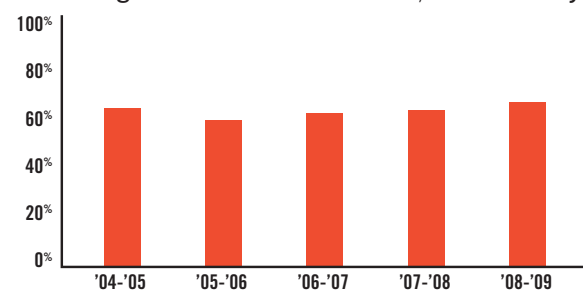
With these facts in mind, United Way has developed a new and innovative model known as **Achievers For Life**. In partnership with local social service providers, United Way provides support for Achievers For Life at Duval County middle schools feed into some of our most challenged schools. Achievers For Life schools identify 6th grade students who are at-risk for academic failure and the Achievers For Life staff provide support to both students and their families with access to social services and focused academic assistance. The progress of these middle school students will be followed from 6th grade into their 7th and 8th grade years. The middle schools also work to identify obstacles that prevent parents from being fully engaged in their student’s academic lives. The short term goal of this initiative is to decrease the number of 6th graders retained in middle school. The long term goal is to increase the graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate at the high school level.

Promotion Rate, Achievers For Life & Comparison Group



Source: Dr. Laura Lane, JCCI

Public High School Graduation Rate, Duval County



Source: Florida Department of Education, National Governors Association calculation