

Secondary Youth Perspective on Dropping Out of School

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Introduction

- High school dropouts are elusive population
- Paucity of information
- What can they tell us about their experiences?

Purpose of the study

- The purpose of this study was to glean insights from the dropouts themselves, regarding their decision to leave school before completion and to codify their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward dropping out of school.

Research Questions

- *Research Question one:* What are the reasons for students' disengagement from school?
- *Research Question two:* What factors contributed to their decision to leave?
- *Research Question three:* Can the dropouts themselves reveal the critical junctures in their decision to interrupt their education?
- *Research Question four:* What can school administrators and educators do to prevent students from dropping out?

Design of study

- Examined the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions through interviews, surveys, and a review of records.
- Qualitative research methodology grounded in theory framed this study
- Presents the informants' point of view
- Ability to discover themes and relationships at the case level

Survey

- 103 surveyed (54 were tallied)
 - 49 surveys were handed out
 - 54 were mailed out to former dropouts
- Of the 54 surveys mailed out
 - 6 were completed and mailed back to the researcher (11%)
 - nine were sent back by the post office “attempted-not known” (16%)

Interview Questions

1. Was dropping out of school a good decision or a bad decision for you? Explain why.
2. Describe your reasons for leaving school early.
3. When you think back over the years, describe any specific events that lead up to your dropping out of school.
4. Describe the process you went through in deciding to come back and get your GED or high school diploma.
5. What can school administrators and teachers do differently to help prevent students from dropping out of school?
6. Would you do anything differently if you had the opportunity?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Interview

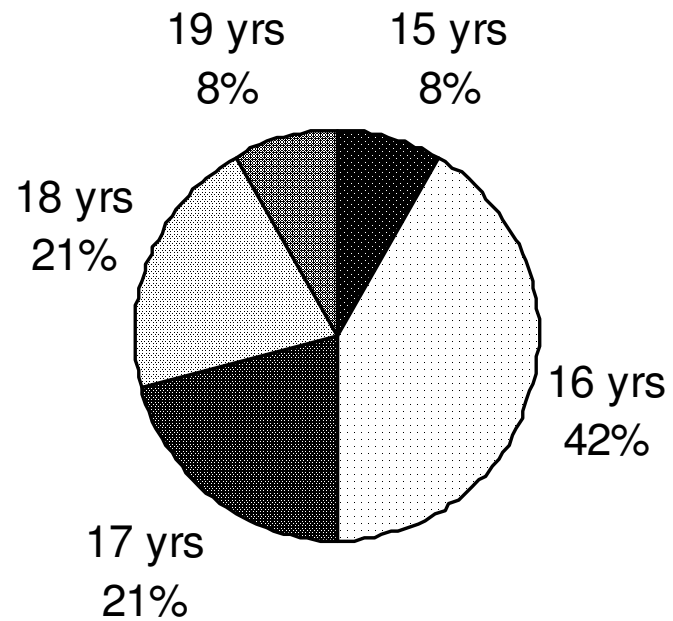
- Fourteen students
- Each one paid \$15.00
- Audio and video taped
- Interviews were transcribed
- Domains and themes jumped off the paper

Review of records

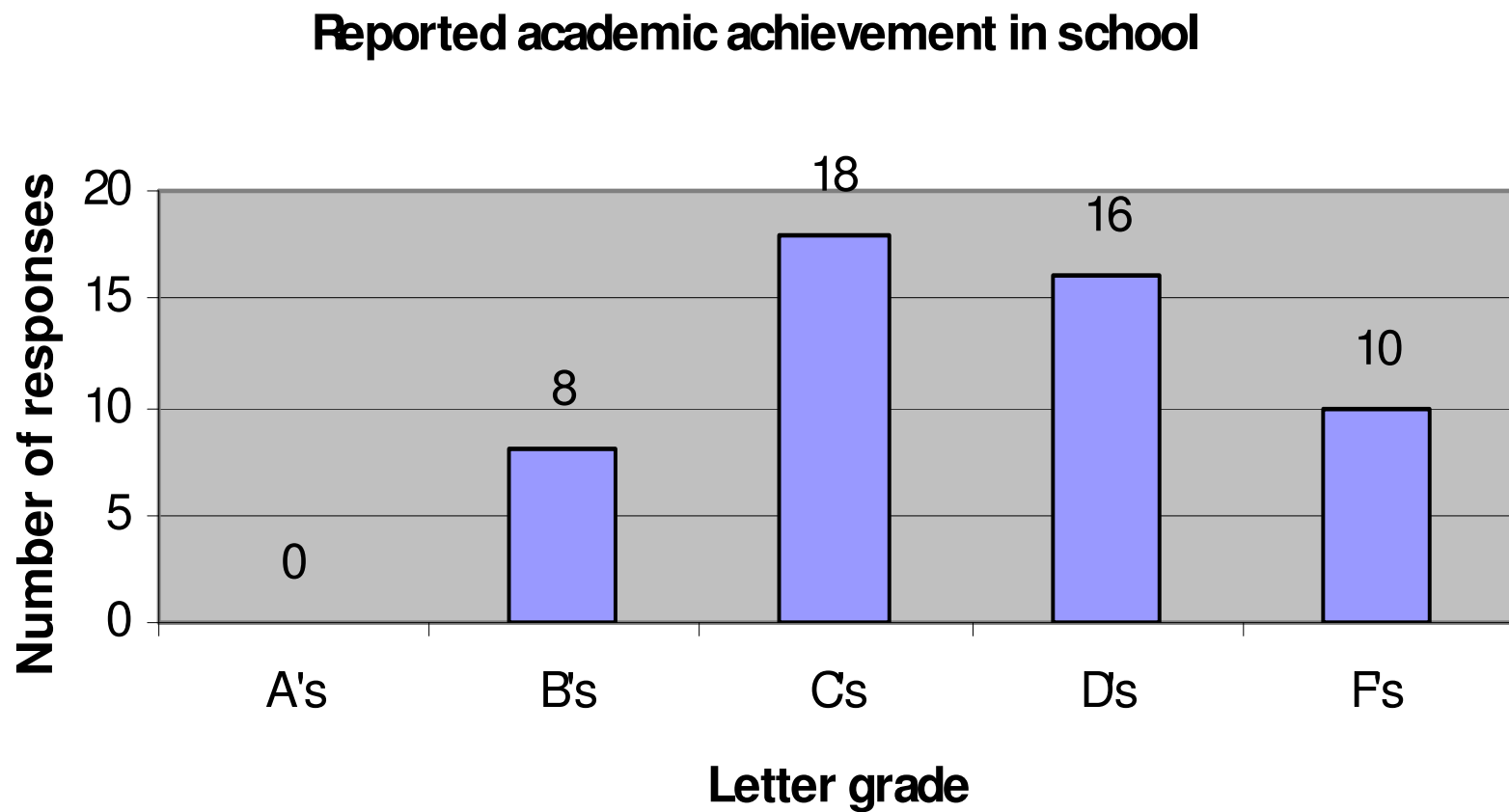
- Twelve of the interviewed students' records were reviewed
- Attendance, discipline, special education identification, vocational schooling, and grades were reviewed and compared to other data

Findings

Number of reposnses



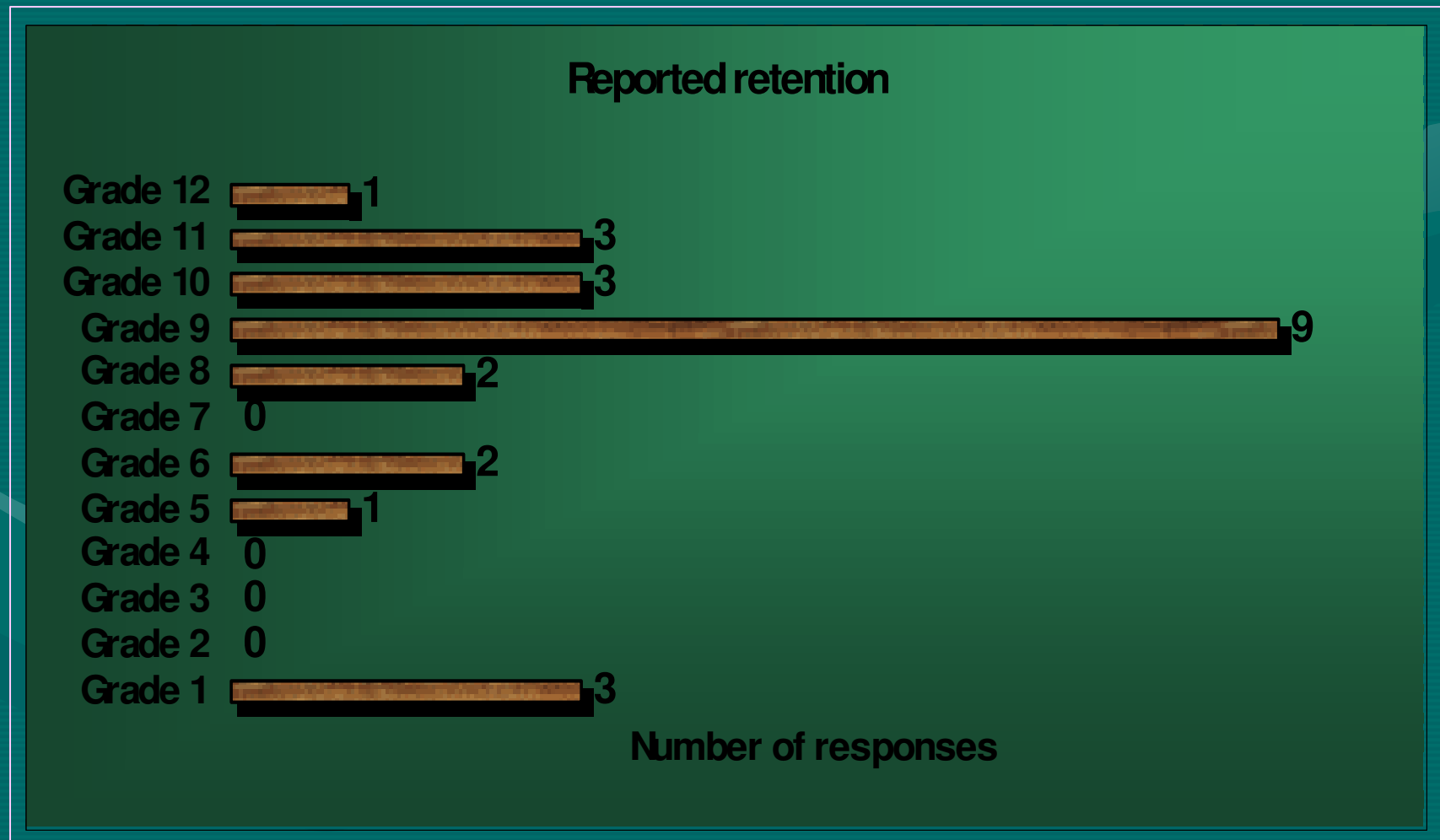
In reality, of the ten transcripts reviewed,
4 of the students had passing grades at
the time of dropping out



Revealing quote from an interview

- “Don’t screw up in freshmen year, because that’s where it all begins. It just goes downhill. I remember when we had a guest speaker come into ninth grade and talk to us about college and stuff. I never took him seriously, and if I had, I would be graduating with my class...which is something I really, really want to do”.

In reality, seven of the 14 interviewed participants dropped out of school in the ninth grade, after being retained



Reported attendance

With regard to attendance, fifty-three students responded to this question

- 8 (15%) of them stated they were seldom absent
- 3 (5%) said they were absent once a month
- 9 (17%) stated they were absent once every two weeks
- 10 (19%) claimed they were absent once a week
- 12 (22%) reported they were absent more than one-half the week
- 12 (22%) stated they were absent all the time

	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6		Gr. 7		Gr. 8	Gr. 9		Gr.10	Gr.11
Stud. A	3	5	*	6	12	4		17		9	23	39	D.O.	
Stud. B	*	1	3	1	1	0		*		31	21	25	88	D.O.
Stud. C	*	21	13	43	32	10		106		38	22	DO		
Stud. D	16	35	6	33	*	1 4	2 9	skip		35	42	DO		
Stud.E	*	7	19	5	15	10		2	5	5	25	D.O.		
Stud.F	4	8	*	5	10	11		8	15	12	8	D.O.		
Stud. G	*	*	*	1	*	2		19		32	43	52	D.O.	
Stud. H	9	12	*	16	15	1 7	1 9	25	5 8	25	D.O.			
Stud. I	*	2	25	8	4	10		16		18	32	43	D.O.	
Stud.J	*	*	*	*	*	7		4		4	27		20	D.O.

Top three reasons why they left

37 total respondents	# 1 Reason	# 2 Reason	# 3 Reason
<i>Domain I:</i> relationships	16 (43%)	21 (57%)	27 (43%)
<i>Domain II:</i> truancy, pregnancy, court	6 (14%)	10 (27%)	8 (22%)
<i>Domain III:</i> job, drug use	1 (3%)	5 (14%)	2 (5%)
Didn't like school	14 (38%)	0	1 (3%)
Was a victim of family violence	0	1 (2%)	0

I left because....

- “I went through a lot of schools”
- “I moved around a lot and stayed back two and a half times in sixth grade”
- “I stayed back in sixth grade then I started being truant in seventh grade”
- “I failed everything all through school”
- “After I moved again, I was getting in trouble in school, always skipping school”
- Another student commented that after repeating ninth grade, she started writing her own notes to get out of school, and ended up in court for truancy
- “High school was all different”

Other survey responses

16 total respondents with 67 total random responses	Reasons
<i>Domain I:</i> Relationships	35 (52%)
<i>Domain II:</i> Truancy, pregnancy, or court	18 (27%)
<i>Domain III:</i> Job or drug use	18 (27%)
Didn't like school	9 (13%)

Other interview reasons

- “Teachers, the only reason”
- Got a job
- It will take too long to graduate
- “Never attended anyway”
- “People around me”
- “Never got along with anybody really”

Survey open response question

- Of the forty-six respondents answering the open response question “If you could have changed your high school to make it more possible for you to stay, what would you have changed?”
- Twenty-six (57%) of respondents included comments about changing teachers or administrators

Teachers should...

- “be more lenient”
- “be more involved, they don’t really know what’s going on”,
- “they gotta learn how to like kids, you’re a teacher, you are supposed to teach us, not suspend us”
- “It was like they didn’t want to help us lower classmen, we weren’t important enough for them to help us so I recommend try to help the kids who don’t do so well so they can do real well”.
- “Give more attention, I needed someone to explain it to me sometimes”
- One student asked for different teaching techniques, consistent discipline and consistent staff

Guidance counselors and administrators ...

- “All the pressure from counselors and administrators led me to dropout. I think if the school could provide more attention to the students that need it, instead of the class in general, they might feel more accepted. Also a little more of a bond between counselors and students, mine seemed to make assumptions based on my reputation, never really knowing me”
- Three of the respondents discussed guidance: “Have the counselors help you stay in school instead of telling you to drop out”
- “My guidance counselor told me ‘You might as well dropout out’ ”

Conclusions

- Long term process of disengagement
- Dropouts faded through chronic truancy
- Ninth grade retention effected drop outs
- Positive relationships are key
- Of significance is the 20/54 (65%) participants who responded that the student-to-school relationship via the teachers, counselors and administrators was inadequate and/or unfulfilling

Solutions

- Implement mentoring programs
- Build bridges for students showing signs of disengagement
- Collect accurate data on students
- Find the courage to address mediocre teaching
- Build partnerships with the community

What Works?

Adult Diploma Class (Kearsarge District)

- Started fall 2003, graduated 28 kids
- have 35 now, in its second year
- 18 credit adult diploma program
- Each class = one credit, meets once week, 3 evening hours, for 15 weeks
- Currently running 6 classes (Art, Phy. Sci., 2 English and 2 History)
- For dropouts or at risk who have failed classes
- Funded by NHDOE Adult programs (\$6,200), Title V, and each student pays \$20 per course