

United Way of York County

YorkCounts

Stay in School Initiative Report to the Community



Four Students Lost Every School Day:
Strategies to Improve the
York County Graduation Rate



United Way of York County

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Letter from Co-Chairs:

After approximately 18 months of study, the YorkCounts' Metro-York Initiative presented its recommendations to the York community. Of particular importance to the United Way of York County was a recommendation regarding reducing the dropout rate. It read:

Invest \$3 million per year in each of the next ten years in “intensive care” for at-risk students: intense, targeted programming to at-risk students, as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or in middle and high school to keep them from thinking that dropping out is an option.

For many years, the United Way of York County has significantly invested in education, from early childhood education through programs designed to impact youth during their high school years. Because of this investment, United Way entered into a compact with YorkCounts to conduct the research and offer recommendations to reduce the dropout rates in area schools.

It is evident that there is no quick fix that will end students dropping out of school. This is a national issue, which requires the involvement of an entire community, not just the schools. Effective dropout prevention cannot occur in a vacuum but must be created within a system that provides an infrastructure for ongoing implementation and sustainability of proven practices. Hence, the above recommendation has been modified to reflect the systematic approach that must be taken if we are to reduce the number of youth dropping out of school.

To create a system that provides for an infrastructure for ongoing implementation and sustainability of proven practices in reducing dropout rates and increasing the graduation rates at area high schools.

Critical to the development of this report was the participation of a 28-member Committee, representative of education, business, government, human services and other sectors of the community. We are greatly appreciative of their work, review of the issues, and ultimate recommendations. We would also like to thank United Way staff members Christy Renjilian and Jackie Dell-Shearer, who conducted the research and drafted the report.

The following report presents the case for why we must act as a community to be sure our youth stay in school, receive a high school diploma, and for many continue on to higher education. This is an issue that effects many aspects of our community but most importantly, affects our ability as a country to compete in a global economy. It is the intent of the committee to: increase the awareness of this issue throughout the community, develop additional resources to impact the problem, invest in proven programs, and ultimately to significantly reduce the dropout rates and increase the graduation rates in York County schools.

Even though the present situation is perhaps the major deterrent to any long term development in the region, we are confident our entire community can work together to solve this most important problem.

Donald Gogniat
Former Campus Executive Officer
Penn State York

Robert J. Woods
Executive Director
United Way of York County

Executive Summary:

In 2008, United Way of York County entered into a compact with YorkCounts following a recommendation from the MetroYork Education Task Force. The United Way established the Stay in School Initiative Committee to address the drop out problem in York County. Its purpose is to create a system that provides for an infrastructure for ongoing implementation and sustainability of proven practices for increasing the graduation rates at area high schools.

In the United States, 7,000 students drop out of school every day. That's 1.2 million a year. From 1998–2008, 6,429 students dropped out of York County schools, approximately four children every school day. Dropping out of school has an economic impact not only on the individual but the entire community. Over the course of a lifetime, a college graduate will earn, on average, \$1 million more than a high school dropout. Four out of every 10 young adults lacking a high school diploma receive some type of government assistance.

According to the 2007 study, *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*¹, a dropout converted to a graduate would yield a public benefit of \$209,000 in higher government revenues and lower government spending. This equates to a net economic advantage of \$127,000 for each additional high school graduate, a benefit two and a half times greater than the initial public investment. If the 6,429 York County students who dropped out over the past 10 years had graduated, the community could have benefited from an additional \$816,483,000.

Currently, Pennsylvania school districts report a dropout rate to the state that measures how many students who were enrolled in school on October 1 of a particular year are enrolled in school the following September 30th. Unfortunately, this provides an incomplete picture of a districts success in graduating its students in four year. Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year states are required to report a uniform, comparable and accurate graduation rate known as a "four-year adjusted cohort rate" which measures the percent of students in a ninth grade cohort that graduate with a regular diploma in four years. For the 2005-2006 school year the graduation rate for York County was 78 percent. Of the 5,943 students who entered York County high schools, 4,460 graduated four years later. A total of 1,483 failed to graduate within four years.

Research has shown that dropping out is not a spur-of-the-moment decision. Rather, it is the culmination of factors that typically begin in the early grades. A study conducted by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service² found that, "habitual truants will most likely transition to dropping out, in fact, 75 percent of students who were truant in high school did not graduate, compared to a mere one percent for non-truants." Truancy is a problem that confronts all York County school districts and all grades. With an enrolled student truancy rate of 21 percent, York County had the eighth highest rate of habitual truancy in Pennsylvania for the 2006-2007 school year. In addition to truancy, learning issues, as well as family, community and school norms play a role in a student's decision to drop out of school.

The York County Truancy Task Force, chaired by the Honorable Judge John Uhler, Administrative Judge, is a coalition of educators, law enforcement, juvenile justice and probation officials, social service providers, faith-based and youth-serving agencies and physicians who work to provide a cohesive, consistent response to the issues related to truancy. The Truancy Task Force works collaboratively with all school districts and related organizations, law

enforcement officials and Children and Youth Services (CYS) to identify children and families early in the cycle of unlawful absences.

York County school districts, non-profit organizations and community partnerships are currently working to improve the graduation rate. A survey was distributed to over 100 institutions, including school districts, youth serving organizations and government programs to determine what resources and strategies are currently available to students and their families. Examples of effective programs, currently offered in York County, are LinkCrew, Quantum Opportunities, and Big Brothers Big Sisters SMART program.

To improve the graduation rate in York County schools, the Stay in School Initiative Committee recommends the following strategies, which are designed to address the underlying risk factors identified by the community:

Recommendation #1: Enhance the Effectiveness of York County Schools:

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network³ states that the three most important components of any program designed to increase the graduation rate are: relationships, rigor and relevancy. Fostering positive relationships are critical. Students do not respond to programs, they respond to people. Successful schools have a common set of core beliefs and a consistent and caring staff. Schools must have higher expectations for their students. The culture of the school should convey that performing below “proficient” on state assessments is not acceptable. Teachers must be able to differentiate their instruction to meet individual needs, provide real world learning opportunities, and engage the students in active learning.

Recommendation #2: Expand the Work of the York County Truancy Task Force:

The community should support efforts to build and sustain the work of the Truancy Task Force and promote collaboration between Children and Youth Services and school districts to promptly address the needs of children who have unexcused absences. Assure the continuation and expansion of the collaborative efforts of educators, law enforcement, juvenile justice and probation officials, social service providers, faith-based and youth-serving agencies and physicians who work to provide a cohesive, consistent response to the issues related to truancy.

Recommendation #3: Promote and Foster Supportive Communities:

Social service organizations and government agencies need to improve and expand their offerings to children, youth and families. Programs that are proven to address the risk factors associated with dropping out of school should be replicated. Current efforts to promote high quality early childhood education and school readiness should be supported. All sectors of the community: families, religious institutions, higher education, medical community, and elected officials should work collaboratively to address the problem. Other initiatives and community partnerships that address youth issues should be engaged in the work of the Stay in School Initiative. Particular attention should be given to securing additional mentors for area youth.

Recommendation #4: Engage the Business Community:

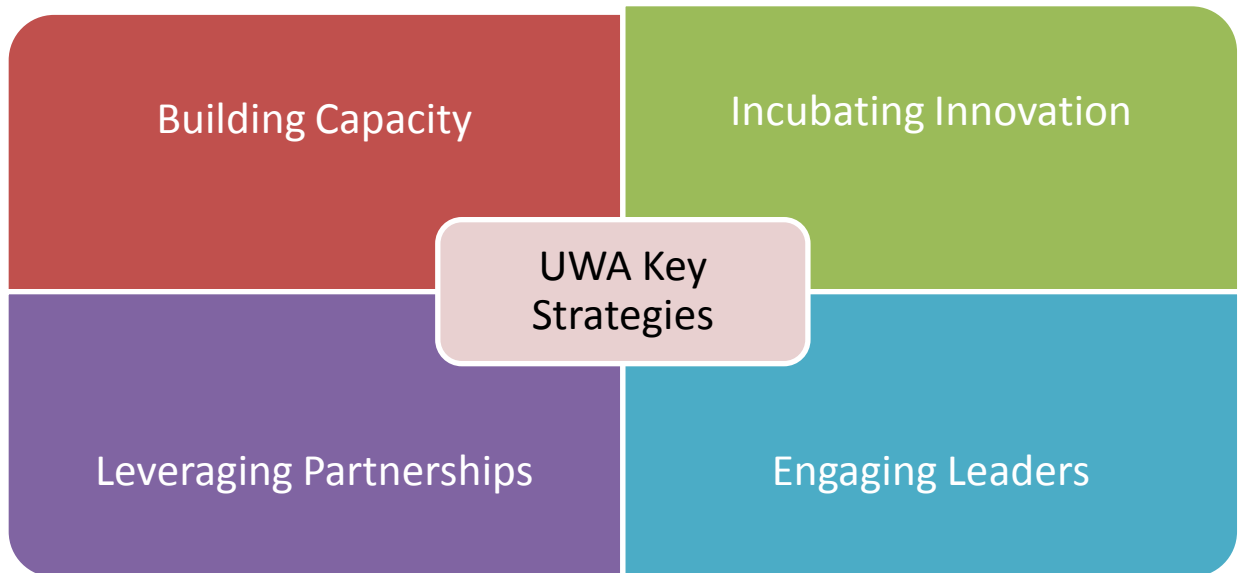
Area business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce and other professional organizations should determine the best use of their talents, resources and memberships to impact the graduation rate in York County. If area businesses are to have the skilled workforce needed to compete in a global economy they need to become actively involved. Business leaders should also consider entering into an agreement to encourage all new full time employees to have a high school diploma or GED or to pursue a diploma or GED.

Section I: Four Students Lost Every School Day: Strategies to Improve the York County Graduation Rate

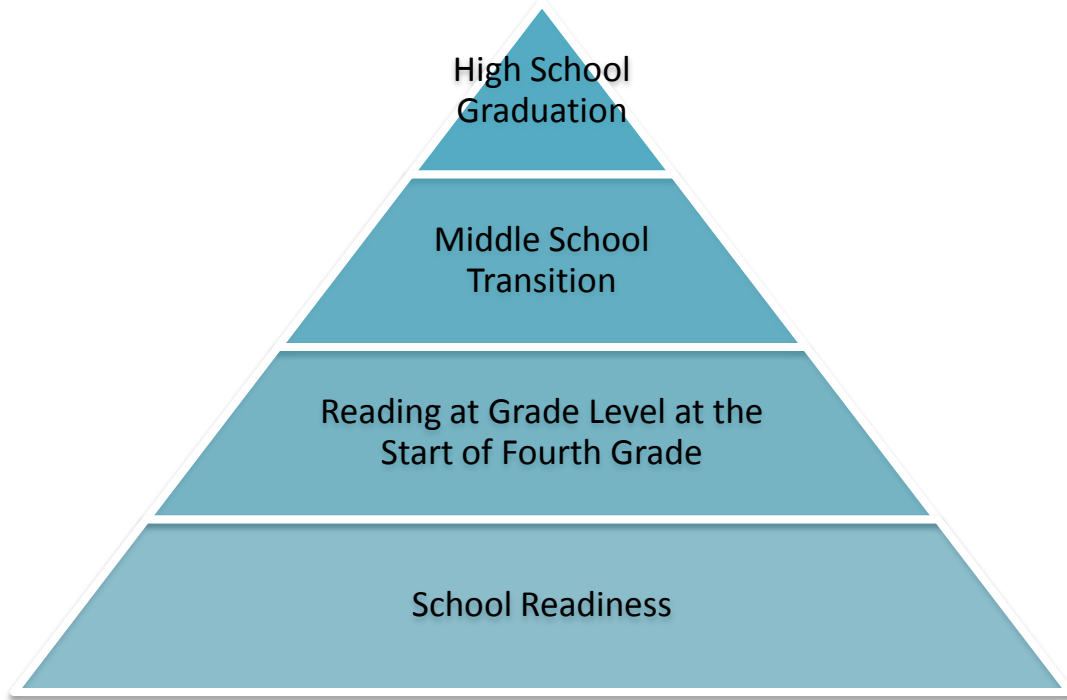
YorkCounts began as a community-wide effort to define York County's quality of life in an objective and measurable way. Metro-York's purpose is to look at medium and long-term solutions to the region's most pressing needs. In the area of education, one of the identified priorities is to invest in intense, targeted programming for at-risk students as they enter grade school to keep them focused and/or in middle and high school to dissuade them from thinking that dropping out of school is an option.

From 1998–2008, 6,429 students dropped out of York County schools, approximately four students lost every school day. In 2008, United Way of York County entered into a compact with YorkCounts and established the Stay in School Initiative Committee to address this priority area. Its purpose is to create a system that provides for an infrastructure for ongoing implementation and sustainability of proven practices in reducing dropout rates and increasing the graduation rates at area high schools.

The United Way of York County, in keeping with United Way of America (UWA) priorities⁴, has recently realigned its focus areas to Education, Income and Health. As part of the realignment, new national goals have been developed. The primary goal of the United Way of America's Education Plan is to reduce the number of high school dropouts by 50 percent by 2018. The key strategies of the plan are to support a local United Way's efforts in:



The United Way of America Education Focus Area is designed to focus on the whole child. Research tells us that 85 percent of brain development occurs before age five. Success in high school and life is dependent upon the foundation laid in the early years. Children need support as they transition through elementary school, into middle school and onto high school. An effective strategy must include the following focus areas:



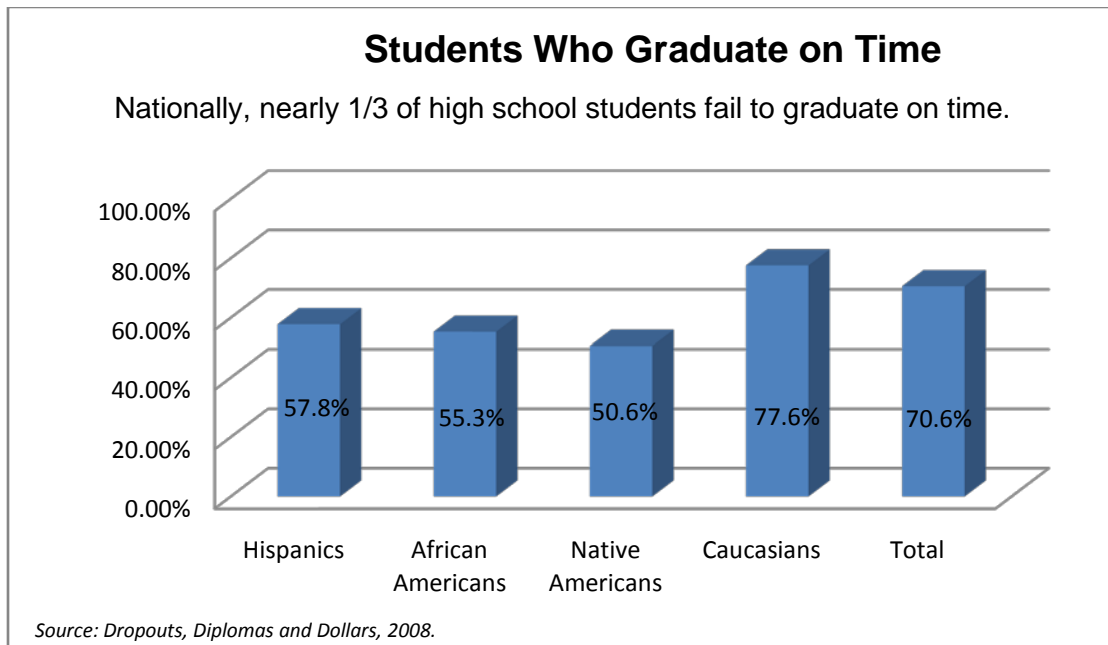
United Way of York County is already heavily involved in these focus areas. Focus On Our Future, the early childhood education initiative, has been in existence for fifteen years. During this time, the number of high quality early childhood education programs has increased from one to 12 National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited centers. York County currently ranks fourth in the Commonwealth in the percentage of high quality programs. Research shows that children who attend high quality early childhood education programs enter school better prepared to succeed. Focus On Our Future collaborates with area school districts and early childhood education programs to promote school readiness. The work of Focus On Our Future is an integral component for reducing the dropout rate in York County. Youth Development programs funded by United Way of York County address reading skills, middle school transition and high school graduation. The most successful of these programs need to be expanded.

Section II: Defining the Problem:

Did You Know?

For the past 10 years, an average of four students every school day, dropped out of a York County high school.

In the United States, 7,000 students drop out of school every day. That's 1.2 million a year. From 1998 – 2008, 6,429 students dropped out of York County schools, approximately four children every school day. The national graduation rate is hovering around 70 percent. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education's Report, *Dropouts, Diplomas and Dollars*⁵, of the four million students who enter ninth grade, a third will drop out and another third will graduate without having gained the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in work or post secondary education. Minorities have the highest drop out rates; roughly half of all minority students fail to graduate on time.



Despite additional attention to education through the programs of the No Child Left Behind Act, the national graduation rate has not significantly improved. Thirty years ago the United States ranked first in the percentage of adults with a high school diploma. Now, it ranks 18th of 23 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members. According to OECD, the lower ranking is because the percentage of adults with a high school diploma has remained the same in the United States while it has risen in other countries⁶.

Approximately 12 percent of the country's high schools are doing such a poor job of educating their students that researchers from John Hopkins University call them "dropout factories". At these schools, less than 60 percent of students who enter ninth grade graduate four years later. They produce about 50 percent of the nation's dropouts; 69 percent of all African American, and 63 percent of all Hispanic dropouts⁷.

The researchers also found a near perfect correlation between a high school's poverty level and its tendency to lose large numbers of students between ninth and 12th grade. The more impoverished and racially isolated the school, the greater the likelihood that students in the school will be taught by inexperienced teachers, uncertified teachers, and teachers who do not hold a degree in the subject they are assigned to teach. Schools with these characteristics are invariably low performing schools. It is no surprise that the consequence of having our least qualified educators responsible for our neediest students is that the achievement gap continues to grow.

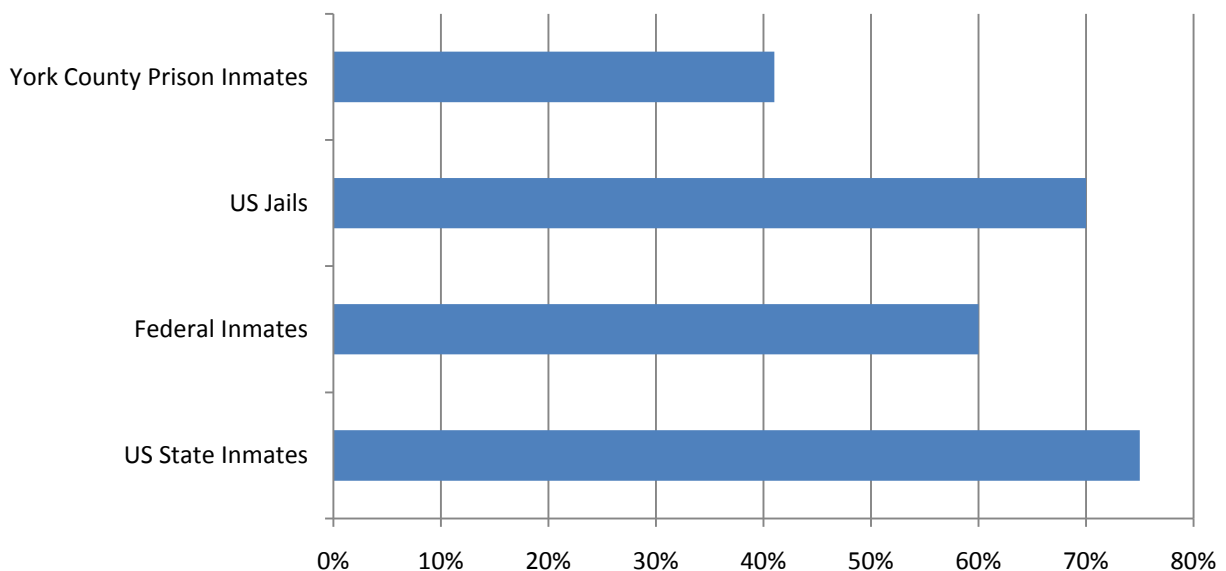
Dropping out of school has an economic impact not only on the individual but the entire community. Over the course of a lifetime, a college graduate will earn, on average, \$1 million more than a high school dropout. Four out of every 10 young adults lacking a high school diploma receive some type of government assistance. Over the course of his lifetime, a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. If the students who dropped out of the class of 2008 stayed in school and graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from an additional \$319 billion in income. Over the next decade, more than 12 million students will drop out at a loss of more than \$3 trillion. To put that figure in perspective, if all of these students graduated, they could pay for the proposed federal government health care reform three times over. Increasing the high school graduation rate and college matriculation for male students by only five percent would lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$8 billion each year.

Did You Know?

Students who drop out of school are more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison.

Percentage of Inmates Without a High School Diploma

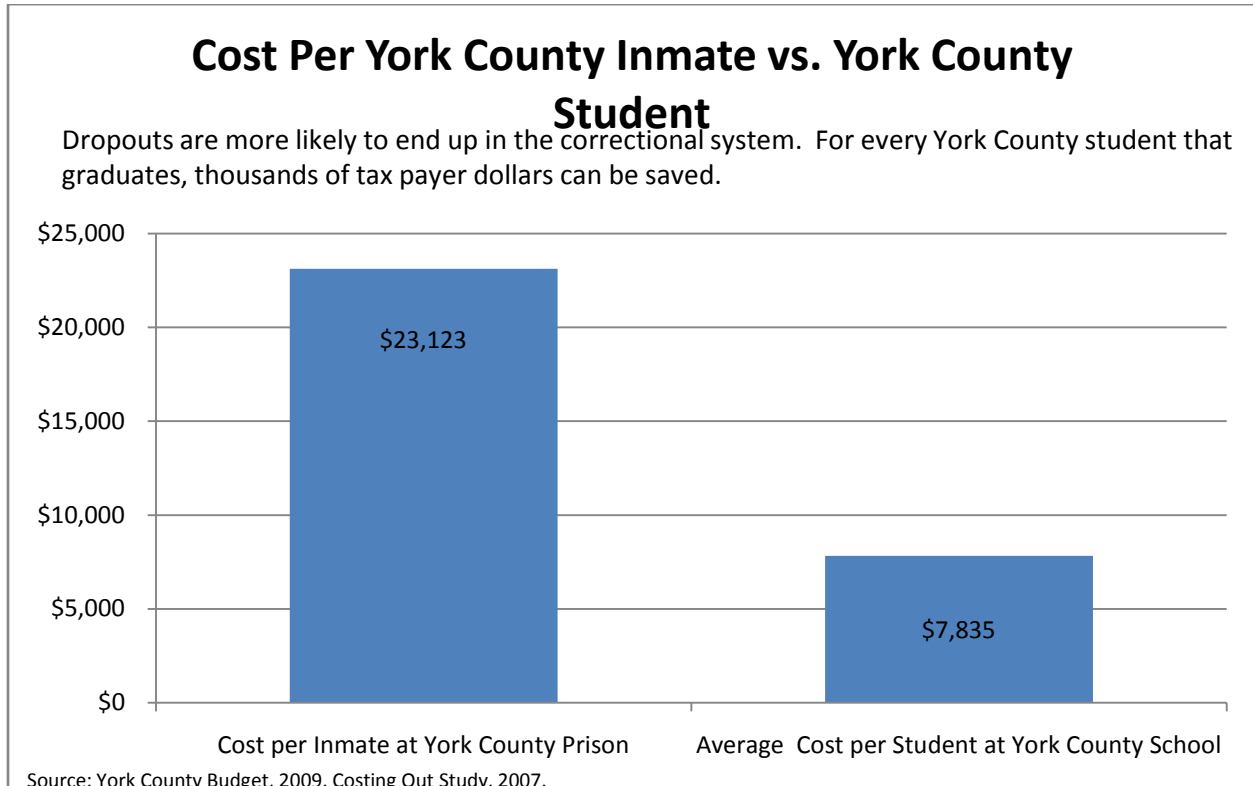
The majority of people in the correction system do not have a high school diploma.



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003; PA Department of Corrections, 2007.

Did You Know?

*The cost to incarcerate a York County resident is approximately **three times** the cost to educate them.*



Currently, York County bills \$23,123 per inmate to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for costs associated with incarceration. This compares to an average cost of \$7,835 spent per year per student by York County schools. In addition, research has shown that each student who graduates from high school instead of dropping out will save states an average of \$13,706 in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care over the course of his or her lifetime.

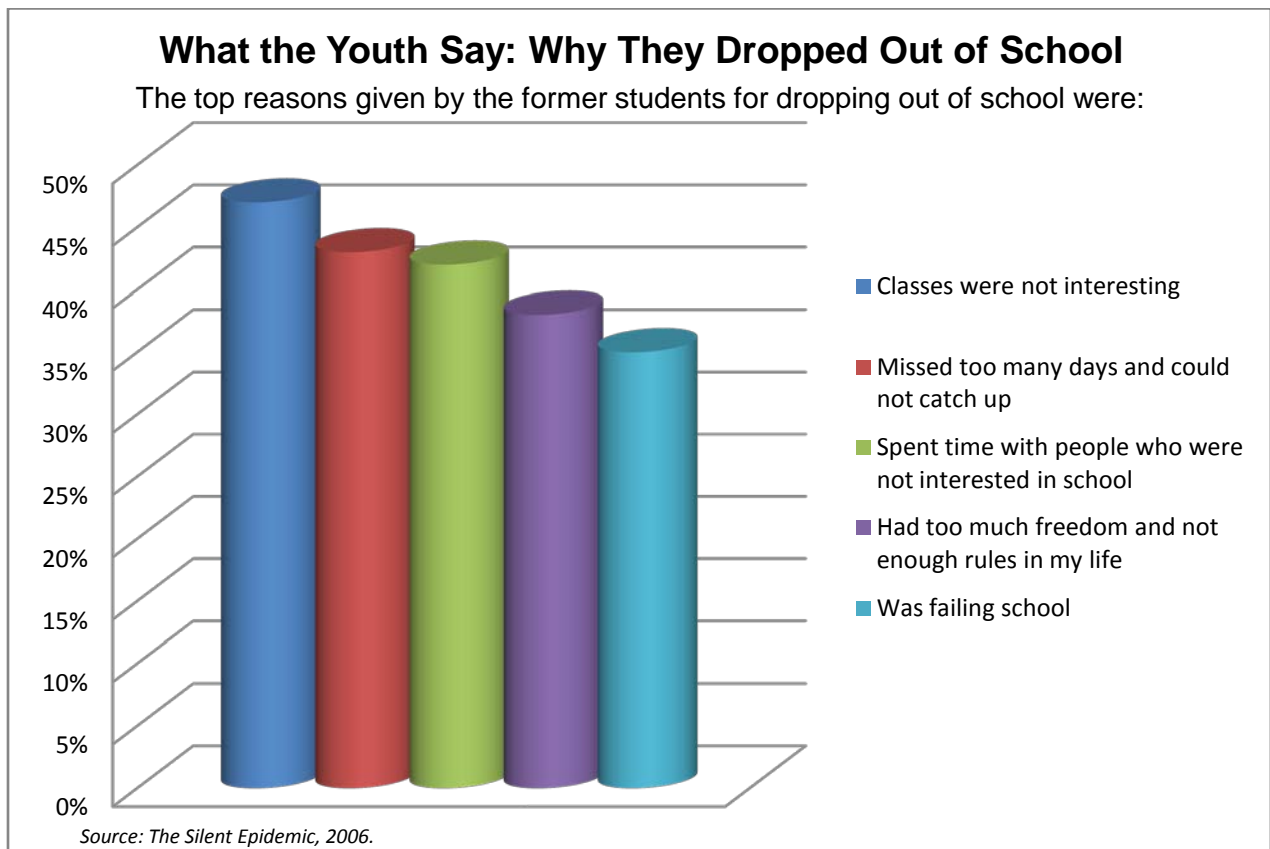
Lower tax revenue is perhaps the most obvious consequence of low graduation rates, but state and local economies suffer further when they have less educated populaces as they find it more difficult to attract new business investment, and must spend more on social programs, incarceration costs and health care.

According to the 2007 study, *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*⁸, a dropout converted to a graduate would yield a public benefit of \$209,000 in higher government revenues and lower government spending. This equates to a net economic advantage of \$127,000 for each additional high school graduate, a benefit two and a half times greater than the initial public investment.

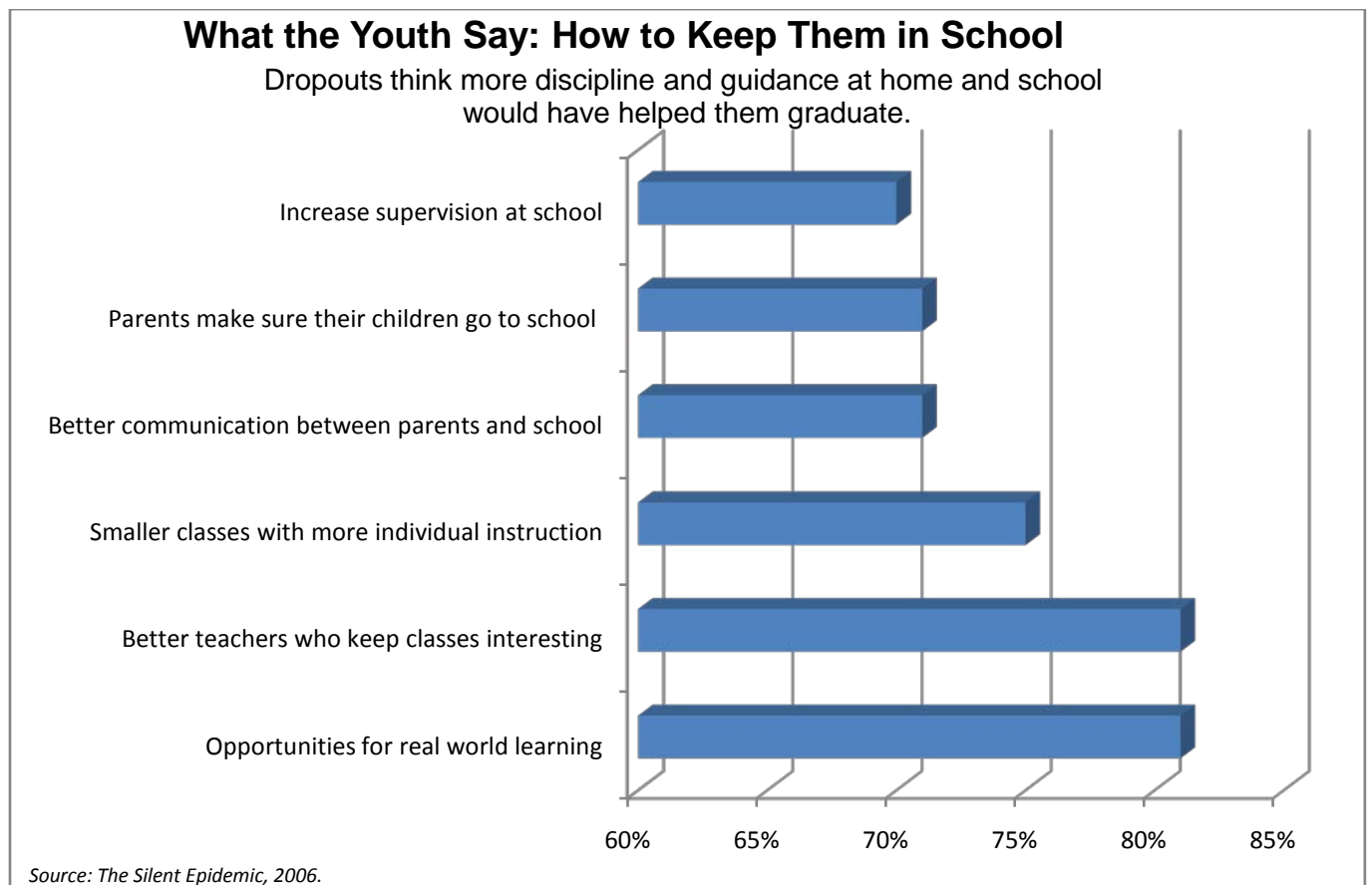
Did You Know?

If the 6,429 York County students who dropped out over the past ten years had eventually graduated, the community could have benefited from an additional \$816,483,000 or approximately \$816.5 million.

The 2006 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation report, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*⁹ interviewed nearly 500, 16 to 24 year olds who had dropped out of school. The purpose of the study was to ascertain why these students had dropped out and how they think the education system in the United States could be improved. The top reasons for dropping out given by the participants were:



The nearly 500 dropouts who participated in 25 focus groups throughout the country mostly blamed themselves for failing to graduate. However, they do believe that there are things schools, families and the community can do to keep students in school. The respondents in the *Silent Epidemic*, believe the following would improve a student's chances of staying in school:



The *Costing Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Public Education Goals*¹⁰ study, commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, found that no district in York County is currently funded at an adequate level to meet state performance expectations. Results also indicate that York City has more than double the statewide average of economically disadvantaged students while all other districts in the county are below the state average. York City also serves almost eight times the percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) as the average district in Pennsylvania. When you take into account the needs of the York City students and families, it costs about twice as much to educate them.

Understanding Graduation Rates:

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congress, *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA): Education Could Do More to Help States Better Define Graduation Rates and Improve Knowledge about Intervention Strategies*¹¹, found that the different methods employed by the states for calculating the graduation rate produce different results. As a result, beginning in the 2010-2011 school year states are required to report a uniform, comparable and accurate graduation rate known as a “four-year adjusted cohort rate” which measures the percent of students in a ninth grade cohort that graduate with a regular diploma in four years or less. This rate must also be used for determining NCLBA Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, *Federal High School Graduation Rate Policies and the Impact on Pennsylvania*¹² “the most accurate high school graduation rates are calculated using graduation data based on individual students’ progress over time. Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, Pennsylvania will have a system in place to track individual students which will enable PA to comply with changes in Federal regulations.

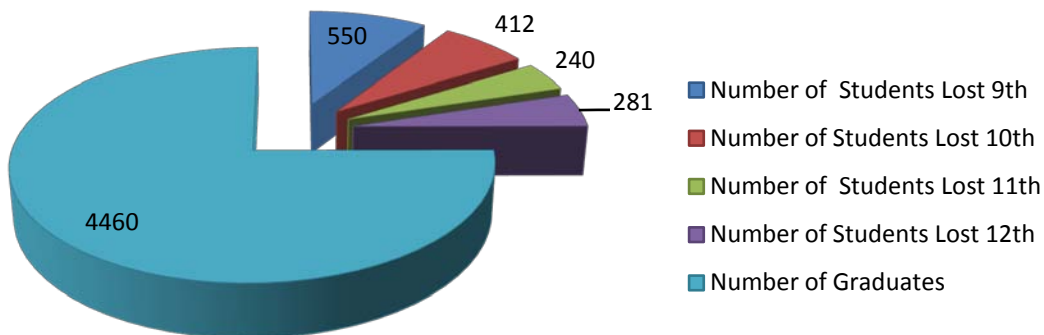
Pennsylvania school districts are not currently using the cohort definition to calculate graduation rates, so for purposes of more completely understanding the problem in York County, this report uses the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) cohort definition to calculate the 2006 graduation rate. Enrollment data to calculate the CPI was provided to the PA Department of Education by York County school districts. The data was also verified against the US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data. The calculation of the graduation rate was verified against the Education Week’s Research Center Graduation Rate reports for York County school districts.

Did You Know?

**For the 2005-2006 school year the graduation rate for York County was 78%.
Of the 5,943 students who entered York County schools, 4,460 graduated
four years later. A total of 1,483 failed to graduate within four years.**

Where the Students Get Lost

York County Enrollment Data indicates that the greatest shrinkage occurs in the freshman and sophomore years.



Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005 -2006.

State Law and District Policies Compound Problem:

Pennsylvania compulsory attendance laws mandate a child be enrolled in school no later than eight years of age and until the age of seventeen or graduation from high school. The following exceptions are permitted:

- Private or Home Schooling.
- Children who are 16 and regularly engaged in useful and lawful employment may be signed out of school by their parents.
- Children who are 15 who hold a permit approved by the school district to engage in farm work or domestic service.
- Children who are 14 and satisfactorily complete the equivalent of the highest grade of elementary school in their district who hold a permit by the Secretary of Education to engage in farm or domestic work.

The fact that students may be signed out of school at the age of 16, or earlier with school permission, exacerbates the dropout problem. Many states have compulsory attendance until 18 years or graduation from high school.

Another state regulation that impacts the dropout problem is the Department of Education's policy for Unaccounted Absences stated in Chapter 11.24. It states that:

- Students whose names are on the active membership roll, who are at anytime in the school term absent from school for 10 consecutive school days, shall thereafter be removed from the active membership roll unless one of the following occurs:
 - The district has been provided with evidence that absence may be legally excused.
 - Compulsory attendance prosecution has been or is being pursued.

One effect of this regulation is that school districts remove children from their rolls, sending the unintended message to the student and family that it is okay to drop out of school. Some parents also sign the paperwork to permit their student to drop out of school rather than paying the fines associated with chronic truancy.

Why Students Drop Out:

Research has shown that dropping out is not a spur-of-the-moment decision. Rather it is the culmination of factors that typically begin in the early grades. Disadvantaged children start school at least two years behind their peers in pre-literacy skills. For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still be struggling to read in third grade. Children who are not reading on grade level by third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school. Research shows that grades and absenteeism rates by third grade predict with 90 percent accuracy whether children will dropout. The three main correlates for determining who will drop out are:

- **Course Success:**
 - Students with a B or better average have more than a 95 percent chance of graduating.

- **Attendance:**
 - Students who had high absenteeism, cut classes at least once a week or were tardy 10 or more times in a single month were more than six times as likely as their peers to drop out.
 - Nearly 90 percent of freshmen who missed less than a week of school per semester, graduated, regardless of their eighth grade test scores.

- **Academic Skills:**
 - In an average high-poverty urban school, approximately half of incoming ninth grade students read at a sixth – seventh grade level.

Did You Know?

There is a strong correlation between truancy and dropping out of school and incarceration.

According to the report, *Truancy Prevention in Action: Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs*¹³, “truancy has been linked to many problem behaviors including school failure, school drop out and juvenile delinquency”. A study conducted by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service found that, “habitual truants will most likely transition to dropping out, in fact, 75 percent of students who were truant in high school did not graduate, compared to a mere one percent for non-truants.”

Truancy is a problem that confronts all school districts and all grades. With an enrolled student truancy rate of 21 percent, York County had the eighth highest rate of habitual truancy in Pennsylvania for the 2006-2007 school year. An astounding 13 percent of first graders were habitually truant. Ninth graders in York County have the highest truancy rate at 31 percent.

Did You Know?

***In York County, 95% of juvenile offenders were habitual truants;
80% of the prison population was habitual truants.***

In addition to truancy, learning issues, as well as family, community and school norms play a role in a student's decision to drop out of school. Learning issues include disabilities and those for whom English is not their primary language. Students who have difficulty in school due to failure to complete homework and class assignments, being held back and/or are poor readers are more likely to drop out of school.

Family norms impact a child's attitudes toward school. Families who rarely read to their children, are unable or unwilling to assist their child with assignments can convey the message that school is not important. Families under chronic stress may not have the resources to adequately support their child. Additional family norms that can negatively affect a student's ability to graduate include family members who are in the correctional system, drug abuse and parents who dropped out school. Community norms can influence a student's decision to drop out of school. Students who live in communities where the majority of adults did not graduate may believe a diploma is not necessary for success. School norms also play a role in the graduation rate. If the majority of students fail to meet state standards but are advanced to the next grade, students may enter high school destined to fail and drop out.

Based upon current research and input from York County school superintendents and community leaders, the following risk factors effecting York County students were identified. The risk factors can be grouped into those related to absenteeism (truancy), learning issues, family norms, community norms and school norms.

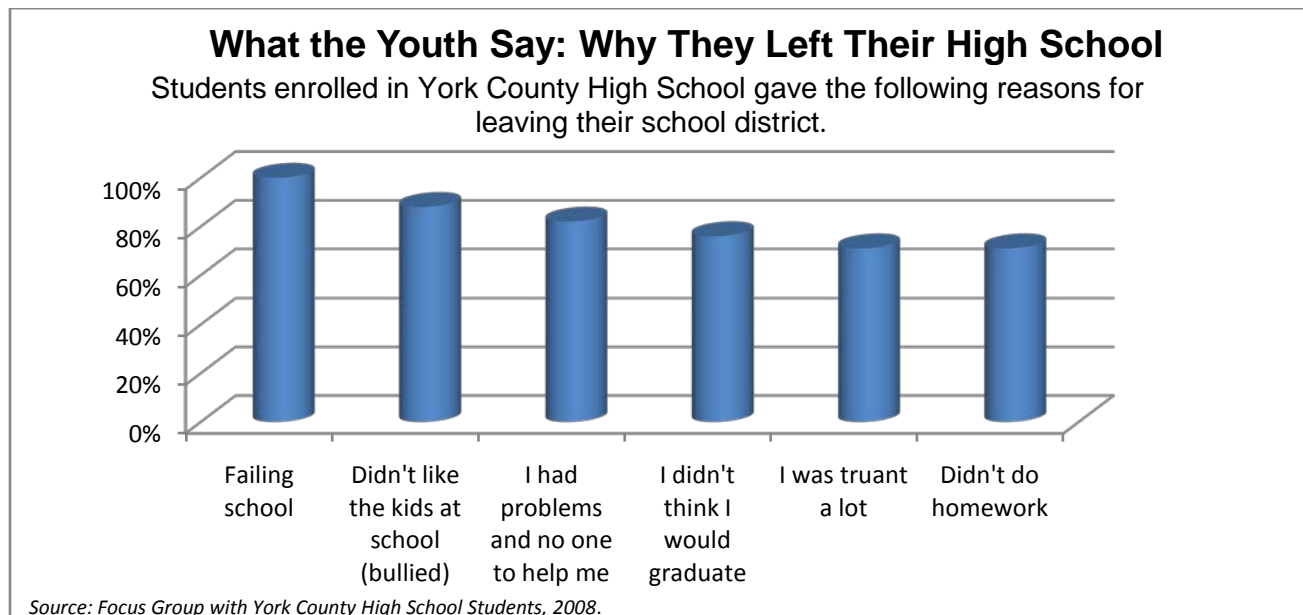
Did You Know?

31% of York County ninth graders are habitually truant.

	Absenteeism	Learning Issues	Family Norms	Community Norms	School Norms
Abuses Drugs and/or Alcohol	✓				
Apathy	✓				
Bullied	✓				
Cares for Siblings	✓		✓		
Does Little Homework	✓	✓			
Does Not Read for Fun		✓			
Disciplinary Problems	✓	✓			
English Not Primary Language		✓	✓	✓	
ESL/ELL (particularly if entering school in York County at the MS or HS level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
External Locus of Control	✓				
Failure to Perform on Grade Level (regardless of grades)		✓			✓
Family Member Who Is Alcoholic/Drug User	✓		✓		
Gang Involvement	✓		✓	✓	
Grandparent (or other family member) Raising Student			✓		
Has Attended Five or More Schools	✓			✓	
Has Child	✓				
High Unemployment			✓	✓	
Homeless	✓		✓		
Incarcerated Family Member			✓		
Lack of Attachment/Relationship with Caring Adult	✓		✓		
Lack of Goals and/or Vision for Post High School	✓				
Lack of Oversight if Home Schooled or Attending Cyber Charter School			✓		✓
Lack of Significant Consequences for Dropping Out	✓			✓	✓
Lack of Transportation (having to walk or rely on others for rides)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Legal Aspects of Truancy/Dropping Out (fines)				✓	✓
Low Grades	✓	✓			
Low Self-Esteem	✓				
Mother is a High School Dropout			✓		
Not Sure of High School Graduation	✓				
Over Age by Two or More Years for Grade	✓	✓			
Parents Do Not Talk to Student About School			✓		
Previously Dropped Out	✓				
Public Assistance			✓		
Sibling Has Dropped Out			✓		
Single Parent			✓		
Unresolved/Untreated Mental Health Issues	✓	✓			

York County High School Students' Perspectives:

Students from York County High School were interviewed to determine their reasons for leaving their home school. York County High School is an alternative school that is supported by 13 York County School Districts. A school district pays \$45,000 for 12 slots per year. Students wishing to attend York County High School must be between 17-20 years of age and reside in one of the participating districts. Students over age 21 may attend through a federal grant. Approximately 350 students are served annually and 209 students graduated in 2007-2008. The school is structured in three-hour sessions, offered in the morning, afternoon and evening. Students work at their own pace – no lectures or direct instruction – on one subject at a time. Certified teachers are available to provide instructional support and counseling services are available. Students who successfully complete the program receive a high school diploma from their home district's school. Students participating in the focus groups represented the following districts; Central, Dallastown, Dover, Eastern, Northeastern, Red Lion, West York and York City. Students were asked to complete a check list to indicate if a particular risk factor was a reason for their decision to leave their home school. The top reasons identified were:



During the interview sessions, the students identified the following factors that contributed to their decision to leave their home school and enroll at York County High School:

- **School Environment Issues:**

- Bullying and “drama” at school.
- Some teachers exacerbate the drama and bullying.
- Some teachers don't care about the students.
- Classes are mostly lectures, can't work at your own pace.
- Class size of 30 - 40 students, can't get the help you need.
- A large percentage of a school day is wasted on non-instructional time.
- Some teachers can't control the students in their class.

- **School Policy and Procedures Issues:**

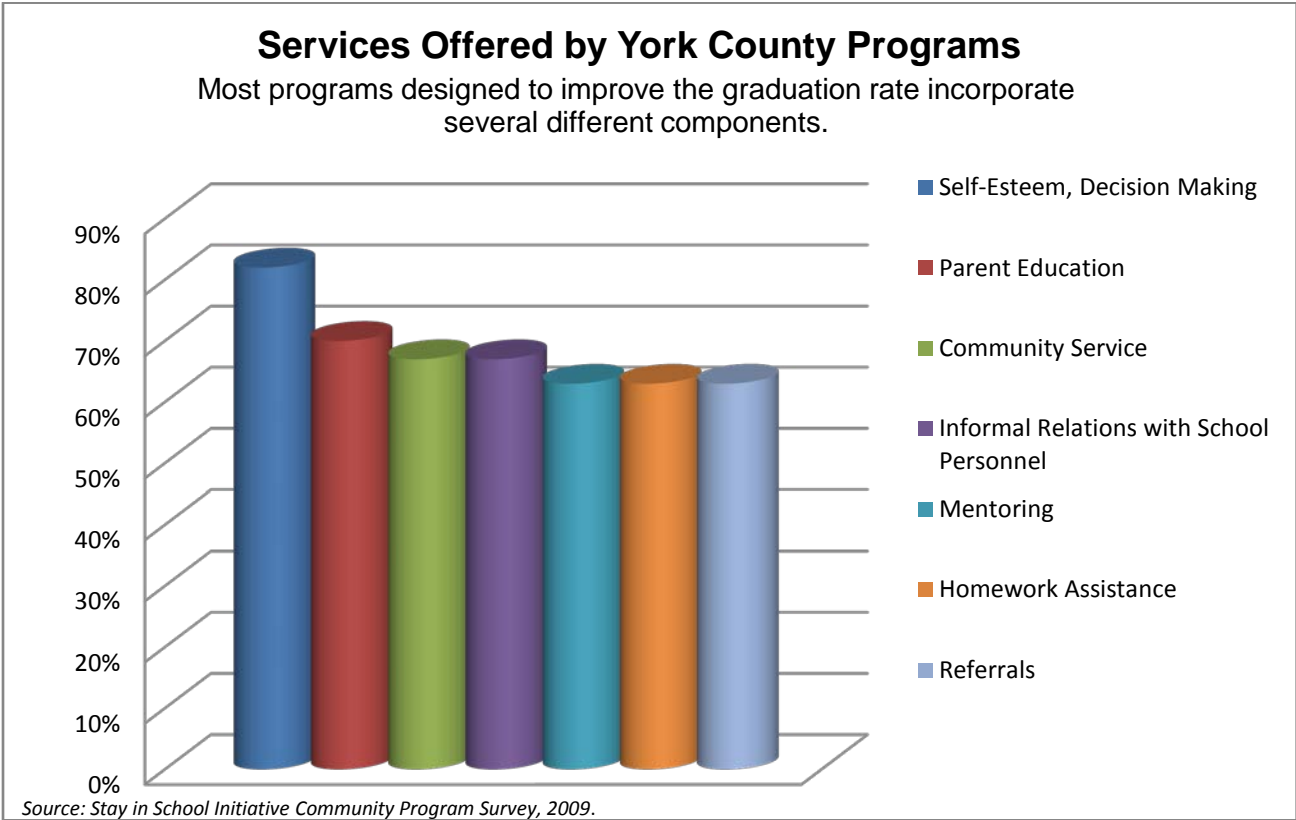
- Lack of organization from school personnel on course assignments.
- Failing classes but continued to be assigned to next grade level.
- Assigned to a special education or low achieving class but since testing didn't qualify the student for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and extra help, student was denied assistance even though they were failing.
- York County school districts require a different number of credits to graduate, ranging from 21 credits to 28 credits. If one transfers from a "low credit" district to a "high credit" district in junior or senior year, there is no way to catch up.
- Night school program allows only four credits per semester. If a student finishes all the work required before the end of a semester, they are required to attend all remaining classes and are not allowed to begin a new course.

- **External Issues:**

- Peer issues and problems outside of school.
- Students who move into a district in high school have a hard time making friends and fitting in.
- Racial tensions.
- Family responsibilities.
- Mental health issues.

Section III: Evaluating Existing Resources:

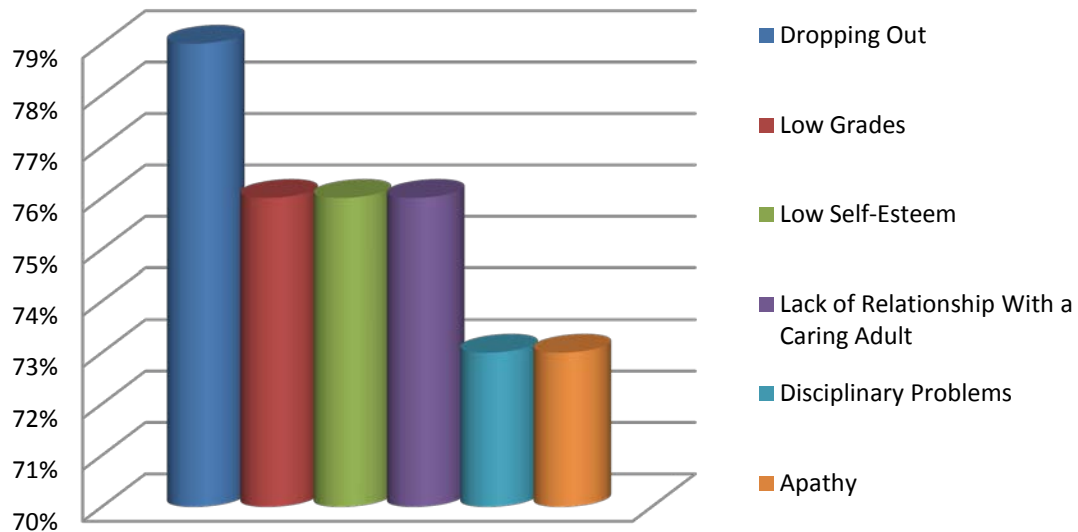
York County school districts, non-profit organizations and community partnerships are currently working to address the dropout problem. A survey was distributed to over 100 institutions, including school districts, youth serving organizations and government programs to determine what resources and strategies are currently available to students and their families. Programs that are an effective strategy to improve the graduation rate have the following components:



Respondents to the survey were provided with the list of risk factors contributing to reductions in the graduation rate for York County students. They were asked to identify which risk factors their programs address. Respondents could indicate more than one risk factor. Most programs are focused on improving academic skills, promoting self-esteem and fostering positive relationships with a caring adult. The risk factors addressed by current York County programs are:

Risk Factors Addressed by York County Programs

York County programs that work with youth reported that they focus primarily on keeping students in school, improving their grades and developing healthy relationships with caring adults.



Source: Stay in School Initiative Community Program Survey, 2009.

The Committee described the services and programs being provided to students and their families as internal or external. Internal programs are administered by school district personnel within the school setting. External programs are administered by outside organizations and may occur either on school grounds or at other settings.

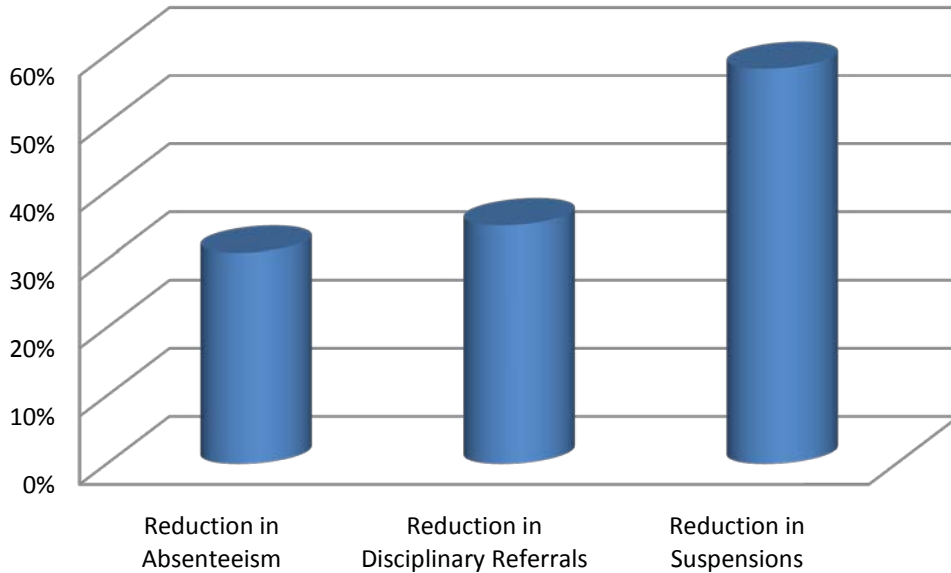
Most school districts provide programs and/or services to address the risk factors associated with dropping out of school. These programs may be national researched based programs or ones developed by school personnel. Examples of programs being offered include homework assistance and tutoring, mentoring, peer conflict resolution and support groups. One research based program of particular note being offered in York County is LinkCrew.

LinkCrew:

LinkCrew is a program to help freshmen transition to high school. At Southern school district, in only its second year, the program has resulted in a 31 percent reduction in absenteeism, a 35 percent reduction in disciplinary referrals, and a 58 percent reduction in suspensions. It reduces student anxiety by fostering relationships among students. Upperclassman serve as LinkCrew leaders and each leader oversees 10 freshmen. These relationships help students succeed and create a sense of belonging. The program increases connection to the school and the desire to stay in school. Currently, Southern and York City school districts are offering the program. South Western will implement the program in the fall of 2009.

Impact of LinkCrew

According to school personnel at Southern school district LinkCrew has reduced the risk factors that are associated with dropping out of school.



Source: Southern School District, 2009.

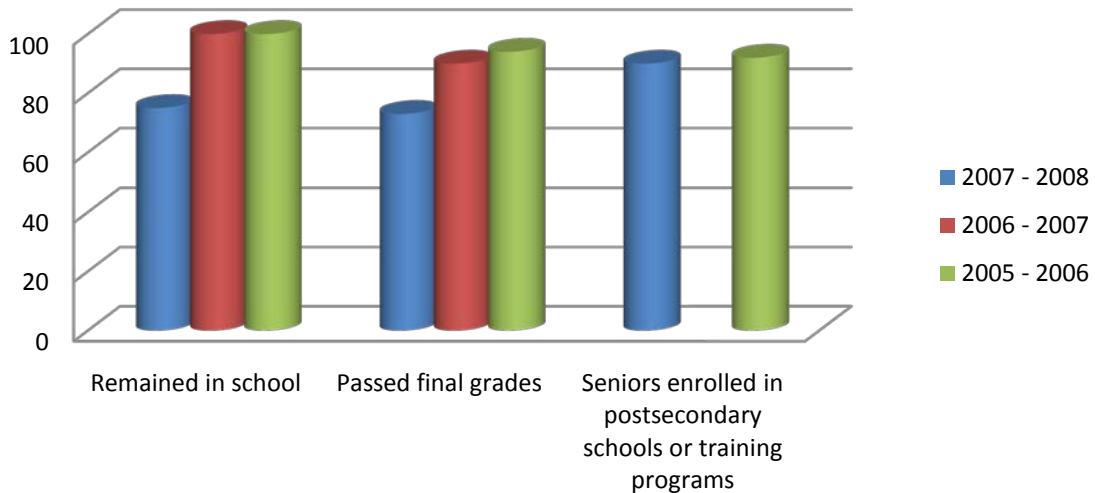
York County has several research-based external programs that have been proven to have a positive impact on reducing the dropout rate, specifically: Quantum Opportunities and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Quantum Opportunities:

Operated by the YWCA of York, Quantum Opportunities is a research-based, dropout prevention model program that seeks to increase the graduation rate and enrollment in postsecondary education among at-risk youth. The students complete 250 hours of educational support, 250 hours of community service and 250 hours of leadership development. If they successfully complete the program, students receive a stipend that can be used for higher education. Currently the program serves 50 youth from York City School District that are referred to the program by their guidance counselors. Students are tracked through their first year of higher education. For the past three years, students enrolled in the program have stayed in school, earned passing grades and enrolled in post-secondary schools and training programs. During the 2006–2007 program year no seniors were enrolled in Quantum Opportunities.

Quantum Opportunities Results

YWCA program is keeping students in school.



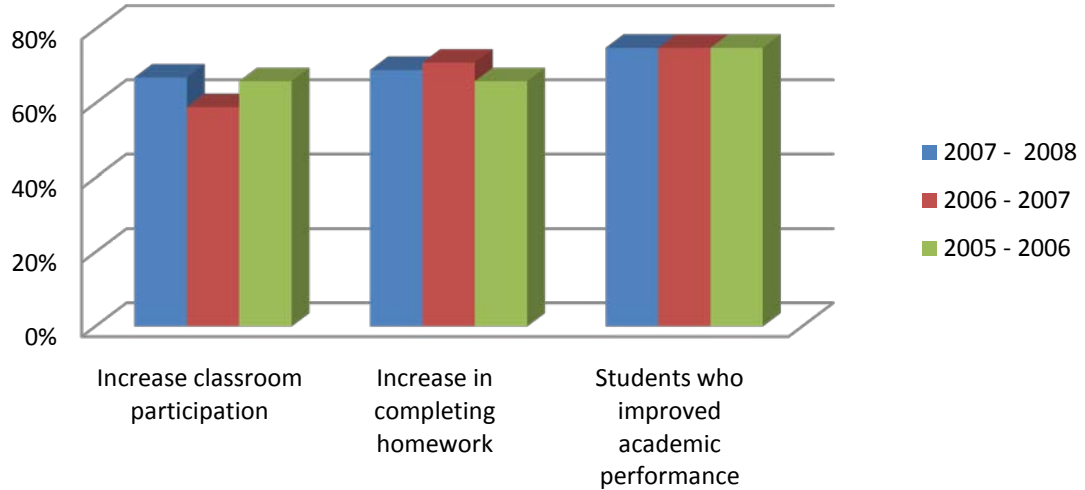
Source: YWCA of York, 2009. No seniors were enrolled in 2006 - 2007.

SMART Program:

Big Brothers Big Sisters has two main programs, the SMART program which matches high school students with elementary students and the Community Program which matches adults with children. Currently there are 62 matches in the community program and many children on the waiting list. The SMART program is in most school districts, and has 140 matches in York County. The purpose of the program is to provide positive one-to-one relationships between screened and trained high school/college volunteers and elementary students who are referred by school personnel for the purpose of impacting the areas of poor performance. For the 2007-2008 school year, there was a 67 percent increase in classroom participation, 69 percent increase in school preparedness and 75 percent of the students showed improvement in their academic performance.

Big Brothers Big Sisters SMART Program

The SMART program operates in nearly every school district in York County. Students involved in the program improve their behavior and academic skills.



Source: Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2009.

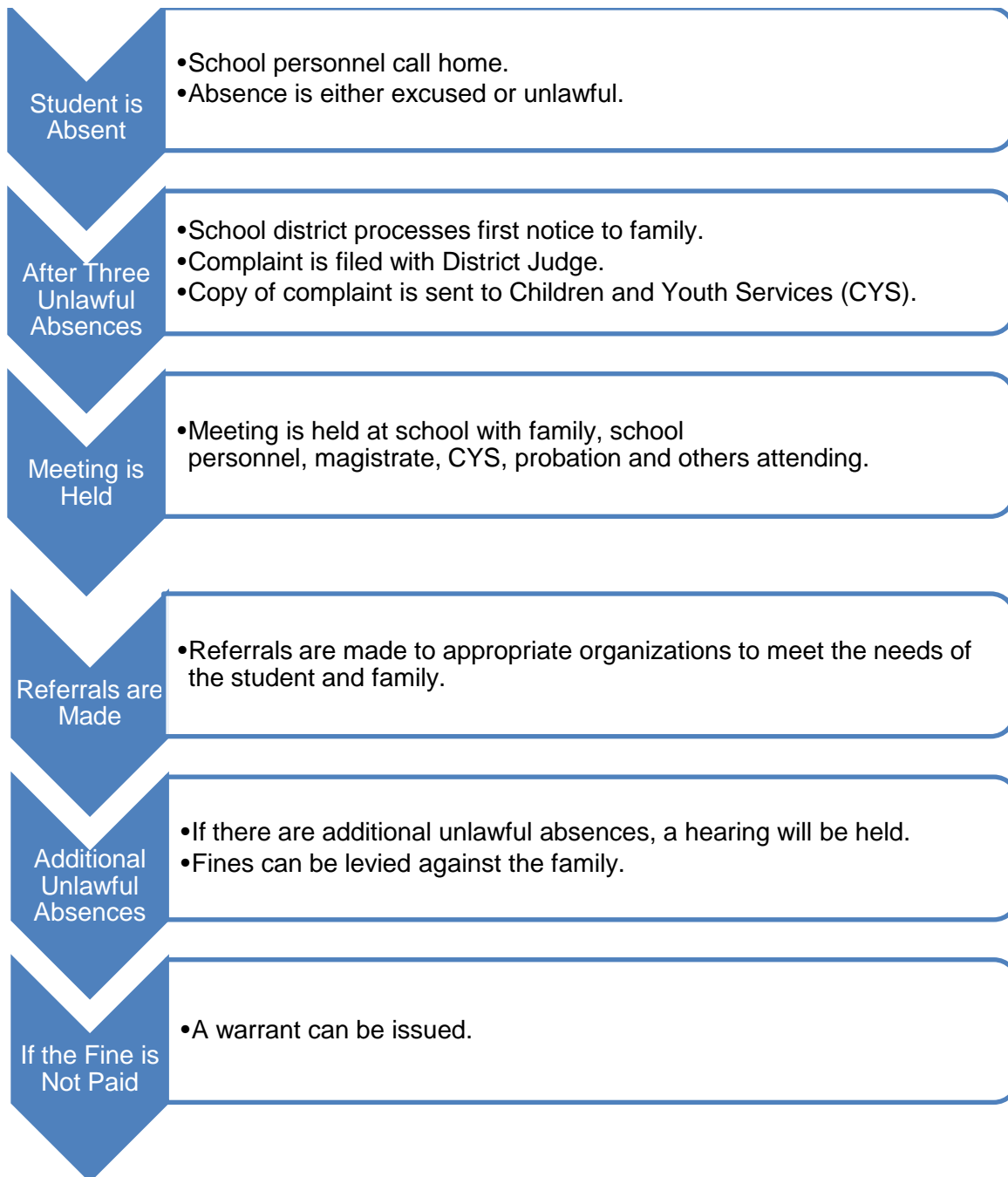
Other innovative programs that are addressing the needs of high school students include Y Achievers and York City Scholars. These programs work with students to prepare them for post-secondary education. York City Scholars provides scholarships and on-going support to York City high school students enrolled at York College.

York County Truancy Task Force:

The York County Truancy Task Force, chaired by the Honorable Judge John Uhler, Administrative Judge, is a coalition of educators, law enforcement, juvenile justice and probation officials, social service providers, faith-based and youth-serving agencies and physicians who work to provide a cohesive, consistent response to the issues related to truancy. The focus of the work of the all volunteer Truancy Task Force is intervention. The Truancy Task Force works collaboratively with all school districts and related organizations, law enforcement officials and Children and Youth Services (CYS) to identify children and families early in the cycle of unlawful absences. It provides intervention services such as Mental Health/Mental Retardation support, bullying prevention programs, parenting classes, substance abuse counseling, tutoring, and mentoring. The intervention services enable children and families to address the underlying causes for the truancy, and to avoid potential fines and other punishments. It should be noted that York is the only county in Pennsylvania to have a task force addressing these issues. Specifically, the Truancy Task Force has accomplished the following:

- CYS caseworker housed in several school districts.
- Uniform truancy protocols and enforcement standards accepted by all school districts.
- Annual agreement with all York County school districts on truancy protocols.
- Standardized data collection.
- Presentations made for health care providers related to the importance of accurate and valid medical excuses.
- Protocols established for referring truant youth to CYS.
- In-school truancy hearings and pre-hearing meetings.
- Truancy sweeps.

All 16 school districts in York County are supportive and participate in the work of the Truancy Task Force. All superintendents annually sign the York County Truancy Task Force's "Indication of Commitment to Follow Attendance Protocols" forms. The 17 protocols cover topics from monitoring and documenting the frequency and type of absences to protocols for doctors' excuses to making referrals to Children and Youth and the district justice. The purpose of establishing standard protocols is to improve communication and provide a consistent response to the child and family. Every school district has submitted truancy data to the Task Force. The data is used to target prevention and intervention services for specific children, grade levels and school districts. The goal of the Task Force is to intervene and provide appropriate services to the child and family to reduce future truancy. The process for working with a family is:



During truancy sweeps, which can be requested by a school district, truant students are identified by school personnel, truant officers, district attorneys, sheriffs, probation officers and Children and Youth. If a student is found to be unlawfully absent during a truancy sweep they are returned to school.

National Programs Proven to be Effective:

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network provides information about the research based programs that have been proven to be successful. There are dozens of proven programs from around the nation that could be incorporated into the York County strategy. Some of particular note are:

- **Graduation Coaches:**

- Serve as extra support to potentially at-risk students.
- Provide one on one, small group and whole school support.
- Transition activities from elementary to middle and middle to high school.
- Activities occur throughout the school year and over the summer.
- Develop “success plans” for at-risk students.
- Working lunches – provide academic support during lunch hour.
- Middle school students attend college and career fairs.
- Partner with local service club(s) to provide speakers, tutors and mentors.

- **Why Try?:**

- Strength based approach to help youth overcome challenges in the areas of truancy, behavior and academics.
- Uses visual aids and music to teach social and emotional principles.
- Focuses on decision making and goal setting.

- **12 For Life:**

- A partnership between a school district and local factory.
- Provides school-based learning and on the job training.
- Students work in an actual manufacturing plant, built just for them for four hours a day and attend classes for four hours.
- Students attend standard academic classes.
- Company employees supervise the students in the plant. Students are paid.
- Company employees serve as mentors, tutors.
- School personnel and company personnel meet bi-weekly.
- The products produced at the plant more than pays for the cost of the program.
- Upon graduation, students are offered a position in the company.

Section IV: Finding Solutions:

The United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES) *Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention*¹⁴ indicates that in order to reduce the dropout rate, a community's strategy must include the following components:

- Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out.
- Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out.
- Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance.
- Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.
- Personalize the learning environment and instructional process.
- Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.

The Stay in School Initiative Committee recommends the following strategies to improve the graduation rate in York County schools:

- **Recommendation #1: Enhance the Effectiveness of York County Schools:**
 - Accurate data should be used to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school. This should occur at the elementary, middle and high school levels.
 - Students should be provided with effective research-based internal and external programs and services to address their needs.
 - School districts must collaborate with the York County Truancy Task Force and related organizations to address their truancy and dropout problem.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network states that the three most important components of any program designed to increase the graduation rate are: relationships, rigor and relevancy. Fostering positive relationships are critical. Students do not respond to programs, they respond to people. Successful schools have a common set of core beliefs and a consistent and caring staff. These practices foster cooperation and a sense of a safe community. If a student feels that they belong at school and people care about them, they are more likely to stay in school.

Schools must have higher expectations for their students. The culture of the school should convey that performing below "proficient" on state assessments is not acceptable. Teachers must be able to differentiate their instruction to meet individual needs, provide real world learning opportunities, and engage the students in active learning.

- **Recommendation #2: Expand the Work of the York County Truancy Prevention Initiative:**
 - Sustain the work of the York County Truancy Prevention Initiative.
 - Promote collaboration between Children and Youth Services and school districts to promptly address the needs of children who have unexcused absences.
 - Assure the continuation and expansion of the collaborative of all the principle parties.
 - Educate family members about the impact of regular attendance on school success. Support the family's efforts to address the problem.

In 2009 the Truancy Task Force completed a business plan to build and sustain the heretofore all- volunteer initiative. The newly reorganized York County Truancy Prevention Initiative (YCTPI) will be a program of the York County Bar Foundation which will also provide office space and first-year financial support for the YCTPI. Additional first-year support was secured by the Stay In School Initiative from the Women's Giving Circle of York County Community Foundation. Specifically, funds will be used for a staff person to oversee YCTPI's work to achieve the outcomes of reducing truancy and increasing the graduation rate for students throughout York County schools.

- **Recommendation #3: Promote and Foster Supportive Communities:**

- Expand effective research-based community programs.
- Develop a system to enhance the quality of existing youth development programs.
- Continue the work of Focus On Our Future to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.
- Hold meetings to educate the public about the problem.
- Provide opportunities for individuals and groups to become engaged in addressing the problem.
- Collaborate with existing agencies to support and engage families and students.
- Encourage local legislators to support state policies and programs that promote high school graduation.

Social service organizations and government agencies need to improve and expand their offerings to children, youth and families. Programs that are proven to address the risk factors associated with dropping out of school should be replicated. Current efforts to promote high quality early childhood education and school readiness should be supported. All sectors of the community: families, religious institutions, higher education, medical community, and elected officials should work collaboratively to address the problem. Other initiatives and community partnerships that address youth issues should be engaged in the work of the Stay in School Initiative. Particular attention should be given to securing additional mentors for area youth.

- **Recommendation #4: Engage the Business Community:**

- Form a task force of business leaders to identify strategies for effectively engaging the business community.
- Encourage businesses to adopt a program whereby employees without a high school diploma would be encouraged to secure a GED.

Area business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce and other professional organizations should determine the best use of their talents, resources and memberships to impact the graduation rate in York County. If area businesses are to have the skilled workforce needed to compete in a global economy they need to become actively involved. Business leaders should also consider entering into an agreement to encourage all new full time employees to have a high school diploma or GED or to pursue a diploma or GED.

Financial Information:

- **Infrastructure:**

United Way of York County is uniquely positioned to provide the infrastructure to support the work of the Stay in School Initiative. The United Way has the necessary connections to school districts, non-profit organizations and governmental agencies to promote collaborations and leverage resources. A Committee composed of representatives from school districts, government agencies, non-profit organizations, business and community leaders should be convened to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and the progress made on improving the graduation rate for all York County children. Additional United Way staff will need to be secured to provide support for this initiative

- **Programs:**

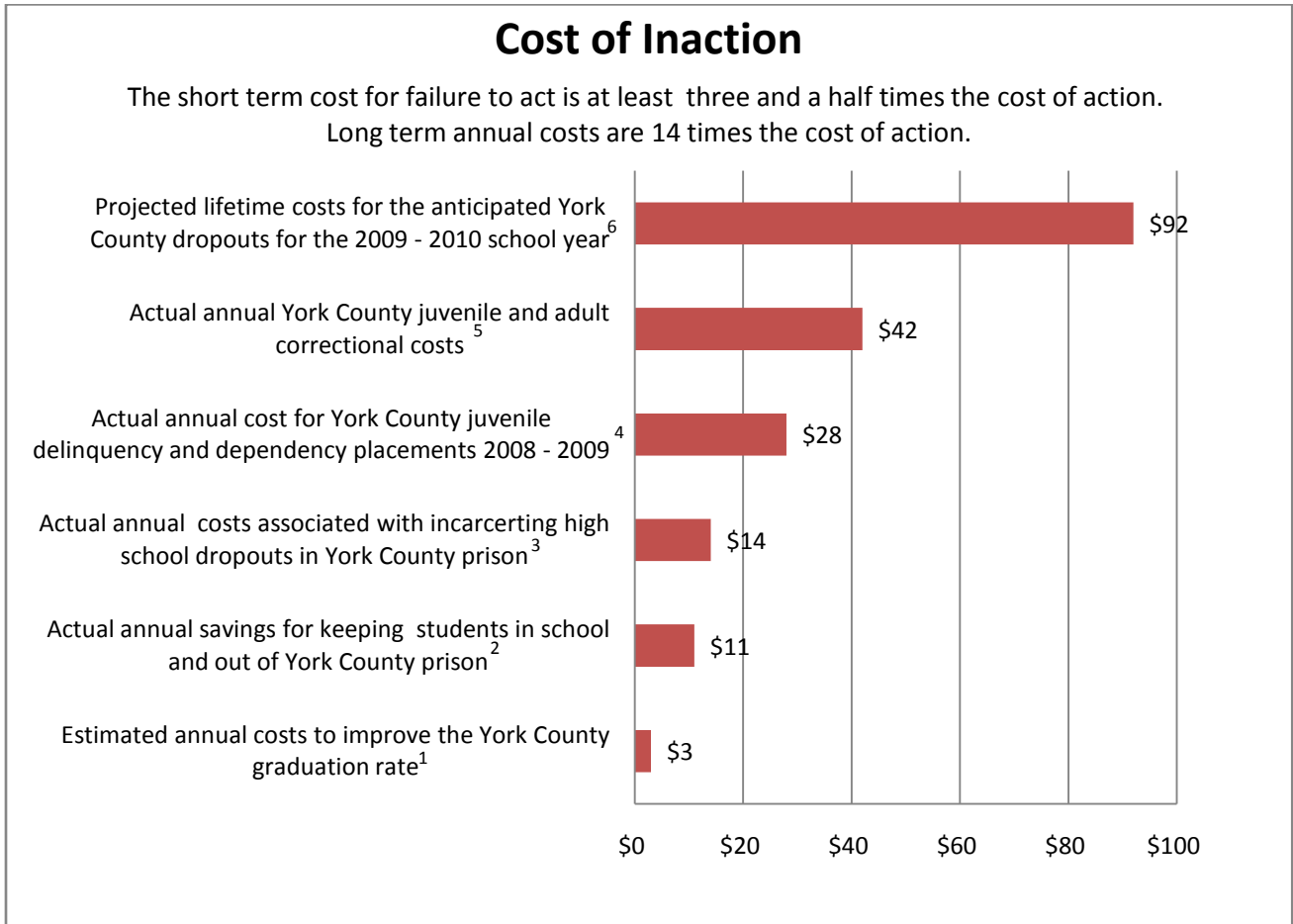
Costs associated with internal research-based programs, those administered by school districts, designed to meet the identified needs of area students would be \$1.7 million. The costs associated with implementing LinkCrew are \$20,000 for start up and \$5,000 per year. School districts would select which research-based program to implement based upon their student needs as identified by their student performance, truancy and graduation rate data.

To expand effective research-based external or community programs approximately \$2.3 million is needed annually. An additional 300 participants in Quantum Opportunities at \$6,000 per participant equals \$1.8 million. An additional 300 participants in Big Brothers Big Sisters SMART program at \$700 per student would cost \$210,000. An approximate \$210,000 would be needed for other external programs. An estimated \$750,000 would be needed to expand the work of the York County Truancy Task Force. An additional \$20,000 would be needed to engage and educate the community.

The Committee and the York County community will need to determine how to financially support this work. Funds could be secured from national, state and local public and private sources. Possible sources include the United Way of America and its partners, York County Community Foundation, United Way of York County, YorkCounts, government grants and local businesses. As much as \$4.5 million would be needed for the first year and \$3 million annually to improve the graduation rates for York County schools.

Section V: The Cost of Inaction

In order to improve the graduation rate for students throughout York County, the Stay in School Initiative Committee projects startup costs of \$4.5 million and annual costs of \$3 million. While this is a substantial amount of money, the York County community is already spending at least nine times as much for its inaction. Currently, the county spends \$27.3 million annually on juvenile delinquency and dependency placements. The cost for one year of juvenile and adult correctional costs is approximately \$42 million. Long term, the projected 720 York County students that could be lost in the 2009-2010 school year, four students every school day, will cost our community approximately \$91.5 million. The choice is clear. Now is the time to act.



¹Based upon projected figures.

²Anticipated 720 dropouts in 2009-2010 school year. It costs \$15,288 less, on average to educate a student than to incarcerate them.

³As of January 2009, there were 1,483 inmates in York County Prison (not including ICE detainees). 41% of inmates are high school dropouts. It costs \$23,123 per inmate per year.

⁴Figures provided by York County Truancy Prevention Initiative based upon CYS budget.

⁵Annual York County prison costs for high school dropouts and juvenile delinquency and dependency placement costs.

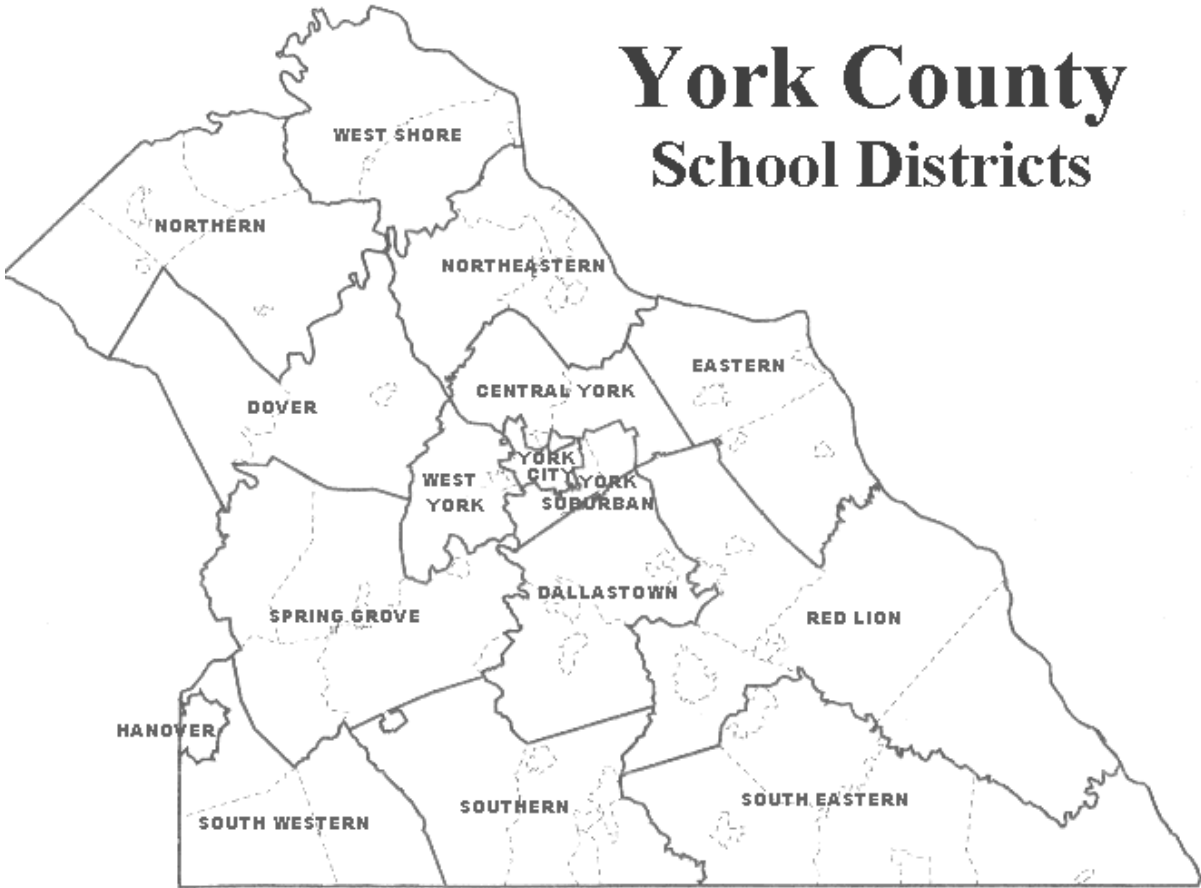
⁶Projected cost for the anticipated 720 high school dropouts in the 2009-2010 school year multiplied by the net economic advantage for each additional high school graduate.

Appendices:

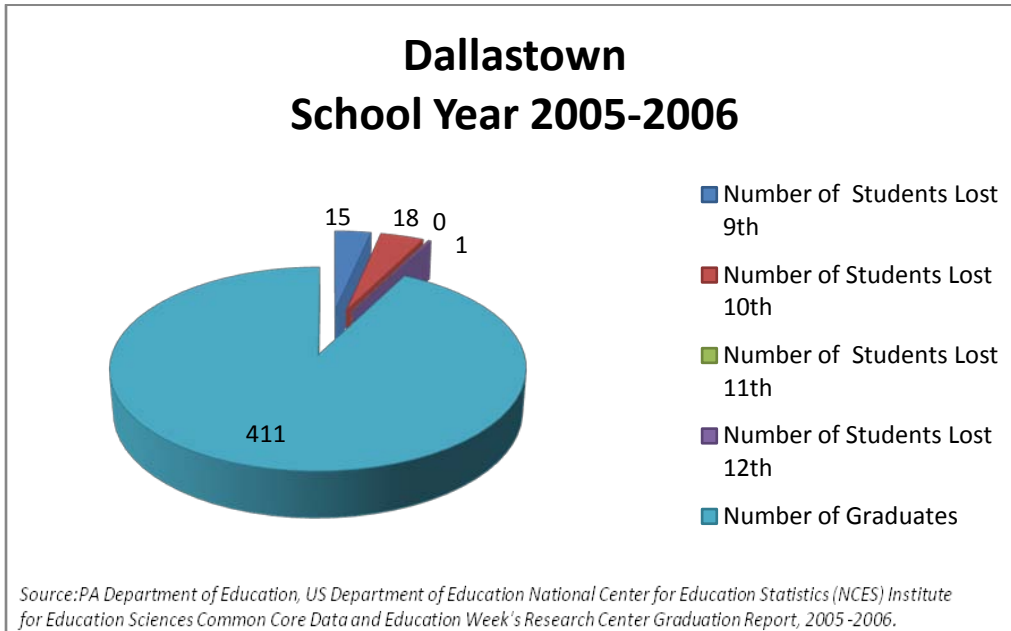
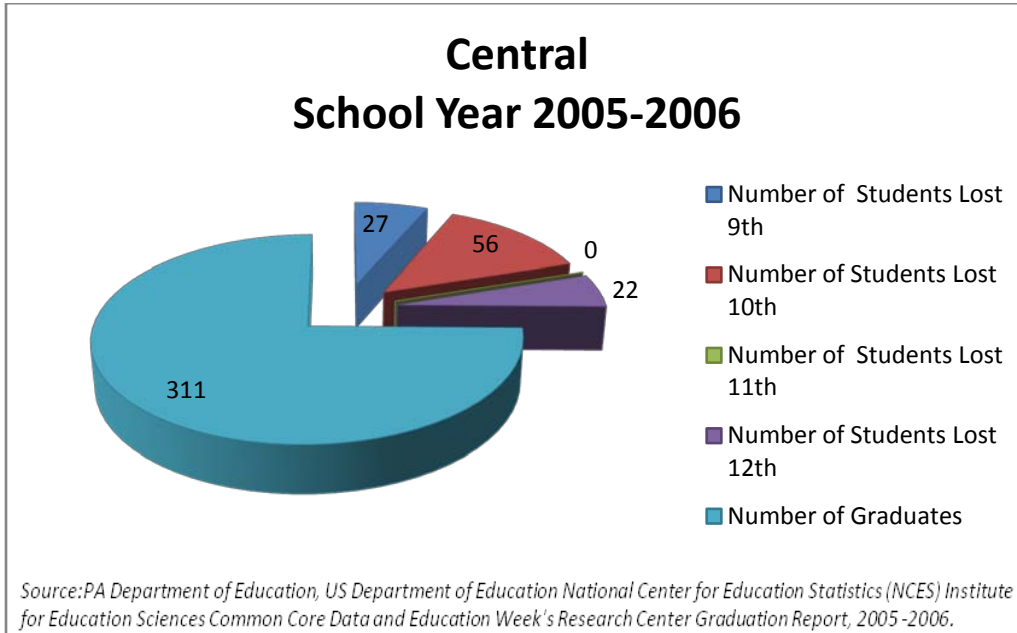
1. School District Maps
2. York County 2005-2006 CPI Graduation Rates
3. York County Dropouts 1998-2008

Appendix 1: York County School Districts

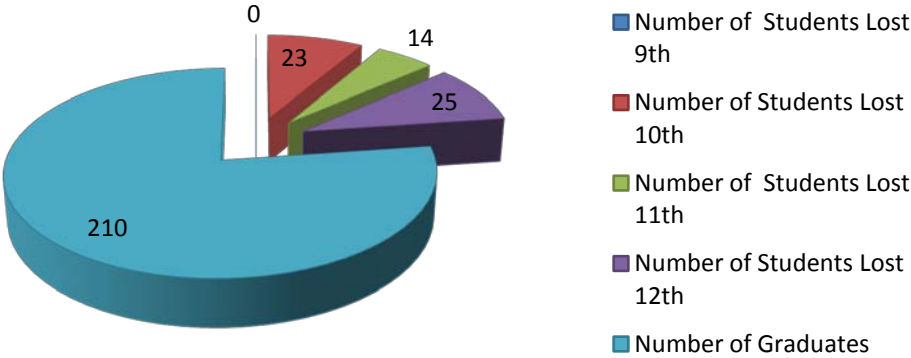
York County School Districts



Appendix 2: York County Graduation Rate 2005–2006

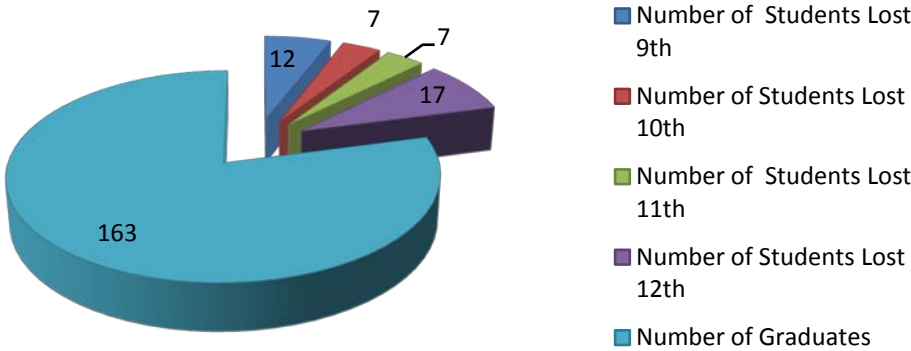


Dover School Year 2005-2006



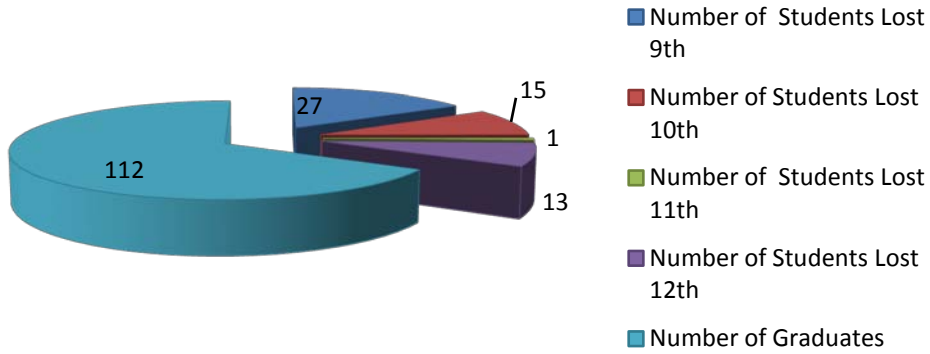
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Eastern School Year 2005-2006



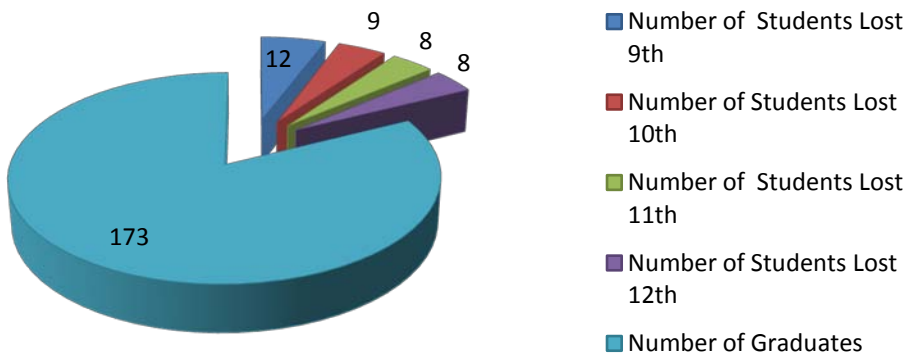
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Hanover School Year 2005-2006



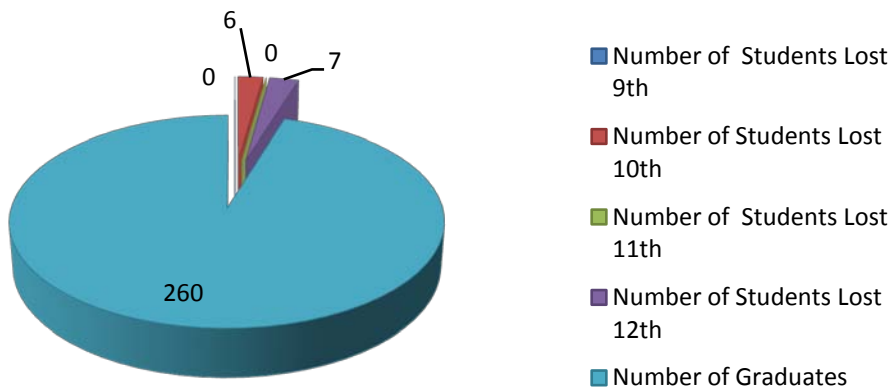
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Northeastern School Year 2005-2006



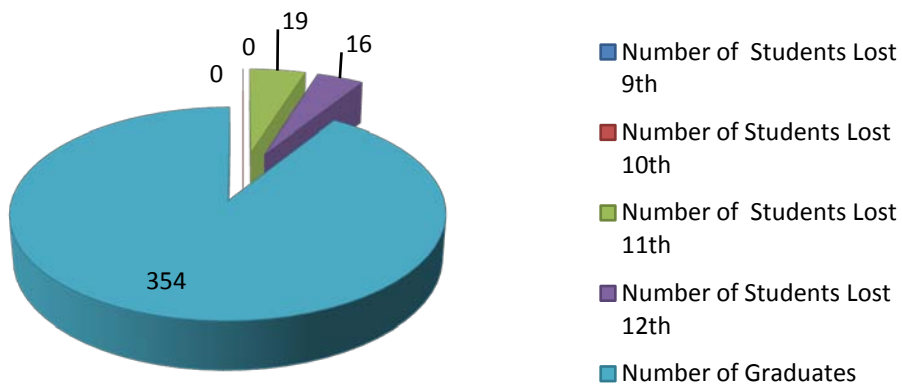
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Northern School Year 2005-2006



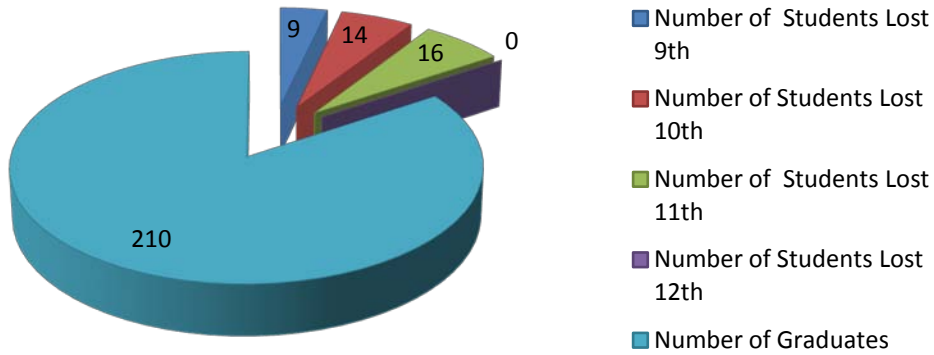
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Red Lion School Year 2005-2006



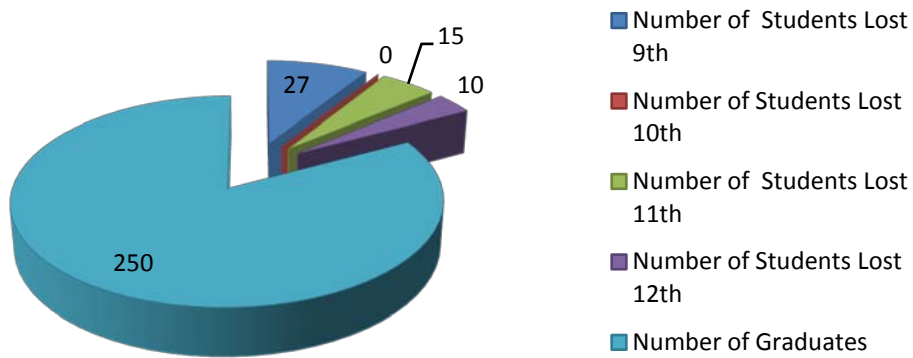
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

South Eastern School Year 2005-2006



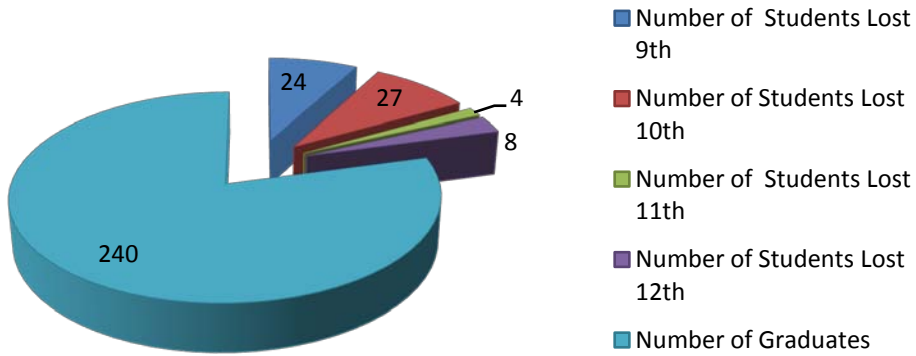
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

South Western School Year 2005-2006



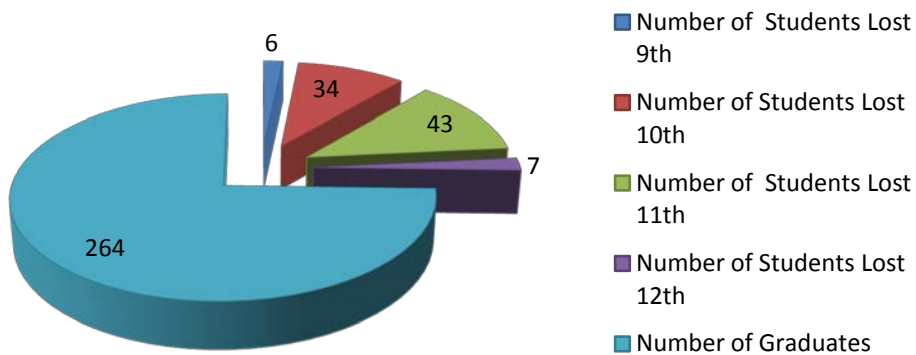
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Southern School Year 2005-2006



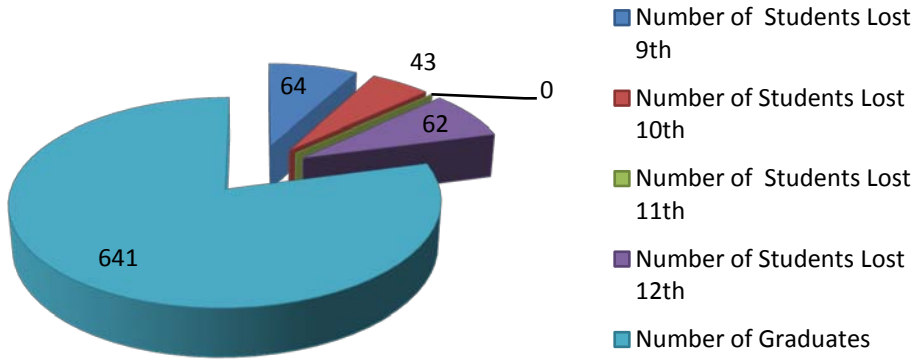
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Spring Grove School Year 2005-2006



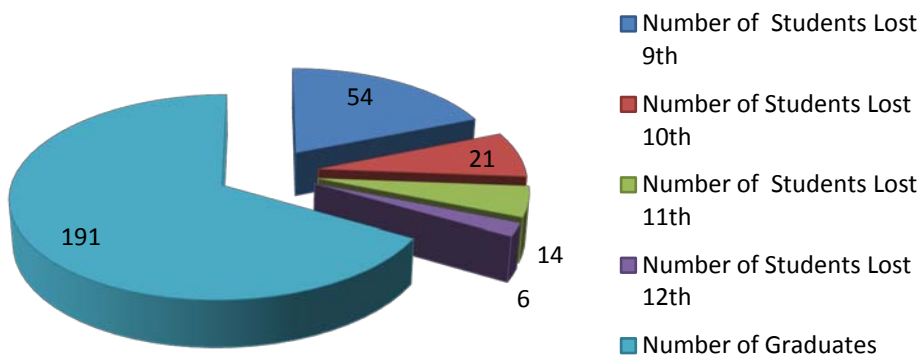
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

West Shore School Year 2005-2006



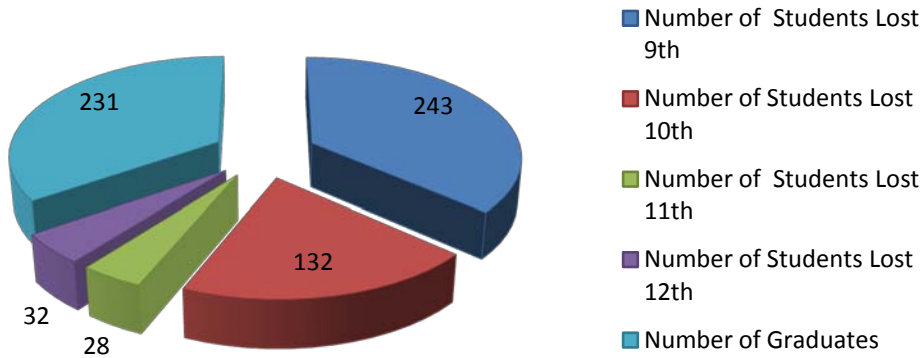
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

West York School Year 2005-2006



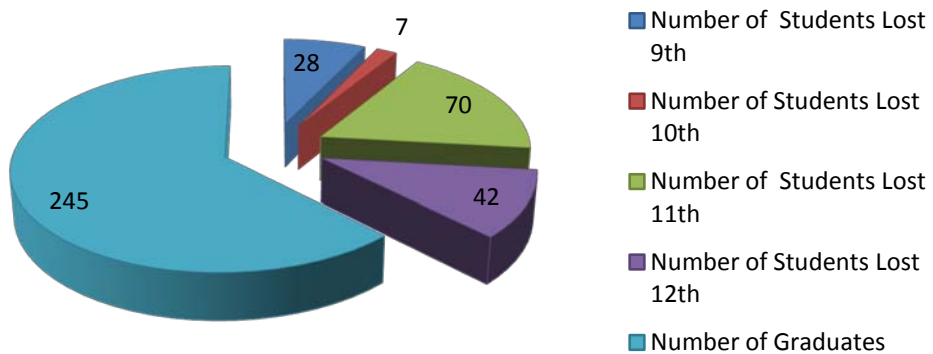
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

York City School Year 2005-2006



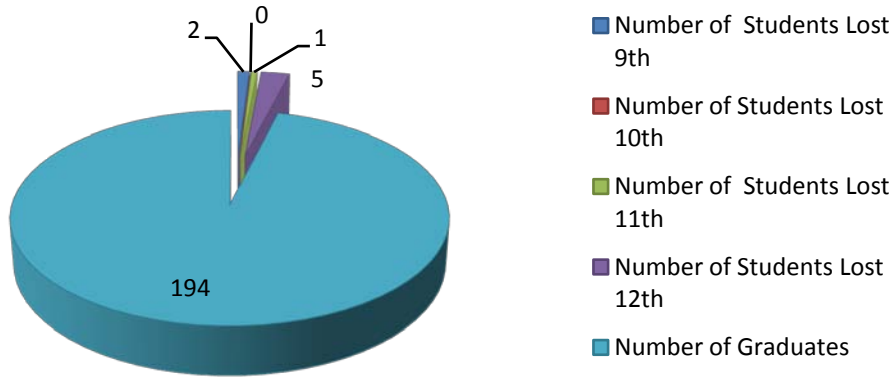
Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

York County School of Technology School Year 2005-2006



Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

York Suburban School Year 2005-2006



Source: PA Department of Education, US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute for Education Sciences Common Core Data and Education Week's Research Center Graduation Report, 2005-2006.

Appendix 3: High School Dropouts 1998–2008 by School District

1998-2008 Dropouts

Central	105
Crispus Attucks Youthbuild CS	387
Dallastown	225
Dover	282
Eastern	180
Hanover	213
Northeastern	214
Northern	219
Red Lion	382
South Eastern	162
South Western	308
Southern	234
Spring Grove	319
West Shore	642
West York	142
York City	1411
York County High School	669
York County School of Technology	289
York Suburban	46
YORK COUNTY TOTAL	6429

Endnotes:

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6. Alliance for Excellent Education. *From No Child Left Behind to Every Child a Graduate*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008, 15.
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8. Levin, H., Belfield, C., Muenning, P., and C. Rouse. *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*. New York, NY: Columbia University, 2007, 18.
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