

James M. Jeffords Center's
Vermont Legislative Research Service
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Increasing the Compulsory Age of

The Effectiveness of a Higher Compulsory Education Age

Statistical research has shown that increasing the compulsory age of attendance will increase an individual's probability to complete high school by roughly sixteen percent. In addition a study published in the Journal of Public Economics found a positive correlation between years of educational attainment and school leaving age, using data from the 1950-2000 censuses.⁷ These findings of benefits of higher age levels of compulsory education are supported by other research in the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Norway and include benefits such as lower crime rates and reductions in teen pregnancies. As well as increasing the compulsory age of attendance, many states have had various degrees of success in decreasing the rate at which students drop out by initiating a variety of programs in order to supplement an increased compulsory age of attendance. Below is an overview of some of these efforts.

State Experiences

Wisconsin

Wisconsin is one of the states that utilized additional programs to supplement their higher mandatory attendance age. In 2002, the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) began a program which allowed parents of students considered 'at risk' of dropping out to have a choice in what school they wanted their children to attend. This program also provided vouchers to these families, allowing the students to attend local private high schools. This program is known as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, and appears to have been a success for the school district. Participation in this program has been shown to increase the likelihood of graduation by 4-7% in addition to students scoring higher on reading evaluations than traditional public school students in Milwaukee.⁸

⁶ Jennie W. Wenger, "Does The Dropout Age Matter? How Mandatory Schooling Laws Impact High School Completion and School Choice," *Public Finance and Management*, Fall 2002, accessed May 3, 2012, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5334/is_4_2/ai_n28975681/pg_10/?tag=content:col1, p. 4.

⁷ Philip Oreopoulos "Do Dropouts Drop Out Too Soon? Wealth, Health and Happiness from Compulsory Schooling," *Journal of Public Economics* 91 February 13, 2007, accessed May 4, 2012, http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~oreo/research/compositions/do_dropouts_drop_out_too_soon.pdf

everywhere learning,' or extended learning opportunities.¹² This is a common theme among states that have raised the compulsory drop out age: that it is not enough when implemented alone. A strong system of programs, staff, and utilities is needed in order to support students in addition to raising the age.

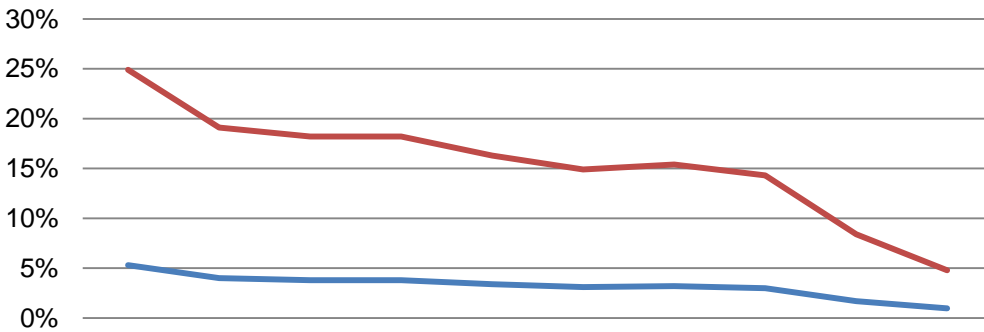


Figure 1: New Hampshire Dropout Rate: 2000 -2010. ¹³

Financial Effects

In 2010 Vermont spent 32.9% of its state budget on K-12 education.¹⁴ Research has shown that increasing the age of compulsory education can effectively lower the dropout rate if it is accompanied by supplementary programs. At first glance the upfront cost of programs to support increasing the legal age for dropping out can be staggering. A study done by the Maryland State Department of Education estimated that, had no students dropped out in the 2007-2008 school year, it would have cost the state an additional \$245 million to accommodate classrooms, supplies, and staff for these students.¹⁵ However this is an upfront cost, while the benefits of a high school diploma are an investment for the state,

¹² Lesli A Maxwell, "Obama Rekindles State Debates on Dropout Age: But experts warn it will take more than new laws to put a real dent in dropout rates," Education Week, February 7, 2012, accessed March 15, 2012, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/08/20compulsory_ep.h31.html.

¹³ New Hampshire Department of Education, "Dropouts and Completers," accessed April 26, 2012, <http://www.education.nh.gov/data/dropouts.htm>.

¹⁴ Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office, "2010 Fiscal Fact\$,," Joint Fiscal Committee, 2011, accessed December 13, 2011 <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/jfo/publications/2010%20Fiscal%20Facts.pdf>, p. 14.

¹⁵ Task Force to Study Raising the Compulsory Public School Attendance Age to 18, "Attending to Learn: The Implications of Raising the Compulsory Age for School Attendance," Maryland State Department of Education, December 1, 2007, accessed May 4 2012 <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/0700B064-C2B341FGA6CFD3DAE4969707/15419/FINALCOMPULSORYATTENDANCETASKFORCEREPORT.pdf>.

work-force training. The success of this program has prompted MetLife to expand its funding in order to extend the program to other large U.S. cities, including New York.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) an international economic research and discussion organisation, based in Paris, produced two reports; 'Learning for Jobs' and 'Jobs for Youth,' that examined American and foreign vocational training and apprenticeship programs. These two thorough studies which consisted of 33 countries including the US, involved country self-assessments, site visits by experts, and extensive quantitative data collection.²³ In conclusion, these studies deemed that individuals in countries with stronger vocational training programs find it easier to transition into the workforce than Americans. "In Germany, for example, over 80 percent of young adults found jobs within six months of completing their education in 2007, versus just 48 percent in the U.S. Similarly, countries with strong apprenticeship systems had fewer "poorly integrated new entrants"—those who are still struggling to settle into a career path five years after leaving school—than the U.S."²⁴

Although other countries might have more extensive apprenticeship programs and vocational training than the US, there are still some success stories that further demonstrate the potential of such programs. Project Lead the Way (PLTW), an engineering program launched in New York high schools in 1997, has now expanded to 305 schools in all 50 states. After completion of the program, some 80 percent of those who complete the program say they will study engineering, technology or computer science in college, and their retention rate in these courses is higher than that of students who did not complete PLTW.²⁵

A longitudinal MDRC study found that this kind of program improved high school grades of at-risk students. The Wisconsin Youth Apprenticeship Program, for example, is the largest apprenticeship program for youth offered nationally. This program has had a high level of success, with over 75% of graduates enrolled in college, over 60% (significantly larger than the national average) completing their degrees, and 85% of graduates getting jobs out of college. Additionally, 98% of employers involved in this program would recommend it to other employers.²⁶ Other employee based programs such as Year Up have also been very successful, with over 100 employers contributing upwards of \$20,000 for each intern, each of which plans on taking on more interns and recommending the program to more

²¹ Susan Brenna, "Successful High School Apprenticeship Program Goes National," The School Corporation, June 20, 2008, accessed April 3, 2012, <http://www.tascorp.org/content/blog/detail/2122>.

²² BBC News: World Edition, "OECD: What is it and what does it Do?" British Broadcasting Channel, February 12, 2003, accessed April, 5, 2012, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/92719.stm>.

²³ Ronald Fergusson, Robert B. Schwartz, and William C. Symonds, "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," pp.1920.

²⁴ Ronald Fergusson, Robert B. Schwartz, William C. Symonds, "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," pp. 1921.

²⁵ Ronald Fergusson, Robert B. Schwartz, and William C. Symonds, "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," p. 27.

²⁶ Ronald Fergusson, Robert B. Schwartz, and William C. Symonds, "Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century," p. 32.

employers.²⁷