

Research in Brief:

Dropout prevention and intervention programs

There are several negative consequences associated with leaving school prematurely, including low wages, unemployment, incarceration and poverty. In Canada, 9% of 20-24 year olds have not completed high school and are not attending school. Males are more likely to drop out of school than females, however, pregnancy is a significant risk factor for young women.

There are many types of programs aimed at reducing dropout rates. Such programs most often take place in schools, but they may also be community-based. Teen parents are a common target population for specialized dropout prevention programs.

Are dropout prevention programs effective?

A recent systematic review sought to determine what kinds of dropout prevention programs are most effective for increasing school completion. The authors categorized programs into the following types:

- School or class restructuring
- Vocational training
- Supplemental and academic services
- Community service
- Mentoring/counseling
- Alternative schools
- Attendance monitoring/contingencies
- College-oriented programming
- Multi-service
- Skills training
- Case management

The authors found that both general programs and specialized programs for teen parents were effective in reducing dropout rates. These positive effects were found to be similar across different types of programs.

Why does this matter?

- ⇒ Dropping out of school is associated with reduced wages, unemployment, incarceration, and poverty
- ⇒ Many different types of programs aimed at reducing dropout rates are similarly effective
- ⇒ Factors to consider in the selection of a dropout prevention program include cost-effectiveness and fit with local needs



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What is a systematic review?

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

What did they do?

The researchers conducted a search of several major bibliographic databases, in addition to searching the reference lists of relevant papers. The following criteria qualified a study for inclusion in the review:

- Programs were school-based, school-affiliated or community-based
- Participants were elementary or secondary school students
- Study designs were experimental or quasi-experimental
- Outcomes were measured by rates of school dropout, secondary school completion, truancy or enrollment
- Studies were published between 1985 and 2010

A total of 167 studies were included in the review. 152 of the studies were of programs geared toward general or at-risk populations, and 15 were of programs specifically geared toward teen parents.

What did they learn?

The average length of the dropout prevention programs included in the review was 2 years. Most programs involved daily contact with students.

The authors found that both general dropout programs and those specialized for teen parents were effective in reducing dropout rates. Rates of improvement were similar across different types of programs – no particular type of program was found to be more effective than others. However, attendance monitoring programs were less effective than other program types. Community-based programs were also found to be less effective than school-based and mixed-setting programs.

Programs are most likely to be effective if they are well-implemented, cost-effective and fit well with local needs.



This brief summary was prepared from:

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Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.