

Analysis: 1 in 10 schools ‘Dropout Factories’

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WASHINGTON — It’s a nickname no principal could be proud of: "Dropout Factory," a high school where no more than 60 percent of the students who start as freshmen make it to their senior year. That dubious distinction applies to more than one in 10 high schools across America. "If you're born in a neighborhood or town where the only high school is one where graduation is not the norm, how is this living in the land of equal opportunity?" asks Bob Balfanz, the researcher at Johns Hopkins University who defines such a school as a "dropout factory."

There are about 1,700 regular or vocational high schools nationwide that fit that description, according to an analysis of Education Department data conducted by Johns Hopkins for The Associated Press. That's 12 percent of all such schools, no more than a decade ago but no less, either. While some of the missing students transferred, most dropped out, Balfanz says. The data tracked senior classes for three years in a row — 2004, 2005 and 2006 — to make sure local events like plant closures weren't to blame for the low retention rates.

The highest concentration of dropout factories is in large cities or high-poverty rural areas in the South and Southwest. Most have high proportions of minority students. These schools are tougher to turn around, because their students face challenges well beyond the academic ones — the need to work as well as go to school, for example, or a need for social services. Utah, which has low poverty rates and fewer minorities than most states, is the only state without a dropout factory. Florida and South Carolina have the highest percentages. About half of high schools in those states classify as dropout factories.

Federal lawmakers haven't focused much attention on the problem. The No Child Left Behind education law, for example, pays much more attention to educating younger students. But that appears to be changing. The current law imposes serious consequences on schools that report low scores on math and reading tests, such as having to replace teachers or principals, but it lacks the same kind of teeth when it comes to graduation rates. Nationally, about 70 percent of U.S. students graduate on time with a regular diploma. For Hispanic and black students, the proportion drops to about half.

The current law requires testing in reading and math once in high school, and those tests take on added importance because of serious consequences for a school that fails. Critics say that creates a perverse incentive for schools to encourage kids to drop out before they bring down a school's scores. "The vast majority of educators do not want to push out kids, but the pressures to raise test scores above all else are intense," said Bethany Little, vice president for policy at the Alliance for Excellent Education, an advocacy group focused on high schools. "To know if a high school is doing its job, we need to consider test scores and graduation rates equally." Little said some students pushed out of high schools are encouraged to enroll in programs that prepare them to take the GED exam. People who pass that test get certificates indicating they have high-school level academic skills. But the research shows getting a GED doesn't lead to the kind of job or college success associated with a regular diploma.

Teachers and administrators at Baltimore Talent Development High School, where 90 percent of kids are on track toward graduating on time, are working hard to make sure students don't have an experience like Miller's. The school, which sits in the middle of a high-crime, impoverished neighborhood two miles west of downtown Baltimore, was founded by Balfanz and others four years ago as a laboratory for getting kids out on time with a diploma and ready for college.

1. In paragraph form, identify and interpret the requirements which constitute a 'Dropout Factory.'
2. According to an analysis of Education Department data conducted by Johns Hopkins for The Associated Press, approximately how many regular or vocational high schools nationwide qualify for the "dubious distinction" in question one? How do these figures compare to information obtained a decade prior? Explain.
3. Specifically, where is the highest concentration (geographic region, demographics, etc.) of dropout factories in the United States? What justification was provided as to why this epidemic is so prevalent? Explain.
4. How has the *No Child Left Behind* education law failed to combat dropout rates? Explain.
5. In 1999, fall enrollment in public secondary high schools was slightly over 13,369,000 students (Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2001, Table 37). Assuming these figures have risen by 7.241% for the 2007-08 academic school year, what would the difference in the two numbers equate to?
6. Given the projected 2007-08 figure determined in question five, how many U.S. students graduate on time with a regular diploma? Hispanic and black students?
7. Over the past two decades, percentages of students who have completed high school have risen from 69% in 1980 to 84% in 2000 (Source: Bureau of the Census, Table A-2). Assuming these figures continued to progress at a constant rate of change, design a table accompanied with a coordinate graph conveying data for the following years a) 2010, 2020, 2030, and 2040. Create a second table and graph by converting the original figures by the equation $2x$, $2y$. Are they similar figures? What is the scale factor? Explain.
8. Upon completion of this assignment, how far have we progressed through the 2007-08 series of The Daughtry Times? Express your answer as a fraction, decimal, and percentage.
9. As obtained from the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least eight ways using the "Traditional Writing Guidelines and Checklist for Success" simplifies the paragraph writing process. Be specific.
10. As obtained from the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least six ways using the "Preliminary Reading Guidelines and Checklist for Success" simplifies understanding of the material. Be specific.
11. In complete sentences, using contextual clues only, explain the meaning of the words: *dubious* and *perverse*. Additionally, use each defined word in a sentence to demonstrate further comprehension.
12. In paragraph form, explain at least five legitimate and educational purposes behind The Daughtry Times.