



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Study Explores Dropping Out Through Student Perspectives

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON (June 27, 2012) - Student voice adds new dimensions to our understanding of the school dropout issue, according to a study released by the [Washington Student Oral Histories Project](http://www.wsohp.org) www.wsohp.org, a research partnership affiliated with the University of Washington Bothell Education Program.

The [authors](#) of [Pathways to Dropping Out](#) investigated this critical topic by gathering in-depth oral histories from youth, ages 16-22, who had dropped out and were struggling to get back on track. The study is unique in capturing narrative histories of each participant's school life as it unfolded over time--starting with the earliest memories of kindergarten through dropping out and, in some cases, returning to school. Through systematic analysis of these student narratives, the study identified common patterns of disengagement from school as reflected in the participants' reported behaviors and attitudes. For example, one salient pattern is that almost all interviewed youth enjoyed their elementary school experience but started to dislike and disengage from school upon entering middle or junior high school. Thus, a large portion of the study participants could be characterized as "slow faders." Beginning as early as 6th grade, they skipped significant chunks of school over many years, often maintaining a half-hearted participation in their classes until 11th or 12th grade, when they finally dropped out. Participants frequently characterized school and parental interventions in response to their ongoing truancy as limited and ineffective.

What caused the participants to lose interest in and stop attending school? According to the study's principal investigator, [Dr. Antony Smith](#), the majority of study participants appeared to have entered middle school with some kind of academic vulnerability, such as weak reading or math skills, which led to ongoing frustration, withdrawal of effort, and course failure. In addition, a majority struggled with serious personal or family issues that further interfered with their ability to be successful in school. "Typically, there was no one factor alone that initiated serious disengagement from school. Rather, a perfect storm of family, individual, and school factors tended to converge and overwhelm students, placing them on a pathway to dropping out."

Study Implications

Dr. Smith and his co-authors, Deborah Feldman and Dr. Barbara Waxman, argue that their findings have important implications for school policy and instructional practice under the [Common Core State Standards \(CCSS\)](#), which 45 states to date have adopted. "To be truly successful," Dr. Waxman commented, "implementation of the Standards must be coupled with a highly intentional focus on creating school and classroom settings that welcome, support and engage students, particularly struggling students. Demanding rigor without attending to engagement may lead to even more students following a pathway to dropping out."



Elements of the Report

The study's initial report, which is presented in a four-part series, covers the following major topics:

- **Part One: Common Patterns** - Examines the process of dropping out and the behavioral patterns it encompasses; provides background on the dropout problem and describes the study's conceptual framework and research methods.
- **Part Two: Initiating Points** - Outlines in greater detail study findings on how students start down a pathway toward dropping out and describes key "initiating points."
- **Part Three: Tipping Points** - Summarizes study findings on "tipping points" associated with the final stage of the dropping out process.
- **Part Four: Implications of Study Findings** – Discusses practical implications of study findings for schools and communities interested in addressing the dropout issue.

Partners and Funders

The *Washington Student Oral Histories Project* is a collaborative partnership between the [Education Program](#) at the University of Washington Bothell and [Paragon Education Network](#), a Seattle-based non-profit education change organization. It received funding from the [Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice](#) and the [Washington Educational Research Association](#) to support its research on dropping out. The Project is currently working on a second study based on an expanded set of interviews with Western Washington youth who have dropped out.

Report Availability

The report can be downloaded from the project web site's [Reports Page](#) (direct link: <http://www.wsohp.org/project-reports--updates.html>).

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