



At-Risk Indicators Research: **Multiple Dropout Risk Factors**

Overview

The National Dropout Prevention conducted a comprehensive analysis of 44 studies that examined major trends in dropout research. Four factors were found to significantly impact dropout at all three school levels (elementary, middle and high school): low achievement/grades, grade retention/over-age for grade, poor attendance and low socioeconomic status.



Resources

Article: [Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs](#) from National Dropout Prevention Center



Key Considerations

- Dropping out of school is related to a variety of factors that can be classified in four areas or domains: individual, family, school and community factors.
- Dropouts are not a homogeneous group. Many subgroups of students can be identified based on when risk factors emerge, the combinations of risk factors experienced and how the factors influence them (pg. 2).
- Students who drop out often cite factors across multiple domains, and there are complex interactions among risk factors.
- Dropping out of school is often the result of a long process of disengagement that may begin before a child enters school.
- Dropping out is often described as a process, not an event, with factors building and compounding over time.
- Twenty-five significant risk factors were identified across eight factor categories (*listed on the next page*):
 - Four factors were found in at least two data sources to significantly impact dropout at all three school levels.
 - Three of these four factors are individual ones and include low achievement/grades, grade retention/over-age for grade and poor attendance.
 - The fourth factor found to be significant across all school levels was the family factor of low socioeconomic status.

Recommended Indicator: Combination of Multiple Risk Factors

There is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out. Accuracy increases when combinations of multiple risk factors are considered.

Individual Domain

- **Individual Background Characteristics**
 - Learning disability
 - Emotional disturbance
- **Early Adult Responsibilities**
 - High number of work hours
 - Parenthood
- **Social Attitudes, Values and Behavior**
 - High-risk peer group
 - High-risk social behavior
 - Highly socially active outside of school
- **School Performance**
 - Grades/Low achievement
 - Grade retention/Over-age for grade
- **School Engagement**
 - Poor attendance
 - Low educational expectations
 - Lack of effort
 - Low commitment to school
 - No extracurricular participation
- **School Behavior**
 - Misbehavior
 - Early aggression

Family Domain

- **Family Background Characteristics**
 - Low socioeconomic status
 - High family mobility
 - Low education level of parents
 - Large number of siblings
 - Not living with both natural parents
 - Family disruption
- **Family Engagement/Commitment to Education**
 - Low educational expectations
 - Sibling has dropped out
 - Low contact with school
 - Lack of conversations about school



Putting it to Practice

There is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out. The accuracy of dropout predictions increases when combinations of multiple risk factors are considered. When designing a risk profile system, low achievement/grades, grade retention/over-age for grade, poor attendance and low socioeconomic status are strong predictors of high school graduation.



Additional Tool

From the [Executive Summary](#) of [Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs](#)

Significant Risk Factors by School Level

Key

- ✓ Indicates that the risk factor was found to be significantly related to dropout at this school level in one study
- ✓* Indicates that the risk factors was found to be significantly related to dropout at this school level in two or more studies

Risk Category and Risk Factor	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Individual Background Characteristics			
Learning disability or emotional disturbance		✓	✓
Early Adult Responsibilities			
High number of work hours		✓	✓*
Parenthood			✓*
Social Attitudes, Values and Behavior			
High-risk peer group		✓*	✓
High-risk social behavior		✓*	✓
Highly socially active outside of school			✓
School Performance			
Grades/Low achievement	✓*	✓*	✓*
Grade retention/Over-age for grade	✓*	✓*	✓*
School Engagement			
Poor attendance	✓*	✓*	✓*
Low educational expectations		✓*	✓*
Lack of effort		✓	✓
Low commitment to school		✓	✓*
No extracurricular participation		✓	✓*
Social Behavior			
Misbehavior	✓	✓	✓*
Early aggression	✓	✓	
Family Background Characteristics			
Low socioeconomic status	✓*	✓*	✓*
High family mobility		✓*	
Low education level of parents	✓	✓	✓*
Large number of siblings	✓		✓
Not living with both natural parents	✓	✓	✓*
Family disruption	✓		
Family Engagement/Commitment to Education			
Low educational expectations		✓*	
Sibling has dropped out		✓	✓
Low contact with school		✓*	
Lack of conversations about school		✓*	✓