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ISSUES BRIEF

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The Five Promises from America's Promise Alliance The Link to School Completion and Pregnancy Prevention

The decision to drop out of school bears with it myriad negative consequences, both for the individual student and the nation as a whole. Regardless of that fact, over 1.2 million students drop out of school each year (Amos). In the post-industrial, technological age, these students will encounter much difficulty competing in a job market that has largely replaced unskilled labor with machines, or shipped these positions overseas. On average, a high school dropout can expect to earn \$9,200 less per year than a high school graduate, and approximately \$1 million less over a lifetime than a college graduate. Along with that, in 2004, high school dropouts were over three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates, and twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty each year (Bridgeland). This influences the economic vitality of our nation overall, as a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity over their lifetime, a number that translates to more than \$3 trillion in losses over the next ten years (Amos).

The effects of this decision go beyond simple economics. There is a direct correlation between educational attainment and the health of an individual. Those with less education are much more likely to die from cardiovascular disease, cancer, infection, lung disease, and diabetes. A high school graduate will live an average of six to nine years longer than a dropout (Wong). Those with lower educational attainment are less likely to have insurance coverage as well. Only 67 percent of employees who are high school dropouts have employer-provided health care, compared to 77 percent of employees who are high school graduates, and 95 percent who are college graduates (Amos).

High school dropouts are also more likely to be arrested or incarcerated in their lifetime. According to the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, high school dropouts are three and a half times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates (Coalition for Juvenile Justice). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2003 that 75 percent of state prison inmates, 60 percent of federal inmates, and 70 percent of jail inmates had failed to complete high school (Harlow).

A related and equally troubling issue among the nation's youth is the prevalence of teen pregnancies. In the United States, almost 1 million teenage girls become pregnant each year. This is one of the highest adolescent pregnancy rates among industrialized nations, as four out of every ten pregnancies are among women below age 20 (Domenico). This

is most often a serious impediment to the future of a young woman. It is common for female students to drop out of high school as a result of pregnancy. Seven out of ten adolescent females who become young mothers do not graduate from high school, and their children are less likely to graduate from high school, as well (Domenico).

America's Promise Alliance and The Five Promises

Research on the subject has demonstrated that a child is much more likely to succeed when they receive a mass of developmental resources in their life. This is true regardless of racial, ethnic, or economic demographics, and the presence of these resources can almost completely mitigate the gaps created by these divides (America's Promise Alliance). In an attempt to combat the issues that plague our young population, America's Promise Alliance has outlined five developmental resources, or Five Promises, that are integral to the success of youth in school and society in general. Specifically, these are:

- ▶ Caring Adults
- ▶ Safe Places
- ▶ A Healthy Start
- ▶ An Effective Education
- ▶ Opportunities To Help Others

This issue brief will examine the necessity and availability of these resources, and demonstrate that where these resources are present, there is a direct correlation to school completion, dropout prevention, and pregnancy prevention among youth.

CARING ADULTS Promise 1

In a report titled "The Silent Epidemic," researchers attempted to gain a better understanding of the reasons students drop out by getting the perspectives of actual dropouts. When asked about the level of parent awareness of their grades and attendance, 51 percent of these students said their parents were "Just somewhat aware," and 22 percent said their parents were "Not at all aware" (Bridgeland). These numbers remain practically unchanged when asked if their parents were aware that they were on the verge of dropping out of school. This

touches upon the first and most essential of the five promises, caring adults.

The presence of caring adults in a child's life has the greatest effect on the subsequent success of that child, including the level to which they experience the other four promises. Teenagers with a high parent influence are more likely than those without to attend school and achieve up to their abilities (America's Promise Alliance, "Issue Brief: Parenting"). While parents are the most important adult influence, young people also need caring adults throughout their lives, including in school, in their communities, among extended family and neighbors. These are people who children can turn to for support and guidance, who can provide mentoring in a formal and informal manner (America's Promise Alliance).

It is clear that children desire this support as well. The "Voices Study," conducted by Just Kid Inc. and Harris Interactive, offers detailed data on the perspectives of young people in terms of their needs and well-being. They found that more than half of the children in the study sought advice from adults on issues such as school, relationships, jobs, and college. More than 40 percent of children between ages 8 and 21 who participated in the study said they wanted more adults in their lives to whom they could turn for help (Paris).

The consequences of these children not receiving this support is clear, as the "Silent Epidemic" report, (Bridgeland) demonstrates that the majority of dropouts did not receive enough attention from their parents in terms of basic school attendance or performance. Along with that, 33 percent of the high school dropouts interviewed said there was not at least one teacher or staff member who personally cared about their success. In addition, 43 percent said there was not at least one teacher or staff member to whom they could talk about their school problems, and 57 percent said there was not at least one teacher or staff member to whom they could talk about their personal problems (Bridgeland). The high proportion of dropouts who did not have enough adult support demonstrates the dangers of leaving students without caring adults in multiple aspects of their lives.

The relationship between dropouts and a lack of caring adults becomes particularly troubling based on the findings of the "National Promises Study," a report that details the degree to which youth receive the five promises in their lives. According to this study, 33 percent of teens and 20 percent of younger children do not have quality relationships with their parents, and more than 55 percent of adolescents and 40 percent of younger children do not have caring adults in all areas of their lives. Along with that, only 8 percent of young people ages 6 to 17 have access to a formal mentor (Scales).

The US Department of Education's "What Works Clearinghouse" (WWC) provides scientific evidence on those programs that have proven to be effective in education. Some of the programs that have been successful in terms of dropout prevention are a direct result of programs aimed at increasing youth-adult relationships, and encouraging parent engagement in their child's schooling. The program "Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success" attempts to build bridges between homes and schools. The program features counselors who provide support to students as well as to parents. This includes student monitoring and reports to parents on attendance and truancy on an as-needed daily basis. The counselors also attempt to express a personal interest in students through methods such as positive reinforcement and group

bonding activities. Counselors provide direct instruction to parents, along with modeling on how to participate in their child's schooling and manage adolescent behavior. This program has been effective in preventing students from dropping out according to the criteria of the WWC (Kennelly). This is clear evidence that providing students with enough caring adults in their lives can help prevent dropping out.

In New York State, discussion at the Governors Summit on Student Engagement and Dropout Prevention echoed the importance of "more than one caring adult in the lives of all youth" and the necessity to "build relationships and foster youth-adult connections" (Jalloh and Palmer). The "Achieving Graduation" report identifies five New York high schools with relatively low student dropout rates through a process of comparison with other high schools. These schools were chosen to represent a wide range of schools in the state with similar demographics and community characteristics, but lower graduation rates (RMC Research Corporation). Examples from the study demonstrate how providing students with the Promise of caring adults at home, in school, and in the community is an effective resource for dropout prevention.

One benchmark school, Elmont Memorial High School in Elmont, New York represents a larger school, with a junior high student population of 653 and a high school population of 1,272. The school is also ethnically diverse, with a 77 percent African American, 13 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, and 2 percent White student population (RMC Research Corporation). Many of their policies are specifically aimed at increasing the role of adults in the lives of students. As the report indicates, there is a high degree of student support, and students know "that they will be relentlessly chased by caring personnel if they are not performing" (RMC Research Corporation). Assistant principals are responsible for discipline at two grade levels, and in the high school, these administrators move up with their students each year to develop and maintain positive relationships with the students. If students require academic intervention, the school includes their parents in the development of an intervention plan. Ten guidance counselors conduct annual reviews with students and their parents during a yearly conference, which can include instruction for parents on topics such as "how to visit a college." If ninth-grade students are determined to be "at-risk" in terms of dropout potential, they are paired with a volunteer teacher to oversee their academic progress. Many students at the school reported teachers treating them like they were their own kids, and one student commented that "the teachers here give us that extra push that we need; they will find a way to pick us up whether it be extra help or coming in early." Parental involvement is heavily encouraged, and the school even sponsors a number of clubs specifically for parents (RMC Research Corporation).

The result of policies such as these speaks for itself. Most of these programs were implemented in the early 1990's. In 2002, Elmont had a graduation rate of 99 percent. In 2003 the graduation rate was 98 percent. In 2004, they graduated 100 percent of their students. In 2002 and 2003, the average school completion rate for New York State was 60 percent (Laird). Regularly, 97 percent of Elmont Memorial students go on to pursue higher education (RMC Research Corporation). As the study demonstrates, the strong promotion of youth-adult relationships has contributed to a near elimination of dropouts at Elmont.

The existence of caring adults in the life of adolescents has

a similar preventive effect on pregnancies among youth. The most important adult influence is that of parents. When teens were polled about who influences their decisions about sex most, 45 percent said parents, a larger percentage than those who said peers (Albert). Factors such as parental rejection or a lack of affection or love at home has been shown to lead adolescents to seek relationships outside the family in order to achieve a sense of comfort or to boost self-esteem. Strong familial relationships, on the other hand, have been shown to promote less risky adolescent sexual behavior (Domenico). According to the “Emerging Answers 2007” report, authored by Douglas Kirby, teens who experience parental support and feel a sense of being connected to parents are less likely to have sex at an early age, to have sex less frequently, to have fewer sexual partners, and to use contraception more consistently. Teens are also less likely to have sex at an early age, to have sex less frequently, and to use contraception if they are regularly receiving parental supervision (Kirby, “Emerging Answers 2007”).

In the “Plain Talk Initiative,” a field study of methods for distributing sexual health information to adolescents, community residents in multiple cities were recruited and mobilized to increase youth-adult dialogue regarding sexuality. Participants attended workshops with the intention of increasing adult awareness of sexual activity among youth, providing accurate information regarding sexual health, and coaching adults on how to speak with youth regarding sexual behavior. The study found that reinforcing kinship ties between adults and youth within the community could help combat teen pregnancy, as well (Walker).

SAFE PLACES

Promise 2

For effective youth development, it is important that children are safe at home, at school, and in their neighborhood (America’s Promise Alliance). In the Board on Children, Youth, and Families report, “Community Programs to Promote Youth Development,” the psychological effects of violence on youth are discussed. For children, the “experience of violence and harassment in school (being picked on, hit, or talked about unkindly) are related to skipping school, more negative attitudes toward school, lower achievement levels, and fewer friendships” (Eccles). The effects of neglecting this promise are demonstrated by high school dropouts themselves. Among individuals who had dropped out of school, 70 percent were in favor of increasing supervision in school, and 62 percent felt that it was necessary to have more classroom discipline. This is because 57 percent of those students who had dropped out said their high school did not do enough to help them feel safe from violence (Bridgeland). Many of the individuals who participated in a focus group commented that “they could not do homework or pay attention in class because of the many disruptions, including the fear of violence” (Bridgeland).

Failing to ensure that students feel safe in their environment is a factor that can contribute to the decision to drop out in many aspects. In a community, a high prevalence of violence alters the social norms of that community, and gang formation or membership can be a result of consistent violent activity in a neighborhood, which leads to cyclical retributive violence (Eccles). The result of this experience is often violent or generally disruptive behavior on the part of the student that

permeates their school environment. In the “Voices Study”, 40 percent of respondents said they would like to see teachers and administrators discipline students who misbehave (Paris). This makes sense, as parents of 6 to 11 year olds interviewed in the National Promises Study reported that bullying in school was so common that less than half of their children felt safe in their school environment (Scales). The experience of violence outside of school can obviously have detrimental effects on classroom function, but it also has a clear negative impact on the achievement of the child who is subjected to it. A study conducted in Philadelphia demonstrated that a majority of students who had substantiated claims of abuse or neglect at home eventually dropped out of school (Kennelly).

Behavior problems, such as violent activity, disrupt classroom function overall, and are a red flag for a student who is experiencing violence and may be a potential dropout (Kennelly). Early warning data systems can be an effective preventive tool in this regard. One of the example schools in the New York benchmark study, Albion High School in Albion, New York, has developed just such a system. One of their indicators for at-risk students is level of engagement, which is related to classroom behavior. Those students who are determined to be at-risk participate in a specialized program with reduced class size and instructional approaches based on learning style. The team that runs the program consists of a facilitator, social worker, guidance counselors, and teachers. The school even has a full-time Department of Social Services worker as a link to community agencies for students who need additional services (RMC Research Corporation). This can be an effective tool in assisting those students who experience violence in their community. Additionally, guidance counselors make home visits, accompanied by teachers and administrators if helpful for keeping a student in school. Albion had a graduation rate of 93 percent in 2002, and 97 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

Family income is unfortunately the most important determinant as to whether a student will experience the promise of safety. Children from low-income families have insufficient access to safe streets and safe schools, according to the “Every Child, Every Promise” report. Only 52 percent of low-income students report living in safe neighborhoods, compared to 86 percent of high-income students (America’s Promise Alliance, “Issue Brief: Income”). Sleepy Hollow High School in Sleepy Hollow, New York, is very diverse in terms of income distribution, and the school makes a concerted effort to deal with this issue. The guidance staff includes a social worker who makes referrals to service agencies in the community. The school has an early warning data collection system in place, with one of the criteria being discipline issues, which again can be an indicator of a student experiencing violence in their lives. Sleepy Hollow regularly communicates with parents and addresses the idea that teenagers need rules and that it is the job of parental figures in the school and community to establish and maintain appropriate behavioral boundaries (RMC Research Corporation).

Equally important within this promise is the need for adolescents to have an appropriate balance of structured, supervised activities and unstructured, unscheduled time. According to the “National Promises Study,” only four in ten young people participate in high-quality activities that teach them necessary skills, how to form lasting relationships with others, and how to make big decisions. Also, less than half of

the parents of 6-17 year olds surveyed say that affordable, high-quality after-school activities are available in their communities (Scales). One study concluded that “the amount of time adolescents spend with peers in unstructured activities, like driving around in cars, predicts increases in involvement in problem behaviors” (Eccles). There is an obvious need for constructive use of time, but again this promise is related to family income. Sleepy Hollow High School combats this problem, as well, by offering an extensive extracurricular physical education program. Some of the programs they offer include dance, mountain biking, weight training, violence prevention for women, and lifeguarding. They stress the fact that winning is not the first goal of the sports program, but rather inclusion. Mount Morris High School in Mount Morris, New York, similarly has 28 sports teams, with the goal of every student participating in at least one sport. The administrators “believe that sports and other extracurricular activities help keep many students in school.” They also have popular music and drama programs, and provide opportunities for students to travel for cultural and academic learning. Mount Morris had a graduation rate of 95 percent in 2002 and 94 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

Safety is also important in preventing adolescent pregnancy. Research has shown that “childhood sexual abuse appears again and again as a causal factor in numerous adult psychological disorders” (Eccles). Sexual abuse often leads young females to initiate sex at an earlier age and have more partners (Domenico). Others have speculated that some teen pregnancies resulted from unresolved feelings and behaviors associated with earlier sexual abuse (Saewyc). In one study, approximately 40 percent of girls who first had intercourse at age 13 or 14 indicated involuntary or unwanted intercourse with an older partner (Farber). Females who are sexually abused as children are three times more likely to become pregnant during their teen years, and likewise about two-thirds of adolescent mothers were previously sexually abused or raped (Domenico). Extracurricular programs such as Sleepy Hollow High School’s violence prevention for women can be effective when girls reach high school age, but too often the psychological damage has already been done at this point. Guidance staff members at Sleepy Hollow High School act as advocates for students and families in social as well as academic issues. They make an effort to identify and target specific programmatic needs. This includes dealing with the issue of teen parents. If necessary, they can make referrals to service agencies, such as for abuse counseling. Albion High School has a full-time Department of Social Services worker on staff to link students with community agencies for additional services if necessary. Brentwood High School on Long Island has also developed an array of social and mental health supports for students. The graduation rate at Brentwood was 82 percent in 2002 and 84 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

A HEALTHY START

Promise 3

A healthy start is a critical developmental resource for children and youth. This includes a number of elements, such as regular checkups and health insurance, good nutrition, physical activity, comprehensive health education classes, and positive adult role models in terms of healthy behavior (America’s Promise Alliance). However, according to the “National

Promises Study,” only 43 percent of young people ages 6 to 17 are experiencing this promise. This includes one-third of teens and one-fourth of younger children without health insurance coverage or annual doctor visits (Scales). Dropping out of school can have extremely detrimental effects on a child’s health. Presently, 29.4 percent of high school dropouts are considered to be obese, as compared to 20 percent of college graduates (Amos).

These disparities are again often related to socioeconomic status. Low income is directly related to the availability of insurance, and income is directly related to educational attainment. Therefore, those parents with less educational attainment have less access to healthcare, and as a result, so do their children (Amos). Also, children in low-income households are less likely to have an appropriate health example in adults, as evidenced by the fact that 30.6 percent of adults living below the poverty level are smokers, as opposed to 20.4 percent living at or above the poverty level (Amos).

Another issue caused by income disparity is the availability of food for children in low-income families. According to the US Department of Agriculture, 11 percent of households were classified as “food insecure” at some point in 2005, meaning they were unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all household members at some time during the year. This is equal to approximately 12.6 million families (Barton). Proper nutrition is vital for developing youth. Research has shown that kindergartners from less food secure families scored lower and learned less throughout the school year than other children (Barton).

The New York State Governor’s Summit addresses some strategies for mitigating this problem. Health education and school-linked mental health support services, increased accessibility of health care services, holistic and informative health education curriculum, and better school meals are all possibilities for increasing youth experience of this promise (Jalloh and Palmer).

Medicaid is a potential solution for those parents who are unable provide insurance through employment. In 2005, 26 million children were enrolled in Medicaid, representing half of all Medicaid recipients (American Academy of Pediatrics). However, according to estimates, over 9 million children are still uninsured, 70 percent of whom are eligible for the program (American Academy of Pediatrics). Educating parents about this program could help to decrease the amount of children who are currently uninsured (Barton). Most schools also reach out beyond classroom instruction by providing school lunch and breakfast programs for children from economically disadvantaged families (Barton).

Effective health education could help to eliminate many other issues among adolescents, including teen pregnancies. Research has demonstrated that health programs that holistically address teen risk behaviors can help prevent substance abuse and pregnancy, as teens who drink and do drugs are more likely to have sex, to begin having sex at a younger age, and to have more partners (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University). Promoting a wide range of healthy behaviors is perhaps a more effective strategy for ensuring adolescent health and helping teens develop good decision-making skills (Forum on Adolescence). Research on cognitive development among adolescents also demonstrates that positive adult relationships are associated with “better mental health, and lower rates of

drinking, drug use” (Eccles). Examples from our successful benchmark schools show that an important factor in many of the schools involves fostering positive adult-youth relationships, as well as providing guidance counselors and onsite staff social service workers who could address health related issues if necessary (RMC Research Corporation).

Adult education seems equally necessary in promoting student health. There was an effective reduction of pregnancy and STD rates among sample communities that participated in the “Plain Talk Initiative.” One of the features of this program was first educating adults, who could then properly disseminate health information throughout the community to youth (Walker).

Specifically approaching pregnancy issues through holistic health programs has proven to be effective in many other countries across the globe, including England, Australia, Germany, France, Japan, and the Netherlands. Their lower rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing are directly related to mandatory sex education, easy access to contraception and other forms of reproductive health care, social acceptance of adolescent sexual expression, and government support for information programs and services (Berne).

AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATION Promise 4

Providing students with relevant education in an effective manner is largely influential on the student dropout rates in America. This promise includes a school culture that emphasizes academic achievement, and a curriculum that is relevant, and prepares students for the job market in the 21st century (America’s Promise Alliance). In the “Silent Epidemic,” 47 percent of students who had dropped out of high school stated that one of the major reasons they left school was because the classes were not interesting (Bridgeland). One dropout who was interviewed said “the teacher just stood in front of the room and just talked and didn’t really like to involve you.” Another commented that “they make you take classes in school that you’re never going to use in life” (Bridgeland). This sentiment is mirrored in another report that states that most high-schools “are not able to adequately prepare today’s students for the high-tech, knowledge-based, increasingly competitive global economy” (Amos).

Student engagement is obviously paramount. In the “Silent Epidemic,” 69 percent of dropouts cited not feeling motivated as part of their reason for leaving school. Two-thirds of these same respondents said they would have worked harder if there had been more demanded of them (Bridgeland). This will be problematic in the future as only 39 percent of teens are receiving an effective education (Scales).

Almost every single one of the New York schools participating in the benchmark study had strategies for presenting students with effective education and keeping them motivated. At Albion, Advanced Placement courses are available to all students, and they are encouraged to stretch themselves to participate. They also have an arrangement with a local community college where students can earn up to 30 credits towards a Bachelors Degree. Many students are able to graduate from high school with an Associate’s Degree (RMC Research Corporation). They also monitor student progress and place students in an extra block class at the end of the day if more attention is necessary. Again, Albion’s graduation rate

was well above the state average of 60 percent in 2002 and 2003. In 2002, their graduation rate was 93 percent, and 97 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

At Brentwood High School in Brentwood, Long Island, students have similar AP course availability and access to college courses. They have progress monitoring for students, as well, and an after-school program for those who exhibit academic problems. The after-school program features intense academic work, and a low student to teacher ratio. Students also take an “interest inventory” in tenth grade, and based on their responses they participate in meetings with outside professionals to learn about career opportunities. The graduation rate at Brentwood was 82 percent in 2002, and 84 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

Elmont Memorial has high academic expectations and an attitude that refuses to accept failure. All students are encouraged to take AP courses. If necessary, individual academic intervention plans are developed for at-risk students, and often include pairing a volunteer teacher with a student in order to monitor academic progress. Extensive feedback from students documents the authentic concern for student success among teachers. Again, Elmont had a graduation rate of 99 percent in 2002, 98 percent in 2003, and in 2004, they graduated 100 percent of their students (RMC Research Corporation).

In terms of pregnancy prevention, effectively educating youth about sexuality seems to be an effective deterrent to adolescent pregnancy. The “Emerging Answers” report studied 56 sexual education programs that were implemented in schools, community centers, and health clinics. These were comprehensive sexual education programs which included instruction on abstinence, reducing teen pregnancy, and preventing the spread of HIV/STD’s. The study found that 40 percent of these programs delayed the initiation of sex, 30 percent reduced the frequency of sex among youth, 41 percent lowered the number of sexual partners, and 41 percent increased the frequency of condom use. Overall, 56 percent of these comprehensive education programs reduced sexual risk taking among youth (Kirby, “Emerging Answers”). These studies were compared to abstinence only programs, which exclusively taught abstaining from sex until marriage with no information regarding sexual health in any other sense. Among these programs, none were found to delay initiation of sex, reduce sexual partners, increase abstaining from sex, or decrease the rate of teen pregnancies at all (Kirby, “Emerging Answers”) This study makes it clear that providing youth with effective education in terms of sexual health is more productive in reducing teen pregnancies and reducing adolescent sexual risk taking.

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP OTHERS Promise 5

As one study demonstrates, developing adolescents need “the opportunity to be efficacious and to make a difference in their social worlds” (Eccles). This can include volunteer work, community service programs, or any other program that allows youth to feel that they are having a positive effect on their environment. In the “Voices Study”, 94 percent of children interviewed expressed their desire to be involved in making the world a better place (America’s Promise Alliance). Former dropouts expressed a similar desire, with 81 percent of

respondents saying that if schools provided opportunities for real-world learning, including internships and service-learning projects, it would have improved their chances of graduating from high school (Bridgeland).

In a study of 807 schools, researchers found that 65 percent of students found the idea of service learning appealing. Among students surveyed, 83 percent said they would enroll in service learning projects if their school offered them (Civic Enterprises). Service Learning can be a highly effective tool for dropout prevention as it provides students an opportunity to participate in community service and feel as if they are making a difference, and it addresses a number of issues among students. One of the most important indicators of a potential dropout is poor attendance (Kennelly). Among teachers who participated in service learning that were interviewed, most reported that service learning projects improved attendance. In terms of engagement and student motivation, 45 percent of students said their service learning classes were more worthwhile than others, and 44 percent of students said they were motivated to do their best in service learning classes because their work was tied to community service (Civic Enterprises).

At benchmark school Albion High, students are required to complete thirty hours of community service to graduate. Many of their courses include a service learning component, and all of their AP courses have a service learning component. Again the graduation rates at Albion were 93 percent in 2002 and 97 percent in 2003 (RMC Research Corporation).

Service learning programs have proven to be particularly effective in preventing teen pregnancy. An evaluation of the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) found that youth were less likely to become pregnant during the school year in which they participated in TOP (Kirby, "Effective Approaches"). TOP participants spent approximately 46 hours engaged in service activity. Along with pregnancy reduction, they had lower rates of school failure than students in a control group (Kirby, "Effective Approaches"). A study of a similar program, Learn and Serve, had equally promising results, with participants also reporting lower pregnancy rates during the period in which they were involved in the program. A study of health education curriculum combined with service learning found that in the short term it delayed the onset of sex, and in the long term (over 3 years later) it both delayed the onset of sex and reduced the percentage of students who had sex in the previous month. The health curriculum alone did not significantly reduce sexual activity. These findings suggest that service learning can reduce teen pregnancy in part by reducing sexual activity (Kirby, "Effective Approaches").

ECONOMIC AND RACIAL DIVISIONS

One thing that is clear upon analysis of the Five Promises is that there is an unequal distribution of these developmental resources based on income and race (America's Promise Alliance). Individuals who drop out of high school are much more likely to make less money and be in poverty throughout their life than high school and college graduates. As a result, their children are less likely to receive the developmental resources they need, and become high school dropouts themselves in a possibly endless cycle (Amos). In their experience of the Five Promises, 6 to 17 year olds from families

that earn more than \$100,000 per year are twice as likely to have four or more of the five promises than 6 to 17 year olds from families that earn less than \$30,000 dollars per year (America's Promise Alliance). Less than 30 percent of teenagers, and 20 percent of younger children in low-income families have what they consider "safe places" that engage them in constructive uses of time. And only 40 percent of children in low-income families experience a healthy start, compared to 50 percent in high-income families (America's Promise Alliance). Also, almost 80 percent of adolescent mothers grow up in extreme poverty, and their children are much more likely to grow up in poverty and become adolescent mothers as well (Domenico). Among these young mothers, 70 percent will fail to graduate from high school (Kennelly).

The divides are similar along racial lines. White children have an almost 50% greater chance of receiving four or more of the five promises than African American or Hispanic children. Two-fifths of white children experience safe places, compared to less than one-fourth of African Americans, and more than one-fourth of Hispanics (America's Promise Alliance). The graduation rates of white and Asian American students are approximately 20 percent higher than those of African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics. Only 57 percent of Hispanics and 55 percent of African Americans will graduate on time, compared to 77 percent of white students (Amos). African American women also make up 77 percent of the 2.3 million births to single mothers below 30. This birthrate is directly related to the mother's level of educational attainment. When educational attainment increases, the likelihood of becoming a single mother under the age of 30 decreases. Educational attainment is in turn directly related to income. As a National Research Council report posited "the disadvantage of black children relative to white children is due almost entirely to the low income of black family heads" (Barton). The connection between minority communities and poverty is clear, and minorities are more likely to be concentrated in high schools with high poverty and low graduation rates (Amos).

However, the "National Promises Study" findings show that when four of these five development resources are available to youth, the disparities created by race/ethnicity and income are eliminated in terms of achievement (America's Promise Alliance). When African American and Hispanic students were found to be receiving four of five promises, the disparity between white students and these minorities in terms of grades and school attendance was reduced for 12 to 17 year olds and eliminated for 6 to 11 year olds. Disparities between high income and low income families in terms of school attendance were also eliminated when at least 4 of 5 promises were available to youth (America's Promise Alliance). These numbers demonstrate the fact that providing our children with the necessary developmental resources in their youth and adolescence can greatly increase their chances of success, in school and in life.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated, the Five Promises are necessary for ensuring the future of youth in America. A study of adolescent cognitive development found very definitively that "investing" in children throughout their youth and adolescence has a lasting effect on their ability to achieve (Cunha). "Investing" refers to providing children with elements of the Five Promises, through activities

such as reading to young children, encouraging and helping youth with school work, involving them in extracurricular activities, and setting good examples for them through healthy lifestyle choices and civic engagement. The discovered result of providing youth with resources such as these was a dramatic rise in high school graduation and college attendance rates, especially among those youth considered “at-risk,” such as those from low-income and minority families (Cunha). There was also a calculated decrease in welfare dependence, which is often a direct result of young girls becoming single mothers and failing to educate themselves (Cunha). Addressing the needs of children holistically, through providing them with caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to make a difference, is essential to improvement in adolescent achievement issues. When these resources are available en masse, the rate of graduation increases, the rate of dropouts decreases, and the rate of teen pregnancy decreases. The Five Promises are effective tools for ensuring success among youth.

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