

# School or the Streets

Crime and New York's Dropout Crisis



# Acknowledgements

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York** is a bipartisan anti-crime organization made up of almost 250 law enforcement leaders and crime survivors statewide. Its sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors and crime victims promote greater public investments in programs proven to direct kids onto better paths in life, paths that lead them away from crime and towards success.

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids'** members are from all fifty states, including for example, 45 out of the 63 Major Cities Chiefs. Seattle Chief Gil Kerlikowski chairs the board and David Kass is President. **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** has almost 50 staff members at its national and state offices and receives funding from several major funders.

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals and corporations. **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** accepts no funds from federal, state or local governments.

New York Funders: The Atlantic Philanthropies · The Horace Hagedorn Foundation · Long Island Community Foundation · The New York Community Trust · The Pew Charitable Trusts · Advancing Quality Pre-K for All · Rauch Foundation · Robert Sterling Clark Foundation.

Major additional funding for **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** is provided by: The Afterschool Alliance · The Atlantic Philanthropies · The Boeing Company · The Buffett Early Childhood Fund · The Butler Family Fund · The California Endowment · The California Wellness Foundation · Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation · Sam L. Cohen Foundation · Dr. Scholl Foundation · Early Childhood Investment Corporation · Frey Foundation · Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation · The Grable Foundation · Grand Victoria Foundation · The George Gund Foundation · Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund · The Irving Harris Foundation · The Heinz Endowments · The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation · The James Irvine Foundation · JEHT Foundation · The Walter S. Johnson Foundation · W.K. Kellogg Foundation · McCormick Foundation · Richard King Mellon Foundation · The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation · The David and Lucile Packard Foundation · The William Penn Foundation · The Pew Charitable Trusts · Advancing Quality Pre-K for All · The Robins Foundation · Schumann Fund for New Jersey · The Skillman Foundation.

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Fight Crime: Invest in Kids



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# School or the Streets

## Crime and New York's Dropout Crisis

### Executive Summary

New York faces a dropout crisis that poses a significant threat to public safety. Statewide, an estimated more than three out of ten high school students fail to graduate from high school on time; by one account, almost 15 percent of high schools in New York have four out of ten students becoming dropouts.

#### HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TURN TO CRIME

High school dropouts are three and one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated. Throughout the country, 68 percent of state prison inmates have not received a high school diploma.

According to researchers, 10 percentage-point increases in graduation rates have historically been shown to reduce murder and assault rates by approximately 20 percent. Increasing graduation rates by 10 percentage points would prevent 180 murders and 9,100 aggravated assaults in New York each year.

#### HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN INCREASES GRADUATION RATES AND CUTS CRIME

Many efforts are underway in New York to increase graduation rates, but the most tested and most widely adopted school reform shown to greatly increase graduation rates is high-quality pre-kindergarten. Evidence from two long-term evaluations of the effects of pre-kindergarten programs show that participating in high-quality pre-kindergarten increases high school graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.

#### INCREASED INVESTMENTS IN EARLY EDUCATION ARE NEEDED

In New York, 84 percent of its 3-year-olds and 45 percent of its 4-year-olds are not enrolled in the state's Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK), Head Start, or early childhood special education programs. Statewide, funding for Head Start, the nation's premier pre-kindergarten program for poor kids, is sufficient to serve only 42 percent of all eligible children.

#### CUTTING DROPOUTS SAVES MONEY AND LIVES

New York's dropout crisis not only threatens public safety, it also damages New York's economy. Dropouts earn less, pay fewer taxes, and are more likely to collect welfare and turn to a life of crime. If New York could raise male graduation rates by 10 percent, the state would save approximately \$913 million dollars every year, including almost \$573 million in reduced crime costs alone.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS AND CRIME VICTIMS ARE UNITED

The almost 250 members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York are convinced that in order to cut violent crime and to save lives and money, New York should invest far more in high-quality early education programs.

# School or the Streets

## Crime and New York's Dropout Crisis

**T**he almost 250 law enforcement leaders and crime victim members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York are committed to taking dangerous criminals off the streets. But years of crime-fighting experience and rigorous research show that tough law enforcement is not enough. In order to most effectively reduce crime and safeguard our communities, it is necessary to take steps to prevent kids from ever becoming involved in crime in the first place.

A good education is not only critical to a young person's success in life, it is also one of the most fundamental crime-prevention tools available. Kids who stay in school and graduate are more likely to become productive citizens, and less likely to turn to crime.

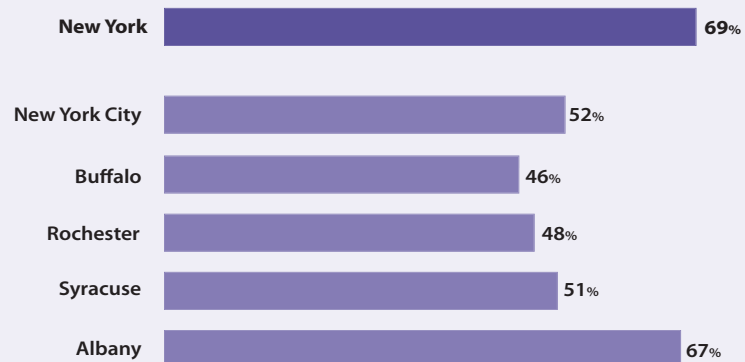
### NEW YORK'S DROPOUT CRISIS

New York faces a dropout crisis that poses a significant threat to public safety. More than three out of ten high school students do not graduate from high school on time.<sup>1</sup> In New York, almost 15 percent of high schools have four out of ten students becoming dropouts.<sup>2</sup>

For years, the dropout crisis in New York and across the nation has been a silent epidemic,<sup>3</sup> drawing insufficient attention due to differing, and sometimes very misleading, methodologies to measure high school graduation rates. Many districts have assumed, without evidence, that students who stopped showing up for class were enrolled somewhere else.

New York State has recently revised

### LOW GRADUATION RATES IN NEW YORK



New York State Department of Education, 2008

how it counts graduates. New York now reports that almost 69 percent of students graduate on time with a degree.<sup>4</sup> Another widely cited estimate puts the figure at 68 percent.<sup>5</sup> So, by these calculations, more than three out of ten students are not graduating on time.

### HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE LESS LIKELY TO TURN TO CRIME

Rigorous research has established the strong link between high school graduation and reduced crime. This is not surprising since dropping out can have the short-term effect of leaving young people unsupervised on the streets, and the long-term impact of leaving teens and adults without the skills they need to make ends meet.

High school dropouts are three and one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and over

**High school dropouts are three and one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and over eight times more likely to be in jail or prison.**

## INCREASING GRADUATION RATES CUTS MURDERS & ASSAULTS

ANNUAL IMPACT IF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES INCREASED 10 PERCENTAGE POINTS

	Murders Prevented	Aggravated Assaults Prevented
<b>New York</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>9,100</b>
New York City	108	5,590
Buffalo	11	410
Rochester	11	159
Syracuse	4	185
Albany	2	150

Lochner & Moretti, 2004  
FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2007

eight times more likely to be in jail or prison.<sup>6</sup> Across the country, 68 percent of state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.<sup>7</sup>

While staying in school even one year longer reduces the likelihood that a youngster will turn to crime,<sup>8</sup> graduating from high school has a dramatic impact. University of California at Berkeley economist Enrico Moretti and Canadian economist Lance Lochner studied the relationship over time between changes in graduation rates and crime and concluded that a 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates reduce murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Increasing New York's graduation rates

from an estimated 69 percent to 79 percent, therefore, would yield more than 26,000 additional graduates annually and prevent 180 murders and 9,000 aggravated assaults each year.<sup>10</sup>

### PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS ARE PROVEN TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES AND CUT CRIME

Improving graduation rates is not easy. Columbia University researcher Henry Levin and his colleagues conducted an extensive search of programs impacting graduation and "found very few interventions that demonstrably increased high school graduation rates on the basis of rigorous and systematic evaluation."<sup>11</sup>

Two of the five programs that had undergone rigorous research that Levin found to be effective were pre-kindergarten programs.<sup>12</sup> And pre-kindergarten is the most widely-implemented school reform that produces solid graduation rate increases.

### HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Law enforcement leaders have long known about the impressive crime-prevention benefits of high-quality pre-kindergarten. By age 27, at-risk three- and four-year-olds left out of one effective program were five times more likely to be chronic law breakers than similar children who attended the program.<sup>13</sup> And youngsters left out of another high-quality program were 70 percent more likely than program participants to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18.<sup>14</sup>

Evidence from two long-term evaluations of the effects of pre-kindergarten programs shows that participating in effective early education also increases high school graduation rates.

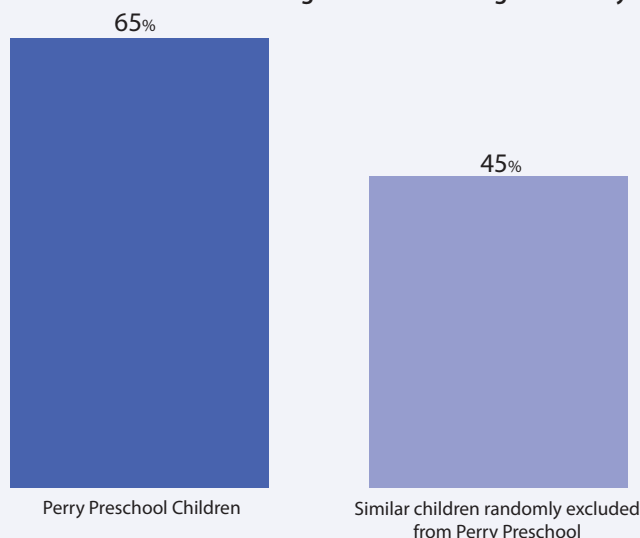
The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation initiated a study of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1962. The Perry Preschool Program is a high-quality, one- to two-year long educational program. The program includes a home-visiting component and is considered a model of effective early childhood educational programs.<sup>15</sup>

According to a long-term study following at-risk children through age 40 who attended Perry Preschool, children enrolled in Perry Preschool were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school than similar children randomly assigned to not participate in the program.<sup>16</sup> A separate analysis concluded that the Perry Preschool Program would yield 19 extra high school graduates for every 100 students provided the intervention.<sup>17</sup>

Chicago's federally-funded Child-Parent Centers have served over 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. The

## QUALITY PRESCHOOL INCREASES GRADUATION RATES

Percent of children who have graduated from high school by age 40



Schweinhart et al, 2005

**A 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates would prevent approximately 180 murders and over 9,000 aggravated assaults in New York each year.**

program is a center-based early education program that provides pre-kindergarten and family-support services to economically-disadvantaged children.<sup>18</sup>

Researchers found that Child-Parent Center children were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than similar children not enrolled in the program.<sup>19</sup> A separate analysis concluded that this program yields 11 extra high school graduates for every 100 students provided the intervention.<sup>20</sup>

**PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS ARE STILL LACKING IN NEW YORK**

Support and funding for New York’s Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK) has been growing with an 81 percent increase in funding over the past five years.<sup>21</sup> That brings the current annual total to \$451 million and the number of 4-year-old children being served from 93,000 in FY 2007-08 to over 120,000 four-year-olds in 2008-2009.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, 43,000 three- and four-year-old children (representing 42 percent of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds) participated in Head Start, a federally funded program for low-income families.<sup>23</sup>

While much progress has been made, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are still not available for thousands of New York children. Due to limited capacity, children in UPK are often enrolled by lottery. During the 2006- 2007 school year, 84 percent of New York’s 3-year-olds and 45 percent of 4-year-olds were not enrolled in either UPK, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs.<sup>24</sup>

Another concern is an underutilization of available UPK funds. Under current law, UPK funding cannot be spent on full-day programs or on programmatic

needs such as transportation or planning. Due to these and other concerns, school districts only utilized about three-quarters of the appropriated funds during FY 2007-2008.

New York State needs to address these funding concerns, as well as the need for ensuring program quality. High quality is essential to achieving the crime prevention benefits of pre-k. Fortunately, there are some quality standards in place such as small class sizes, low teacher-student ratios, and screening and referral services. UPK meets 6 of the 10 pre-k quality standards set forth by the National Institute for Early Education Research.<sup>25</sup> But more needs to be done, in particular to require that teachers have a bachelor’s degree and assistant teachers have Child Development Associates degrees.

In 2007, UPK was identified as one of two top priorities of the newly created Children’s Cabinet. The Cabinet, which convenes the many agencies of state government that serve children and families to collaboratively work across jurisdictional lines, focused their initial pre-k work on the expansion of UPK and the implementation of a quality improvement system named Quality Stars NY. This effort would establish statewide standards for early care and education programs including pre-k. Currently the Office of Children and Family Services is coordinating the Quality Stars NY initiative, but the State has yet to fund implementation of the first phase of field-testing the standards and to pass legislation codifying them.

**IMPACT OF A TEN PERCENT INCREASE IN MALE GRADUATION RATES ON ANNUAL CRIME SAVINGS AND EARNINGS IN NEW YORK**

CRIME RELATED SAVINGS	\$573,000,000
ADDITIONAL INCOME	\$340,000,000
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>	<b>\$913,000,000</b>

Lochner & Moretti 2004; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006



## REDUCING DROPOUTS SAVES LIVES AND MONEY

New York's dropout crisis not only threatens public safety, it also damages New York's economy. Dropouts earn less, pay fewer taxes, and are more likely to collect welfare and turn to crime.

Alternatively, increasing graduation rates will help individuals and the overall economy. Based on the findings of Lochner and Moretti, increasing male high school graduation rates in New York

by ten percent would produce \$573 million in annual crime-related savings and \$340 million in additional annual earnings, for a total benefit to New York of approximately \$913 million every year.<sup>26</sup>

Separate research shows that the Child-Parent Centers' pre-kindergarten programs cut crime, special education and other costs so much that the programs saved more than \$10 for every \$1 invested.<sup>27</sup> The High/Scope Perry Preschool program also cut crime, welfare and other costs so much that it saved

\$16 (including more than \$11 in crime savings) for every \$1 invested.<sup>28</sup>

Bottom line: New York can't afford *not* to invest in high-quality pre-kindergarten.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 84 percent of New York's three-year-olds and 45 percent of four-year-olds were not enrolled in either UPK, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The law enforcement leaders and crime survivors of Fight Crime: Invest In Kids New York call on policy-makers to cut crime by investing wisely in high-quality pre-kindergarten:

- State policy-makers should continue to support efforts to make UPK available for all children. To do this, districts should be allowed to use the UPK funding for full-day programs, (which are proven to result in better outcomes for children), transportation to the program, and other supports that would increase access for the children of working parents. Stronger efforts should also be made to ensure continued improvements in the quality of the programs by funding the Quality Stars NY initiative and formally adopting its standards by law. Improving access and quality will help UPK realize its full potential to reduce dropouts and cut crime.

- United States Senators and Representatives from New York should work to increase federal support for Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grants. They should also work to draft and support legislation ensuring continual improvements in the pre-kindergarten programs paid for by those funding streams.

New York cannot afford to turn its back on wise investments that will increase high school graduation rates and cut crime. Too much is at stake, including the safety of all those living in New York State.

### TAXPAYERS, VICTIMS AND PARTICIPANTS SAVED OVER \$16 FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN THE HIGH/SCOPE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM



For every \$1 invested



Over \$16 was saved

Schweinhart et al, 2005

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