

# School or the Streets

Crime and Alabama's Dropout Crisis



# Acknowledgements

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** is a bipartisan anti-crime organization of over 4,000 law enforcement leaders and crime survivors nationwide. 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 foundations.

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# School or the Streets

## Crime and Alabama's Dropout Crisis

### Executive Summary

Alabama faces a dropout crisis that poses a significant threat to public safety. Statewide, almost four out of ten high school students fail to graduate from high school on time.

#### 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 more than 75 murders and 2,100 aggravated assaults in Alabama each year.

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

Many efforts are underway in Alabama 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

With new funding just announced for Alabama's high-quality pre-kindergarten program the number of four-year-olds served will triple from just two years ago. Still, 74 percent of the state's 4-year-olds are not enrolled in state pre-k programs, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs. And statewide, funding for Head Start, the nation's premier pre-kindergarten program for poor kids, is sufficient to serve only 46 percent of eligible children.

#### CUTTING DROPOUTS SAVES MONEY AND LIVES

Alabama's dropout crisis not only threatens public safety, it also damages Alabama's economy. Dropouts earn less, pay fewer taxes, and are more likely to collect welfare and turn to a life of crime. If Alabama could raise male graduation rates by 10 percent, the state would save approximately \$249 million dollars every year, including almost \$164 million in reduced crime costs alone.

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

The more than 70 members of **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** in Alabama are convinced that in order to cut violent crime and to save lives and money, Alabama should invest far more in high-quality early education programs.

# School or the Streets

## Crime and Alabama's Dropout Crisis

**T**he more than 70 law enforcement leaders and crime victim members of **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** in Alabama 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.

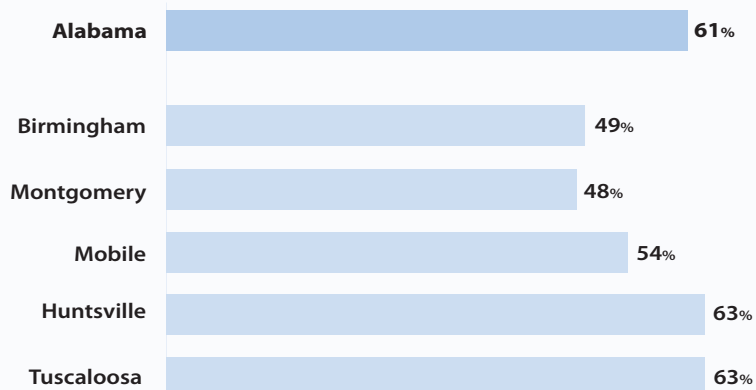
### ALABAMA'S DROPOUT CRISIS

Alabama faces a dropout crisis that poses a significant threat to public safety. Almost four out of ten high school students do not graduate from high school on time.<sup>1</sup>

For years, the dropout crisis in Alabama and across the nation has been a silent epidemic,<sup>2</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.

For example, Alabama reports on its state website that 82 percent of its students graduate, whereas a more realistic

### LOW GRADUATION RATES IN ALABAMA



2004-05 Graduation Rates,  
Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2008

estimate concluded that only 61 percent of its students graduated on time.<sup>3</sup>

Alabama is joining in an effort by the National Governor's Association to adopt more accurate measures of graduation rates.<sup>4</sup> What is needed is a comprehensive data system that will track individual student data starting from the time a student enters the educational system until he or she leaves it. Lacking such data, there are different methodologies for estimating the scope of the problem, but it is clear to all researchers who study this issue that far too many Alabama young people are dropping out, putting Alabama's future at risk.

### 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 sur-

**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>Alabama</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>2,100</b>
Birmingham	21	340
Montgomery	6	130
Mobile	7	92
Huntsville	4	120
Tuscaloosa	1	52

Lochner & Moretti, 2004  
FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2006

prising 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 eight times more likely to be in jail or prison.<sup>5</sup> Across the country, 68 percent of state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.<sup>6</sup>

While staying in school even one year longer reduces the likelihood that a youngster will turn to crime,<sup>7</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>8</sup>

Increasing Alabama's graduation rates from an estimated 61 percent to 71 percent, therefore, would yield more than 6,000 additional graduates annually and prevent more than 75 murders and 2,100 aggravated assaults each year.<sup>9</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>10</sup>

Two of the five programs that had undergone rigorous research that Levin found to be effective were pre-kindergarten programs.<sup>11</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>12</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>13</sup>

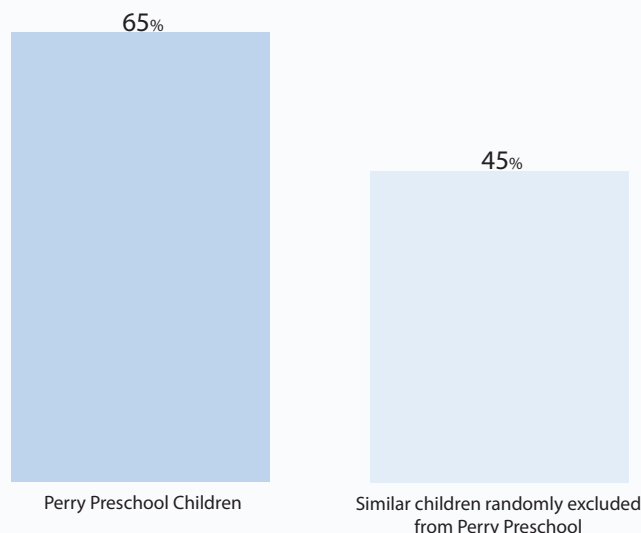
Evidence from two long-term evaluations of the effects of pre-kindergarten programs shows that participating in effective early education also increases high school graduation rates.

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>14</sup>

According to a long-term study following at-risk children through age 40 who

## 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 more than 75 murders and over 2,100 aggravated assaults in Alabama each year.

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>15</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>16</sup>

Chicago’s federally-funded Child-Parent Centers have served over 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. The program is a center-based early education program that provides pre-kindergarten and family-support services to economically-disadvantaged children.<sup>17</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>18</sup> A separate analysis concluded that this program yields 11 extra high school graduates for every 100 students provided the intervention.<sup>19</sup>

**PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS ARE STILL LACKING IN ALABAMA**

The state is to be commended because their state-funded pre-kindergarten program meets all the ten standards for quality of the National Institute for Early Education Research. In particular, pre-kindergarten teachers in Alabama are required to have a college degree with specialized training in early childhood. That is important, because in order to realize the solid benefits of early education the program must be of high quality.

As of 2007, the state pre-kindergarten program was serving only slightly over 1,000 children.<sup>20</sup> By this school year, the program is expected to reach 3,400 children. Combined with the federally-funded

Head Start program which serves well over 15 thousand children (46 percent of those eligible<sup>21</sup>) and special education pre-kindergarten programs serving nearly 4,000 children, that still leaves the vast majority of Alabama children un-served. In Alabama, 74 percent of its 4-year-olds are not enrolled in the Alabama pre-kindergarten program, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs.<sup>22</sup>

**REDUCING DROPOUTS SAVES LIVES AND MONEY**

Alabama’s dropout crisis not only threatens public safety, it also damages Alabama’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 Alabama by ten percent would produce \$164 million in annual crime-related savings and \$85 million in additional annual earnings, for a total benefit to Alabama of approximately \$249 million every year.<sup>23</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>24</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>25</sup>

Bottom line: Alabama can’t afford *not* to invest more in high-quality pre-kindergarten.

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

CRIME RELATED SAVINGS	\$164,000,000
ADDITIONAL INCOME	\$ 85,000,000
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>	<b>\$249,000,000</b>



Lochner & Moretti 2004; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006

## 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

In Alabama, 74 percent of its four-year-olds are not enrolled in the Alabama pre-kindergarten program, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs.

## Conclusion and recommendations

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

- The first step for state policy-makers and regulators is to make sure Alabama is accurately counting dropouts and graduates.
- State policy-makers should continue their bold efforts to build on the high-quality state pre-kindergarten program to provide excellent pre-kindergarten programs to far more children in Alabama.
- Alabama's U.S. Senators and Representatives should work to increase support for Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grant and do more to ensure continual improvements in the quality of the pre-kindergarten programs paid for by those funding streams.

Alabama 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 everyone living in Alabama.

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