

# GONE AND BACK AGAIN:

## CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL NON-GRADUATES

DECEMBER 2013

Although high school dropout is associated with higher rates of incarceration and unemployment, failure to graduate is not a one-way ticket to jail or the unemployment line. In fact, in Utah, most students who drop out continue with formal education at some point in the future. This policy brief describes the continuing education trajectory of students who do not graduate from high school.

### BACKGROUND

This study identified a group of 4,693 students scheduled for graduation in 2008 who formally dropped out of high school and did not graduate<sup>1</sup>. The study followed this group of students from 2005 through the fall of 2012 and chronicled their continuing education as students entered the following programs or systems:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE),
- Public colleges and universities through the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), and
- Career and technical education through the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT).

### CONTINUING EDUCATION RATES

Within four years of expected graduation:

- 53% of the students who had dropped out continued their education and
- 39% had not yet re-engaged.
- We could not determine whether the remaining 8% continued.

At least  
**53%**

of Utah's non-  
graduates continued  
their education

### WHERE DID NON-GRADUATES CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION?

Of the high school dropouts who continued with public education:

- 85% enrolled in Adult Basic Education and
- 39% enrolled in postsecondary education through USHE or UCAT.
- 64% of the students who enrolled in post-secondary education engaged with ABE first.

### WHICH STUDENTS CONTINUED?

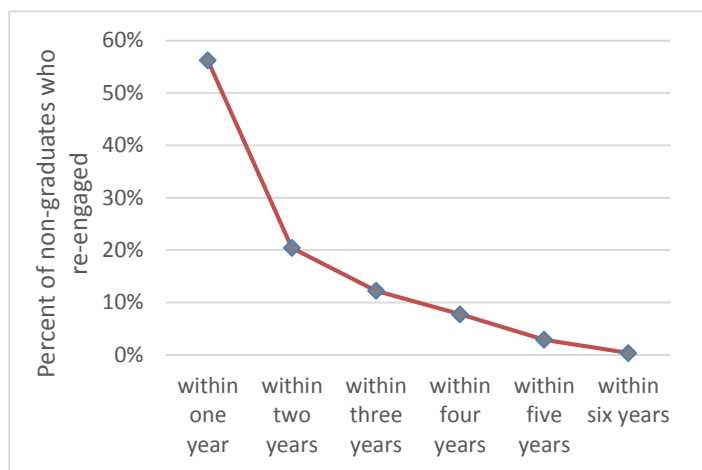
- When race/ethnicity group membership was considered, only Black students were significantly more likely than other students to continue their education.
- There were no relationships between gender, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, or special education and the likelihood of continuing education.
- High school students with higher GPAs prior to dropping out were slightly more likely to continue their education.
- Students who stayed in high school longer were slightly more likely to continue their education.
- Chronically absent students (students who were absent 10% of the time or more while enrolled in high school) were just as likely to continue their education as non-chronically absent students.

Chronically absent students were **just as likely** to continue their education as non-chronically absent students

## TIME TO RE-ENGAGEMENT

Of the non-graduates who re-engaged and continued their education through ABE, USHE, or UCAT,

- Nearly one-third re-engaged within three months of dropout,
- Approximately 60% re-engaged within one year of drop out,
- More than three-fourths re-engaged within two years of drop out.



## STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR NON-GRADUATES

For the state of Utah to meet education attainment goals, such as achieving a [90% high school graduation rate](#)<sup>ii</sup> or achieving [66% of Utahns with a college certificate or degree by 2020](#)<sup>iii</sup>, it is critical that non-graduates continue with education after dropping out of high school in places such as re-engagement centers. The following strategies are offered to encourage re-engagement and continued education for non-graduates.

**Raise Awareness about Continuing and Post-Secondary Education Opportunities.** In most cases, dropping out of high school is not the end of formal education. Share information about continuing education opportunities in public venues such as libraries, community centers, public events, social service organizations, and religious organizations.

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*Ability to follow the trajectory of student from the Utah K-12 system to Adult Basic Education and postsecondary education was made possible by the Utah Data Alliance*

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**Intervene with High School Students as Soon as Signs of Disengagement Occur.** Re-engagement in formal education occurred within the first year for nearly 60% of non-graduates who re-engaged. Therefore, provide resources outlining continuing education opportunities to students and their families as soon as signs of disengagement are observed and also at the time of dropout. When possible, maintain contact with non-graduates to provide encouragement and information about continuing education opportunities.

**Expand Partnerships between High Schools and Adult Basic Education.** Eighty-five percent of non-graduates who continued did so through Adult Basic Education. Strong partnerships between high school counsellors and ABE programs could provide important mechanisms for bridging non-graduates with continued education.

**Improve Enrollment Opportunities at Utah's Colleges, Universities, and Applied Technology Colleges.** Within six years of high school dropout, 21% of non-graduates attended one of Utah's public colleges, universities, or applied technology colleges. Utah's higher education institutions and applied technology centers could encourage continuing education by developing strategies to reach out to non-graduates, particularly those engaged in ABE programs.

*This study was conducted using data available from the USOE Data Warehouse that are made available to the UEPC through a data sharing agreement with the Utah State Office of Education and the [Utah Data Alliance](#) of which the UEPC is a founding member.*

<sup>i</sup> Excluded students with exit codes of withdrew, GED, unknown, or expelled, also excluded students who dropped out and then returned to graduate.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.utah.gov/governor/priorities/education.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://prosperity2020.com/>