

# Solving California's Dropout Crisis

The role of relationships, relevance, and rigor

Russell W. Rumberger

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# Urgency

- “So this is a problem we cannot afford to accept and we cannot afford to ignore. The stakes are too high -- for our children, for our economy, and for our country. It's time for all of us to come together -- parents, students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials from across the political spectrum -- to end America's dropout crisis.”

--Barack Obama, February 24, 2009

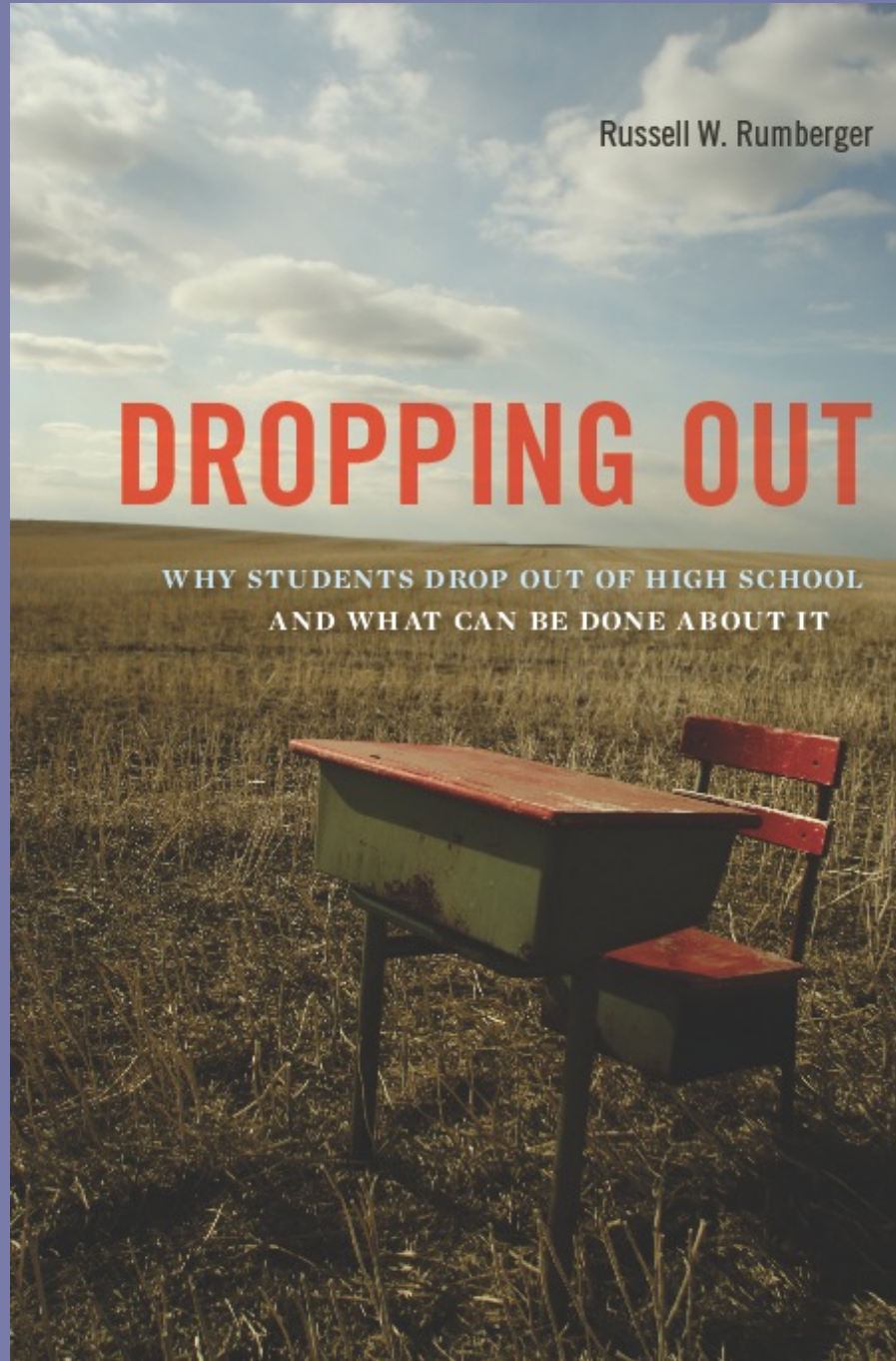
# My Background on Dropouts

- “Dropping Out of High School” (AERJ, 1983)
- *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Student’s Motivation to Learn* (NRC, 2005)
- *Solving California’s Dropout Crisis* (CDRP, 2008)
- *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (IES, 2008)
- *Improving Measures of High School Dropout, Graduation, and Completion Rates: Better Data, Better Measures, Better Decisions* (NRC, 2010)
- *Dropping Out: Why Students Drop Out of High School and What Can be Done About It* (Harvard University Press, 2011)

Russell W. Rumberger

# DROPPING OUT

WHY STUDENTS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL  
AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT





# California Dropout Research Project

UC Santa Barbara | Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

[cdrp.ucsb.edu](http://cdrp.ucsb.edu)

# California Dropout Research Project Activities

- New research with a focus on California (research studies, policy briefs, statistical briefs, city dropout profiles)
- Policy recommendations from policy committee (policymakers, educators, researchers)
- Dissemination through mailings, website, presentations, media

# Impact

- 50,000 downloads of 67 publications
- Media exposure in newspapers, radio, television at state and national levels
- Four bills based on CDRP recommendations, with three signed into law

# Dimensions of the Problem

1. Magnitude and trends
2. Consequences
3. Causes
4. Solutions



1. The problem is severe.

# What is a Dropout?

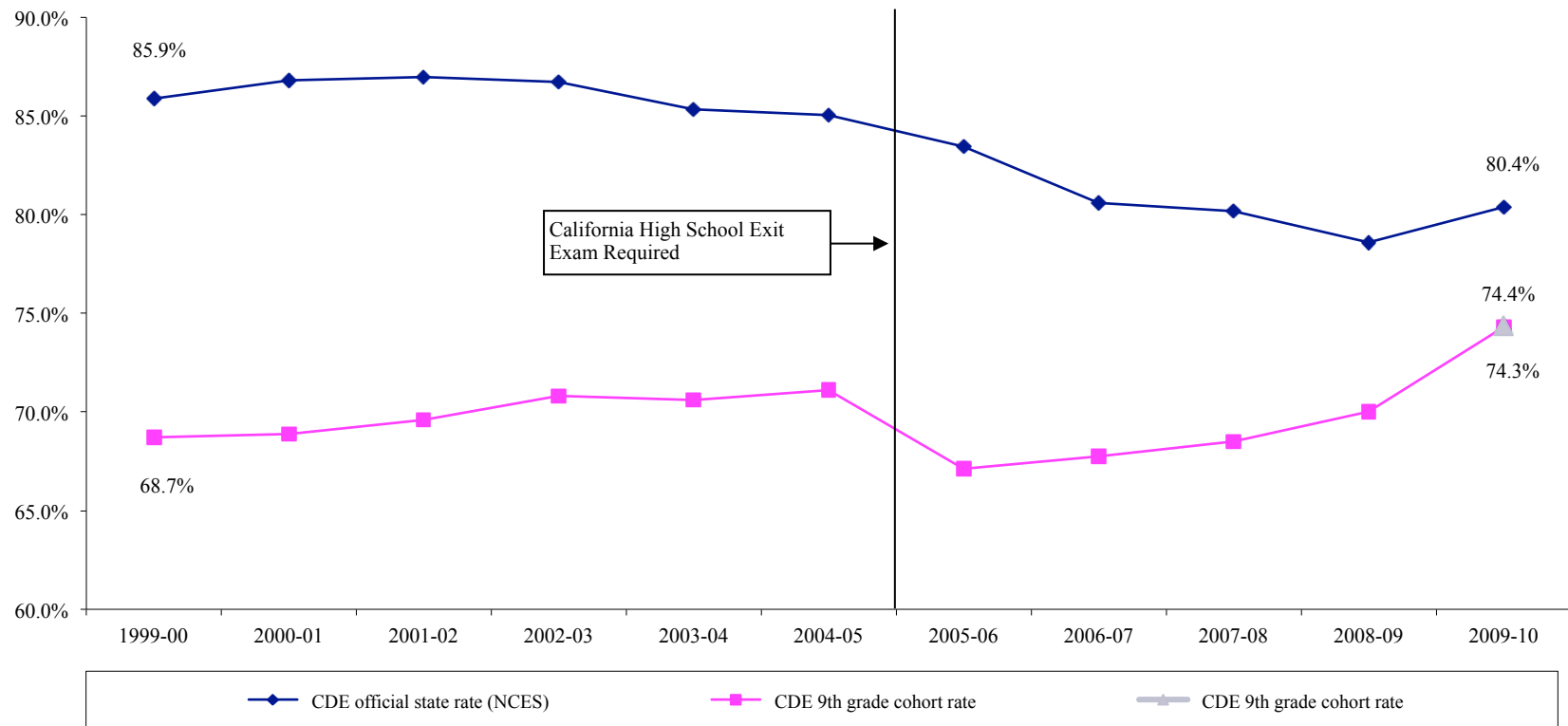
- Dropout as a status
- Dropout as an event
- Dropout as a process:

Enroll → Attend → Progress → Graduate

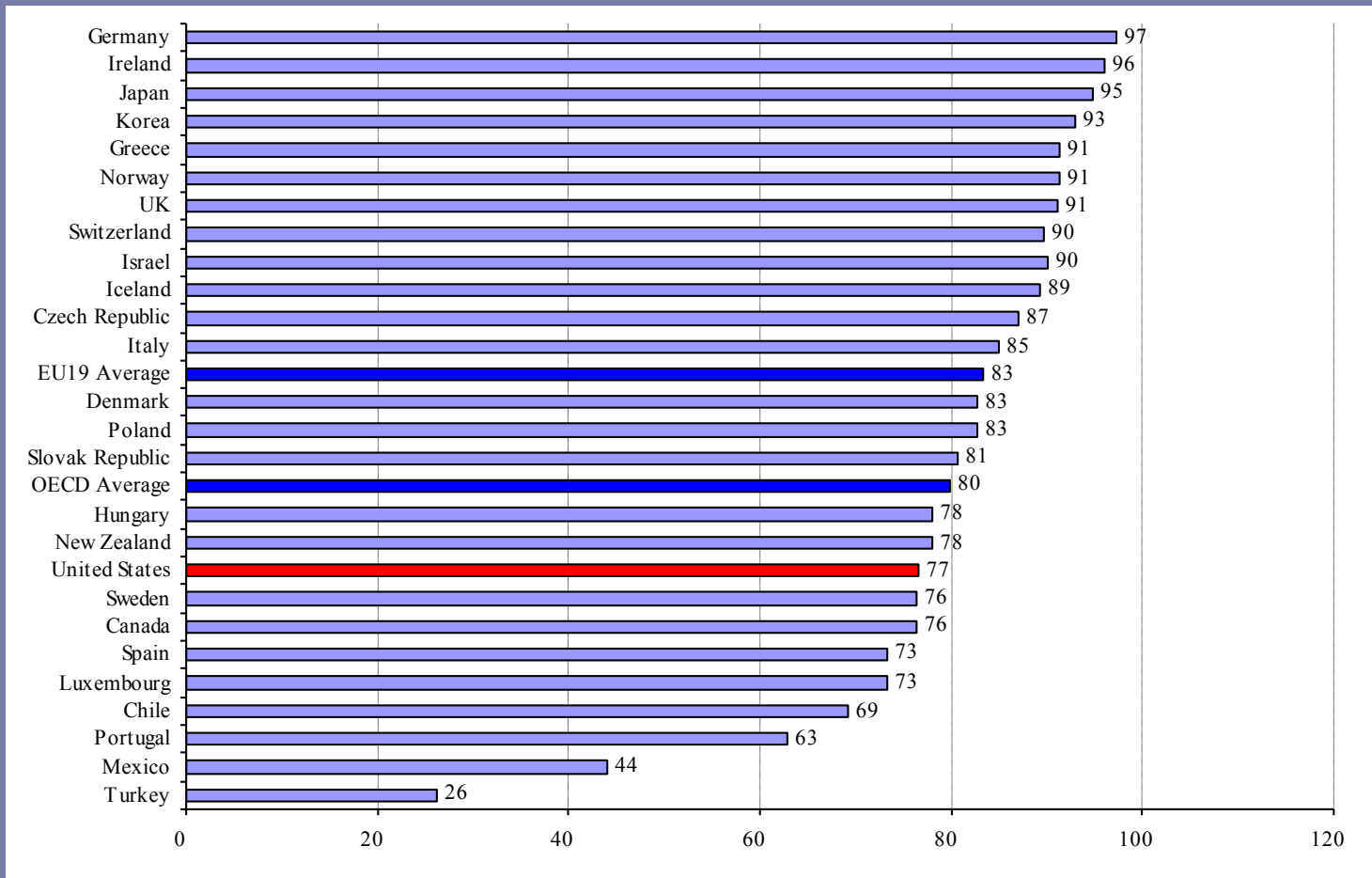


Drop Out

# California graduation rate



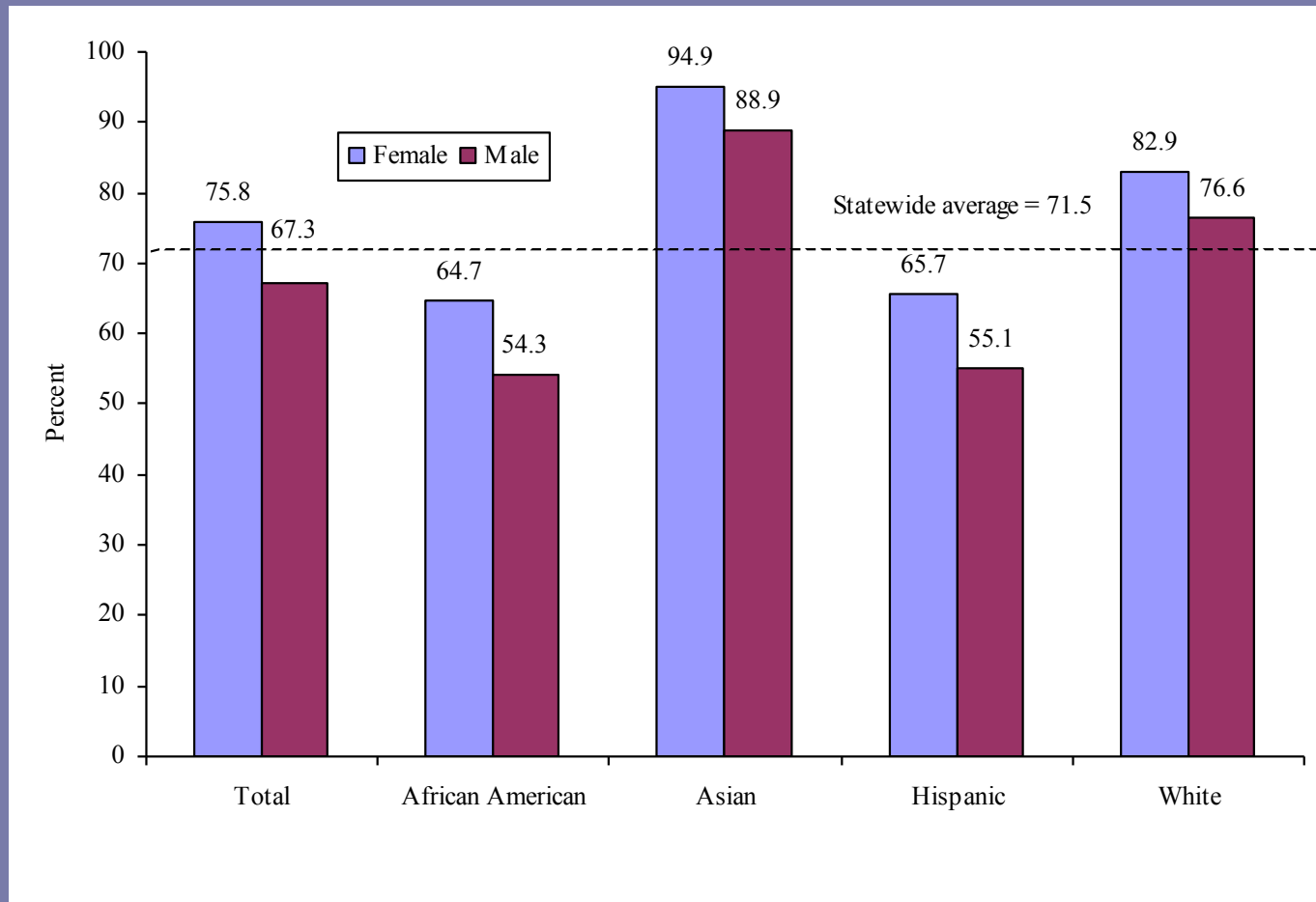
# US ranks 18<sup>th</sup> worldwide in high school graduation rate



# Problem is concentrated

- Latinos represent 43% of high school students, but account for 56% of the dropouts
- English learners represent 15% of high school students, but account for 30% of the dropouts
- 1% (25) of the schools account for 21% of dropouts
- 10 districts account for 36% of dropouts

# Public High School Graduation Rates for California by Ethnicity and Gender, 2006-07



## 2. The economic costs are staggering.

# The Consequences of Dropping Out

- INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCES

- Lower wages
- Higher unemployment
- Increased crime
- Poorer health
- Reduced political participation
- Reduced intergenerational mobility



- SOCIAL COSTS

- Reduced national and state income
- Reduced tax revenues
- Increased social services
- Increased crime
- Poorer health
- Reduced political participation
- Reduced intergenerational mobility



# Economic Costs in California

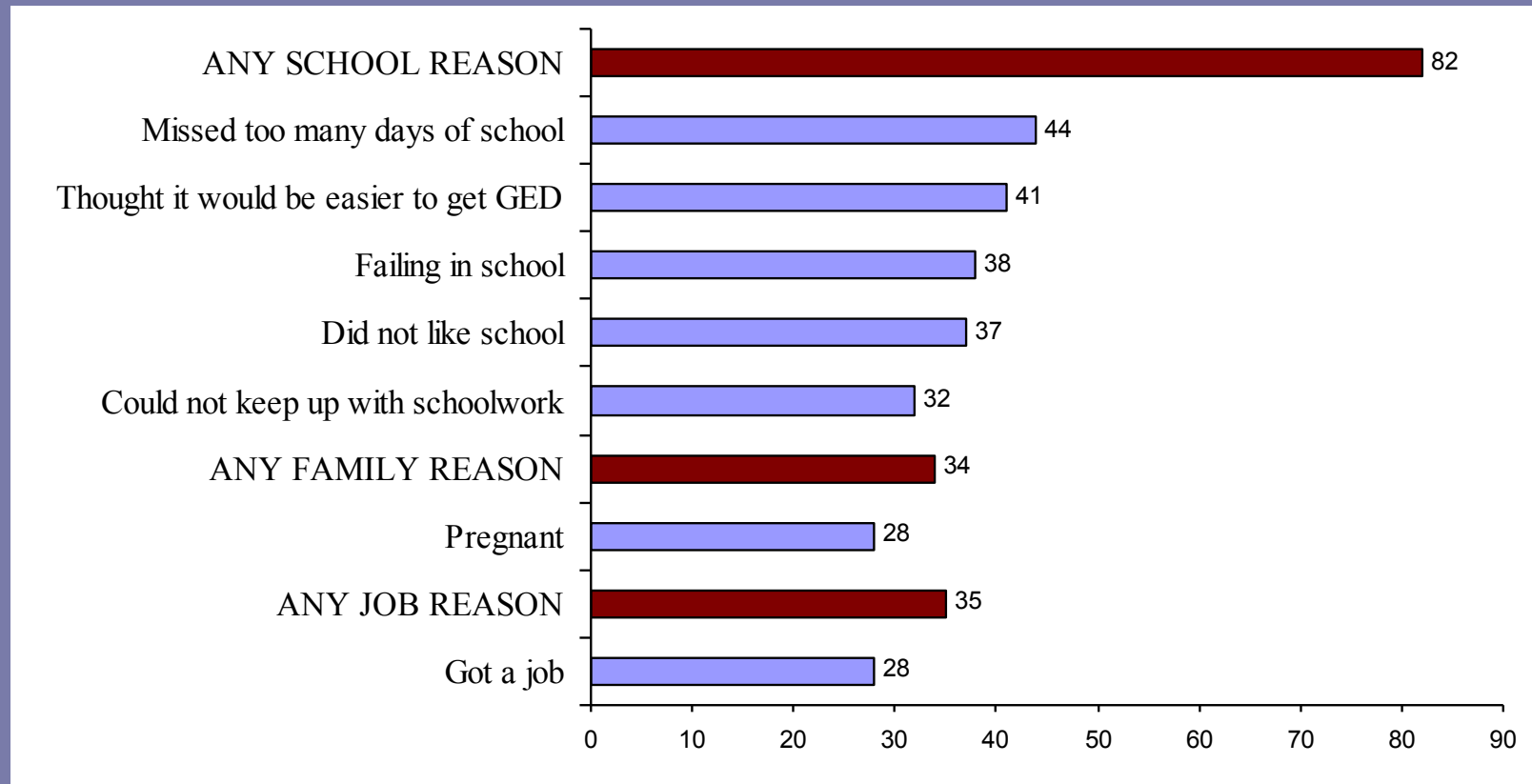
	Dropouts (2006-07)	Costs
California	123,651	\$24 Billion
Los Angeles	12,367	\$2 Billion
Fresno	3,236	\$555 Million
Berkeley	151	\$26 Million

3. The causes are complex—  
related to students, families,  
schools, and communities

# Understanding Causes

- Causes vs. reasons and predictors
- Individual vs. institutional factors
- Individual and family factors
  - Demographic vs. behavioral/attitudinal (alterable vs. unalterable)
  - Proximal (high school) vs. distal (before h.s.)
- School and community factors
  - Resources vs. practices
- Dropout vs. achievement

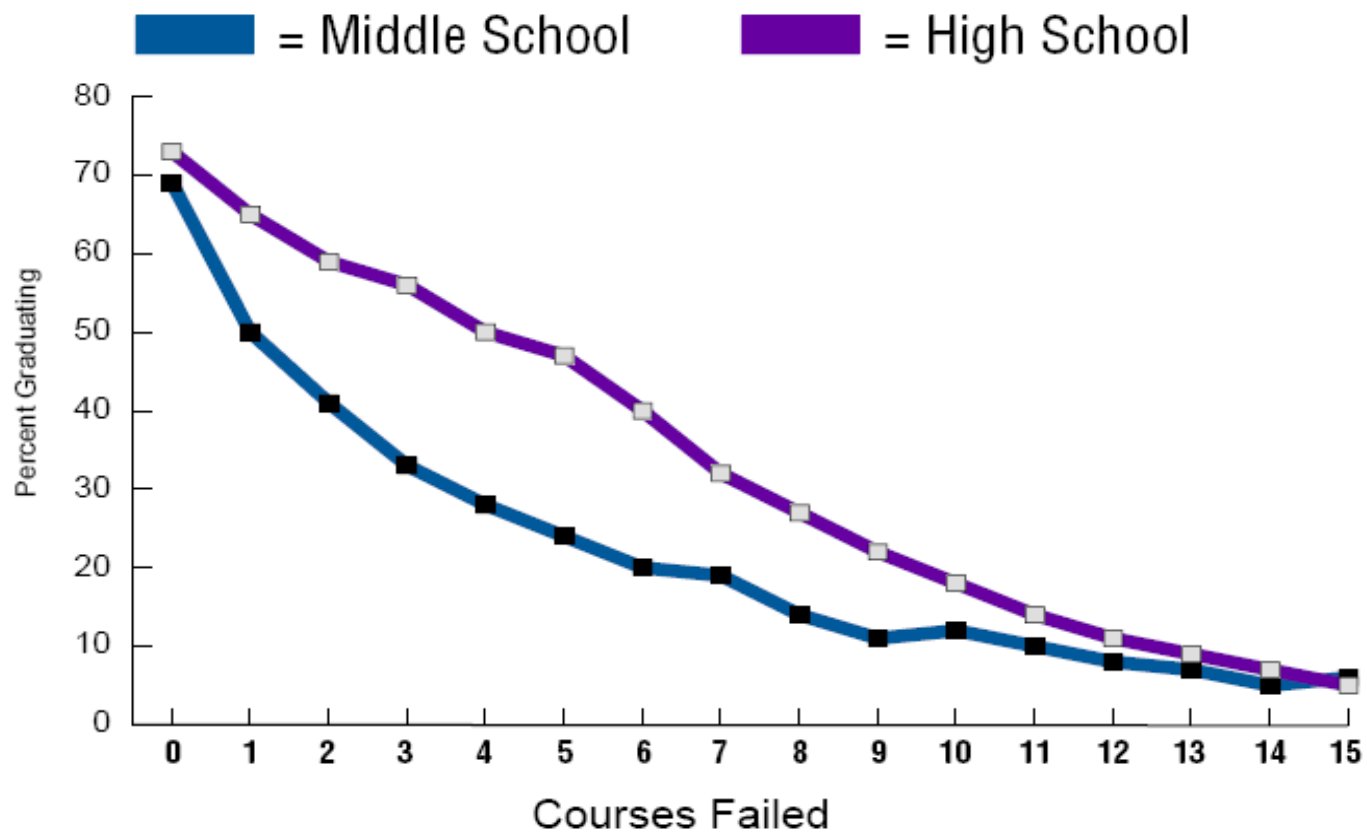
# Reasons for Dropping Out



SOURCE: CDRP Statistical Brief 2.

# Risk Indicators

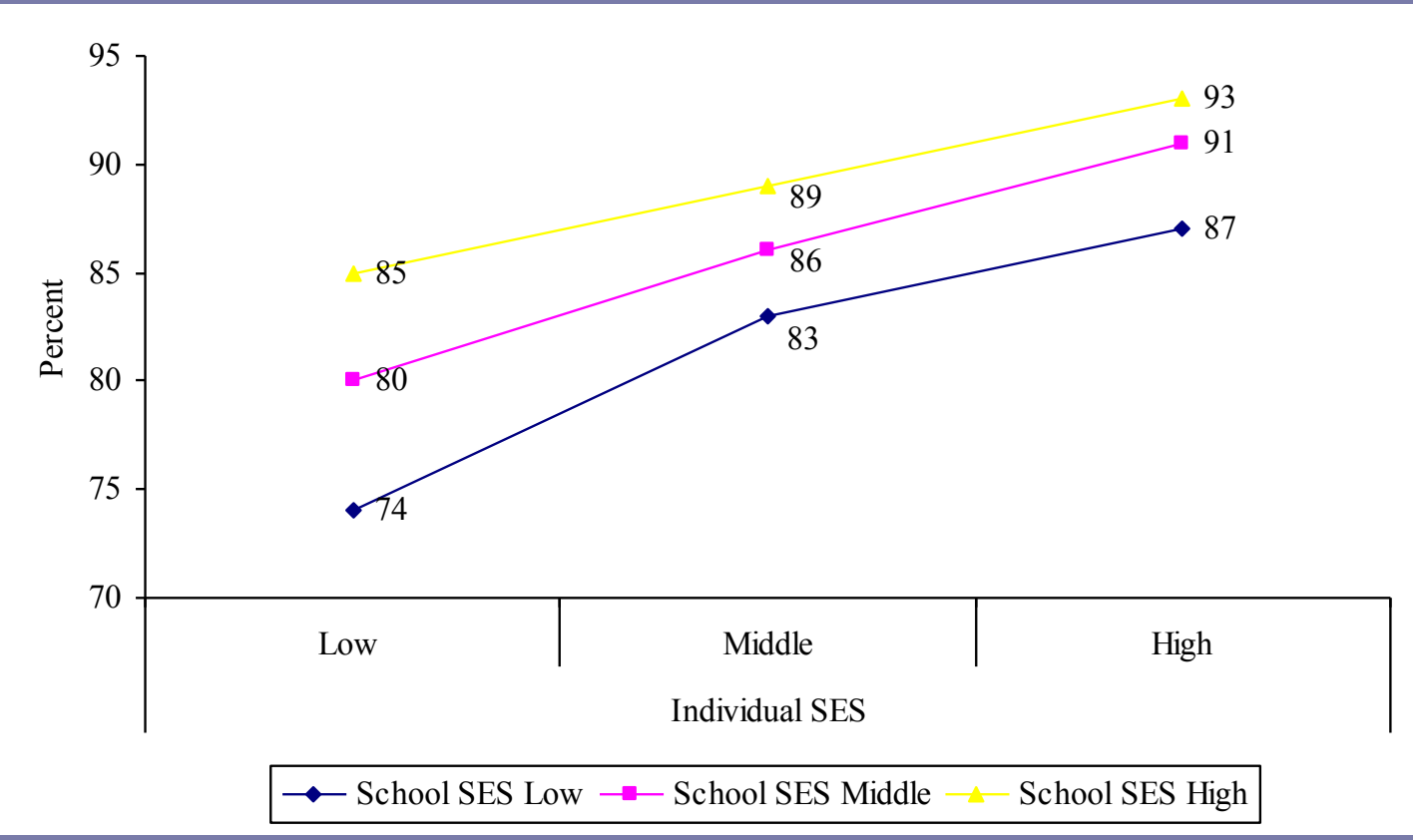
## Graduation Rates by Courses Failed



SOURCE: CDRP Research Report 14.

# Student and School Predictors

(Predicted 10<sup>th</sup> grade graduation rates by student and school SES, 2002)



SOURCE: Preliminary analysis of data from Education Longitudinal Study: 2002.

# High School Dropouts in California

- More than 100,000 students from the high school class of 2009-10 dropped out of California's public schools
- Dropouts generate huge economic losses to California and its local communities: over their lifetimes, a single group of 120,000 20-year-old dropouts will generate \$46 billion in economic losses to the state; the lifetime economic losses from a single group of 20-year-old dropouts in Oakland will exceed \$ 500 million
- The Public Policy Institute of California estimates that by 2020, California will have twice as many workers without high school degrees (22%) as there will be jobs to support them (11%)

SOURCE: *Solving California's Dropout Crisis* (2008).

4. There are a range of possible solutions.



# Interventions

1. Programmatic—focus on students
  - Support programs
  - Alternative programs and schools
2. Comprehensive—focus on schools
  - Comprehensive school reform
  - School/community partnerships
3. Systemic—focus on system
  - School/district capacity building
  - State policy (e.g., compulsory schooling age; graduation requirements)

# 1. Programmatic Solutions

- Advantages
  - Easier to design, fund, implement, evaluate
- Disadvantages
  - Limited impact--only appropriate where dropout problem is small
  - Adds to programmatic “overload” at local level
  - Few proven programs—What Works Clearinghouse has identified five proven programs

## 2. Comprehensive Solutions

- Advantages
  - Potential to impact more students—more appropriate in “dropout factories”
  - Potential to impact multiple educational outcomes (test scores and dropout rates)
- Disadvantages
  - More difficult to alter families, schools, and communities
  - Few proven comprehensive school reform models—  
Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center identified 3 out of 18 models that significantly improved graduation rates

# What Works Clearinghouse (US Department of Education)

- Reviewed 84 studies of 22 dropout interventions
- Only 23 studies of 16 interventions (12 targeted; 4 comprehensive) had rigorous evaluations
  - Seven effective in reducing dropout rates
  - Six effective in improving student progress toward graduation
  - Four effective in improving completion (inc. GED) rates
  - Zero effective in improving graduation rates

# 3. Systemic Solutions

- Advantages
  - Potential to impact more students
  - Potential to impact multiple educational outcomes (test scores and dropout rates)
- Disadvantages
  - Difficult to secure political support and buy in
  - Unclear what incentives, resources, and support needed to improve school, district, and state capacity

# CDRP Policy Report

*(released February 27, 2008)*

- Policy strategy—pressure and support
- Pressure—modify accountability system, report more useful data
- Support—build capacity of schools, districts, state—rather than implementing programs
- Will improve achievement and other student outcomes
- Improvement requires fiscal, human, and social resources

# What the State Should Do

1. Fix the accountability system in order to maintain pressure and to allow sufficient time to address the problem.
2. Collect and report more useful data on dropouts and the state's progress in improving graduation rates.
3. Develop high school reform standards and create “lighthouse” districts to implement them in schools with high dropout rates.
4. Undertake middle school reform.
5. Make strategic investments in proven dropout prevention strategies targeting the most disadvantaged students and schools.
6. Re-examine high school graduation requirements.

# Proven Interventions

	Benefit-Cost Ratio
Preschool	2.33
Preschool + Early Childhood	3.59
Class size reduction in grades K-3 (15 to 1)	
--All students	1.29
--Low-income students	2.11
Raise teacher salaries	2.65
High school reform	4.47



# What Districts Should Do

1. Marshal the will of the district and community to address the dropout problem.
2. Adopt proven strategies to keep students in school and support their successful graduation.
3. Develop a structured, participatory, and timed process for implementing these strategies in all targeted schools.
4. Develop and use data to monitor the implementation of the strategies and to modify the implementation plan.
5. Partner with outside support organizations to identify strategies and to develop and monitor implementation.

# What Schools Should Do

1. Create a personalized learning environment for both students and teachers.
2. Provide academic and social supports for students.
3. Provide rigorous and meaningful instruction.
4. Create connections to the real world.

# Skills and competencies

- Noncognitive skills
- Deeper learning
- 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

# Noncognitive skills

Both types of skill [cognitive and noncognitive (motivation, tenacity, trustworthiness, perseverance)] are valued in the market and affect school choices...Our finding...demonstrates the folly of a psychometrically oriented educational policy that assumes cognitive skills to be all that matter.

A more comprehensive evaluation of educational systems would account for their effects on producing the noncognitive traits that are also valued in the market.

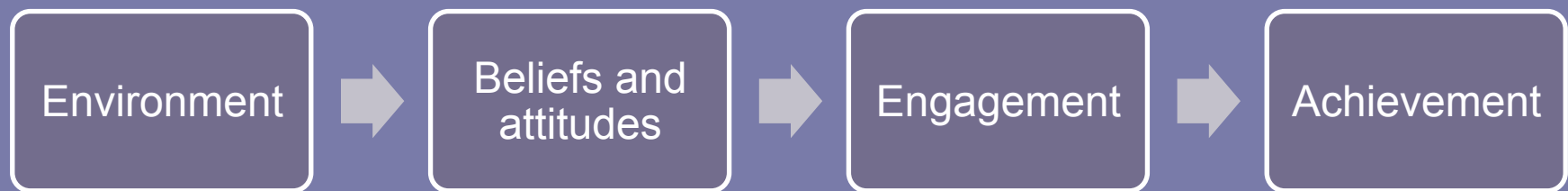
James Heckman (2001, pp. 146, 148)  
Nobel laureate, Economics

# Engaging Instruction

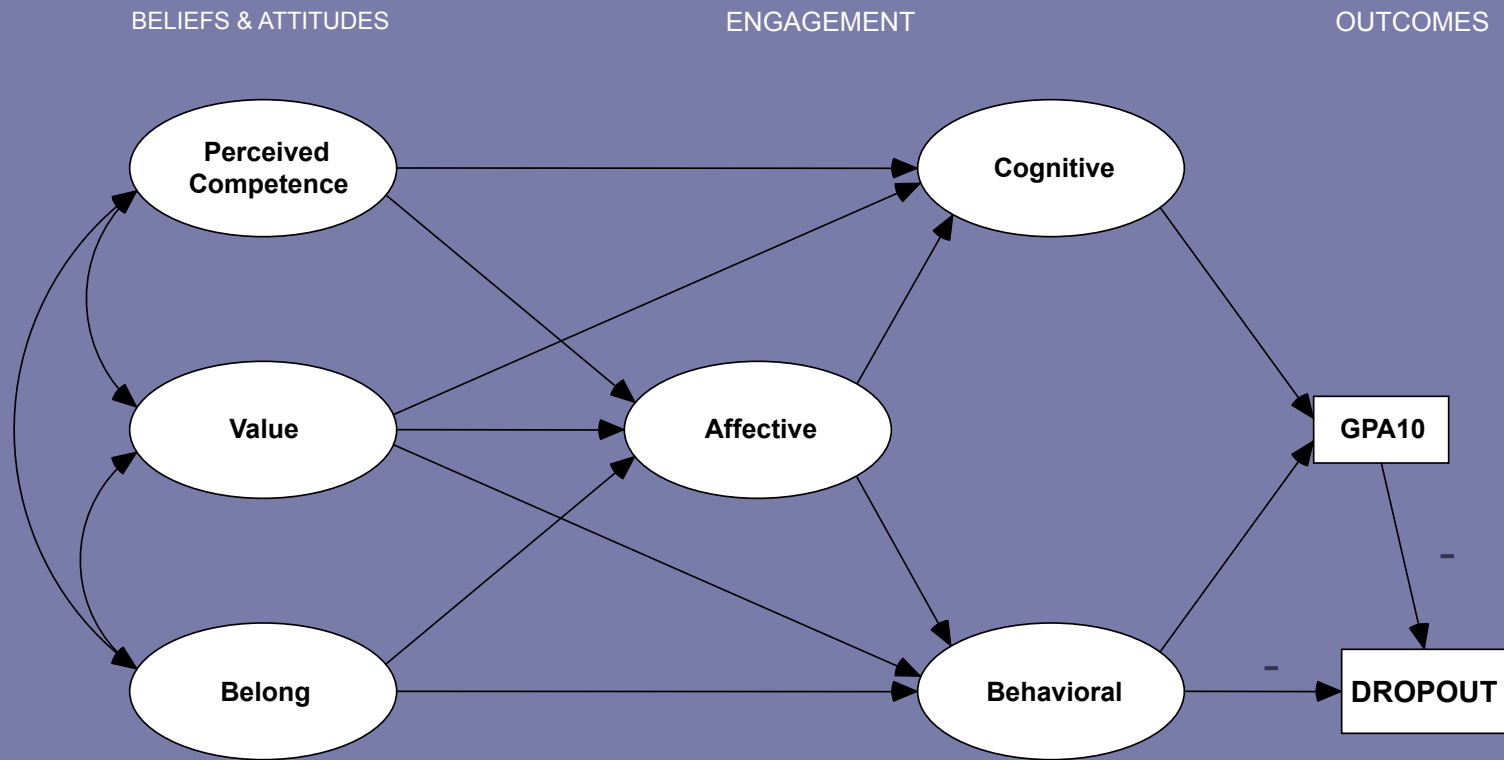
It needs to be relevant to and build on students' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, and provide opportunities for students to engage in authentic tasks that have meaning in the world outside of school. Engaging instruction gives students multiple learning modalities to master material and represent their knowledge, and allows them to draw on their native language and other resources. This kind of teaching is not possible if teachers do not have a deep understanding of their subject matter, of how people learn, and of how to address students' developmental needs.

SOURCE: *Engaging Schools* (NRC 2005), pp. 94-95.

# A Model of Engagement



SOURCE: *Engaging Schools* (NRC 2005).



SOURCE: Rotermund (2010).

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