

Over 500,000 Top-Scoring Students Fail to Complete a Postsecondary Credential Every Year, Says Georgetown University Research

The cumulative effect of this loss means 5 million lost youth every decade—or nearly half of the projected 11 million shortfall of college educated workers needed in the US.

(Washington, D.C., January 17, 2018) - Among the 1.5 million students who are in the top half of their high school class, more than 500,000 do not complete a postsecondary certificate or college degree. This new research from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (Georgetown CEW) also shows that almost all of these students attempt college and only have debt to show for it.

This loss of 500,000 students equates to around one-third of the top performing students (above 1000 on the SAT) or 15 to 17 percent of the high school class. The cumulative effects of this loss are immense—5 million lost youth every decade, which is nearly half of the projected 11 million shortfall of college educated workers needed in the US over the next 10 years.

“We can’t continue to overlook this talent drain,” said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center. “The loss of individual opportunity, productivity, and overall competitiveness of the American workforce hurts us tremendously.”

Students who do not obtain a bachelor’s degree will typically earn \$1 million less over a career, and much more than that if they earn a graduate degree. For the nation, this loss adds up to \$400 billion in lost wages, and even more in lost productivity each year, given how important college educated workers are in the technologically enhanced workplace.

These students in the top half would graduate at well over 80 percent when attending selective institutions, therefore, interventions to help get more students through the system will undoubtedly pay dividends.

Cost of current interventions shows that an average of \$5,000 per student per year would move significant numbers of these highly-qualified students to completion.

Targeted interventions include:

- Active academic and financial counseling
- Work exposure
- Clear credit transfer between institutions

The impact of failure is widely spread by race and class. The majority of these high-scoring students who do not complete a credential are about evenly distributed between the top half and the bottom half of the income distribution. The majority of students who do not complete a credential are White (69%), with 13 percent Latino, eight percent Black, and 10 percent Asian, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, multiple race, and other. This loss appears fairly constant over the last two generations of students, when comparing outcomes eight years after high school among 8th graders in 1988 and 10th graders in 2002.

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To learn more about the forgotten 500,000 college-ready students, watch our video:
cew.georgetown.edu/500K.

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