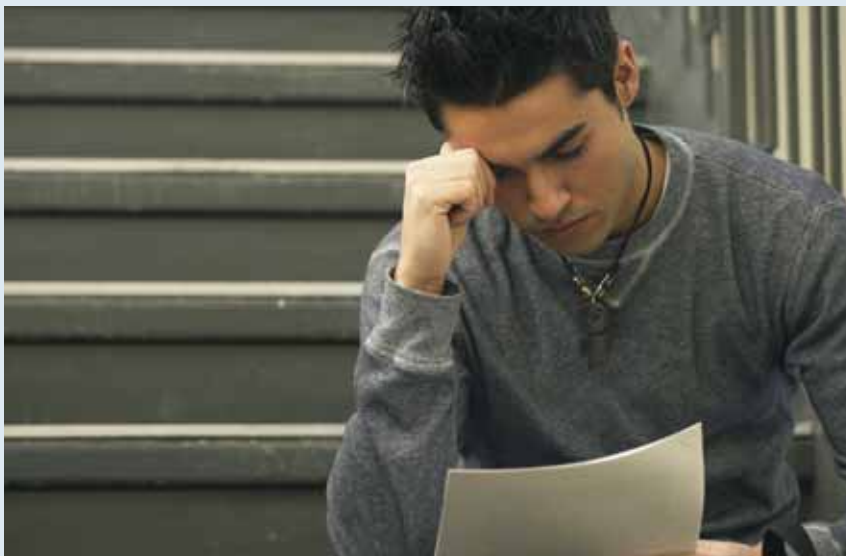


a misconception in recent studies. In a follow-up study to the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study, researchers examined characteristics of 132 gifted dropouts who were 26 years old. Results showed that gifted dropouts had more employment difficulties, fewer educational achievements and more personal difficulties than gifted high school graduates. Thirty-two percent of the gifted dropouts were unemployed, and of those working, their average salary was \$13,000 a year, compared to \$23,000 for gifted high school graduates. Further, 66 percent had not obtained a high school diploma or General Educational Development certificate. Of those who had received a diploma, only two percent went on to college.

Much more study needs to be done in the area of high-ability dropouts, particularly qualitative research that reveals students' school experience. Much of the existing research has focused on dropouts in general, particularly on factors such as socio-economic status and the ways minority status, poverty and personal problems affect the decision to drop out. However, as researchers have found, over half of the gifted dropouts were not in the lowest economic group. A study hypothesis is that the decision to drop out is rooted more strongly, at least in the case of most above-average ability dropouts, in the mismatch between the students' intellectual and psychological traits and the school environment.

Cramond received a faculty seed grant last fall to fund the dropout study but hopes to expand the study.

"We are applying for external grants to continue this work. We really want to implement some ideas to improve the school experience for students. There are many wonderful things going on at individual schools or with individual teachers. However, the reasons for students to drop out vary and so should the means of addressing their needs," said Cramond. "When we talk to students who dropped out, but are very happy and successful at Classic City High School, we see that the problem does not simply reside within the students. There should be options for those for whom a regular school model does not work."



What High-Ability Dropouts Say About Regular School

Common themes found in interviews with participants:

- Material in regular high school not relevant to what they wanted to know or do. Wanted choice and freedom in learning. Resented being "spoon fed" or made to memorize material that they had not chosen.
- Did not find the regular school environment intellectual. They liked classes in which intellectual discussions were held, but those were uncommon.
- Not motivated to do school work. Confident they could do the work but did not find it challenging. Felt no need to prove themselves to others.
- Felt no respect at the regular high school.
- Felt most of their teachers and administrators did not care about them personally or about teaching. When they did feel a teacher cared, they cherished the memory of that teacher. Liked having one-on-one relationships with teachers.
- Were rebellious and independent.
- Considered themselves and their friends very creative thinkers. Had causes, saw injustices in the world and wanted to think of ways to remedy problems. (The researchers are administering the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking and a sensitivities questionnaire to determine whether there is a correlation between high levels of creativity and dropping out.)
- Resented being disciplined for small infractions. Considered schoolboy pranks to be a form of entertainment and felt school officials often overreacted in punishing these antics.
- Felt classroom discipline was a big problem in the regular high school. It took up a large amount of class time – about half.
- Did well in first few years of school, but then lost interest by the end of elementary school.
- Enjoyed humor.

NOTE: Three of the five interviewed showed signs of learning disabilities. Serving twice-exceptional children, those with giftedness and learning disabilities, is often challenging because one exceptionality masks the other.