

Santee-Lynches Education Series

The Region's High School Non-Completion Rate

Places Its Economic Growth at Risk

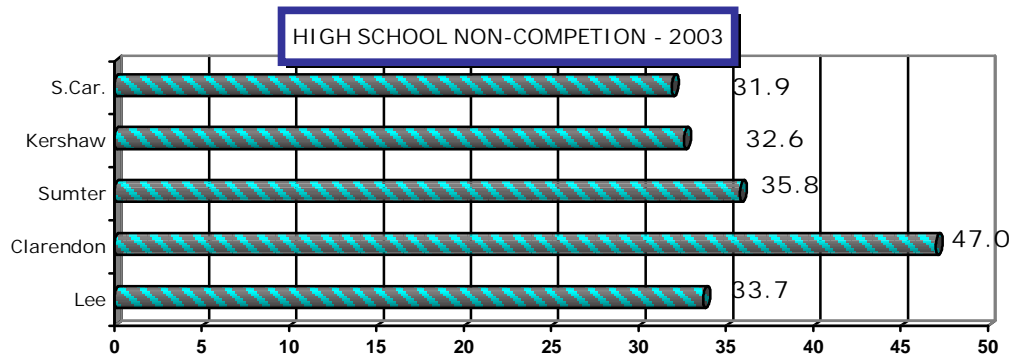
The education of America's youth is one of the paramount social, cultural, and political concerns of the nation. As the country becomes more reliant on technological advances in both the business and personal spheres, the value of education assumes an even greater role. As we enter the 21st Century, our nation with its universal education opportunities, major financial investment in education, and identified demand for improved education, has a high school graduation rate of only seventy percent (70%). This graduation rate equates to a High School non-completion rate of thirty percent (30%).

There are several studies on the South Carolina High Schools' non-completion rate but this paper will use the South Carolina Kids Count formula which defines dropouts as eighth grade students no longer enrolled in grade 12.

Number of Students Who Drop Out Annually (Kids Count 2003)

S. Carolina	Clarendon Co.	Kershaw Co.	Lee Co.	Sumter Co.	S-L Region
16,648	169	290	122	524	1,105

This region's 15 to 19 year olds are only 4.8% of the statewide 15-19 year old total population, but, the 1,105 drop outs in Santee-Lynches account for 6.6% of all dropouts in the State.



Source; SC Kids Count 2003

If these annual percentages continue, three of our four counties will maintain or increase their rate of adults without a high school diploma. As our business community becomes more dependent on sophisticated technology to remain competitive, a large segment of the local workforce will be incapable of meeting these business/industry requirements. This condition could either cost the region new business prospects or make it dependent on in-migration of workers from counties and states with more favorable high school graduation rates.

In addition to the potential loss of higher paying businesses; a resident population with a large number of undereducated adults faces other social and financial problems. A recent U.S. Department of Labor study that compared the status of 16 to 24 year old high school graduates and drop outs on a national level had the following conclusions

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	EMPLOYED	IN SCHOOL	UNEMPLOYED	NOT IN LABOR FORCE
Graduates	52%	33%	9%	7%
Drop Outs	44%	0%	17%	39%

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oct. 2000

This study's results not only show an unemployment rate that is twice as high for drop outs, but perhaps more importantly that 4 out of 10 of these young people are not even looking for work. When 56% of a segment of this important age group is either unemployed or not looking for work, a community or state can expect to face serious social and economic problems.

Another study by the U.S. Department of Commerce estimated earnings based on highest level of educational attainment. In this study, earnings estimates were for full-time, year round workers over a forty-year work life. The study concluded that a high school graduate meeting these criteria would average a minimum of \$200,000 more that a non high school graduate over their working lives. While this is only an average, \$200,000 less in disposable income even over an extended period can seriously affect an individual or family's quality of life. When this dollar amount is multiplied by a large number of adults in a county, it will limit the local government's ability to raise taxes and therefore can reduce the services that residents and business require. In addition, the reduced buying power of this portion of the population will have a negative impact on the overall economy of a county or region.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- A High School diploma is a minimum needed to earn a living wage, especially for a family, now and even more so in the future.
- Young adult drop outs face greater risk of unemployment and idleness, which can result in larger social problems with their corresponding expenditure of additional tax dollars.
- A large undereducated segment of the workforce degrades a county's ability to attract high tech business/industry and the better paying jobs associated with these businesses
- The reduced earning potential and buying power of adults who have not completed high school influences the area's economy and limits local government ability to raise the capital required to meet the needs of its citizens.