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Dropout Crisis is Costly to the State, Says UCSB Researcher

High school graduation rates in California are lower than have been reported by state officials, and research shows that just one year of high school dropouts cost the state \$14-billion in lost wages, according to Russell Rumberger, professor of education and director of the Linguistic Minority Research Project at UCSB.

"High school dropouts are ill-prepared to join the work force, leading to higher unemployment and underemployment rates," says Rumberger.

Rumberger and other education researchers from across the country presented findings indicating a dropout crisis in the state at a recent conference in Los Angeles sponsored by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.

Reports show that California's overall high school graduation rate is approximately 71 percent, 16 percentage points lower than the official rate of 87 percent.

And the graduation rates for African-American and Latino students are "even more alarming," Rumberger says, explaining that just 60 percent of Latino students and only 56.6 percent of African-American students receive high school diplomas.

Other research findings indicate that current educational policies, such as high-stakes tests for students and test-driven accountability for schools, appear to create unintended incentives for school officials to push out low-achieving students.

The conference participants discussed possible solutions to the crisis, including accurately tracking high school graduation rates by providing each student with a single lifetime school identification number that would follow him/her throughout the entire school career and new legislation that would require more accurate statewide reporting and greater accountability for improving graduation rates.

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