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Whatever It Takes, Don't Let Your Friends Drop Out

Photograph

By: JWT

Date: 2005

Source: “Bus,” JWT, New York. <http://staging.adcouncil.org/files/hs_dropout_bus_ooh.jpg> (accessed June 23, 2006).

About the Artist: This advertisement was produced for the Ad Council by JWT. JWT, formerly known as the J. Walter Thompson Company, is the oldest advertising agency in the world and one of the largest, and is responsible for many famous campaigns, slogans, and brands. Since 1942, the Ad Council has been a leading producer of public service announcements for numerous causes. The Council harnesses a variety of creative

and professional resources to produce and distribute messages dealing with social issues such as education, healthcare, and communities.

INTRODUCTION

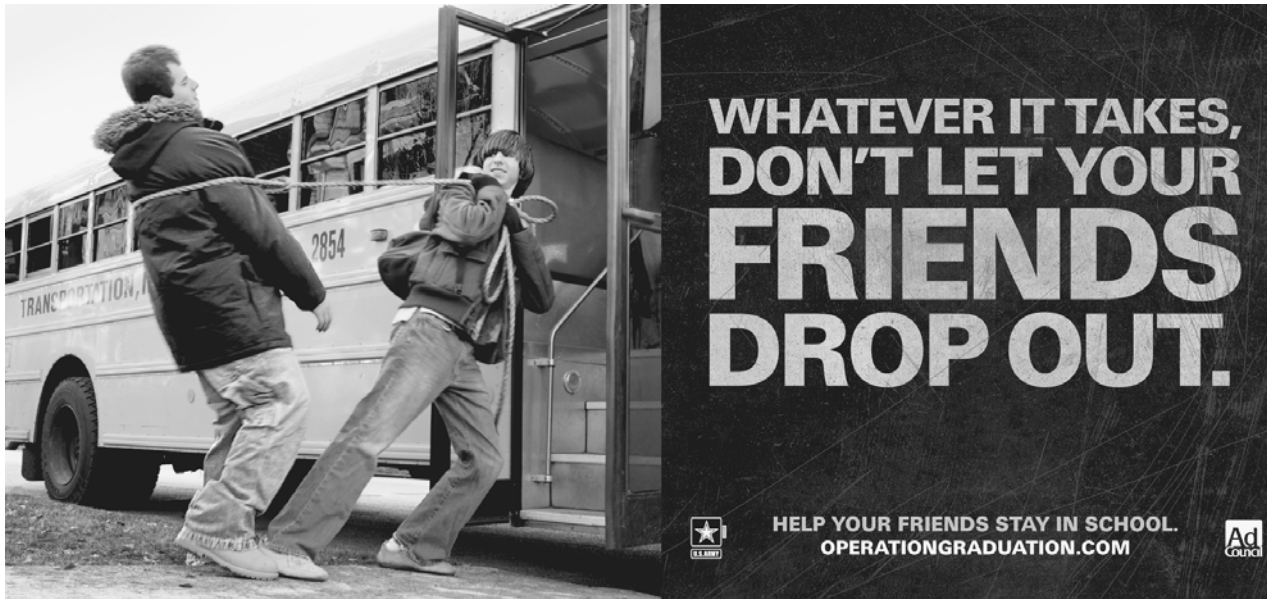
Public schools existed in North America before the United States was founded. The first public school opened in a Boston schoolmaster's home in 1635, and by the dawn of the twenty-first century American public schools served more than fifty million students each year. Education in America has generally been provided as a public service offered free to all children and made mandatory for those of appropriate age.

Early in the nation's history, law enforcement officials observed that truancy, or skipping school, appeared to be well correlated with criminal behavior. One early criminologist, writing in 1915, noted that roughly one-fourth of the young men appearing in court had a history of truancy. A 1942 study in Chicago mapped juvenile delinquency and truancy, comparing the two and finding a high correlation. A 1979 study of repeat criminal offenders found that more than three of four offenders had criminal records that began with truancy charges.

Not surprisingly, successful attempts to reduce truancy frequently reduce juvenile crime as well. A concerted effort in Inglewood, California to reduce truancy was accompanied by a thirty percent drop in daytime burglaries and a sixty percent decrease in vehicle burglaries; a similar push by combined law enforcement agencies from four other California cities produced similar results. Yet despite several decades of data pointing to a relationship between truancy and crime, local law enforcement officials frequently dismiss truancy as a minor problem, devoting few resources to combating it.

Beyond demonstrated reductions in crime, communities also reap other benefits when students attend school. State school funding is frequently tied to attendance, meaning that each student who skips school costs the local school system a set amount of money. School systems facing tight finances have tremendous incentive to ensure that students show up for class, though many systems struggle with how to achieve this objective.

The biggest losers when teens quit school are usually the teens themselves. High school dropouts earn less than their diploma-holding peers, and the difference is growing. From 1980 to 2000, average earnings for high school dropouts doubled, while annual incomes for high school graduates tripled. When inflation is factored in and constant (2002) dollars are



PRIMARY SOURCE

Whatever It Takes, Don't Let Your Friends Drop Out: An advertisement from the Operation Graduation Campaign encourages students to put pressure on their peers to stay in school. "BUS," JWT, NEW YORK.

used, male dropouts experienced a stunning thirty-five percent decline in earnings, from \$35,087 in 1971 to just \$23,903 in 2002. Female dropouts saw their earnings fall from almost \$20,000 per year to just over \$17,000 in the same period.

Despite the many problems associated with dropping out of school and the extensive efforts devoted to reducing dropout rates, recent research suggests the problem may actually be growing worse. In 2005, the Education Testing Service (ETS) released a report examining the current state of high school completion in the United States. The report estimated that high school completion rates peaked at 77.1 percent in 1969 and have fallen ever since, dropping below 70 percent in 2000. Most states continued to experience falling completion rates during the 1990s; the District of Columbia had the lowest completion rate, forty-eight percent, while Vermont had the highest at eighty-eight percent.

The study found that three primary factors predict dropout rates: socioeconomic characteristics such as household income; the number of parents in the home; and the number of times a student has previously changed schools. Though these factors are often beyond the control of social service agencies, the report notes that a variety of alternative programs and intervention efforts have shown promising results in

reducing dropout rates. However, the report also echoes previous studies with its prediction that dropouts will generally face sporadic employment in low-paying jobs and that many will leave the workforce entirely.

PRIMARY SOURCE

WHATEVER IT TAKES, DON'T LET YOUR FRIENDS DROP OUT

See primary source image.

SIGNIFICANCE

Among the critical problems noted in the ETS report is a shortage of counselors who can provide individual guidance for at-risk teens. A campaign called Boost, cosponsored by the U.S. Army and produced by the Ad Council, encourages at-risk teens, along with their friends and family members, to work together toward school completion. By enlisting a teen's friends and family as supporters, the effort hopes to provide at-risk teens with a level of personal attention that formal programs cannot.

While the military has long been viewed as an alternative for non-college bound students, the service's increasingly technical equipment requires a

higher basic level of education among soldiers, and the military has found itself providing an increasing volume of remedial education for recruits. For this reason, the military has chosen to become involved in efforts to promote basic education, in the hopes that the quality of its recruiting pool will improve.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

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For Parents Seeking a Choice, Charter Schools Prove More Popular Than Vouchers

Newspaper article

By: Sam Dillon

Date: July 13, 2005

Source: Dillon, Sam. "For Parents Seeking a Choice, Charter Schools Prove More Popular Than Vouchers." *New York Times* (13 July 2005): B8.

About the Author: Sam Dillon won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the drug trade in Mexico; he currently writes on issues related to education for the *New York Times*.

INTRODUCTION

In 1988, then-president of the union American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, called for massive reform in public education via the establishment of a "charter" school, a school designed by teachers or other educators that involves a contract with local authorities. The charter school movement began in 1991 in Minnesota with the passage of a law permitting such schools to open; the first, City Academy in St. Paul, received a charter exempting the school from local or state regulations, to allow the school to provide an alternative educational experience for students while being supported by taxpayer dollars.

A charter school can be public or private, though in common terms a charter school denotes a publicly funded school that operates outside of standard government regulations. Each charter school must outline its educational goals to justify exemption from standard local and state regulation; failure to meet these goals over an established period of time can lead to the closing of the charter school.

Unlike private schools, public charter schools receive taxpayer dollars. In some states, such as Massachusetts, charter schools are allotted the same per-pupil amount granted to traditional public schools, but typically do not receive additional funds for buildings and capital expenses; therefore, the charter school must operate under a much tighter budget than a traditional public school. From the establishment of the City Academy of St. Paul in 1992 through the year 2006, the charter school movement has grown to include more than 3,600 schools in more than forty U.S. states.

Charter schools can be organized around educational philosophies such as Waldorf, Montessori, or Reggio Emilia; around particular concentrations such as drama and performing arts, math and science, or foreign language; or managed by for-profit institutions such as SABIS, Inc. or The Edison Project.

At the same time that charter schools gained in popularity, the concept of vouchers—a set amount of money per pupil to be used by parents at the school of choice, public or private—became popular as well.