

Poverty increases high school dropout rates

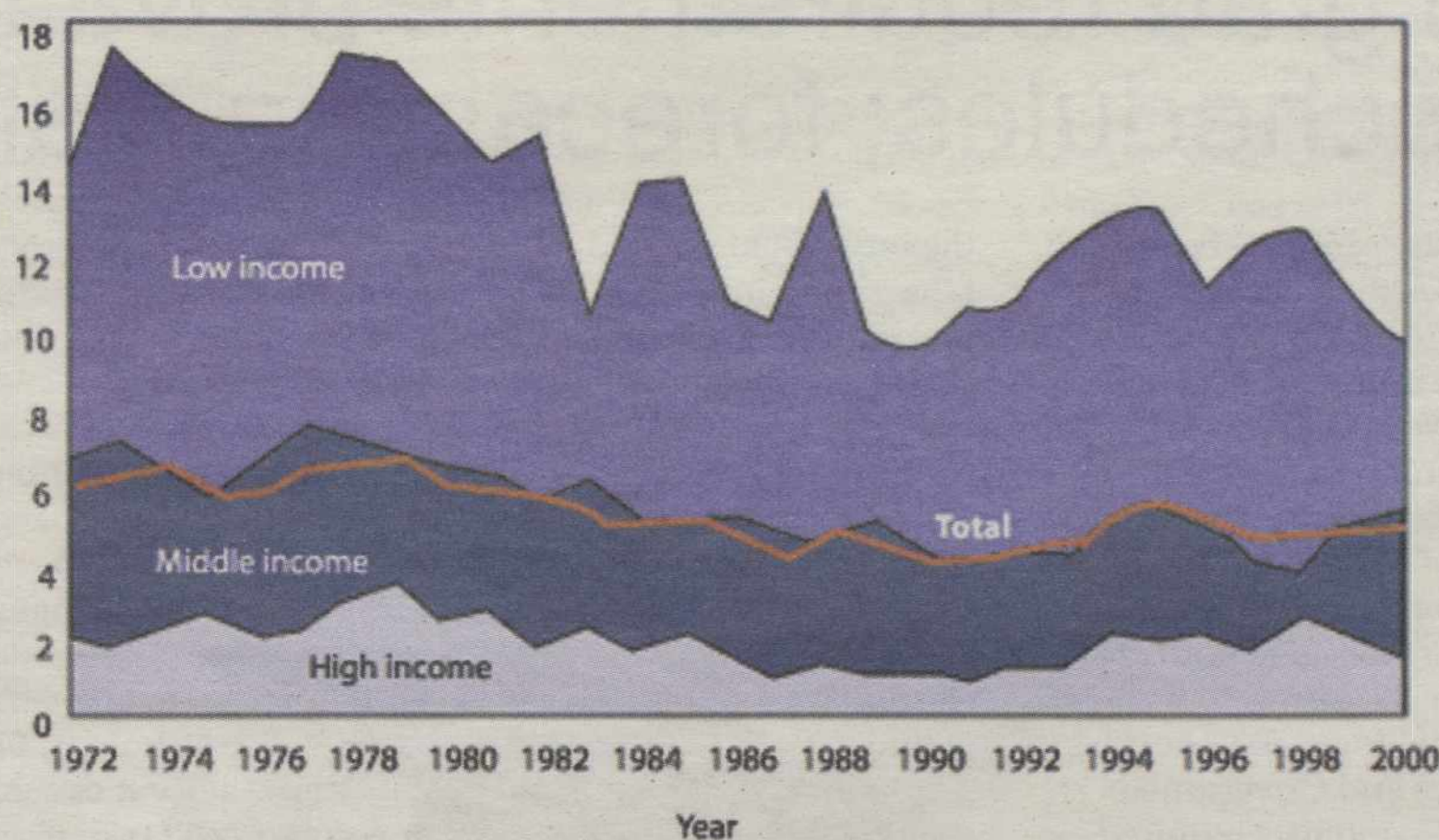
CHARLIE CRAFT

One of "America's Best High Schools" and an "Oregon Exceptional School" are just two of the awards West Linn High School received in 2010. In 2008, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District had a dropout rate of 0.9 percent, one of the lowest in the state. In contrast, the Portland School District had a dropout rate of 9.6 percent.

High school dropouts have become an epidemic in the U.S., with nearly 1.2 million students failing to graduate from high schools each year. Federal policies such as the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind" initiative and the Obama Administration's "Race to the Top" have failed to change this staggering statistic.

One statistic says that students between the ages of 16 to 24 are seven times as likely to have completed high school if they come from the highest income level than those who come

Figure 1.-Event dropout rates of 15- through 24-year-olds who dropped out of grades 10-12, by family income:* October 1972 through October 2000



Graph courtesy of U.S. Department of Commerce

Students of lower income are more likely to drop out of school than students coming from a family with a higher income. The government has attempted various initiatives to curb dropout rates over the past 30 years with little success. The West Linn-Wilsonville School District cut its 2006 dropout rate in half in 2008.

from the lowest income level. This statistic suggests that students coming from the lowest income families are at a direct disadvantage.

The fact that high school students come to schools with an advantage or a

disadvantage appears again, albeit in a different form; the graduation gap between whites and minority groups can be 40-50 percent, meaning (in some areas) white students are nearly twice as likely to graduate

as students from minority groups.

In Clackamas County, in which West Linn-Wilsonville School District is located, 11.7 percent of children live below the poverty line, while in Multnomah

County, in which Portland School District is located, the number of children living below the poverty line jumps to 18.1 percent.

West Linn-Wilsonville School District has had massive success reducing its high school dropout rate, but the district is located in a county in which the average income is over \$60,000. Michele Olson, guidance counselor, said that level of wealth can affect dropout rates in different ways, but many of the problems stem from a lack of support from home.

This lack of support can stem from parents who are unemployed or who work two jobs or who have many children, according to Olson. "Drugs and alcohol and the lack of support students have from their parents are also some possible reasons for a lack of support from home," said Olson. But, "Community involvement helps [reduce] dropout rates".

More summer school options considered due to new requirements

CHRISANN KIM

Starting this fall, all current freshmen and sophomores are required to take World History (Gold), U.S. History (Green and Gold) or AP U.S. History, Civics and Government and Economics. The number of credits needed for graduation is still the same—48 total. The number of credits in each subject area has remained the same. The three additional social studies requirements were not added to the previous six credits, but the courses have been changed within those required credits. Current sophomores do not have to take another semester of U.S. History since they are already taking a full year U.S. History class.

Summer school has become an option for students to eliminate requirements. Credit recovery and core and wellness classes are available for students wishing to be proactive with their schedules. Summer school is important for students that have failed any courses. There is no wiggle room for failing courses.

"I'm taking Kickboxing so I can take band next year and so I don't have to take a wellness credit," Emma Brown, sophomore, said. "It's a good idea (to take summer school) so that you are on track and you can

do what you want during the school year."

Morning classes include Algebra, Biology/Life Science, two English 9-12 classes, Algebra Review, Healthful Living (juniors and seniors only), Kickboxing/Health, Trigonometry, Wellness 1 and PBC Wellness/The Nia Technique (class times vary). Afternoon classes include Biology/Life Science, History/English hybrid, U.S./World History, Wellness 2 and PBC Wellness/The Nia Technique (class times vary).

Students who are behind in their credits are at risk of not being able to graduate with

their class because they lack the necessary number of credits to do so. If students have failed a class or dropped out, summer school is a wise choice. Recovering credits is vital in order to graduate with the required amount of credits. They are able to catch up with their credits and eventually be on track again.

Students who wish to be ahead of their credit planning can also consider summer school. Taking classes over the summer allow you to

free up a spot in your schedule during the coming year, without having to arrange your school schedule around the classes you need to make up.

While WLHS offers summer school classes, some students have found independent online classes over the summer to be another option. Tara Galloway, sophomore, will be taking an online class through Brigham Young University in order to be able to take more social studies classes.

"I'm taking physics online through BYU because WL doesn't offer it any time other than during the year," Galloway said. "It is all about the better scheduling and use of my time. I have to take it because I will still need to fill that credit, and colleges like to see the three core science classes."

To students like Galloway or those who wish to be proactive and free up a spot in their schedule, taking courses online through colleges/universities can be advantageous. It frees up more room in their schedule, enabling them to take more desired or required classes. Other colleges that offer online high school courses include Portland State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and The Center for Distance and Independent Study/University of Missouri.

WLHS summer school costs \$200 (for in-district residents; \$250 for out-of-district residents). All classes start on July 5 and end on July 29. PBC Wellness/The Nia Technique starts on July 12 and ends on Aug. 25.

"I loved it," Shannon Hardman, sophomore, said. "It gave me a chance to accomplish something academically while still connecting with friends and enjoying my summer."

Graphic by Patrick Sluiter

