

# A Close Connection

THE LINKS BETWEEN education and lifelong health are stronger now than ever, according to a project of the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University. The center’s Education and Health Initiative, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is an effort to raise awareness that Americans without a high school diploma experience poorer health and shorter life expectancy rates than their better-educated peers.

Between 1990 and 2008, the difference in life expectancy between the most- and least-educated Americans grew from 13 to 14 years among males and from 8 to 10 years among females. The center’s report introducing the initiative states that this difference has been growing since the 1960s.

Major diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, are also more likely to affect less-educated Americans. “By 2011, the prevalence of diabetes had reached 15 percent for adults without a high school education, compared with 7 percent for college graduates,” the report states. In addition, risk factors, such as smoking and obesity, that contribute to disease are more likely to affect those with less education. The report states that by 2011, 27 percent of people without a high school diploma or GED reported smoking, but only 8 percent of those with a bachelor’s degree were smokers.

When it comes to life expectancy among racial groups, differences persist. But “education—and the social factors associated with education—are transcending the influence of race on health,” according to the report. African Americans with a college education live longer than whites with less than a high school education. Although highly educated African Americans (those with at least 16 years of education) live four years less than comparably educated whites, they can expect to live eight years longer than whites who have less than 12 years of education.

The report also notes increasing disparities in life expectancy among better- and less-educated whites. Between 1990 and 2008, among whites with less

than 12 years of education, life expectancy at age 25 decreased by more than three years for men and by more than five years for women.

“More education leads to higher earnings that can provide access to healthy food, safer homes, and better health care,” the report says. Because of this connection, the center calls for investments in early child care, affordable housing, and economic development to improve living conditions in communities. The report is available at [www.bit.ly/1dotLBW](http://www.bit.ly/1dotLBW).



SOURCE: CENTER ON SOCIETY AND HEALTH, *EDUCATION: IT MATTERS MORE TO HEALTH THAN EVER BEFORE*, PAGE 3.



# The Promise of Community Schools

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH on community schools—schools that partner with outside groups to provide wraparound services to support the social, emotional, and health needs of students and their families—finds they have promise in helping low-income youth reach their potential.\*

“School success (or failure) is the product of multiple and varied factors at the individual, family, and school levels,” according to a white paper titled “Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers,” which is based on *Making the Grade: Assessing the Evidence for Integrated Student Supports*, a report published by Child Trends. “This suggests that providing an array of academic and non-academic supports in a coordi-

nated fashion, as ISS does, is a more effective strategy than focusing on one, or a small set of, supports.”

The white paper notes that integrated student supports (or ISS)—another name for the community schools approach—includes connecting students and their families to medical care, parent education, family counseling, food banks, and employment assistance, among other services. Such programs serve more than 1.5 million students, many of whom are at-risk, in nearly 3,000 schools nationwide. According to Child Trends, more than 75 percent of students enrolled in these programs are African American or Hispanic.

Based on 11 rigorous evaluations, this study finds that community schools “can contribute to student academic progress as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropout, and increases in attendance, math and reading achievement, and overall GPA.”

The study also finds a positive return on investment in such programs, “ranging from more than \$4 saved for every \$1 invested to almost \$15 saved for every \$1 invested.”

The white paper is available at [www.bit.ly/OtDfmx](http://www.bit.ly/OtDfmx), and the full report is available at [www.bit.ly/1p8tNjN](http://www.bit.ly/1p8tNjN).

\*For more on community schools, see the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, “Surrounded by Support: Partnerships between Communities and Schools Connect Students with the Services They Need,” available at [www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/summer2009/index.cfm](http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/summer2009/index.cfm).