

PROMISING APPROACH # 1

Invest in Education Equivalency Degree Programs for Over-age Young People Who Want to Complete Their Formal Education

Education equivalency programs (also referred to as second chance education programs) can help address the demand and supply-side constraints that have led many young people worldwide to discontinue their education before acquiring basic skills needed to succeed in work and life.¹ The primary goal of equivalency programs is to expand access to secondary education and training opportunities, but they also offer training in a mixture of basic and technical skills. These skills allow at-risk youth either to complete their formal education or enter the labor market, thereby facilitating their (re)integration into society. Educational equivalency degrees are based on the assumption that a certified degree shows employers that the potential employee has both the secondary school skills and the stamina to complete such a course. This increases the young person's chance of gaining employment, as well as giving him or her access to tertiary education and, thus, higher future earnings.²

Equivalency programs differ from traditional education programs in several ways: their target group (school dropouts, as opposed to all children); a flexible and innovative structure; lower-cost teaching methods; and specially designed, innovative teaching materials. Education equivalency programs have to vary to suit the local context in terms of their management structure (private versus public), the teachers' roles (certified teachers as opposed to community volunteers), the program's content (similar to or different from formal secondary school curriculum), accreditation type (same or different exams as formal schools) and the use of technology. For equivalency programs to be most effective, they must be accessible to all school dropouts (nonselective), effective (they should increase students' educational attainment), and equivalent (graduates should be provided with the same, or similar, qualifications as graduates of formal education programs).

How Do Education Equivalency Degree Programs Reduce Risky Youth Behavior?

Research has shown that the number of years of education and/or training attained by a young person is a significant predictor of his or her future employment. In the case of young people who leave school early, they are likely to be highly vulnerable to economic and social change because of their limited amount of schooling.³ Second chance programs can have a positive impact on at-risk youth both directly (by increasing their schooling that was cut short when they dropped out, which increases their chances of acquiring employment and receiving higher wages) and indirectly (by providing them with information and skills to make good decisions, giving them better prospects for a successful life, and consequently reducing their chances of engaging in risky behavior). Studies also show that second chance education can provide many intangible benefits to young people.⁴ Such benefits include improved social and interaction skills; increased confidence and self-esteem that gives participants a sense of control over their lives and the ability to seek out new opportunities; and a sense of connectedness with their peers, teachers, and schools, which has been proven to be one of the most important protective factors for young people. Therefore, helping young people who have left school early to increase their educational attainment and/or skills so they can enter the labor market and mainstream society can help dissuade them from future risky behavior or minimize current risky behavior.

Research Findings: Providing the Evidence Base

Evidence shows that, while equivalency programs can be more cost-effective than traditional programs (due to their lower recurrent and fixed costs), their impact on school performance (test scores, completion rates, and numbers of students continuing in education) and on employment and wages is mixed. An evaluation of Colombia's *Tutorial Learning System (SAT)* program showed that on average SAT students scored higher on the national exam than students in formal schools within the same municipalities.⁵ Meanwhile, in Indonesia's *Open Junior Secondary Schools* program, 93 percent of participants who took the national exam passed, and there was no significant difference in terms of academic performance between students from the program and those from traditional schools.⁶ However, only 10 percent of participants in the Philippines' *Non-formal Education Project* passed the nationally equivalent exam over the span of two years, though 99 percent of those who passed continued their education or found employment.⁷

In Mexico's *Telesecundaria* program, which offers year-round curricula via television to rural junior secondary schools, almost 75 percent of the students who enter at grade 7 successfully complete grade 9. However, figures from 1994 showed that only 21 percent of *Telesecundaria* students continued on to high school compared with 85 percent of grade 9 students in urban areas. It is estimated that another 15 percent of *Telesecundaria* students pursue technical careers. The table below shows that *Telesecundaria* students are substantially more likely than other groups to pass a final grade 9 examination that is set and administered by the central government and certified by the Ministry of Education. These exams certify successful completion of junior secondary school and are eligibility criteria for entering senior high school. However, the regular and *Telesecundaria* students do not take the same examination, although both exams are based on national standards and both must be certified by the central government.⁸

**The Effectiveness of Mexico's *Telesecundaria* Program:
Examination Pass Rates by Type of School**

Type of School	Exam Pass Rates (%)
Traditional	74
Telesecundaria	93
Technical	72
Secondary for Workers	68
Total Secondary Population	76

Source: Basic Statistics of the National Education System. CYCLE 1995–1996, Ministry of Public Education, Mexico.

An evaluation of the European Union's *Second Chance Schools* pilot project showed that it had a 94 percent success rate in getting some 4,000 young people who lack basic skills and qualifications back into school.⁹ Denmark's *Youth Unemployment Program* aims to increase the employment possibilities available to unemployed, low-educated young people and to motivate them to return to school. An evaluation of the program showed that it has had small but positive short-term effects on employment.¹⁰ However, a nationwide evaluation of the U.S. program *JOBSTART Demonstration*, which targets school dropouts with low literacy skills, showed that employment rates among participants were not consistently above rates for the control group and that the program's effects on earnings were either insignificant or negative. The evaluation also found that the program was not cost-effective. Nevertheless, an evaluation of *JOBSTART* in San Jose, California, a subset of the national *JOBSTART* program in the United States, demonstrated that the program had resulted in significant earnings gains for participants.¹¹ Results of evaluations of the *General Educational Development (GED)* program in the United States have shown that GED certification has little or no impact on wages for those who do not go on to receive post-secondary schooling. However, the fact that GED certification makes post-

secondary opportunities available in the first place can be considered an indirect (positive) impact of the program.¹²

Moving Forward: Factors for Success

- Graduates of equivalency programs should be provided with ***similar qualifications as graduates of formal education programs*** (in other words, a certificate of completion).
- It is vital to know about the ***needs of the target group*** and the circumstances in which they operate, including ***why they dropped out of formal education system*** in the first place.
- ***Programs should build partnerships among NGOs and private providers, the formal education system, and potential employers*** of students to ensure that graduates are able to continue their education or get a job.
- Instructors and facilitators should be specifically trained in ***innovative teaching methods*** as well as in the special needs and learning styles of the target group.
- The programs should provide classes on ***a flexible schedule*** (nights and weekends) to accommodate the different circumstances of the participants.
- The ***programs should be simply designed and the curricula should be practical and integrated*** (and include life skills and vocational training).
- ***Formal education teaching methods should also be used*** so that students who go back to formal education system will have a less difficult time integrating and adapting to the formal system.
- There should be ***substantial personal interaction between students and instructors***.
- The ***program should be perceived to be of high quality and comparable to formal education*** by participants, instructors, and community members.
- ***Programs should emphasize social support and emotional connectedness*** of students by involving parents, especially of the younger participants in the program, and by keeping a group of students with the same teacher over the years.

Endnotes

1. Although there are many youth who never attended school and could benefit from various types of nonformal education, this note focuses on the needs of school dropouts.
2. World Bank. 2007. *The Promise of Youth: Policy for Youth at Risk in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
3. Business Council of Australia. 2003. "The Cost of Dropping Out: The Economic Impact of Early School Leaving." Business Council of Australia, Melbourne. <http://www.bca.com.au>.
4. Saunders, J., M. Jones, K. Bowman, P. Loveder, and L. Brooks. 2003. "Indigenous People in Vocational Education and Training: A Statistical Review of Progress." National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook. Available at: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/commercial/op298.pdf>; and Wyn, J., H. Stokes, and D. Tyler. 2004. "Stepping Stones: TAFE and ACE Program Development for Early School Leavers." National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook. Available at: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr0015.pdf>.
5. di Grapello, Emanuela, ed. 2006. *Meeting the Challenges of Secondary Education in Latin America and East Asia: Improving Efficiency and Resource Mobilization*. Directions in Development: Human Development. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
6. di Grapello 2006.
7. di Grapello 2006.
8. Calderon, J. 1998. "Telesecundaria: Using TV to Bring Education to Rural Mexico." *Education and Technology Technical Notes* 3(2). World Bank, Washington, D.C.
9. European Commission. 2001. "Second Chance Schools: The Results of a European Pilot Project." Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission.
10. Betcherman, G., M. Godfrey, S. Puerto, F. Rother, and A. Stavreska. 2007. "Global Inventory of Interventions to Support Young Workers, Synthesis Report." Preliminary draft. World Bank, Washington, D.C.
10. Betcherman and others 2007.
11. Arends-Kuenning, M., Andrea Ferro, and D. Levison. 2006. "Youth at Risk in the Latin American and Caribbean Region: Focus on Early School-Leaving." Policy paper prepared for the World Bank's "Youth at Risk in the Latin America and Caribbean Region: Building a Policy Toolkit." Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

Key Implementation Considerations	
Anticipated Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return of dropouts to formal education system • Acquisition of basic education/literacy skills • Employability, entry into labor market • Increase in earnings • Social reintegration
Secondary Effects	Self confidence, self-esteem, better social interaction skills
Responsible Agency/Actor	Ministries of Education or Labor, public and private training institutes, NGOs, private sector
Targeted Risk Group	Type III—students who have dropped out before completing secondary schooling
Target Age Group	15 and older
Examples of Cost per Beneficiary	Mexico <i>Telesecundaria</i> : Approximately US\$550 per student per year ^a
Necessary Initial Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full acceptance by formal education sector, private sector, prospective students, and community members • Detailed knowledge of target population and local context • Established partnerships with formal education sector and prospective employers • Well-trained facilitators/teachers in innovative education methods and in working with target group • Marketing of courses both to target group and to prospective employers
Specific Examples & Levels of Effectiveness (Strong Evidence and Emerging Evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexico: <i>Telesecundaria</i>—Emerging evidence • Colombia: <i>Tutorial Learning System (SAT)</i>—Emerging evidence (http://www.sat.edu.co) • Philippines: <i>Non-formal Education Project</i>—Emerging evidence • Indonesia: <i>Open Junior Secondary School Program</i>—Emerging evidence • Denmark: <i>Youth Unemployment Program</i>—Emerging evidence • United States: <i>General Educational Development (GED)</i>—Emerging evidence (http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=GED'S)
Issues to Consider for Replication and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equivalency programs should not aim to replace formal education. • If employers undervalue equivalency degrees, this may discourage young people from pursuing them, which reinforces the need to advertise the benefits of the program both to potential participants and to employers. • School dropouts are a heterogeneous group, so it is important to target accurately.

Source: a. Calderoni 1998.