

Researchers say students should stay in school until age 18

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(Phys.org)—A growing body of research indicates that increasing the minimum school-leaving age to 18 not only increases high-school graduation rates but also significantly improves the life outcomes of students who otherwise would have become dropouts, according to an article in the winter 2013 *Issues in Science and Technology*.

In the article, authors Derek Messacar and Philip Oreopoulos of the University of Toronto write that high-school dropouts fare much worse than their peers on a wide variety of long-term outcomes. On average, a dropout earns less money, is more likely to be in jail, is less healthy, is less likely to be married, and is less happy than a high-school graduate.

Though the study shows demonstrated improvements with a change in minimum school-leaving age, more effort should also be spent on keeping [students](#) engaged in school at earlier ages.

"The act of dropping out," Messacar and Oreopoulos write, "must be understood not as a single event but an outcome that begins with school [disengagement](#), often long before the dropout finally decides to stop coming to class."

If states invest in effective support programs, they can further increase graduation rates and reduce future costs of enforcing compulsory-schooling policies.

"[Compulsion](#) should be a last resort alongside other policies to promote

engagement and foster an environment in which struggling students are encouraged and assisted to complete high [school](#)," Messacar and Oreopoulos write.

Also in the winter 2013 *Issues*, Michael Kugelman of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars writes about a 21st-century land rush now taking place in which governments and corporations are snapping up huge amounts of precious arable land in food-insecure countries.

Kugelman argues that these deals are often deeply problematic. Two-thirds of large-scale land acquisitions have occurred in countries with serious hunger problems. In some cases, investors are cultivating crops and then immediately exporting them. The deals have not resulted in benefits for local communities because investors hire few local laborers, transfer few agricultural technologies and sell few harvests to local markets.

Kugelman is not optimistic about halting big land acquisitions, because powerful vested interests are involved. He thus argues that the most practical strategy is to accept the existence of the deals and encourage policy changes that blunt their harmful effects.

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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