

# Lancaster County Truancy Diversion Project



A Collaboration Between:

The Separate Juvenile Court of Lancaster County, Nebraska  
and Lincoln Public Schools

Judge Reggie L. Ryder  
ryder@lancaster.ne.gov

Why Does It  
Even Matter?

# TWO PRIMARY PURPOSES FOR REDUCING TRUANCY:

- 1) Have all youth attend and be engaged in school so they will have successful and productive lives.
- 2) To increase citizen safety, both in the short term, through having students in school rather than out in the community during school hours, and in the long term, through school engagement and achievement leading to later adult responsibility and productivity.

# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

- Each year, over 1.2 million students drop out of high school in the United States.
  - That breaks down to over 3,287 students per day.
- For each drop out class, there is an estimated cost to the country of **\$337 billion** in lost income over the course of their lives.

# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

- Over the course of his or her lifetime, a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately **\$260,000** in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.
- Nationally, **90%** of welfare recipients are high school dropouts.



# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

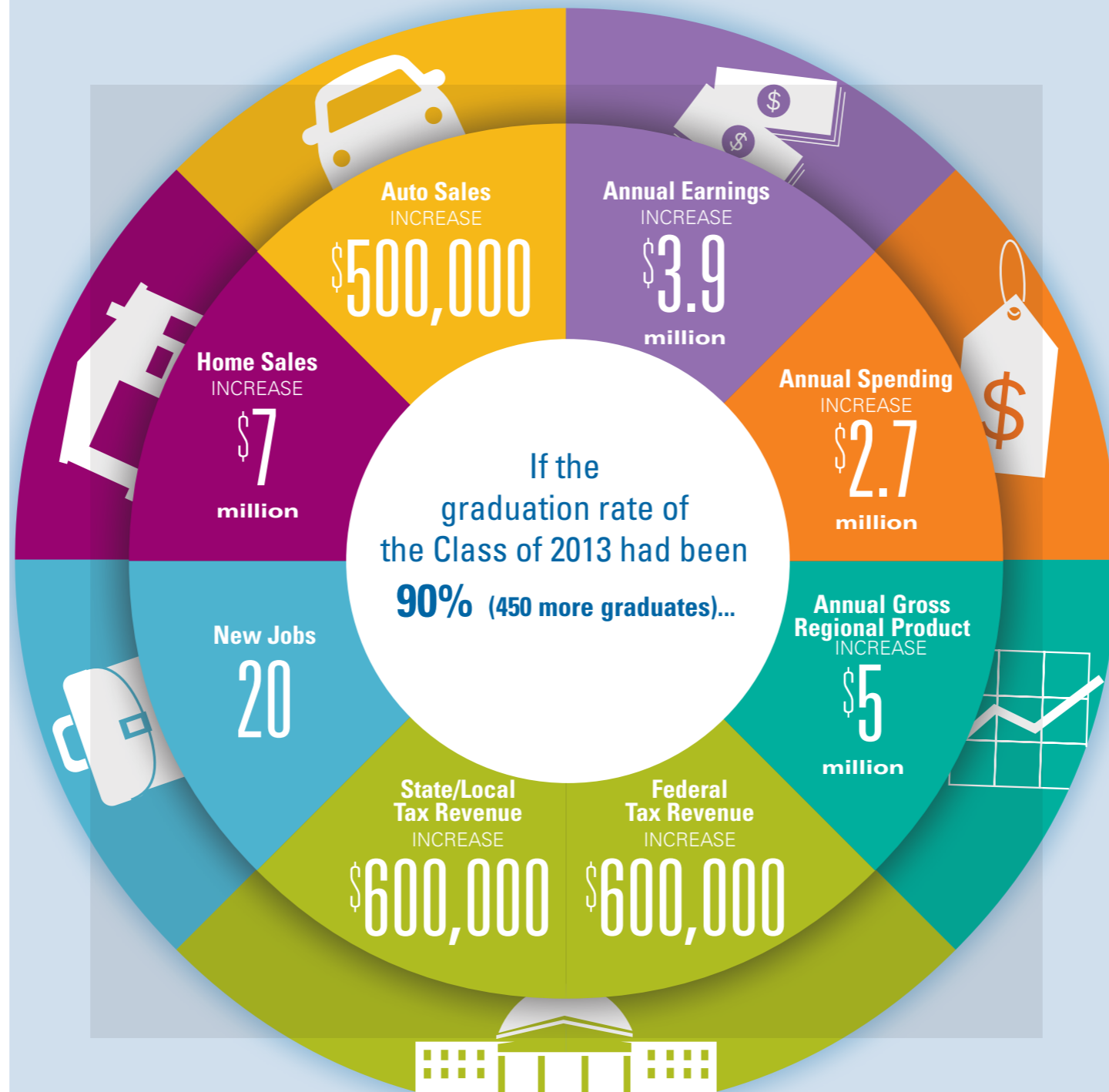
- Each student who graduates from high school will save states an average of **\$13,706** in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured care over the course of his or her lifetime.
- States could save more than **\$17 billion** if those young people earn their high school diploma instead of dropping out.

# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

- **Nebraska** could save \$68.6 million in health care costs over the lifetime of *each class* of dropouts had they earned their diplomas.
- **Nebraska's** economy could see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about \$33 million each year if the *male high school graduation* rate increased by just 5%.

# THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF

## Increasing the High School Graduation Rate for Public School Students in the Lincoln, NE metro area



**THE BEST ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE IS A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA.**

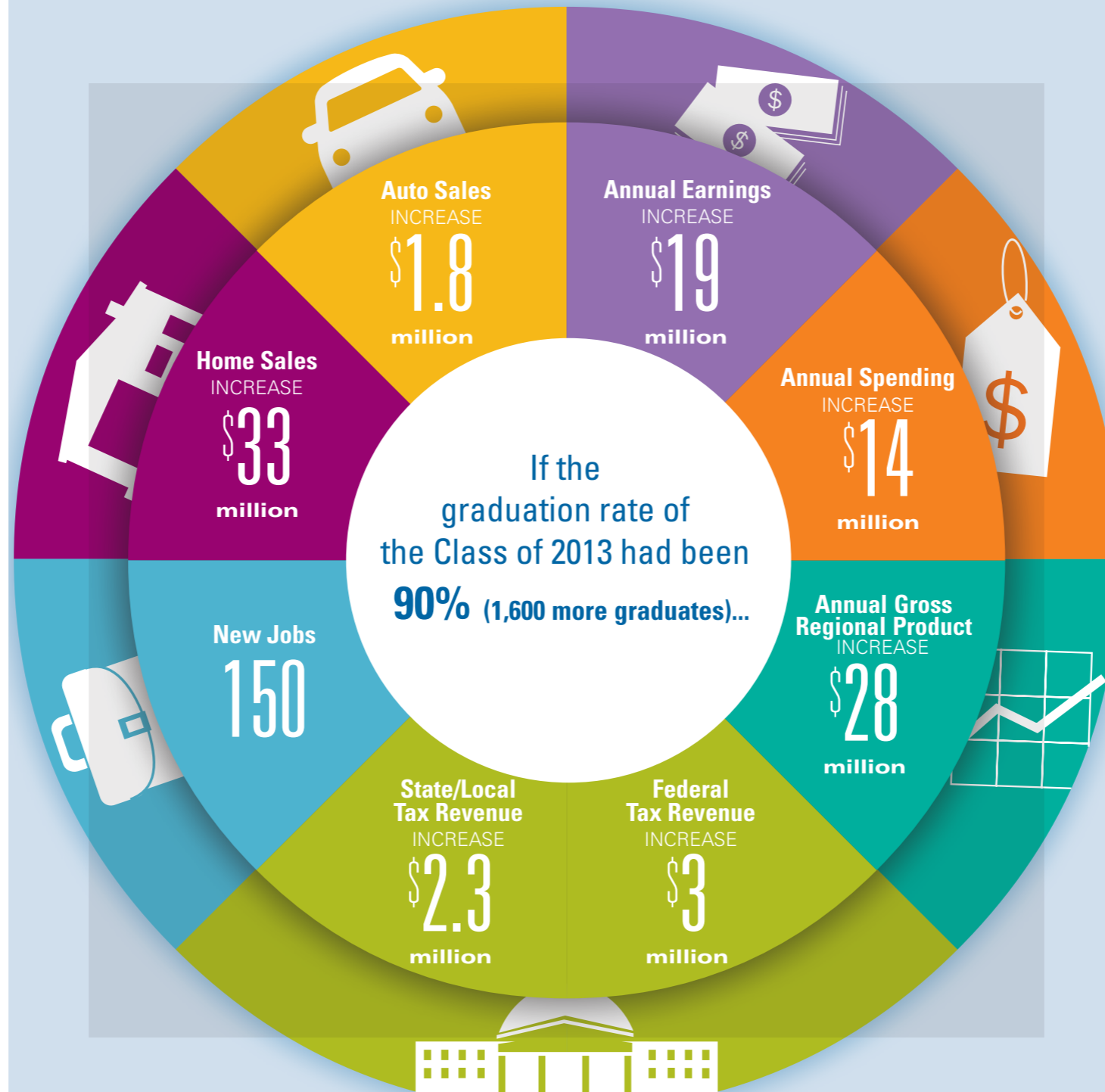
The above projections were generated by the Alliance for Excellent Education using an economic model developed by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., through the generous support of State Farm®. Graduation rates were provided by Editorial Projects in Education. This document builds on previous work by the Alliance analyzing the economies of more than 200 metropolitan statistical areas, all 50 states, and the District of Columbia to determine the economic benefits of improving high school graduation rates and sending additional graduates to college. For more information, visit [impact.all4ed.org](http://impact.all4ed.org). © 2015, Alliance for Excellent Education. Visit [impact.all4ed.org](http://impact.all4ed.org) to see findings from other regions, view technical notes, and learn about the solutions.





# THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF

## Increasing the High School Graduation Rate for Public School Students in the Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE metro area

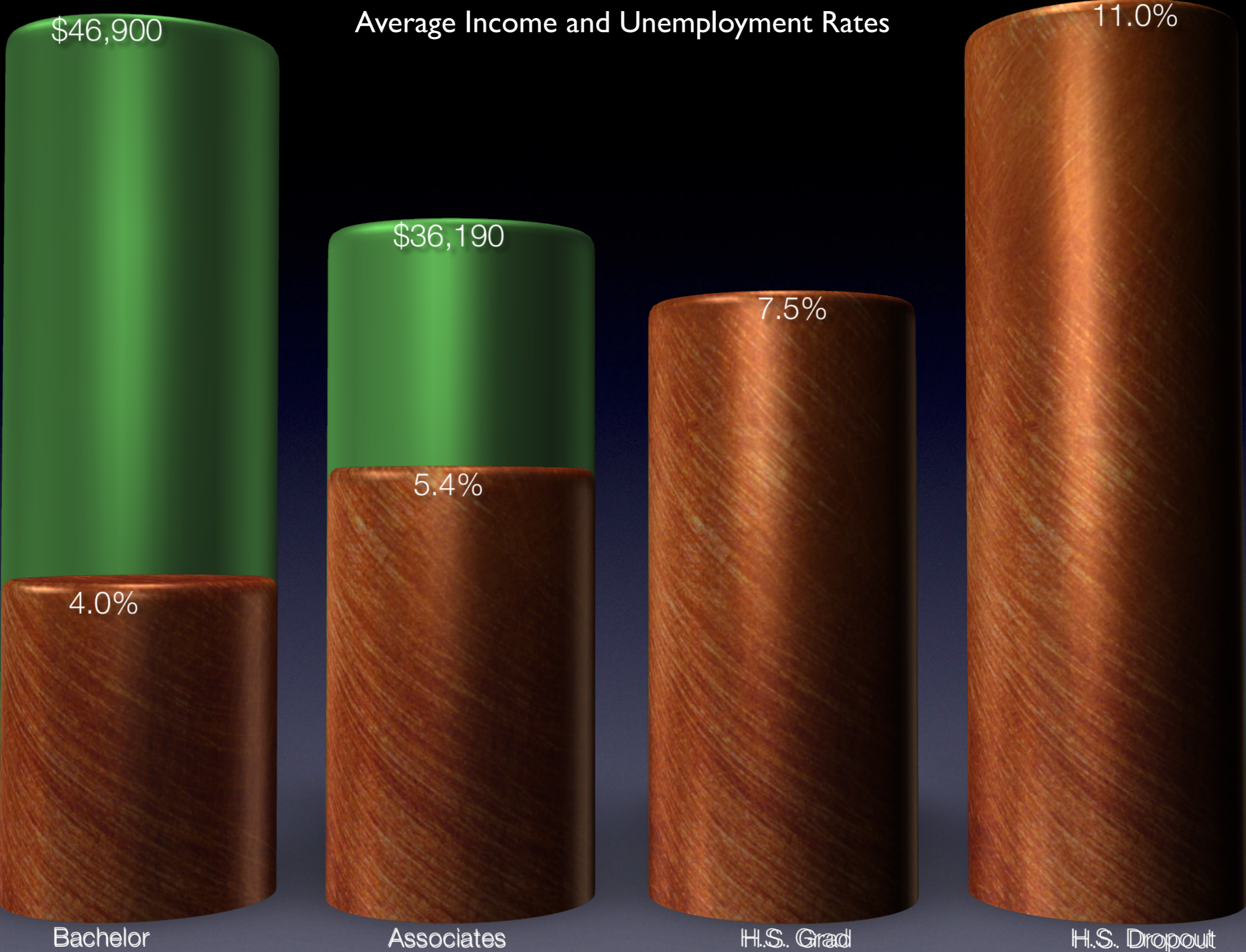


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# Average Income and Unemployment Rates



Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor  
Source: National Center for Educational Statistics (2012)

Average Yearly Salary      Unemployment Rate

# SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

- “The school to prison pipeline—the metaphor encompassing the various issues in our education system that result in students leaving school and becoming involved in the criminal justice system—is one of our nation’s most formidable challenges.”

# SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

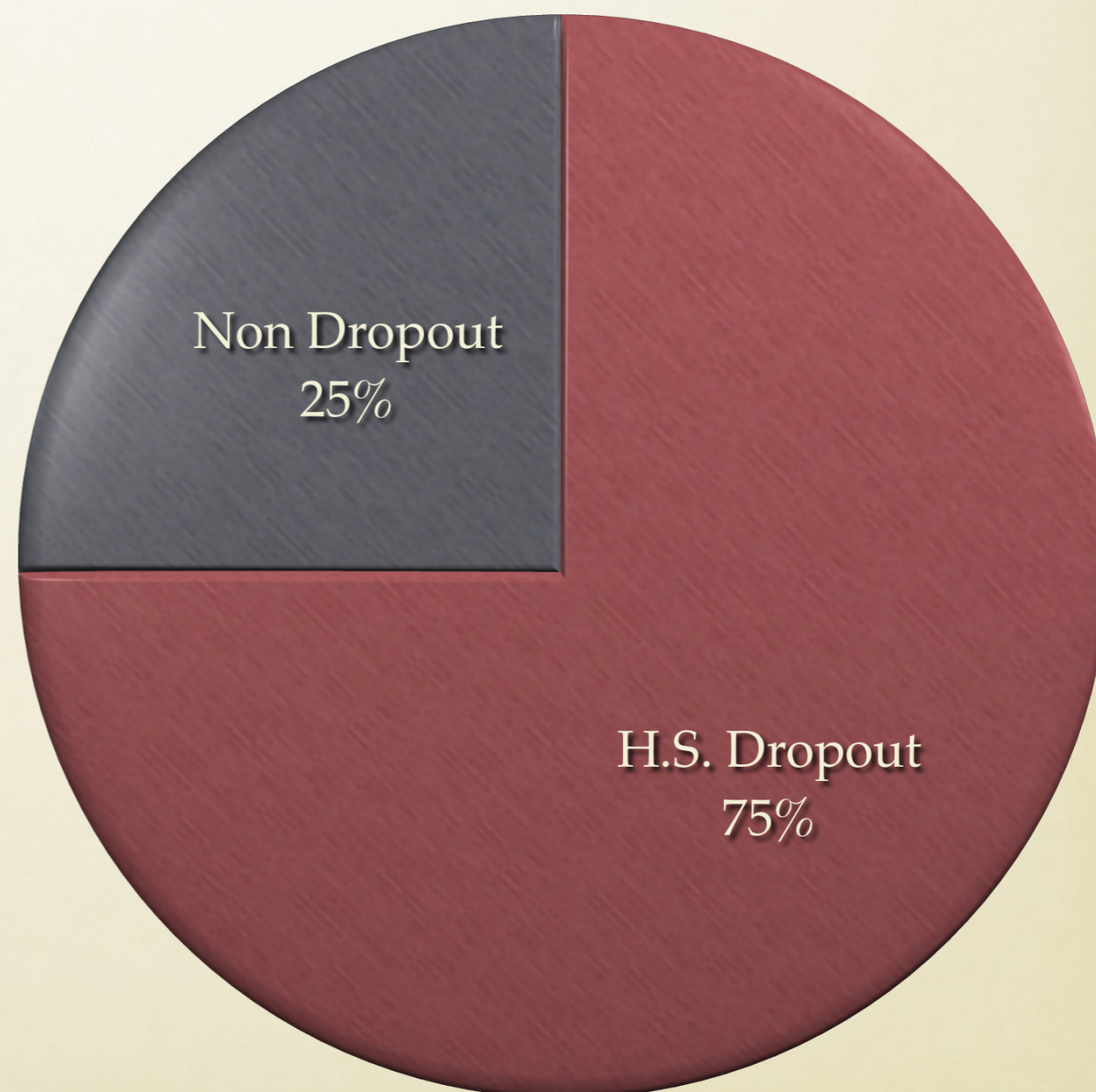
- The number 1 recommendation of the ABA School to Prison Pipeline Task Force:
  - Improve academic achievement and increase the likelihood that students will remain in school, graduate, and prepare to become positive, contributing members of our society

# SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

- **75%** of America's prisoners are high school dropouts.

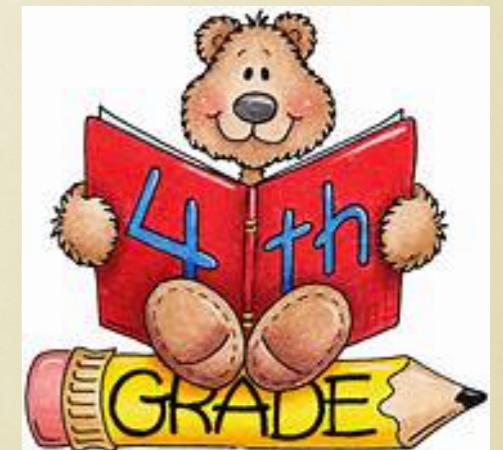
**8X**

**More Likely to End up Incarcerated**



# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

- Over 70% of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level.



# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

## Pennsylvania Example

COST SPENT PER YEAR/ PER PRISONER	TOTAL COST OF THE AVERAGE PRISON TERM
\$33,000	\$132,000

# FINANCIAL COST OF TRUANCY

## Pennsylvania Example

AVERAGE COST OF A PRIVATE  
SCHOOL PER YEAR

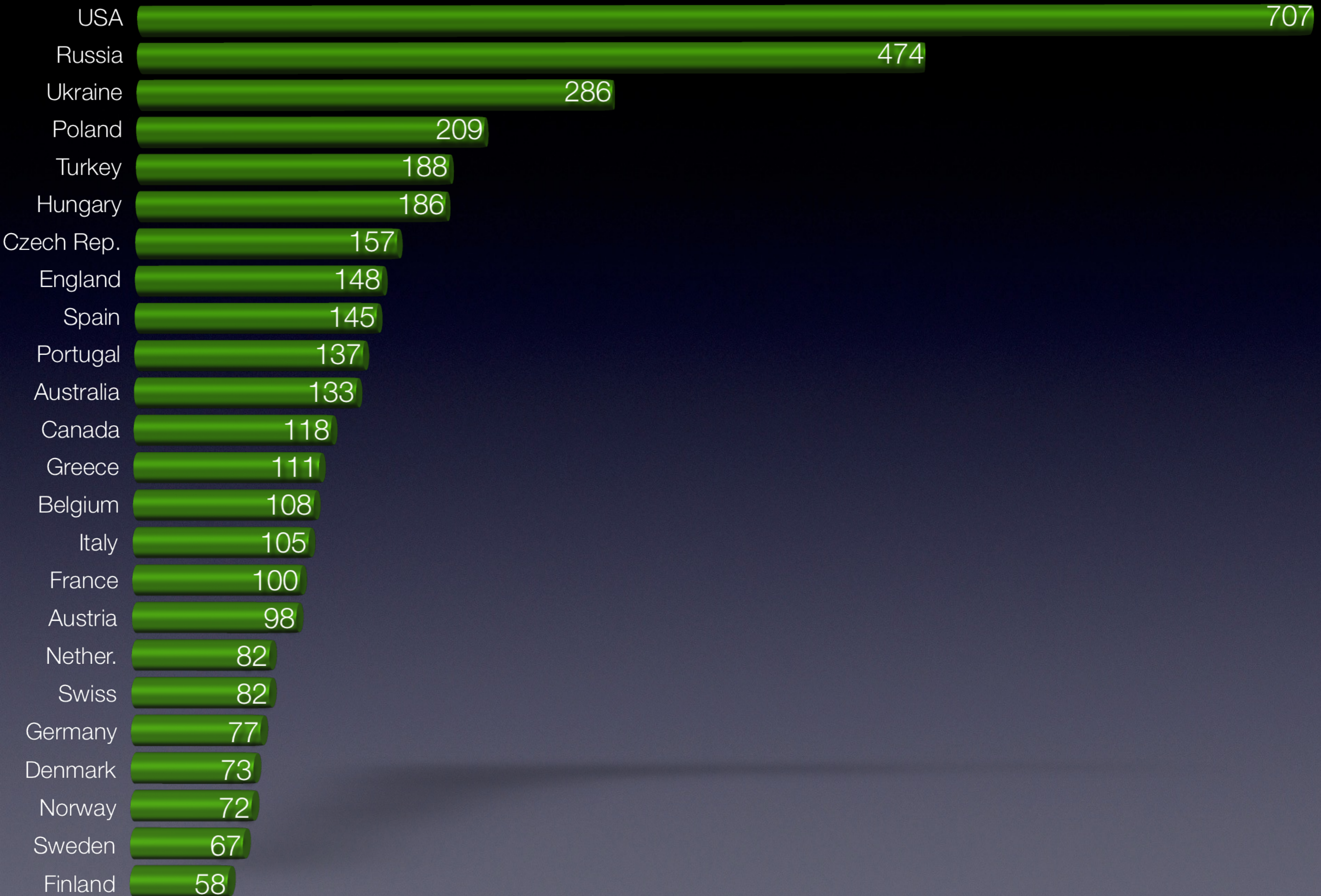
\$8,300

MONEY LEFT OVER FOR  
COLLEGE IF SENT A PRISON  
INMATE TO PRIVATE SCHOOL  
FROM KINDERGARTEN  
THROUGH 12TH GRADE

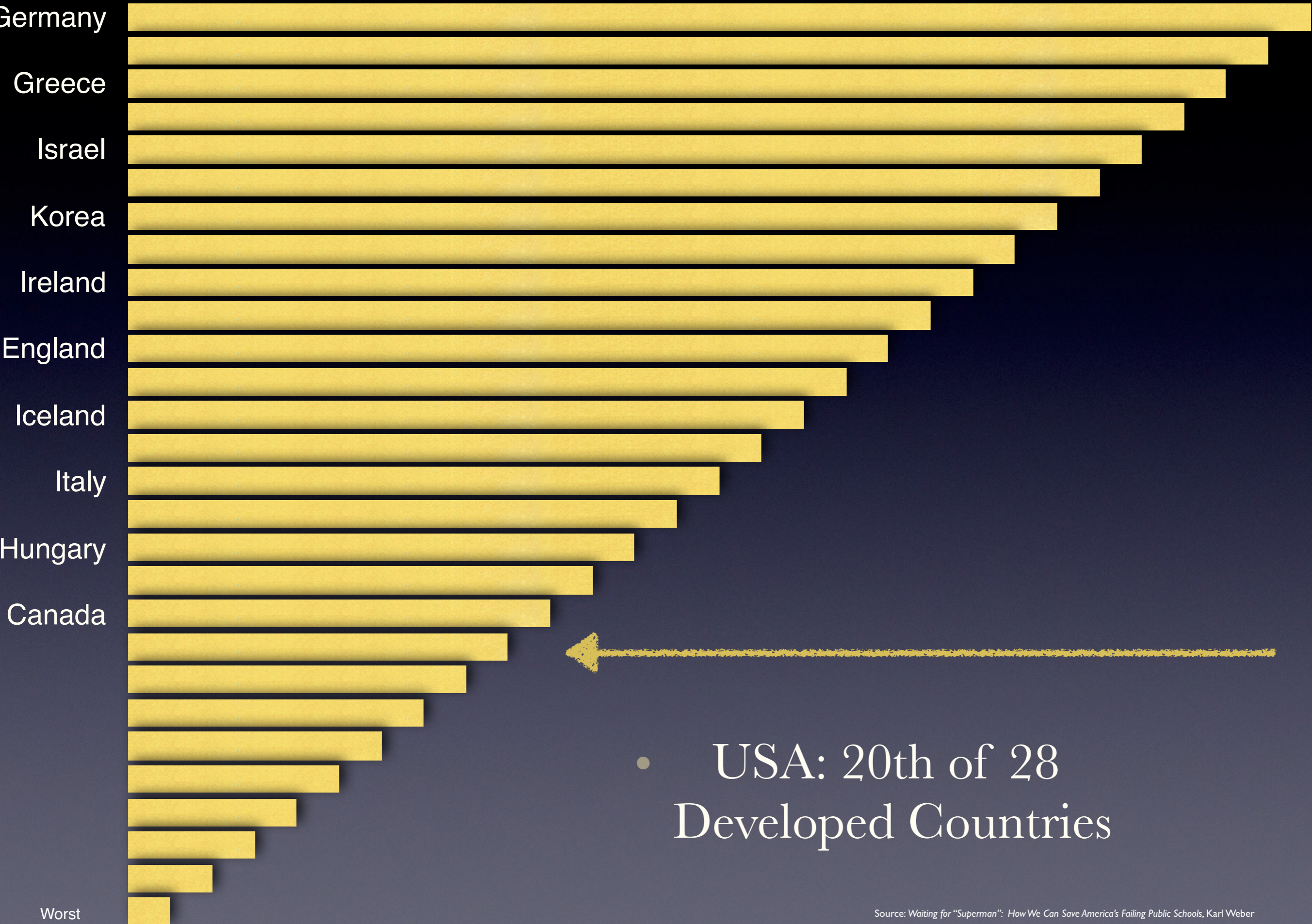
\$24,000



## Incarceration Rate per 100,000: USA vs. The World



# Graduation Rate: USA vs. The World



• USA: 20th of 28  
Developed Countries

What Others Have Said

“The best predictor of whether a student will drop out of school is absenteeism. Those who miss large amounts of school not only fail to learn but also often leave school without a high school diploma.”

-Tom Osborne, *Beyond the Final Score: There's More to Life Than the Game*, Regal Books, 2009

“Although truancy’s financial burdens are considerable, its cost cannot be measured in dollars alone. For a growing number of youth, truancy may be a first step to a lifetime of unemployment, crime, and incarceration.”

-Dr. Shay Bilchik, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Administrator.

“Because truancy is a complex problem requiring a comprehensive response, educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities, and families all play a part in truancy prevention.”

The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

[P]reventing truancy may mean the difference between a lifetime of problems or a lifetime of accomplishments.”

-Eileen M. Garry, Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, October 1996.

ADRIAN GOMES



START

ON YOUR MARK...

DROPPING  
OUT OF  
HIGH  
SCHOOL



# What We Do Now

- Truancy Petition filed by County Attorney.
- An attorney is automatically appointed in Lancaster County.
- Summons issued and first hearing held in 2-4 weeks.
- Rights and potential consequences are explained.
- The juvenile then admits or denies the truancy allegations. Continuances sometimes result at this point.
- If the allegations are not found to be true, the case ends.
- If the allegations are found to be true, set for disposition in 6 weeks, following probation investigation (more time needed if family FTA's).

# What We Do Now

## Court Options

- Place on probation with terms and conditions
- Allow to remain in the home
- Place outside of the home:
  - Foster home
  - Group Home
  - Relative
- Jurisdiction until 19. Practice in Lancaster County is 18.

# What We Do Now

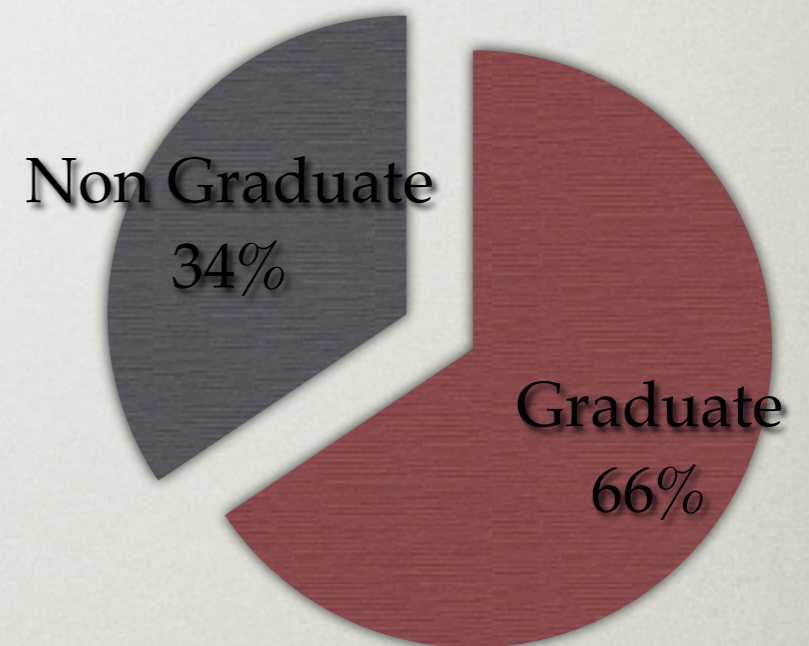
## Typical Conditions Ordered

- Attend school with no truancies or suspensions
- If absence due to illness, medical verification required
- Cooperate with tracker services
- Cooperate with counseling services
- No parental excused absences without probation permission
- Court costs
- One year or more is typical term

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- Pilot launched January, 2011 Feeder to Lincoln High  
Lincoln High 2010
- Park Middle School



Expanded to Lincoln High 2013

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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Principal

Judge

County Attorney

Defense Attorney

Therapist

Social Worker

Student

Parent

“Because truancy is a complex problem requiring a comprehensive response, educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities, and families all play a part in truancy prevention.”

The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- A collaborative effort between Juvenile Court and Lincoln Public Schools. The program was created for students and their families as an alternative to traditional court proceedings. The goals are to initially improve school attendance and grades, followed by consistent school attendance after completion of the program.
- The ultimate goal: high school graduation.

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- The Project is modeled after the Jefferson County Truancy Diversion Project in Louisville, Kentucky, which is now a national model.
- According to Kentucky Chief Justice John D. Minton, Jr., “the strength of the [program] is the collaboration by all participants toward the goal of reducing truancy.”



# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- Students who choose to participate in this voluntary program have their truancy petition placed on hold for the duration of the program.
- Services begin the day of the first court hearing.

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- The social worker for the family is responsible for the implementation of services, which includes:
  - Therapy
  - Grade Checks
  - Attendance Checks
  - Implementation of incentives and sanctions
  - Developing attendance success plan

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- While in the program, the child and his or her parent(s) attend bi-weekly progress reviews, which are held at the school.
- During the progress review, the judge or the principal review the child's progress in the program from the prior review, with particular emphasis on the student's attendance and grades.

## **WHAT THE STUDENT CAN EXPECT:**

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- Supportive services to help with attendance and grades.

## **WHAT THE STUDENT CAN EXPECT:**

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- Rewards for good attendance and good grades.
- \$10 gift card for each two weeks of perfect attendance.

## **WHAT THE STUDENT CAN EXPECT:**

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- Upon successful completion, the petition is dismissed pre-adjudication and all court records are sealed.
- This typically occurs after only one semester of school.

**WHAT WE EXPECT FROM THE  
STUDENT:**

- 
- Significant improvement in attendance.
  - Passing grades in all classes.
  - Good behaviors at school and at home.
  - Participation in individual and/or family therapy as needed.

## **WHAT WE EXPECT FROM THE STUDENT:**

- Attend truancy court every other Thursday at the school at 3:30 p.m. The order is based on attendance.
- Both the student and a parent must attend, unless excused by the team in advance.
- Will be excused if has passing grades, perfect attendance and is cooperating with therapy as directed for the two weeks leading up to each session of truancy court.



# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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Removal from program:

- Move to another school
- Failure to comply with services and progress satisfactorily through the program
- Family opts out

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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## Consequences of Removal:

- Adjudication hearing scheduled in Juvenile Court and proceed through the traditional process.

# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

## Key Differences from Traditional Court Proceedings

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- Starts sooner.
- Not adjudicated as having been habitually truant from school.
- Not placed on probation.
- Rewards for good attendance and grades.
- No out of home option.
- No court costs.
- Ends sooner.
- Records sealed sooner.

Results?

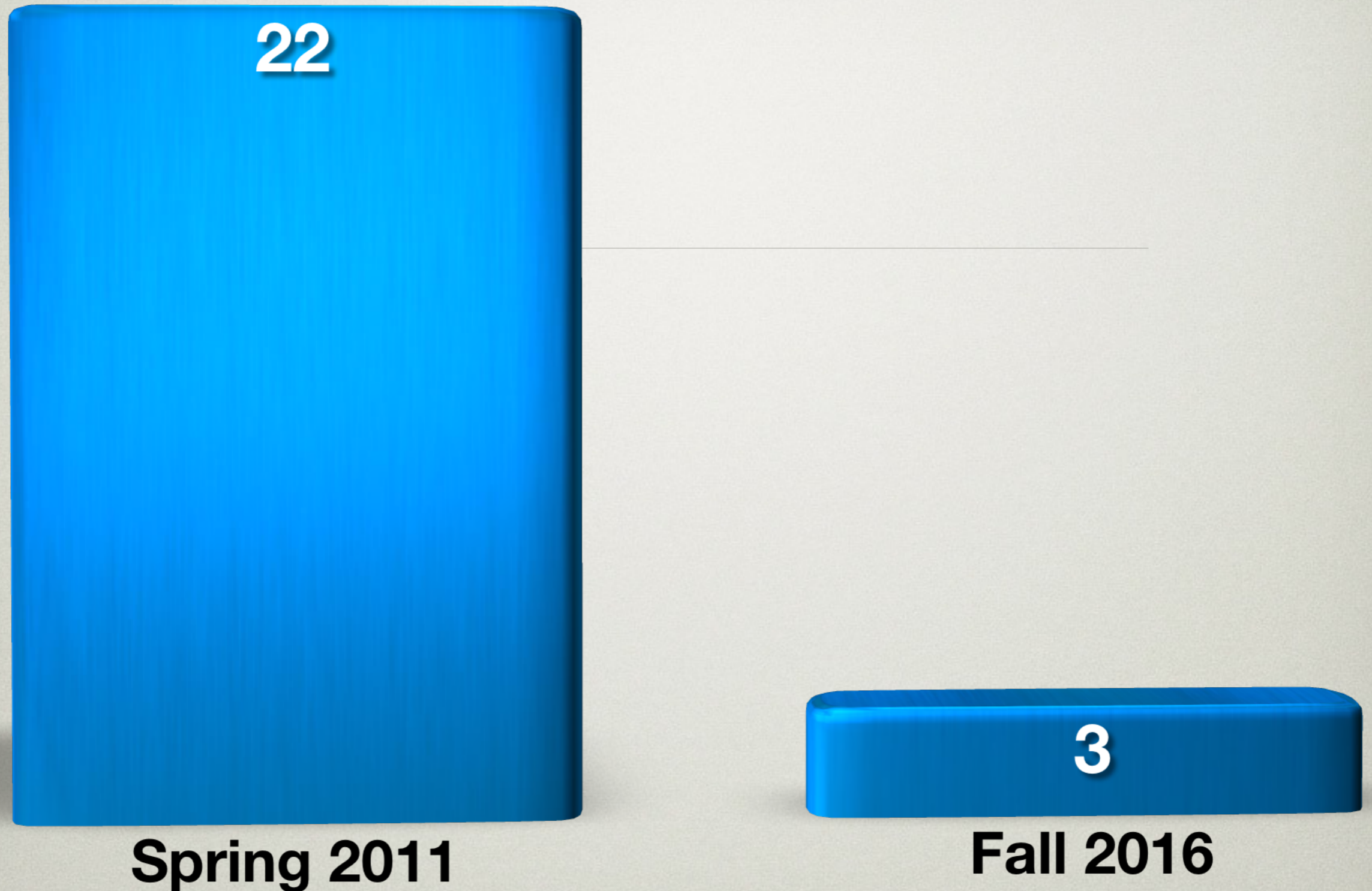
# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT



Results from the first class (2011)\* — total period absences

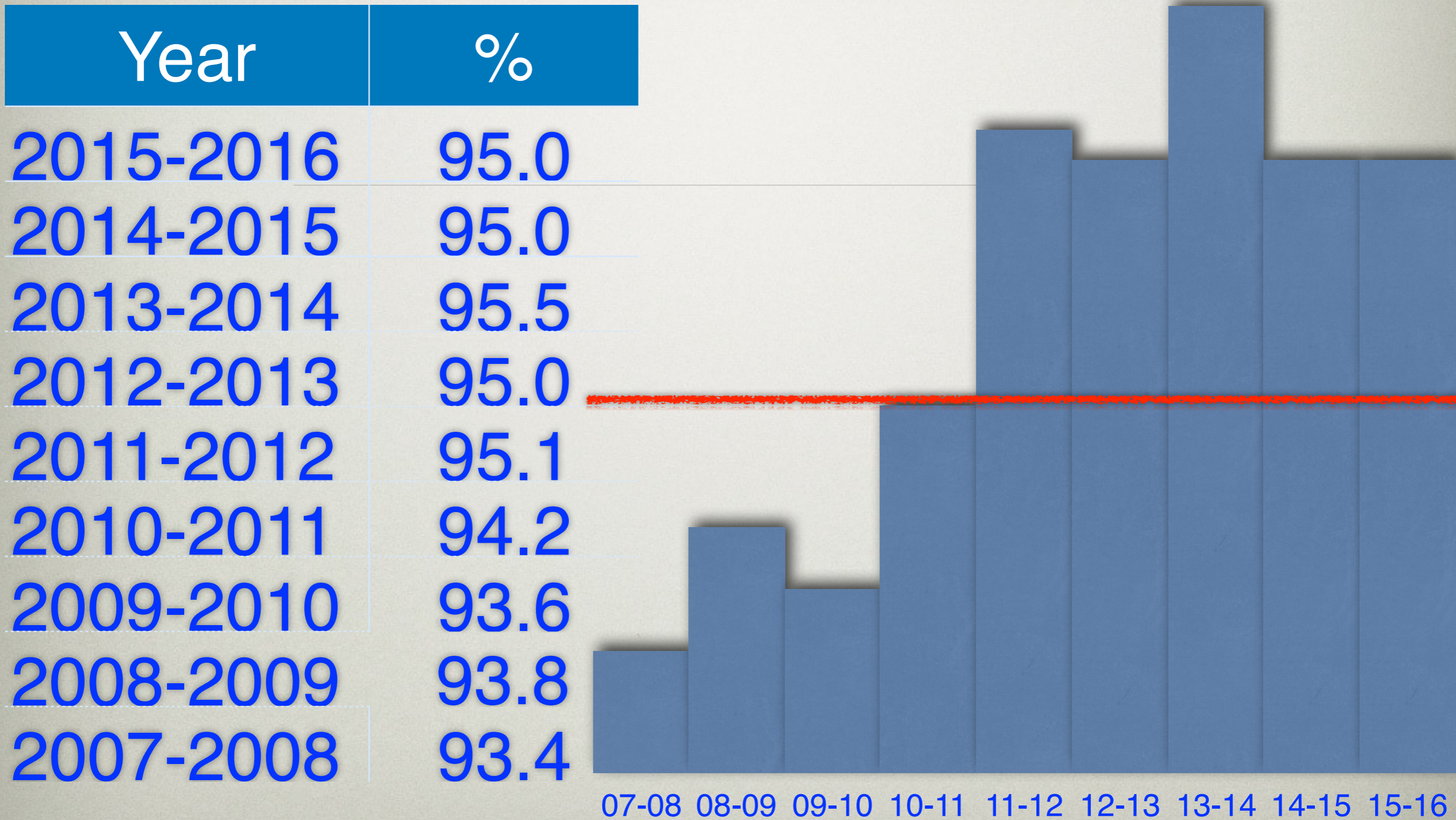
\*Park Middle School

# TRUANCY DIVERSION STUDENTS



Number of Students—2011 vs. 2016 (semester)

# PARK DAILY ATTENDANCE RATE



# 16 Countries

Iraq  
 Egypt  
 Thailand  
 Burma/Myanmar  
 Vietnam  
 Guatemala  
 Korea  
 Mexico  
 Honduras  
 El Salvador  
 Eritrea  
 China  
 Sudan  
 Congo  
 Bosnia  
 USA (US Born)



English  
 Arabic  
 Spanish  
 Russian  
 Vietnamese  
 Chinese  
 Korean  
 French  
 Kurdish  
 Nuer  
 Burmese  
 Karen  
 Karenni  
 Chin-Zomi  
 Tigrinya (Eritrea)

# 15 Languages



# TRUANCY DIVERSION PROJECT

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- Expanded to the following Lincoln schools:



North Star H.S. (2013)    Goodrich M.S. (2013)    Culler M.S. (2013)    Northeast H.S. (2014)

Prosecutor led. No judge. No defense attorney. Similar otherwise.

“Education  
is the most  
powerful  
weapon  
which you  
can use to  
change the  
world.”

-Nelson Mandela

