

## Risk and Protective Factors

**Alterable risk factors** - the behaviors or practices of the student, family, peers, school, or community that are predictive of dropping out.

- Amenable to intervention by educators, youth advocates, parents, and students.
- Useful for identification, guiding intervention, and evaluating impact.

School-based efforts to engage students and promote school completion should focus on alterable risk factors — those that interventionists can ameliorate. School personnel will find the distinction between indicators of disengagement (risk factors) and facilitators of engagement (protective factors) helpful.

**Status risk factors** - historical or demographic characteristics of the student, family, peers, school, or community, such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, or ethnicity.

- Not readily amenable to change, if at all.
- Useful for evaluating the gap in outcomes among high-risk populations.

**Protective factors** - the behaviors or practices of the student, family, peers, school, or community that act as buffers against the effects of status risk factors.

### Alterable Risk and Protective Factors Associated with School Dropout

	Students	Families	Schools
Protective Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete homework</li> <li>• Come to class prepared</li> <li>• High locus of control</li> <li>• Good self-concept</li> <li>• Expectations for school completion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic support for learning (e.g., help with homework)</li> <li>• Motivational support for learning (e.g., high expectations, talk to children about school)</li> <li>• Availability of educational resources</li> <li>• Parental monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orderly school environments</li> <li>• Committed, caring teachers</li> <li>• Fair discipline policies</li> <li>• Relationship with one caring adult</li> <li>• Opportunities for participation</li> </ul>
Risk Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor attendance</li> <li>• Behavior problems</li> <li>• Poor academic performance (e.g., course failure)</li> <li>• Grade retention</li> <li>• Working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low educational expectations</li> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Permissive parenting styles (i.e., lack of supervision or monitoring)</li> <li>• Few educational resources and support at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak adult authority</li> <li>• Large school size (&gt;1,000 students)</li> <li>• High pupil-teacher ratios</li> <li>• Few caring relationships between staff and students</li> <li>• Poor or uninteresting curricula</li> <li>• Low expectations and high rates of truancy</li> <li>• Limited parent outreach</li> </ul>

Compiled from Byrk & Thum, 1989; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Hess & D'Amato, 1996; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Rumberger, 1995.