INTRODUCTION
Educational attainment, not race nor income, is the single greatest predictor of health.

Given the current trends, between 2000 and 2020 educational attainment in the U.S. will be falling for the first time in history. This will not only affect our workforce but will also have a dramatic impact on the health of our nation’s citizens.

Education increases earning potential, social status and cognitive abilities. These lead to more consistent employment, safer work settings, better lifestyle choices and health-related decisions.

More education is correlated with reductions in heart disease and diabetes. Educated people, as a group, are less likely to smoke, drink, use illicit drugs, and demonstrate less obesity. Women with some college are more likely to receive preventive screenings such as Pap tests and to receive early prenatal care.

Education has a direct effect on the health of the populous.

COST
Research indicates that each student who graduates high school instead of dropping out could save states over $15,000 in Medicaid and uninsured medical care costs over the student’s lifetime.

If the 1.2 million people estimated to drop out of high school in the coming year were to graduate, this savings would be over $17 billion during the course of their lifetimes.

For Missouri, this would equate to more than $245 million per year. Additionally, given the lower earning potential of less educated individuals, significant tax revenues are lost.

IMPACT
In 2001 low-income students dropped out of high school at a rate six times that of high income students.

On average, high school graduates live six to nine years longer than high school dropouts.

Of adults who did not finish high school, nearly 80% fell below the mean on a Health Activities Literacy Scale.

Functional literacy is the strongest predictor of overall mortality, with those having lowest reading fluency experiencing more than twenty times higher all-cause mortality.

The Missouri Department of Education should take stock of the impact education can play in health and consider state programming to implement the following:

• Provide early childhood development services for all children under 300% FPL;
• Enact standardized literacy-based high school graduation standards and remediation processes for those not meeting the standards;
• Enact accreditation standards for adult basic education;
• Fund research on the efficacy of programmatic changes.

Good education policy is good economic policy. Missouri has the opportunity to demonstrate that there is more to health than healthcare. Education is the key.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.7 million students graduated from Missouri high schools in 2002, 38% of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch, 23% were from minority families, and 7% were English learners.

By increasing the standards in our schools, improving the quality of our teachers and offering incentives to those who decide to teach in less desirable schools, we can improve the academic performance of Missouri’s youth.

Given the current trends, the next generation of Missouri graduates will not only affect our workforce but will see reductions in heart disease and diabetes. The state’s citizens will be falling for the first time in history. This will affect all of our school systems.

The Missouri Department of Education should:

- Consider state programming to meet the standards;
- Remediation processes for those not

If the 1.2 million people estimated to drop out of high school in the coming year were to graduate, this savings would be over $17 billion during the course of their lifetimes.

For Missouri, this would equate to more than $245 million per year. Additionally, given the lower earning potential of less educated individuals, significant tax revenues are lost.

There is more to health than healthcare. Education is the key.