The Key to Positive Health Outcomes ~ Stay in School
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Abstract

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. More educated people, as a group, are less likely to smoke, drink, use illicit drugs, and demonstrate less obesity. On average, high school graduates live six to nine years longer than high school dropouts.

Improving education will improve health outcomes. 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.

Although education is only one aspect of this constellation of concerns threatening health, it is one shown to make a difference. Good education policy is good economic policy. There is more to health than healthcare. Education is the key.