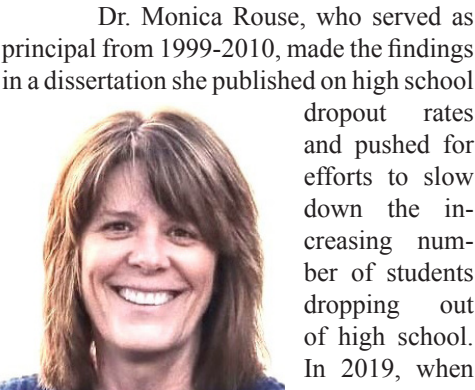


Former principal studies dropout variables

By Katelynn Toft

A study by a former Durant High School principal found that teacher connection was one of the most important variables for preventing students from dropping out of school.



Rouse
Dr. Monica Rouse, who served as principal from 1999-2010, made the findings in a dissertation she published on high school dropout rates and pushed for efforts to slow down the increasing number of students dropping out of high school. In 2019, when Dr. Rouse published her dissertation, the dropout rate in Iowa was 2.61 percent. In 2023, it rose to 3.02 percent.

These numbers have changed noticeably in the last couple of years.

“I think it behooves the question,” said Dr. Rouse. “What actually is happening to education in the state of Iowa.”

For Dr. Rouse, her study is also personal. She was removed from her job as Durant principal over allegations she falsified student records. The district eventually agreed to pay \$850,000 to Dr. Rouse after a

three-year court battle exonerated her.

She said her legal case centered on 10 Durant students who were at higher risk of dropping out by their high school years. Yet they still all graduated. They all got their diploma.

“We looked at creative solutions that were maybe non-traditional, which is what serving at-risk students is all about, right?” said Dr. Rouse. “Non-traditional opportunities, non-traditional ideas.”

Dr. Rouse now works as an assistant professor at Western Illinois University. She completed her study over dropouts as part of an advanced degree from Walden University. In the study, Dr. Rouse examined national statistics but took it further by interviewing ten students who dropped out from a neighboring mid-sized school district.

“Every student who’s dropped out has a story,” said Dr. Rouse. “My main goal was to be a voice for students who drop out of school.”

Those interviews revealed that there were four main steps leading to students deciding to drop out of high school. Their academic issues started in elementary school when they were labeled as behavioral problems. In their interviews with Dr. Rouse, the students showed some sort of disinterest in school, which led them to act out and not really pay attention in class.

“The more negative attention they received from their unacceptable behavior, the more they disengaged from the environment, psychologically,” said Dr. Rouse in her dissertation.

It’s unknown as to why these participants didn’t like school even from the beginning. Dr. Rouse noted that a few causes she had seen personally were when students experienced a traumatic event. For example, this could be a divorce of the student’s parents, the death of a loved one, or even a move.

The way these events affect a student can lead to disengagement and disinterest in learning. It can be hard for a student to recover and hard for a teacher to recognize these problems in a student.

“We don’t have control over these life events,” said Dr. Rouse. “We probably didn’t understand the magnitude of them.”

A second step to dropping out was a lack of connection with classroom teachers. A positive relationship between students and teachers is vital in setting students up for success.

“What I found was kids who had just one teacher that could make a difference for them really could set the stage for a positive educational experience,” said Dr. Rouse.

Dr. Rouse found that it was even more effective if that relationship was experienced in elementary school.

rienced in elementary school.

All of the participants Dr. Rouse interviewed were able to give an example of a teacher who impacted their life in a very positive way, making the students feel cared for, respected, and supported during their education.

The participants also stressed that there were teachers who did not make an effort to form connections with their students. In these classes, the students struggled to find motivation to do the work.

A lack of teacher connection led the students in the study to feel hopeless, the third step to dropping out. Every student Dr. Rouse interviewed had understood the importance of a good education. They all wanted to graduate and earn their diploma, but every student believed there was “no other option.”

Some students did not have enough credits to graduate and had to retake a class while others faced the embarrassment of returning to school as a fifth-year senior.

“They [the participants] each reached a point wherein their desire to finish school did not persuade the risk of a continued sense of failure if they remained in school,” Dr. Rouse stated in her dissertation.

Ultimately, the students lost their desire to succeed, the final step in deciding to drop out of high school.

When entering high school, every participant in Dr. Rouse’s dissertation wanted to succeed in class and get their diploma when it came time.

Eventually, the reality of their situation set in. They were having trouble in their classes and became deficient in their credits. That realization paired, with all of the other steps before, negatively affected their desire to succeed.

However, when it came time to make the final decision, some of the students felt the decision to drop out was not made by themselves because they were pulled aside by staff members and told that their best option was getting their GED.

Dr. Rouse wrote her dissertation because she believes students should not have to drop out of high school because it is their only option.

“I have a passion for dropout prevention,” said Dr. Rouse.

When Dr. Rouse was principal back at Durant, she would often pay attention to the students in elementary school and could make an accurate prediction as to what kids had a higher chance of dropping out later on in their education.

“You could do a pretty accurate prediction based on students’ attendance history, students’ work habits, and some of the social and emotional factors,” she said.

Incident From page 1

fiction get intermixed,” Chief Randolph said.

In Durant, police and school staff communicate often even about minor incidents.

“I can assure you that we’re constantly talking about it,” said Chief Randolph. “I’m talking to school administrators all the time, teachers, of course, not only us.”

The Durant school was one of the first in the area with a school resource officer (SRO) who plays a big role in making sure

students are safe at Durant.

“We were one of the first ones in this area with a community our size to put a SRO here, not to go arresting students, but to make police presence known and get people familiar with the police officers, so they feel comfortable,” said Chief Randolph.

“I think the biggest thing is communication between families, parents, students, staff, and the community.”



Officer Joshua Bujalski waves to elementary students leaving the school lunchroom.

Hair~Makeup~Tanning

Kiley Van Sloten (DHS 2007)
Owner/Stylist
Alicia Cooling and Danielle Halferty,
Stylists
210 5th Street, Durant, IA
(563) 785-6227

Raynor Door's volleyball player of the month

2370 West Lake Blvd.
Davenport, IA 52804
563.391.9566 – phone
www.raynorqc.com

Senior Leah Feuerbach has been playing volleyball since the third grade. What she enjoys most about the sport is getting ready for the games and when the girls do each other’s hair. Feuerbach’s goal this season is to have a winning record. One of her favorite memories from last volleyball season was the team-bonding meals.

Feuerbach

Peel's Inc. cross country runner of the month

755 W. Iowa 80 Road
Walcott, IA 52773
(563) 468-5460

Junior Nolan Williams has been running cross country for three years. Some of Williams’ goals this season are to run a sub 18 5K and to win more meets as a team. His favorite memory from last cross country season was taking naps on the bus ride back from meets.

Williams

Arty's Ice Cream and Grill's football player of the month

609 W. 5th St.
Wilton, IA 52778
563-732-2222

Sophomore Gunner Klahn has been playing football since the third grade. What he enjoys most about the sport is being able to play with his friends. One of Klahn’s goals this season is to continue to start on defense. His favorite memory from last season was when a group of injured players went to Panda Express.

Klahn

Apex Ink and Apparel's junior high athlete of the month

708 5th St., Durant, IA 52747
563-785-6223

Eighth grader Bentley Ineichen is playing for the Durant Wildcats football team. He has played football for four years. He got into the sport because of his parents. One of Ineichen’s goals this season is to have fun. Ineichen plays slot back and wide receiver.

Ineichen