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**NEW STUDY SHOWS THAT TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS  
MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL**

*California Students Identify Factors that Motivate them Toward or Discourage them from Graduating*

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. – The latest report from the California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) finds that teacher-student relationships have a strong influence on students' decisions to stay in school. The study investigates why California students drop out, and compares at-risk students with their more resilient peers. In a survey of 133 predominantly Latino California ninth graders from five high schools across California, most report they are engaged and want to graduate, regardless of their risk for dropping out.

“These kids are optimistic about graduating and committed to their education. Though the state is facing budget cuts, we can't ignore the fact that better funding for schools would provide more quality interactions between students and teachers, encouraging more kids to stay in school,” said Russell Rumberger, Director of the California Dropout Research Project.

The report is the latest in a series of 15 policy and statistical briefs on California's dropouts conducted by CDRP, a research program based at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Last month, the CDRP policy committee—composed of researchers, policymakers and educators—released a state policy agenda identifying short-term and long-term recommendations for improving California's high school graduation rate.

According to the most recent report, entitled *Giving a Student Voice to California's Dropout Crisis*, factors that motivate students to stay in school include support from teachers, counselors, athletic coaches and other adults. Students said that just one caring adult could influence them to complete high school.

One student explained, “When you have somebody that's actually going to be there for you and really support you in all your school educational needs...it boosts you up, you feel better about yourself and your education.”

In addition to fostering student relationships with teachers, relevant coursework, such as elective classes that teach pertinent skills and trades, and career education would encourage students to continue going to school.

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For many students, family responsibility plays an equally important role in the motivation for dropping out as it does for staying in school. “For me, family comes first,” said one Northern California student, “before anything and before my education.”

Family responsibility may not fall within the scope of a school’s capacity; however teachers could better address the issue if they had a deeper understanding of the challenges their students face.

Other factors that play a part in a student’s motivation for dropping out include lack of peer relationships and school safety. Several students mentioned how violence in their communities and schools determine whether or not they attend classes. A previous report by the CDRP indicates that missing too many days of school was the reason most cited for dropping out.

Students recognize that in this tough budget climate there is a shortage of resources that contribute to the difficulty their schools face for improving graduation rates. While most ninth graders—regardless of their risk for dropping out—want to graduate, they understand the threats to their success for completing high school and indicate how important it is for early intervention and support from teachers to keep them in school.

The study was conducted by a team of researchers from Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), led by Principal Research Scientist, Margaret Bridges. A series of video clips featuring students discussing the challenges they face to stay in school accompanies the report. Both the video clips and the report can be viewed at <http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/>.

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### **ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA DROPOUT RESEARCH PROJECT**

Based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the California Dropout Research Project began in December 2006 and is scheduled to conclude in September 2008. The purpose of the project is to synthesize existing research and undertake new research to inform policymakers and the public about the nature of – and potential solutions to – California’s dropout problem.

CDRP is funded by \$850,000 in grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. For more information about CDRP, including a copy of the Policy Committee Report as well as a complete library of the Project’s research, please visit the CDRP website at: <http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/>.