Staying in School:
A Proposal to Raise High School Graduation Rates

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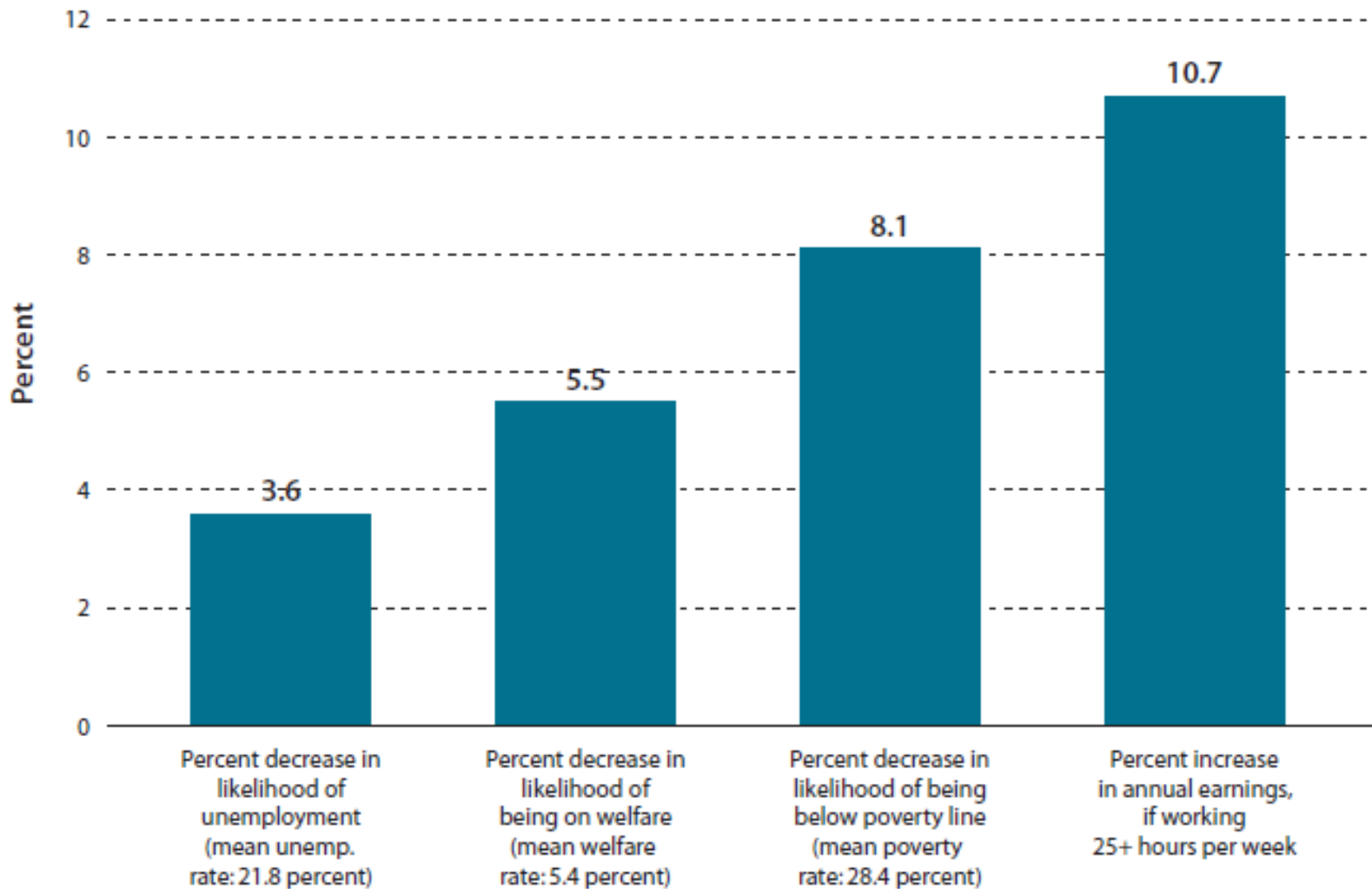
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Compulsory Schooling Is Motivated as a Means to Improve Long-Run Well-Being

- "A person who stops attending school at age 16 will always lack the skills and preparation to successfully compete in the workforce and function in society."
  – *Bonnie Watson Coleman, New Jersey State Assembly*

- "It's symbolically important for state laws to indicate that kids shouldn't be leaving school before they receive a high school diploma."
  – *Sunny Deye, National Conference of State Legislatures*

- "When students are not allowed to drop out, they do better."
  – *President Barack Obama*

The Effects of One Additional Year of Schooling on Labor-Market Outcomes

Impact of Compulsory-Schooling on Education

- **Raising the school-leaving age from 16 to 18:**
  - Increased high school completion by 2.6 percentage points
  - Increased college enrollment by 2.8 percentage points

- **Benefits for those affected:**
  - Increased present-value lifetime earnings by about $100,000

- **Costs for those affected:**
  - Additional per-pupil case-worker costs: $4,300
  - Additional per-pupil labor costs: $12,900
  - Additional per-pupil capital costs: $11,600

How Do These Laws Work?

- Youth are particularly predisposed to impulsive behavior.

- Most dropouts regret decision.

- Compulsory-schooling laws provide opportunity and resources to address disengagement, not just through penalties.

Room for Improvement

- Students at margin of dropping out face, on average, significant lifetime returns from completing high school and considering college.

- States should be encouraged to raise the school-leaving age to 18 (allowing for exceptions), while developing programs to reengage at-risk youth.

Examples of Programs to Help Reengage Truant Youth

- **Check and Connect**
  - Support workers meet with students and parents to help plan ways to improve attendance and performance.

- **Career Academies**
  - Small learning communities, combining academic and technical curricula around a career theme with local employer partnerships.

- **High expectations, coaching, tutoring**