

Educate, donand#39t incarcerate

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Imagine you live in a country where 500 out of every hundred thousand people are prisoners. A country that spends more money on its inmates than its students. A country where if being incarcerated was a job, it would be one of the most common occupations.

You're probably thinking, That sounds like a horrible place. I'm glad I don't live there. However, you probably do. The country I am describing is the United States of America. The United States is home to about 5 percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. These figures just don't make sense.

In 1980 there were about 500, 000 people incarcerated in America. In 2006, there were almost 2. 5 million. That's a 500 percent increase in just 26 years. Not only does the U.

S. have the most prisoners, but our citizens commit the most crimes in the world by a landslide - about 12. 5 million crimes in 2011. The next country on the list, Germany, had about a sixth that number. According to FBI's annual report " Crime in the United States," about 11 percent of crimes in 2012 were committed by minors under age 18.

Now, one might say, " Those kids should be in school. Why are they committing crimes?" Well, they might not actually be in school. In 2012 the high school dropout rate was 7 percent. One of the main reasons for dropping out is socioeconomic status. Kids from low-income families are 2. 4 times more likely to drop out than middle-class kids, and 10 times more likely than high-income students. If we support kids from lower-income

families, they will be more likely to stay in school. Getting an education will improve not just their future, but that of their children. High school graduates on average make \$10, 000 more than dropouts annually, and someone with a bachelor's degree earns about \$26, 000 more than that. If these kids succeed in school, they will make more money in the real world, so their kids will be more financially stable and more likely to succeed too. Bringing this back to the crime rate, more than 80 percent of those who spend time in the corrections system are dropouts.

If the money spent on incarcerating people had been put toward providing a proper education for them as children, many probably wouldn't have dropped out and would have led much more successful lives. The U. S. has to start helping young people succeed in school in order to decrease the dropout and incarceration rates in our country. The prison system and social welfare programs cost a lot of money that could be used by the education system instead.

Instead of spending millions building jails, we should be funding schools and keeping kids in the classroom. Would you rather live in a place where everyone is educated and employed, or where many citizens are locked up and draining your tax dollars? Think about it.