In 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics did a study on high school drop out rates and whether a family’s income had any relationship to the student leaving school. “In 2000, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes were six times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20 percent of the income distribution to drop out of high school. (nces.ed.gov, National Center for Education Statistics)” The study also found that out of 100 students from the lowest 20 percent of family incomes about 10 of them would drop out, from the middle 60 percent of family incomes about 5 students would drop out, and from the top 20 percent of family incomes about 1 student would drop out. The study also showed that the drop-out rates for students in the lowest 20 percent of family incomes ranged from 9.5 to 13.3 percent (nces.ed.gov, National Center for Economic Statistics).

Students from the lowest 20 percent of family incomes have struggles that other students in the middle and upper family income ranges do not have to deal with. For students whose families have lower incomes the purchase of school supplies and books may be a struggle. There are national programs to help children in these situations, but many students do not want to admit that they come from a family that is economically stretched and that having lunch money alone is a struggle; forget about books.

Students from the lower 20 percent of family incomes can also find themselves as the subject of ridicule from other students because of the “rag-tag” or “hand me down” clothing that they have to wear to school. Students in the lower range of family incomes tend to find themselves as outcast from the students who come from families that are better off financially. The feeling of being an outcast can also lead to trouble, as they feel an urge to prove themselves to others to make up for financial shortcomings.

The status and class of a student can play a direct role in the decisions that he makes about school. A student who has never had a lot of money to put into education will probably not take education as seriously because his or her parents probably didn’t either. A job which provides a steady but small income is probably better than anything they’ve ever had and so it may entice them to leave school before they are finished. But the drop out ranging from 9.5 to 13.3 percent is much larger than any other financial class. A persons income is, in most cases, directly associated with the education that person has received. This drop out rate then is a perfect example of a reason why “the poor stay poor” in America. It is also an example of a person’s social status affecting their decisions and income. The student then leaving school only helps to stratify American society into even more distinct classes and status groups. The college degree becoming much more common means that he has separated himself from many people by a great distance. So in this situation, the inequality found in the distribution of family incomes hinders social mobility between classes, and the mobility of a person to move up in the family income distribution. A person who comes from a family of lower financial status that also drops out of high school will struggle greatly to move from the financial quartile their parents are in because they will not have the skills or knowledge necessary to land a job that would push them ahead. This number range shows a negative effect
that inequality has on the social structure of America, and a negative effect it has on individual people and society as high school dropouts are more prone to crime. And with such a large dropout rate for students from this lower 20 percent range of family incomes, we can only expect that the dropout rate will increase and that the population of the category, lower 20 percent of family incomes, will only continue to rise.