

Diplomas Important in Today's Job Market

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In today's highly competitive job market, it is vital that our students gain all the advantages they can during school. In years past, it may have been possible for young people to drop out of high school and still maintain a comfortable life style. It isn't so easy in today's job market where having a high school diploma is a necessity, not an option. A growing number of employers will not even consider hiring someone who did not graduate from high school. If they are hired, promotions are limited or not available at all.

Most jobs now require skilled labor. Earning a diploma not only indicates a higher level of skill, it shows the student knows how to set goals and work to meet them. Earning a diploma boosts a student's self-esteem, giving graduates more confidence in pursuing a career. The potential for secure employment rises with the level of education. A student who decides to drop out of school and forego a diploma is automatically at a disadvantage against students competing for jobs who completed high school.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated a nine percent unemployment rate in 2014 among people who did not earn a high school diploma. For students with a high school diploma, the unemployment rate dropped to six percent.

Although the trend in the educational level of the population in the United States has been going up, there is still much work to do. The latest data shows the national graduation rate is 81 percent with Georgia trailing at 72 percent. While 72 percent of Georgia's students are graduating from high school, it is the 28 percent of Georgians who do not graduate that is a concern. Quitting school causes problems for the future of the dropout as well as Georgia's future.

The personal stakes for a high school dropout are frightful because quitting school affects lifetime earnings. Their decision to drop out of school is the first step toward a lifetime of financial struggle. Compare the median earnings of \$488 per week for the employed dropout to a high school graduate's salary of \$668 per week. This amounts to an extra \$780 per month, which could be a house and car payment. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, 82 percent of prisoners in the U.S. are high school dropouts! School dropouts take a toll not only on those individuals and their future families. They impact all citizens, especially the poor and minority community.

We must all work together—teachers, families, and community leaders—to do everything we can to prevent dropouts. We must address social and economic issues including poverty, limited or no access to healthcare, and the lack of stable housing. These are a few factors that prevent children from coming to school ready and able to learn. All of these variables affect student learning and reduce the chance of graduating. Whitfield County continues to make progress with early literacy initiatives such as "Birth to Five" that enable interventions to happen before children enroll in kindergarten. These county-wide efforts strive to keep families involved in their student's learning with support from other adults to give students individual attention. Once they are in school, we assess and monitor student progress and track academic achievement. This data helps us to provide the academic support students need to be successful.

For most students, the decision to drop out of school is made long before high school. Warning signs during the early years of elementary school include problems with attendance, misbehavior, and lagging academic performance. We must address these challenges early to build the best possible foundation for building toward graduation.

Education is the best vehicle to carry our students out of poverty and ensure a healthier financial future through securing better paying jobs for graduates. A high school diploma, coupled with a college degree or technical education, makes them more likely to earn promotions in jobs that already provide higher salaries and better benefits.

There are options for high school dropouts. They can pass a standardized test leading to a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, which is recognized as a diploma by most schools of higher learning. There are many distance learning programs available online that include option for earning a high school diploma.

If you completed high school but did not pass the graduation test, you may be eligible for a diploma today! Georgia law changed this year to waive the graduation test requirement. The new law applies to students who enrolled as a freshman in high school as early as July 1, 1981. Learn more on our website at www.whitfield.k12.ga.us/diploma.

The important thing to remember is it is never too late to further your education. Whether you be 17 or 70, with time and effort you can get that high school diploma or a college degree. You will never regret it!