

# What to Know About



# Dropping Out of School

A PUBLICATION FOR PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK  
WITH ADOLESCENTS AND THE PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS

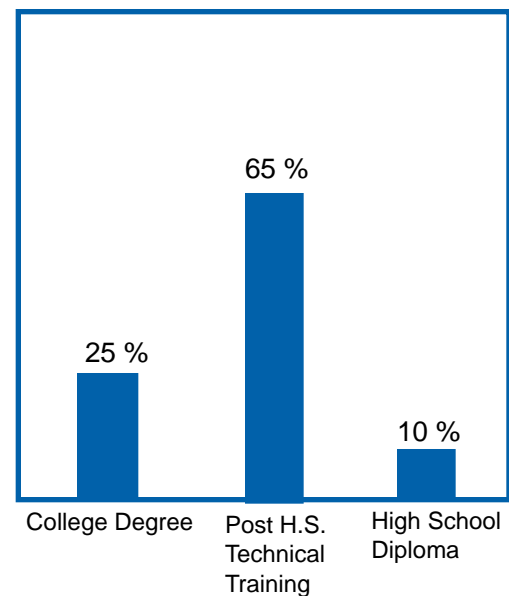
## National Trends

In the past 15 years, the general American population has become better educated. In 1980, 69 percent of the U.S. population over 24 years of age had graduated from high school. By 1994, that percentage increased to 81 percent, and one in five persons (22 percent) had four or more years of college experience. Despite these national gains in education, many students fail to obtain a high school diploma. In fact, 1,868 teenagers drop out of school each day.

Although dropout rates are disproportionately higher among minorities, 66 percent of teens who drop out of school are white students who are not considered "at risk." Reasons for dropping out of school vary, but include doing poorly, having poor social skills, working more than 20 hours per week or becoming pregnant.

According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, "Remaining in school is the single most important action adolescents can take to improve their future economic prospects." In 1992, a high school graduate earned almost \$6,000 per year more than his/her peer who dropped out of school. College graduates had an average yearly income of \$32,629, compared to the \$18,737 earned by a high school graduate. In addition, a male high school graduate is likely to earn two times the salary of a female high school graduate. It is estimated that by the year 2000, the majority of jobs will require some training beyond high school.

## Jobs in the Year 2000 Training / Education Requirement



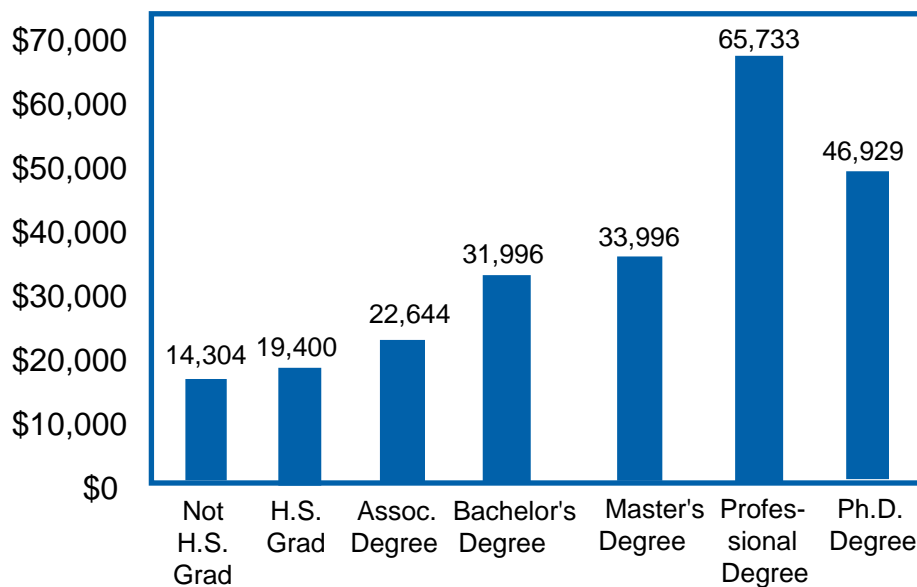
Written by: Kathleen Boyce Rodgers,  
Former Assistant Professor, Family Life

# Education in Tennessee

Tennessee ranks among the lowest 10 states for high school graduates. One third of Tennesseans older than 24 years do not have a high school diploma or above. But like national trends, the overall educational level of Tennesseans is increasing. In the 1991-92 school year, 15,223 teens failed to complete high school. In the 1992-93 school year, this number decreased to 11,832 teens.

According to U.S. Department of Commerce statistics, a Tennessee high school graduate will earn \$5,096 more in an average year than a high school dropout. With a four-year college degree, average yearly earnings will increase by \$12,596. Over the course of their lifetime, high school dropouts will earn far less money than their peers who have a high school diploma.

## Average Income and Educational Attainment (Tennesseans Aged 25 and Older)



Source: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Public Use Microdata. File: Tennessee

The state of Tennessee has instituted several laws in an attempt to reduce the number of students who fail to complete high school. State law requires all youth under the age of 18 to attend school. Learner's permits or driver's licenses are not granted to any teen who drops out of school and is not pursuing a GED (general educational development) certificate. Students who return to school after dropping out can only obtain a license if they meet certain academic performance standards.

These laws, along with innovative dropout prevention programs throughout the state, have helped to reduce the number of teens dropping out of school.

A variety of factors influence whether or not a teen will do poorly or succeed in school.

# We Know From Research That...



- Students who do poorly in school tend to believe their success or failure is beyond their control.
- Students who do well in school tend to believe their success is because they are smart, and any failure is because they didn't try hard enough.
- Students whose parents are not involved in their school are more likely to repeat a grade, be suspended or expelled, have poor grades and have behavior problems compared to those whose parents are involved in school.
- Parent's participation in their child's education declines as children grow older. In fact, by the time teens reach 12th grade, only half of parents are involved in school activities such as attending a school meeting or event, or acting as a volunteer.
- Most parents want their children to do well in school. According to a random national survey, nearly all parents expect their children to finish high school, and nearly 3 in 4 want their child to graduate from college.
- Children who learn cooperatively within mixed-race groups in school have shown increased problem-solving skills, achievement, positive self-esteem and positive race relations. This type of learning could potentially benefit high school students as well.
- After the transition from elementary school to junior high school, students view teachers as less available to them, less friendly and less fair in their grading. This perception can contribute to students' lack of commitment to school.

## What Can Parents And Other Adults Do?

### Parents can.....

- Encourage your children to read, and talk with them about what they are reading.
- Create a space in your home where a child can read and do home work without distraction. For example, set up a small table or desk somewhere away from the TV.
- Applaud your children's *ability* when they do well in school, and their *effort* when they do poorly.

## Schools can encourage parental involvement by.....

- Organizing parent education and support groups to learn about normal changes during adolescence.
- Informing parents about programs and students' progress on a regular basis.
- Providing specific suggestions for ways parents can assist with homework and other learning activities, including community youth service.
- Involving parents as volunteers in schools or include them in school governance committees.
- Creating partnerships among schools, parents and key community organizations in joint responsibility for adolescents' educational achievement and healthy development.



### Books for Parents:

Hahn, J., *Have You Done Your Homework?: A Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers Succeed in School*. New York: Wiley, 1985.

Steinberg, L. & Levine, A. *You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20*. New York: Harper-Collins, 1990.

### Local and State Resources:

School guidance counselors and teachers  
Literacy/GED hotline toll-free 1-800-531-1515

## References

Entwisle, D.R. (1990). Schools and the adolescent. In Feldman, S.S., and Elliot, G.R. (Eds.), *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent* (pp. 197-224). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fork, D., Frase, M., Gonzalez, R. & Tomlinson, T. (1994). *Reaching the goals; Goal 2 -- High school completion*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Steinberg, L. & Levine, A. (1990). *You and your adolescent: A parent's guide for ages 10-20*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

*Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*: Concluding Report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Carnegie Corporation of New York. (October, 1995). New York, NY.

*Tennessee Kids Count: The State of the Child in Tennessee, 1995*. The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth. Nashville, TN.



**SP491D-5M-7/97 E12-2015-00-043-98**

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The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture,  
and county governments cooperating in furtherance of Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.  
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Billy G. Hicks, Dean