



High School Graduation Crisis Fact Sheet

Despite overall progress when it comes to improving teen graduation rates in the United States, the sobering fact remains that three out of every 10 students in U.S. public schools still fail to finish high school with a diploma. That amounts to 1.3 million students lost from the graduation pipeline every year, or almost 7,200 students lost every day.¹ Now more than ever, teens need to be inspired and enabled to do great things because when it comes down to it, teens who fail to earn a high school diploma are at a great disadvantage. More than half (55%) of teens report that the election of President Obama has made them much more hopeful about their future education, and as educators, friends and family, we need to do our part.²

A Silent Epidemic

- The upsetting disparity: Nearly all teens (95%) think that graduating from high school is critical to their future success, and an overwhelming 89% of teens think a college education is very important.³
- Seventy-one percent of teens know someone who has dropped out of high school. When asked what those dropouts were doing now, 46% said they were unemployed; 53% said raising a child; 39% said working in a low-paying job; 29% said involved in a gang; and only 13% said the dropouts they knew were in a successful career.⁴
- While more than three-quarters of white and Asian students earn a high school diploma, just 55 percent of Latino, 51 percent of African-American, and 50 percent of Native American students do.⁵
 - If high schools and colleges were able to raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income across the nation would add, conservatively, more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy.⁶
- Dropouts are more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison as those with at least a high school diploma.⁷

Why Students Drop Out⁸

- One-quarter (25%) of teens think it is more important to make a lot of money than to be educated.
- Although the reasons for dropping out vary, the consequences of the decision are remarkably similar. Getting a job to support themselves or their family is the biggest obstacle in graduating

¹ "Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons - The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students," Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center (June 9, 2009)

² "Teen Graduation Crisis Survey" – Taco Bell Foundation for Teens (March 2009)

³ "Teen Graduation Crisis Survey" – Taco Bell Foundation for Teens (March 2009)

⁴ "Teen Graduation Crisis Survey" – Taco Bell Foundation for Teens (March 2009)

⁵ "Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons - The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students," Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center (June 9, 2009)

⁶ Amos, Jason. Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

⁷ Bridgeland, John; Dilulio, John, Jr.; Morison, Karen Burke (2006). The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Washington DC: Civic Enterprises.

⁸ "Teen Graduation Crisis Survey" – Taco Bell Foundation for Teens (March 2009)

from high school, according to nearly one third of respondents (32%); followed by not being able to keep up with school work (16%); boredom (14%); negative peer pressure (11%); lack of support/motivation (9%); safety (5%) and bullying (3%).

- Teens report that in 10 years they see themselves working as a: professional athlete (13%); healthcare worker (10%); education (9%); musician/singer (8%); actor/actress (6%); corporate executive (5%) and media professional (3%).

Economic Impact of Low Graduation Rates

- Over the course of his or her lifetime, a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately
- \$260,000 in lost earnings⁹
- Dropouts earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates and more than \$1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates.¹⁰
- The government would reap \$45 billion in extra tax revenues and reduced costs in public health, crime, and welfare payments if the number of high school dropouts among 20-year olds in the U.S. today, which numbers more than 700,000 individuals, were cut in half.¹¹

What You Can Do To Help

Graduate To Go is a multi-year campaign, led by the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens, to shine a spotlight on the high school dropout crisis and encourage teens to earn their diploma. As part of this initiative, the Foundation has joined forces with Actor/Producer Mark Wahlberg and his Youth Foundation to encourage communities to give a dollar at participating Taco Bell restaurants nationwide from June 3-15. Money raised will fund real-world experiences, such as job training and college preparation, proven to motivate teens to stay in school. Visit your local Taco Bell or log on to www.graduatetogo.com to learn more about how you can help fight the graduation epidemic by supporting the Graduate to Go initiative today.

⁹ Amos, Jason. Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

¹⁰ Bridgeland, John; Dilulio, John, Jr.; Morison, Karen Burke (2006). The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Washington DC: Civic Enterprises.

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TBFT/Graduate To Go Q&A

What is the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens?

Established in 1992, the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens (TBFT) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The TBFT's mission is to inspire teenagers to graduate from high school and become caring, educated and productive adults. Our goal is to reach 100,000 teen annually through real-world experiences and help cut the high school dropout rate in half by 2018.

How Do We Fulfill Our Mission?

Led by our "*Graduate To Go*" national initiative, we fund organizations that provide at-risk youth with mentors and real-world experiences that are proven to help teens earn their diploma and achieve more in life. This is made possible through Taco Bell's passion, creativity and relentlessness to the graduation cause as well as support from customers, partners, franchisees and employees.

What is "*Graduate To Go*?"

"*Graduate To Go*" is a multi-year initiative led by the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens that will shine a spotlight on the high school dropout crisis and seek solutions through real-world experiences with like-minded partners. Our "*Graduate To Go*" ambassador is Actor/Producer, Mark Wahlberg. Together, the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens and the Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation will work to address the national teen graduation crisis.

How exactly is the foundation teaming up with Mark Wahlberg and his Youth Foundation?

The Taco Bell Foundation for Teens and Actor/Producer Mark Wahlberg recently announced the "*Graduate To Go*" initiative through a national public service campaign. Wahlberg, whose Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation helps improve the quality of life for inner city youth through partnerships with other youth organizations, joins the Foundation's efforts as a "*Graduate To Go*" Ambassador. Together, the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens and Wahlberg will work to address the national teen graduation crisis where one in three students drops out of high school without receiving a diploma.

Why Does the Taco Bell Foundation For Teens Focus on This Issue?

The teen dropout rate has developed into a national crisis that can no longer be ignored. With one in three U.S. teens not graduating from high school, the socio and economic effects have far-reaching implications for the future of our country. Education is something that everyone needs and deserves. With a diploma being the #1 factor for a teen's future success, Taco Bell wants to raise awareness with teens about what graduation means toward a better life and provide real-world solutions that help them achieve their goal.

Does the Taco Bell Foundation For Teens Work with Other Organizations?

TBFT will collaborate with like-minded organizations to drive impact and tackle the teen drop-out problem. As the Foundations grows in endowment and impact, it will look towards national groups and companies with similar missions to join together to form an even stronger presence tackling teen drop-outs in our communities.

Who Do We Support?

Historically, the Foundation funds grants to schools and youth organizations. We are the largest teen program donor to Boys & Girls Clubs of America, giving more than \$28 million to support teen programming since 1995. In addition, TBFT provides grants to other worthy programs that are designed

to help teens stay in school and on the path to graduation. This year, the TBFT will distribute \$1.8M in local grants to nearly 300 organizations.

Why Did We Choose Boys & Girls Clubs of America As Our Primary Partner?

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) is the top youth development organization in America according to *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, serving girls and boys from disadvantaged economic and social circumstances. BGCA reaches more than one million teens each year through its vast network of some 4,000 Clubs – each providing daily access, youth development programs and a trained professional staff. In a recent third-party survey of Club alumni, nearly two-thirds (61 percent) said the Club helped them become more committed to their education and forty-five percent said the Club helped them graduate from high school.

What Do We Fund at the BCGA?

The Taco Bell Foundation for Teens supports Boys & Girls Clubs of America through its long-standing sponsorship of the national Keystone program. This is the largest and most dynamic teen program within the organization, with more than 1,500 Keystone Clubs nationwide. With the guidance of Club staff, members ages 14-18 gain hands-on experiences planning and participating in projects that encourage career growth, academic success and volunteerism. Keystone teens have initiated projects like college field trips, job shadowing tours, health fairs and community clean-up events, all to benefit their Clubs and communities. Each year, “Keystoners” develop a National Service Project with a common theme. The combined action of thousands of local Keystone Clubs results in a service project with national impact. Service projects are recognized each year during the national and regional Keystone Conferences sponsored by the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens. These are premiere leadership events for teens and draw thousands of youth from Clubs nationwide.

How is the Taco Bell Foundation for Teens Funded?

Funding comes from the generosity of Taco Bell customer donations and the support of Taco Bell, its employees, franchisees and partners. Canisters are placed in participating restaurants so patrons can support the program by donating their spare change. Additionally, franchisees have developed fundraising and volunteer opportunities within their own communities to support local teen programs. Taco Bell’s 2010 national fundraiser to support the TBFT will take place June 3-June 15, 2010. During that period, participating Taco Bell restaurants nationwide will invite customers to donate \$1 in support of the “*Graduate To Go*” initiative. By doing so, customers will receive a free taco coupon and all proceeds will go to the TBFT.



Bob Wise Quotes to Leverage

“Can we measure what graduating from high school really means for a student’s financial future? You bet we can. Today, students who do not get their diploma, if they can find a job, can expect to make about \$8 an hour, on average. A worker who successfully completed high school can expect to make about \$13 an hour, on average. That is nearly a 40 percent difference and over the course of a year is more than \$10,000 and could mean the difference between buying a new car versus a thirteen-year-old clunker.”

“It has become clear to me that success means something different to everyone. But when it comes to making a measurable life impact with teens, a high school diploma is an important jumping off point that opens doors to endless opportunities for success—be it additional education in college, home ownership, or strong earning potential—that high school dropouts rarely experience.”

“In the United States, approximately 70 percent of teens fail to read and write at a proficient level. That’s completely unacceptable in today’s fast-paced and ever changing information age. The ability to read, comprehend, and utilize information in the future, are key skills that every student needs to succeed in the twenty-first century job market.”

“Within the US, steady unemployment rates have become a constant point of discussion and debate. High School dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed than their peers who successfully graduate from college-- a sobering reality that many teens fail to truly comprehend. Sure a job at a local XX may be fruitful for a high school dropout now, but there is no opportunity for growth over a longer period of time, which ultimately translates into a sizable loss of \$260,000 in lifetime earnings compared to the lifetime earnings of a high school graduate.”