This year, 16-year-old Jason decided not to return to high school. Jason is one of the 1.2 million American students who drop out of high school each year. Dropout rates for African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are higher than those for white or Asian students. Rates are also significantly higher in urban than suburban or rural districts – sometimes as high as 75%.

Some think dropping out is not a big issue, but others point out that it is an enormous national problem that has been persistent for many years and that now threatens the integrity of the American economy. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or incarcerated. Dropouts who do get jobs typically earn less than graduates and are twice as likely to find themselves in poverty. Once students leave school, many are reluctant to return because they think it’s too late.

Young people drop out of high school for a variety of reasons. Students who are failing, missing many days of school, or having trouble getting along with their classmates and teachers are at a high risk for dropping out. Some high school dropouts say school is too boring. Those from low-income families may need to work to earn money. Others quit because they feel the academic standards are too high for them to reach.

While some adults think dropouts aren’t willing to work hard, many people think differently. They say that high school is the problem, not teenagers. They have some suggestions about how to decrease the dropout rate. One option would be to start the school day later so teens could sleep in. Alternatively, the school day could end earlier to give teenagers time for a part-time job after school – the half-school, half-work model. A third option would be to model high school after college, allowing students to choose their own classes and schedules. A final option would be to reduce high school to three years instead of four, enabling teenagers to look for full-time employment or go to college one year earlier.

What do you think? Should schools do more to prevent students from dropping out? Or do teens need to do more to meet the demands of high school? What might convince teens to stay in school?

Questions for Classroom Discussion:
• What kinds of students are most likely to drop out of high school?
• What are some effects of dropping out of high school?
• Why do some people think parents, teachers, and schools are to blame?
• Why is this problem so persistent?
• What should be done to convince teens to stay in school?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

**convince** *(verb)* to persuade

- **Sample Sentence:** Something must be done to **convince** teens to stay in school.
- **Turn and Talk:** Why do you think it is necessary to **convince** restaurant workers to wash their hands before handling food?

**enormous** *(adjective)* huge

- **Sample Sentence:** Many people think that the amount of students dropping out of high school is an **enormous** problem.
- **Turn and Talk:** Do you consider litter to be an **enormous** issue in your community?

**integrity** *(noun)* honesty; morality

- **Sample Sentence:** Some think today’s teens lack **integrity** and would rather take the easy way out than put in an honest day’s work.
- **Turn and Talk:** How do you know when a friend has **integrity**?

**persistent** *(adjective)* continuing despite difficulty; relentless; continuing longer than expected

- **Sample Sentence:** There has been a **persistent** problem with students dropping out of high school in this country.
- **Turn and Talk:** Why do you think people are told to be **persistent** when working towards a goal?

**reluctant** *(adjective)* unwilling; hesitant

- **Sample Sentence:** Once students leave school, many are **reluctant** to return because they think it’s too late.
- **Turn and Talk:** What is something that you are **reluctant** to do even though it might be good for you?
DO THE MATH

Although many people consider the national dropout rate an enormous problem, it can be difficult to get the facts. In some states, there have been persistent problems getting schools to accurately report how many students drop out. High dropout rates look bad, and when lots of students are dropping out, some schools are reluctant to tell the truth. If some school officials lack the integrity to be straightforward, how can we convince them to report the facts?

**Option 1:** In a school district in Texas, about 13,500 students are enrolled in eighth grade each year. But only 8,000 students graduate from high school each year. Based on these numbers, what percentage of the district’s eighth graders do not complete high school there?

A. about 20%
B. about 35%
C. about 41%
D. about 57%

**Option 2:** In the United States, there are over 1,000 high schools where fewer than 60% of students graduate. These schools are known as “dropout factories.” Half of all high school dropouts in the United States each year come from dropout factories.

a) Let $x$ be the number of students enrolled in a high school. Write an expression that represents the minimum number of students a school can graduate before it becomes a dropout factory.

\[ 0.6x \]

b) Can the district mentioned in Option 1 be considered a “dropout district”? Explain your answer.

Yes, because the school district graduated less than the 60% threshold.

\[ 60\% \times 13,500 = 8,100 > 8,000 \]
\[ 8,000 \div 13,500 = 59.3\% < 60\% \]

**Discussion Question:** The persistent dropout problem has enormous consequences for America’s youth. Students who drop out face low wages and limited opportunities. To solve the dropout problem, we need to have the facts. Most school officials act with integrity when reporting their dropout rates, but some do not. How would you convince reluctant officials to be honest about how many students are dropping out?
Mr. Seemy and Ms. Kahn are worried about the high dropout rate at a nearby high school. They know that when students drop out, they take an enormous risk with their futures.

These two teachers have a lot of integrity and want to know what they can do that might help convince reluctant students to stay in school. They find data about this persistent problem in a report called “The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts.” It was released by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2006.

In this report, researchers John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison asked dropouts directly what they believed would improve students’ chances of staying in school. Here is how they responded.

What Dropouts Believe Would Improve Students’ Chances

- Opportunities for real-world learning (internships, service learning, etc.) to make classroom more relevant: 81%
- Better teachers who keep classes interesting: 81%
- Smaller classes with more individual instruction: 75%
- Better communication between parents & school, get parents more involved: 71%
- Parents make sure their kids go to school every day: 71%
- Increase supervision at school: ensure students attend classes: 70%

Imagine Mr. Seemy and Ms. Kahn asked you to think of one specific recommendation for them that could help with the problem. What would you suggest? Remember to base your recommendation on this data or on other factual information.

Answers will vary.

Imagine that one of your good friends is persistent about wanting to drop out of school. What would you say to convince your friend to stay in school?
DEBATE THE ISSUE

What is the best solution to the high school drop out problem?

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A  High school should start later in the day.

OR

B  High school should only be a half-day so students can work too.

OR

C  High school students should be able to choose their classes and make their own schedules.

OR

D  High school should only be three years instead of four.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

- Can you show me evidence in the text that...
- You make a good point, but have you considered...
- I believe that...
- I agree with you, but...
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

convince | enormous | integrity | persistent | reluctant