

## ***Eleventh & Twelfth Grades—Looking Ahead to the World Outside High School***

Yes, there is life after high school—*if* students have a diploma and good skills!

### ***Important things to know about— Helping 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grade students prepare for life after high school***

- What to expect from 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Essential skills to learn in high school.
- Parents, high schoolers, and decisions about college.

### **What's up with 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders?**

Juniors and seniors are pretty comfortable with the high school experience, and may even be getting a little tired of it. Some may be thinking about dropping out. They may not be planning to get further education, so they think: *Why not just go get a job?*

***Parents, this is no time to let up. Above all, it is not the time to let them drop out of high school.***

Sadly—tragically!—many kids do drop out in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Don't let your child be one of them! Don't let them be part of the almost 30% of kids in our State who don't graduate. Without further training, these dropouts are doomed to minimum-wage jobs and worse, to a lifetime of buried dreams. Help your children stay focused on using this \$30,000 community gift—called high school.

Help them deal with the pressures from the world outside and from the inside. Their friends may be talking about leaving school, but tell your children that dropping out is one of the most costly mistakes they could ever make. High-school graduates earn an additional \$500,000 in lifetime earnings over non-graduates. Support your children as they make decisions about what they'll do after high school, all while they are still thinking a lot about how they look, act, and fit in. The chart on the back page gives you some idea of what to expect this year and next.

### **A checklist of high-school skills**

How can you determine if your teenager is getting the right skills before leaving high school? Here's a list of things your children should know how to do:

***Research.*** Can your teen use a library or other resources to look things up?

***Read.*** Can your teen read fiction and non-fiction written at an 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>-grade level?

***Interpret.*** Can your teen gather important and useful information out of textbooks and other resources? And then make logical conclusions based on that information?

***Writing.*** Can your teen compose a paragraph that has a topic sentence and supporting sentences? Can your teen use accurate spelling and English grammar? Can your teen write an essay or short paper stating ideas clearly and in a logical order?

***Math.*** Can your teen interpret graphs? Manipulate fractions? Plot coordinates using the Cartesian system? Solve quadratic equations? Solve “story problems”?

***Science.*** Can your teen apply the scientific method to collect information and test a hypothesis about the natural world? Does your teen understand basic concepts such as atomic structure?

***Technical skills.*** Is your teen computer-literate—including word-processing, spreadsheets, databases, using the Internet? Can your teen read and follow instructions in a technical manual?

And along with these basic skills, future employers and partners will ask: Are you responsible, truthful, and trustworthy? Are you flexible, helpful, positive, and reliable? Academic skills are essential, but as a philosopher said: **Character is fate.**

## What parents should know about high schoolers making choices about college

Young adults say that their parents are *the number one influence* on their decisions about going to college or going directly into the workforce.\*

In fact, encouragement from parents is probably the biggest single factor when a student decides whether to go to college or not. In the recent *Life After High School* report, two-thirds of the 18-to- 25 year olds who had earned college degrees said that their parents had encouraged—expected—they to go to college.

Most students realize that education and advanced training after high school are keys to success in life. By wide margins, they agree to statements like: *It's easier to move up in a company when you have a college degree.* But many students are not getting the practical, nuts-and-bolts help they need to get to that next step of education and training. Finding help is something that parents can be working on *now*, during their children's last two years in high school.

Parents can't trust that their children are getting all the decision-making help they need at the school. High-school counselors are stretched thin, so it's not surprising that most young adults say that there weren't enough counselors for them to talk with, or that they didn't get enough individual attention from counselors. ***Families need to get involved, meet with teachers, and ask for help.***

And parents definitely need to make sure that their children are making the most of their high school experience. A big majority of young adults say that they could have worked harder in high school. In the *Life After High School* report, 67% of the young people agreed that they could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder in high school—and wished they had!

No matter how we look those statistics, it's pretty obvious that quite a few students have been just sliding through high school. That means parents have been letting them slide. Parents, foster parents, grandparents, godparents—this is your wake-up call to get involved! Ask questions! Show you interest! Tell your teens how much their success matters to you! Just don't let them dropout!

## DEVELOPMENTAL OVERVIEW OF HIGH-SCHOOL JUNIORS AND SENIORS

	11th Grade	12th Grade
<b>Physical</b>	Boys are caught up in physical maturity. Lots of sexual energy. Body image is a major concern for both boys and girls. Everyone is becoming more relaxed—in fact, working hard at being relaxed.	Pretty comfortable as oldest, biggest, most adult students in the school. Lots of sexual energy.
<b>Mental / Academic</b>	Feeling internal and external pressures about this year and about the future. (college? career?) <i>What will happen to me after high school? Who is making these decisions anyway?</i>	First half of year is intense and anxious. During second half, it's tempting to just coast. About to leave a secure and known academic environment—that's both good and bad.
<b>Social</b>	Changing relationships with adults and authority figures. More serious experimentation. Strong desire for closer friends. HS social scene is getting a little boring.	About to leave a secure and known social environment—that's both good and bad. The present is becoming a little boring. The future is huge and a little scary.
<b>Friendships</b>	Close friendships are changing and/or deepening. <i>Life would be super if only I had a boyfriend/girlfriend.</i>	Very close friendships. Some anxiety about what will happen to friendships after HS. <i>Will I ever be able to make new friends as close as my HS friends are?</i>
<b>Personal Identity</b>	Idealistic. Stronger sense of self, but it is fragile and changes rapidly. High expectations for self, lots of "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" and some guilt at not meeting own standards. Strong sexuality.	Reflecting, reacting, learning. Consolidation of changes, preparation for adult identity. I'm just getting a handle on myself. <i>I'm ready to go AND I'm scared about going.</i>
<b>Family Relationships</b>	Driving more. Experimenting with new behaviors more. Want to be seen as grown up and responsible. Serious questioning of parents and their choices. <i>Why can't you treat me like I'm an adult?</i>	Getting ready to leave home soon. Working out parent-and-adult-child relationship. More re-examination of past family issues from new, almost-adult perspective.

Based on Michael Riera, Ph.D., *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*, 2004.

\*Note: The statistics in this section come from *Life After High School: Young People Talk about their Hopes and Prospects*, Public Agenda, 2005.

