

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

School Administrator

MAY 2024

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS AND COMMENTARY FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS



Staffing Shortages

Recruitment and retention runs through the intangibles of teacher support and the realities of affordable places to live



PLUS

Ethics: Correcting Parenting Style, p8

Legal Ground of Book Challenges, p9

Profile: Joe Gothard, p59

Inside AASA: Erin McCallum, p56

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Running Through the High School Finish Line

ONE OF THE MANY SKILLS my wife teaches her high school track athletes is the concept of running through the finish line. She explains that picking a target beyond the final mark helps the runner avoid losing momentum as they approach the final stretch of the race.

While this approach is essential for every sprinter to adopt, a similar perspective also must be conveyed to our nation's high school students. Setting one's sights on a target beyond the diploma no longer can be an aspirational goal for some. It must become an essential reality for all.

Many consider the American Dream fully realized when adult children fare better financially than

their parents. For decades, this had been a reality for most families across our great nation. In fact, almost 90 percent of children born in the 1940s grew up to earn more than their parents when adjusted for inflation, according to the Brookings Institution.


However, as Harvard researcher Raj Chetty points out, over the past 50 years this measure of the American Dream has been in precipitous decline. Remarkably, using the same metrics, only 50 percent of adults today will grow up to earn more than their parents, and future changes to the workforce will likely see this trend continue to fall unless we act.


Poverty's Anchor

Poverty and education play a powerful role in these sobering statistics. In fact, more than half of today's adults who grew up in families with lower levels of income and education earn less than \$20,000 per year at age 30, according to Brookings. Sadly, only about 1 in 10 are able to break free, leaving the vast percentage of their peers stuck in generational poverty.

Unfortunately, it was not the attainment of a high school diploma that often served to break the cycle to lift the lucky few out of poverty. When adjusted for inflation, median wages for workers with a high school diploma or less actually has fallen by


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11 percent from 1979 to 2019, while they rose by 15 percent for those with a four-year degree.

This is not to say that a formal bachelor's degree is the only option to beat the odds and achieve the American Dream. Similar research has shown students who access apprenticeships, technical institutions and other trades-based pathways likewise experience a higher propensity to achieve steady financial footing in adulthood. Sadly, too few of our nation's students are seeking advanced education after high school.

While many graduates are able to find ready employment, albeit often in lower-skill but higher-demand jobs, McKinsey Global Institute estimates that one in four of these positions will become obsolete within seven

years due to automation and artificial intelligence. An estimated 39 million Americans could lose their jobs by 2030 due to the wave of advancements coming.

In just five short years, the Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts 55 percent of high-growth/high-wage jobs will require a bachelor's degree, 20 percent an associate's degree or some other postsecondary education or apprenticeship, leaving less than one in four high-growth/high-wage jobs available for those with only a high school diploma.

A Higher Gaze

Across the nation, we have seen a steady rise in graduation rates, where 87 percent of our public school students now earn a high school diploma, up 8 percent since 2010-11,

according to the National Center for Education Statistics. While these improvements are commendable, if our students are to have a solid chance of achieving the American Dream, their diploma cannot be viewed as their finish line. We must encourage all children to lift their gaze to set sights on an educational target beyond 12th grade.

Only when our students embrace the concept of running through their high school diploma to an educational goal that lies somewhere beyond will we truly have given them the adequate coaching they so desperately deserve and need for their futures.

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