

PRACTICE THE TASK

Should students be required to stay in school until they are 18?

**You will read:**

- ▶ A LETTER
- ▶ A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE
President Pushes States to Raise Dropout Age
- ▶ A DATA ANALYSIS
Average Income by Education, 2009
- ▶ A RADIO INTERVIEW
Paul Moran Talks with Missy Remiss on WSCH

You will write:

- ▶ AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

Should students be required to stay in school until they are 18?

Source Materials for Step 2

AS YOU READ Analyze the letter, the newspaper article, the data analysis, and the radio interview. Think about the information, including the data contained in the sources. Annotate the sources with notes that help you decide where you stand on the issue: Should students be required to stay in school until they are 18?

Source 1: Letter

November 21, 2012

Dear Grandma Ella:

I want to tell you so you don't hear from someone else—I've left school. I know this will disappoint you. I hope after you read what I have to say you will understand.

You know how hard things have been at home for the past three years with dad not working, and mom has only been able to find temporary and part-time work. I've been helping out working at Shelly's Diner, but that money does not go far.

Life was tough enough, but then the storm hit. The diner was flooded and had to close—no more job for me! Mom couldn't get to work on time since the subways were out of whack, and now she's looking for work again. The worst was my school—it took a real beating, so they relocated us to somewhere on the other side of town that takes forever to get to every day.

Rather than spend the day getting to school and back and feeling helpless, I decided to step up and look for a job to really help out at home. I was pretty lucky. I'm happy to say I found a full-time job at Marcy's, starting immediately.

Don't worry, Grandma. I know how important it is to get my education. I plan to get myself settled in this job, and then start to work on my GED. Maybe if I'm lucky and mom or dad finds a good job in the next few months I'll be able to go back to school full-time next fall. But in the meantime, I'm proud to be able to help out at home while we all try to recover from the storm.

Please understand. Thank you for everything.

Love,
Marissa

XXX

Source 2: Newspaper Article

National Education Weekly

President Pushes States to Raise Dropout Age

by Mia Lewis

January 25, 2012

In his recent State of the Union address President Obama called on states to require students to stay in school until age 18 or graduation.

"When students don't walk away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma," the President pointed out.

This is the first time a President has weighed in on an issue that individual states are struggling to solve on their own and in their own ways. In general, the legal age for exiting school pre-graduation has been getting higher over the years. It is now age 18 in 21 states plus the District of Columbia, and age 17 in 11 other states.

Raising the age for exiting pre-graduation may not stop all dropouts, but it has a positive effect, according to New Hampshire Deputy Commissioner of Education, Paul Leather. "What it does is it sets the moral imperative so that students,

parents, and educators become committed to the idea that each student will in fact graduate," Leather says.

Recently, New Hampshire raised the minimum age for exiting pre-graduation to 18. "What we found both in national and international research is that when you raise the compulsory age of education, the graduation and retention rates will in fact increase," he says.

Since the federal government covers only around 10 percent of education financing, it is unlikely to be able to force states to adopt a uniform age for exiting pre-graduation. However, for states wanting to receive special "Race to the Top" education grants, a higher pre-graduation exit age could be a requirement.

The federal government may not be able to dictate individual state policy, but it can give states a strong incentive to make sure more students graduate.

Discuss and Decide

Compare Sources 1 and 2. Explain whether or not Marissa's decision is well thought out. What is the likely effect that dropping out of school will have on her future? Cite text evidence in your discussion.

Source 3: Data Analysis

AVERAGE INCOME BY EDUCATION, 2009

Four-year college degree	\$46,930
Some college/assoc. degree	\$36,190
High school diploma	\$27,380
High school dropout	\$19,540

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Source 4: Radio Interview



Paul Moran Talks with Missy Remiss on WSCH

WSCH interviewer Paul Moran talks with Education Advocate Missy Remiss about how states are tackling high dropout rates.

WSCH: Thanks so much for being with us today. I'm going to jump right in and ask, why is everyone so worried about the high school dropout rate? What's so bad about kids deciding to leave school early?

MR: Well, the problem is that even if a student makes a reasonable decision to leave school for work, that decision is likely to have a negative impact over the course of his or her life. Those without a high school diploma have lower earnings, higher unemployment, lower job satisfaction—they even have a higher likelihood of ending up in jail or on public assistance. So, it really is a bad deal for kids.

WSCH: OK, so why not just require kids to stay in school until they are 18 or they graduate? Can't we do that? Won't that solve the problem?

MR: Well, that's really the question. 21 states plus the District of Columbia already have laws requiring students to stay in school until they are 18 or until they graduate, but some of them still have high dropout rates! And you know, forcing

students to stay in school when they don't want to be there can cause problems for teachers and other students as well.

WSCH: So, raising the minimum school-leaving age doesn't automatically solve the problem?

MR: No. That's why some states have decided to take a different tack. For example, in Kentucky, they have been very successful lowering dropout rates, even though, technically, kids are allowed to leave school at age 16. They've worked hard to make schooling relevant—to offer courses that kids can see will help them get jobs and help them in their adult lives. They also have created several pathways to graduation, so there's more than one way to succeed.

WSCH: So, they're still trying to lower the dropout rate, just not by making it the law that you have to stay in school?

MR: Exactly. Everyone wants to lower the dropout rate, it's just a question of how. Now, if we could only tackle some of the economic and social problems that lead students to drop out, we'd really be able to make progress!

WSCH: Thank you so much for your time, and good luck!

Close Read

1. Cite three reasons for staying in school and getting a high school diploma.

2. Why doesn't raising the minimum age to leave school always lead to higher graduation rates? Cite evidence in the text.
