

## Major US Youth Trends (Draft)

1. Declining family support needed to develop our youth:
  - a. Single parent families now makeup a much larger portion of the community (Nearly two-thirds of African-American children, and almost one in four white children, live in households with only one parent).
  - b. Parents in dual wage-earner families are working longer hours (increased from 84 hours per week in 1998 to 91 hours per week in 2002)
2. Our schools are in crisis:
  - a. Approximately 30% of U.S. students do not finish high school.
  - b. 70% of our 8th graders score below proficiency levels in math.
  - c. 69% of our 8th graders score below proficiency in English
  - d. U.S. 15-year-olds scored 28th in math and problem-solving skills among children from 41 industrialized nations who took the same test.
3. Careers:
  - a. The increasing cost of college education has created career road blocks for many high school grads and accelerated the debt of others who do attend. Higher college costs are marginalizing segments of our communities and limiting the dreams of minority youth.
  - b. Sudden changes in economic realities caused by globalization and outsourcing are quickly changing available career options open to our youth. Youth must now face an uncertain future where the demand for careers may change dramatically during the time needed to get a degree.
  - c. More careers are now demanding graduate degrees due to the increasingly complex world. The amount of research completed and new knowledge discovered during the past 25 years -- thanks to the computer -- exceeds the amount that accumulated over the entire preceding course of history.
  - d. Young workers assuming positions with employers must quickly learn how to deal with complex global markets for which there is a tidal wave on information. Workers are awash in data in every industry from social services to pharmaceuticals, adding new realities to the decision making processes in corporations, government, and non-profits.
4. Diversity in our communities and schools brings new opportunities and challenges.
  - a. Our youth must now transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries in the class room, on the sports field, and in neighborhoods in order to just make friends. A national lifestyle survey by Teenage Research Unlimited in 2004 reported that 58% of teens said their group of closest friends includes members of diverse racial backgrounds. Even more reported having friends from different economic and religious backgrounds
  - b. Employers know that diversity is the cradle for innovation and creativity-- and that it holds out great hope for the future if we can develop the leadership skills needed to facilitate the process.
  - c. The increasingly combative and confrontational approaches by political, news sources and community leaders place unusual strain on the fabric of democracy. If segments of the population are not willing to compromise when the common good is in some other group's behalf, then democracy may fail to provide a civil and stable society.
5. Technology:
  - a. Our youth must be lonely pioneers in navigating in a brave new world created by a wide array of new technologies. These technologies have changed every aspect of our life, from how we find mates, complete our home work, communicate with grandparents, to how we propagate the species, pay for medical service, and receive our news.

- b. Global communication systems have heightened the intensity in our lives:
  - i. The necessary time to coordinate and plan activities has been dramatically shortened by e-mail and web capabilities
  - ii. The size of our market place or area of personal concern has increased dramatically as a result of technology. Example: Outsourcing to overseas countries has created global competition for US jobs; the developing global economies are now causing plant closings in the US; terrorists from far away places plan and execute events in the US that affect the local feeling of tranquility.
- 6. Affluent communities are experiencing serious disconnects in parenting:
  - a. A disconnect between over-involved achievement focused parents and their youth struggling to discover their own identity
  - b. Resulting in a dramatic increase in drug use by their youth, three times the normal rate of youth with depression, increasing promiscuous sex, and growing self-destructive behaviors.
  - c. Excessive emphasis on individualism, competition, and materialism, over friendship, reciprocity, caring and connection.
  - d. Because these families are affluent, they are often reluctant to admit they have a problem, and when they do, are not given the needed assistance to solve a family problem.
- 7. Community Support:
  - a. Communities are striving to deal with juvenile justice because of the cost. The cost to a community for juvenile justice, incarceration, counseling, productivity, tax dollars, and welfare benefits for one youth gone bad amounts to 1.7 - 2.3 million dollars over the lifetime of that person. Hence saving youth at risk should be a priority matter for each community.
  - b. A recent survey indicated that Texas ranks 38<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in the number of volunteers in their communities.
- 8. Associated youth Issues:
  - a. The number of youth excelling is declining as they face a daunting future. For example, whereas nearly all young people say that they have goals they want to reach in their lives, a substantial proportion -- 42% -- does not ever expect to reach those goals.
  - b. Nearly one in six adolescents ages 12-19 were over weight in 1999-2002, more than triple the rate reported in 1976-1980.
  - c. There are many children with chronic health limitations (15.5% of children ages 5-11; 18.8% of children ages 12-17).
  - d. 13% of youth ages 16-24 were neither enrolled in school nor working.
  - e. 12% of high school females reported having been raped at some point in their lives.
  - f. 87% of youth, ages 10-17, say it is important to have caring adults in their lives, yet 45% of the kids express a need for more adults they can go to when they have problems.
  - g. 84% of kids agree on the importance and need for safe places, yet more than one in four kids don't feel safe walking alone in their neighborhoods.
  - h. The overall rate of suicide among youth has declined slowly since 1992. However, rates remain unacceptably high. Adolescents and young adults often experience stress, confusion, and depression from situations occurring in their families, schools, and communities.
  - i. 1.3 million children will experience homelessness during the year (2000)
  - j. While teenage pregnancies have declined nationally in recent years, those in Texas have been increasing.

Note: While any one of above trends/obstacles may be a formidable challenge to many youth, the aggregate presents a serious problem for society in the long run. What will history books in the year 2050 say about our generation of leaders? Please send articles that deal with major trends to:

[jwalther@arlingtonalliance4youth.org](mailto:jwalther@arlingtonalliance4youth.org)