



# TEL·A·VISION

Validates *Neuroplasticity* and is  
Key to Drop Out Prevention



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# TEL.A.VISION Brings Hope to Students and Decreases Dropouts



## Introduction

Every day in the United States, 7,000 students drop out of school.

Our nation's youth are dropping out of school at this alarming rate because they have a lack of hope and do not see the relevance of the curriculum to their futures. It is important that we realize the impact on society of our youth with no hope who are dropping out of school. It is our responsibility to seek interventions and programs that teachers may use with special and general education students to express their visions to realize the future of their dreams.

The United States has now slipped to 10th place in the world in high school completion with roughly one-third of the students who enter the ninth grade failing to complete high school within four years. So, why are students dropping out of school at such an alarming rate? The Silent Epidemic report noted these student responses: 47% stated that classes were not interesting, 43% missed too many days and believed that they could not catch up, 42% reported they spent time with people who were not interested in school, 38% believed they had too much freedom and not enough rules, and 35% dropped out because they were failing in school. Further, 69% of those surveyed indicated they did not feel motivated. Respondents consistently noted that school did not seem relevant resulting in a loss of interest and motivation. (1) A 2006 poll of at-risk California 9th and 10th graders found that six in 10 respondents were not motivated to succeed in school. More than 90 percent said they would be more engaged in their education if classes helped them acquire skills and knowledge relevant to future careers. (2)

Unless high schools are able to graduate their students at higher rates than the 68 to 70 percent that they currently do, more than 12 million students will drop out during the course of the next decade. The result long term will be a loss to the nation of \$3 trillion, and as you can imagine, even more in terms of the quality of life for those dropouts."— Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), March 7, 2007.

The large numbers of students who are dropping out of high school each year present more than just an educational challenge. Not completing high school results in increased costs for the individual, and for the country as a whole. Most directly, those who fail to complete high school are less likely to be employed and earn less over a lifetime. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2004 was \$16,485, and the average annual income for a high school graduate was \$26,156. This results in a loss of \$260,000 in lifetime earnings for an individual who fails to complete high school. High school graduates also have an increased life expectancy, and are less likely to need public assistance. (3) Those who graduate from high school live more than nine years longer than high school dropouts due to factors that include improvement in cognitive ability and decision-making, income, occupational safety and access to health insurance. (4) Recent research found that many of today's students believe that they will die young and therefore take risks because of a feeling of hopelessness.

The U.S. economy and society also suffer. Annual losses to the U.S. economy exceed \$50 billion in federal and state income taxes for all 23 million U.S. high school dropouts age 18–67. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that, at current dropout rates, the U.S. economy could lose more than \$3 trillion during the next decade. Increasing high school graduation rates would not only help put more individuals on the path to success, but would also ensure a stronger American economy. High school graduates are more likely to raise healthier, better-educated children, and are less likely to be teen parents. Society reaps the rewards of increased graduation rates as high school graduates are also less likely to commit crimes and more likely to engage in civic activity, including voting and volunteering. Increasing the male graduation rate by only 5 percent would result in \$4.9 billion in crime-related costs savings annually. (5)

When young people drop out of the educational system, the likely result is that they drop in to other systems such as the criminal justice and welfare systems. Research shows



that dropouts are more likely to be “unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, unhealthy, divorced, and ultimately single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves.”(6). About 75 percent of state prison inmates, almost 59 percent of federal inmates, and 69 percent of jail inmates did not complete high school. (7)

### **Needs of the Field**

Students must have hope for their future. Hope in the future significantly predicted dropout versus graduate status. (8) Nearly 15 percent of teenagers said they have a 50-50 chance -- or less -- of living to the age of 35. Teenagers who are most pessimistic are most likely to put themselves in danger. They may take risks because they feel hopeless and do not believe they will have a future. (9). Students need support from parents, school, and the community to build their ideas for the future. (10) To instill hope in our students, youth must be empowered to be self determined and taught self-advocacy skills. (11, 12) It is up to educators to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and that students see the connection between their hope and vision for the future and the course of study. This connection ensures that students are motivated to achieve in school and graduate. (13, 14)

The ability to self-advocate is important for all students to be successful at all stages of their lives. Self-advocacy is understanding ones own strengths and needs, establishing personal goals, being knowledgeable of rights and responsibilities and communicating this to others. Students need practice, supports and tools to create this life vision and then to communicate the vision effectively to all those interested and concerned with their well-being and their future. When a student can advocate for themselves with an understanding of their strengths and needs, the more prepared for life he/she will be. (15) All students must both understand their strengths and needs and be able to communicate them and advocate for what they need to be successful. Self-determination means that the student

determines his/her vision of the future, and communicates this vision to others including parents and educators and embodies the right of all people to determine their own economic, social, and cultural development and includes the right to influence one’s own future. It takes a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations, together with a belief in one’s self as capable and effective are essential. (16)

Educators must motivate students and establish the relevancy of schoolwork if they are to meet accountability standards of increased student achievement. Students are less likely to drop out of high schools where relationships between teachers and students are positive. (17)

Beginning with the passage of the first federal special education mandate, the Education of All Handicapped Children’s Act of 1975, the focus in special education was on access to the general education program, curriculum, schedule, and extra-curricular programs. (18) In 2001 with the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress increased the emphasis on accountability and achievement of each student including students with disabilities, students in poverty, students learning the English language, and students at risk and struggling to learn by looking at the academic achievement of subgroups of historically underperforming students. (19) With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the emphasis shifted from access to accountability and achievement. Access to the general education curriculum was established as a basic right. Teachers, Principals, Superintendents and Administrators of special programs are held accountable for the achievement of all students and continually seek strategies to increase graduation rates and student achievement. (20) One way to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging is to begin with asking the student to define their hopes and dreams of the future. Students appear more likely to stay in school if they connect to a pathway of acceptance and success that meets their interests. (21). Dropout rates decrease with the implementation of individual, more personalized



interventions from educators and other caring adults who provide more social and emotional support for learning. These include helping students understand the necessity of a solid education for their future employment opportunities, assisting them to set and accomplish educational goals, and planning their transitions for the future (22)

To summarize the needs of the field, consideration is given to the needs of both students and educators. Students need hope and a relevant curriculum to sustain motivation to stay in school. Self-determined goals based on strengths must be identified. Once students have a vision with hope for a positive future, students must advocate for what they need to realize their dreams. A relevant curriculum must be provided to connect learning with student visions and goals. Ultimately educators must develop positive relationships with students and provide effective strategies to instill hope in their students and motivate them to stay in school.

## Research Base

Students in the United States need support from parents, school, and the community to build their energy and ideas for the future. Hopeful students see the future as better than the present, and believe they have the power to make it so. They are able to develop many strategies to reach goals and plan contingencies in the event that they are faced with problems along the way. As such, obstacles are viewed as challenges to overcome and are bypassed by garnering support and/or implementing alternative pathways. Perceiving the likelihood of good outcomes, these students focus on success and, therefore, experience greater positive affect and less distress. (23) Hope in the future significantly predicts dropout versus graduate status for At Risk learners. Learners who feel positive about their futures are less likely to drop out (24). TEL•A•VISION will decrease the number of special education and at risk dropouts by giving students a tool to create a new way of thinking positively about their futures, giving them more hope and more social and emotional support.

The discovery of “neuroplasticity,” that thoughts can rewire the brain, demonstrates the need to promote positive thoughts and eliminate negative thinking. When achieving a goal is visualized, it makes the brain believe attaining that goal is possible. Scientific research shows the human brain cannot tell the difference between thought and reality, or more accurately, what one thinks is real versus what is actually real. At the base of the human brain stem, in between the medulla oblongata and the mesencephalon, there is a small finger-sized control center called the reticular activating system (RAS) that sorts and evaluates incoming data. The RAS is the automatic mechanism inside the brain that brings relevant information to attention. It is like a filter between the conscious and subconscious mind. Vision videos serve to program the RAS to tune into external stimuli that can help people move closer toward their goals. By viewing the vision video repeatedly, it programs the RAS to pay attention to certain things in one’s environment that relate to their goal or vision. This selective attention filter makes people aware of daily occurrences that can help them achieve their goals. (25)

The element of imagery engages the limbic ‘emotional’ brain, linking goal achievement with positive emotion and increasing achievement motivation. TEL.A.VISION directs, focuses and ensures that students are thinking positive thoughts and paying close attention to their dreams as they craft their story and a vision of a future all their own. The process of sharing the TEL.A.VISION video enhances parent-child bonding, provides educator insight into students’ goals, passions and strengths; encourages student/teacher bonding and communication; builds community in the classroom and boosts self-esteem.

There are multiple applications of TEL.A.VISION. For all students, TEL.A.VISION videos are created to share a life vision of who they want to be and what they want to do in the future and can also be an annual vision of a coming school year to support a personalized learning plan for individual students. Dropout rates decrease with the implementation of individual, more personalized interventions from educators and other caring adults who provide more



social and emotional support for learning. These interventions include helping students understand the necessity of a solid education for their future employment opportunities, assisting them to set and accomplish educational goals, and planning their transitions for the future (26). Groups of students create topical visions for their schools, communities and their country. TEL.A.VISION “Vision for America” have been created by groups of students describing their vision for making their country a better place. For special education and at risk students in particular, TEL.A.VISION videos may be a part of the annual review and transition processes where students plan for the coming school year and anticipated transitions by envisioning a positive experience and achieving their individual goals. These processes provide the opportunity for students to create a vision video that describes their education, career and life goals and the parent, student and educator team then develops the objectives and activities to realize these goals.

### **TEL.A.VISION’s design and intent to meet needs of field**

Through the development of a life vision video, self-advocacy skills are developed and enhanced as students understand and learn to articulate strengths, needs and preferences. The students begin by examining their personal self-determined goals, priorities and dreams. The units and lessons are designed to sequentially support students in determining their dreams, setting goals and then envisioning themselves successfully achieving these goals. The vision video starts with self-determination. Students gain hope for their futures as they recognize their strengths and vision themselves being successful in the future. Through the process of creating and sharing a dream video, students identify their goals and not only communicate them, but also advocate for them with teachers and parents. This process fosters the development of self-advocacy skills and motivates students to strive for a future that they might not otherwise have seen as achievable.

The June/July 2009 District Administration, a publication of Professional Media Group, summarizes TEL.A.VISION as Vision Videos that empower students. TEL.A.VISION is described as a new web-based tool that inspires young people to dream the possible dream. The value of TEL.A.VISION is connected with President Obama’s March 19h address to the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce when he quoted California students whose high school class recently made a video titled, “Is Anybody Listening?” There are steps before young people can be heard, steps that involve inspiring students to define and pursue their passions. TEL.A.VISION is a vehicle for educators to enable students to identify their dreams and take those steps to being heard. (27)

### ***The following testimonials represent opinions by teachers, administrators and business representatives who have experienced TEL.A.VISION.***

Dustin Madden, a teacher at Bartlett High School in Alaska, teaches Alaska Native students in a culturally responsive way. He learned how to use TEL.A.VISION to help students clarify their personal goals. He believed that students in his Transitions class would benefit by creating a TEL.A.VISION that encouraged them to reflect on how they want to live their lives. This Transitions class is designed to help the Alaska Native / American Indian students that are currently going through a “transition” in their lives. Many of these students felt uprooted. Madden reported the one of the benefits of the TEL.A.VISION software application was the built-in tutorials, large number of stock photos, music, and video effects, allowing students to focus more on their vision for their future.

“Where you’re looking is where you’re going. We all know it’s easier to make something happen when you can see it. TEL.A.VISION provides a great new tool for students entering a critical period of life to tell their story – to themselves and others.” ~Tim Showalter-Loch, manager, Best Buy Community Relations



“Our current culture is filled with negativity, cynicism and hopelessness. Our young people are the vulnerable recipients. We know from our work in positive youth and community development that it is not only possible to bring hope into the mix; it is a key to sustainable change. We believe TEL.A.VISION and the empowering process of creating visions of hope for the future will be widely embraced.”  
~Dr. Peter Benson, CEO and president, Search Institute

“The TEL.A.VISION project was a great motivator and a huge success for our students. This program was very user friendly, and from a tech coordinator’s seat, that is a huge benefit. This program played a key part in helping our 7th graders view themselves in the larger “global community” that they live. Thanks for helping give our kids a vision!” ~Matt Howe, junior high technology coordinator, Stillwater, Minn.

“Not often do dreams and reality collide in the 5th grade, but last year they did. Each child who created a Vision Video felt empowered to reign-in their future while focusing on the steps they need to take to get there.” ~Andy Fields, elementary school principal, Lake Elmo, Minn.

## **Conclusion**

Having a vision of the future helps students to see the relevance of their schoolwork and sharing these visions with teachers helps teachers ensure that the curriculum is geared to support students in realizing their dreams. When students have hope, are engaged in the curriculum and enjoy positive relationships with teachers and others, they are more likely to stay in school and achieve their dreams. According to cognitive-behavioral psychology, stating goals as positive affirmations promotes the elimination of negative ‘self-talk’, increases achievement motivation and self-esteem, and establishes new habits of constructive goal-oriented behavior. TEL.A.VISION directs, focuses and ensures students are thinking positive thoughts and paying close attention to their dreams as they craft their story and a vision of a future all their own. The combination of imagery, positive affirmations and personally meaningful music catalyzes a

“whole-brained” response that encourages goal-directed behavior and achievement.

## **Potential return on investment**

If one student is saved from dropping out of school by creating a TEL.A.VISION video, not only that student and his/her family benefit, but also society reaps the benefits of a productive citizen. The return on investment can only begin to be measured by the costs of dropping out of school, estimated at a loss in state and federal taxes of approximately \$2174 per dropout per year. For a small investment, one that easily pays for itself in the first year, teachers have use of a tool to motivate and engage students in curriculum that is relevant and aligned with life visions of their students.

## **Background**

TEL.A.VISION was founded by George Johnson, former special education teacher, social entrepreneur and co-founder of Entreviis, a company that coaches people to help make their dreams come true. Frustrated by so much negative imagery in the world, primarily on television, Johnson created TEL.A.VISION as a way to give kids a voice and a platform to share their stories and dreams.

## **For more information**

For more information, or to create and share a vision for a better world, visit [www.telavision.tv](http://www.telavision.tv)

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