

June 1, 2020

Dear Summer,

As a friend, I care a lot about you, and so I was worried when you told me that you were planning to drop out of school. Everyone knows that schooldays can seem long, and at times, boring. I know that I have sat in class, asking myself, “When am I ever going to use this?” But school is about so much more than the assigned subjects. It’s about broadening your horizons, being exposed to new ideas, and gaining a better understanding of the world. This is what we call education. And, Summer, your education matters. You matter. So please do not drop out of school. I honestly believe that you will come to deeply regret your decision if you quit now, because staying in school is the best way for you to have a stable future, to continue growing as a person, and to one day change the world.

Summer, I hate to think of a future when you might not know where your next meal is coming from or how you’re going to pay your rent. This can happen to anyone, but those who have a high school diploma or college degree statistically have much lower rates of unemployment and higher salaries. In “What Do You Want (Really, Really Want) Out of Your College Education?” author Richard Gunderman wrote, “On average, college graduates earn quite a bit more than those without a diploma, and their level of unemployment is only about half as high. US Census studies suggest that a college degree nearly doubles lifetime earnings.” While there are no guarantees in life, you are significantly more likely to have a stable career and consistent source of income if you embrace the opportunities you have as a young person and continue your education.

School is not just about taking classes and studying for tests, it is about growing as a person. Through a wide curriculum in high school, you are exposed to subjects that you would

not study otherwise. You may discover a passion for physics or the Spanish language or ancient world history, but if you quit school before you take those classes, you will likely be forever deprived of the joy you would have had from studying a subject that you love. The same is true for extra curriculars—the education you gain in school is not confined to the classroom. By staying in school and participating in athletics, music groups, theater, or student government, you learn valuable life skills, bond with friends, and enjoy experiences that will not be available to you if you drop out. I am reminded of an article I read titled “In Pakistan, A Self-Styled Teacher Holds Class for 150 in a Cowshed,” which covered a young woman who is determined to make education available to the children of her poor rural village. Author Philip Reeves describes how the students are willing to sit on the ground, using blackboards and crumbling textbooks: “Ram Chand, a farm worker, has allowed three of his daughters to go to the cattle shed: “I am very happy,” he says. “We don’t want the children to lead the life we’ve led.” These people know that education means opportunity for both personal growth and for a better life. Summer, do not throw away the opportunity that has been freely given to you.

As your friend, I know that you are smart, talented, and kind. Imagine what you could do for the world if you harnessed those talents and put them to use. This is what education does: It allows us to change the world. Malala Yousafzai, a young girl who survived being shot by a terrorist for going to school, knew this. That is why, in her Nobel Peace Prize lecture, she said, “It is not time to tell the world leaders to realize how important education is — they already know it — their own children are in good schools. Now it is time to call them to take action for the rest of the world’s children.” Former President Barak Obama knew this, and so in his 2009 National Address to America’s Schoolchildren he urged students to stay in school: “And even when you’re struggling, even when you’re discouraged, and you feel like other people have

given up on you, don't ever give up on yourself, because when you give up on yourself, you give up on your country." Our nation can only achieve greatness if its population is educated; our world can only improve if there are minds willing to seek new answers to old problems.

Summer, do not give up on yourself. Do not give up on your dreams. You have a lot to offer, and you will be fully equipped to help make the world a better place if you continue your education.

I know school can be discouraging and draining. I know that sometimes the work feels pointless, repetitive, or confusing. But when you look at the bigger picture, gaining an education is worth the effort. You are more likely to have stability in your career (and in your bank account) if you continue your education. By staying in school, you will have greater opportunities to continue growing as a person—classes and extracurricular activities ultimately lend themselves to self-discovery. Don't quit now when there is still so much to learn about yourself. Lastly, if people like you give up on school, the world is in trouble. We need people with your intelligence and kindness to improve our society. Dear friend, please keep going to school. Do it for yourself...and for our world.

Your Friend,

Mary