



Student Strategic Excellence Award

2026 Campaign Brief



Agenda

- Campaign Background
- Campaign Messaging
- Your Assignment
- Q&A





High School Equivalency

January 2026

Campaign Background



Issue Background

More than 30 million adults ages 18+ do not have a high school diploma.

Data shows that students who drop out of high school tend to earn less and have a lower quality of life.

Nearly 30% of adults with household incomes at or below the federal poverty line do not have a high school credential.

Objective

Encourage adults to take the first step toward a better future by earning their high school equivalency

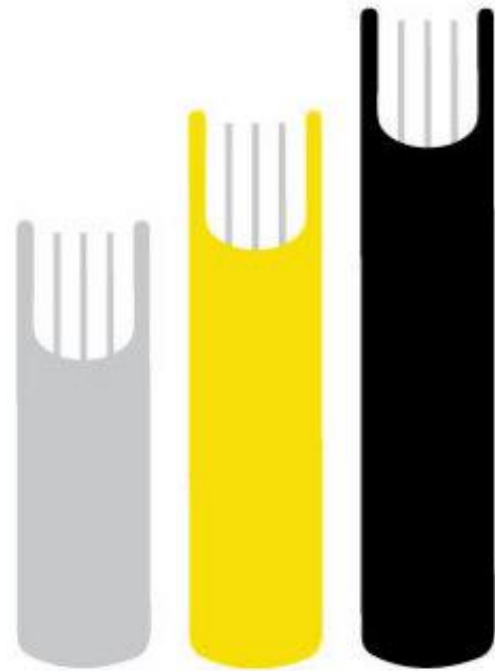
Target

Adults 25-45 without a high school diploma

Call to Action

Find free adult education classes near you at

FinishYourDiploma.org



DOLLAR GENERAL[®]
LITERACY
FOUNDATION

Target Audience – Common Barriers

- Contentment
- Time
- Upsetting the balance at home
- Procrastination
- Fear of failure
- Fear of change
- Not knowing where or how to start
- Transportation or other logistics



Target Audience - Barriers to Adult Education Centers

1. Awareness of centers is low.



"I don't have a lot of time to go to classes. All the ones I looked at cost a lot of money. I just recently got married, so I'm on a budget."

2. People have questions about whether centers will be right for people "like them".



"If it's in Spanish then great, because if it's in English, it's an impediment. That's the main reason why I hadn't asked for information before, because I thought it was mainly in English."

3. They face logistical and emotional barriers to going back.



"I want to be a nurse. Grew up in a family of addicts. Didn't have a lot of support growing up. Would miss a lot of school. I quit and had my daughter. I need a better career for me and my child. I started my GED years ago, but then my child's father left and I couldn't finish it."

Target Audience – Common Motivators

- Better job and more money
- More secure future for themselves and their families
- Making your loved ones proud
- Increased sense of self-worth and feeling of accomplishment
- More respect from others
- Achieving dream goals (e.g. college or owning a business)



Campaign Messaging

Campaign Approach

GET	TO	BY
Adults 25-45 without a high school diploma	Take the first step toward a better future	Encouraging them with the message that finishing their high school diploma not only impacts their life, but also the lives of their family members and the communities around them

Campaign Strategy

THE SHIFT WE NEED TO MAKE

Taking time to get my high school diploma is selfish because instead of focusing on my family, I will be focusing on **myself**.



Taking time to get my high school diploma is not only a feat for me but a positive influence on the **community** around me.

“Parents’ level of education is part of a larger constellation of psychological and sociological variables influencing the children’s school outcomes”

MOTIVATE

Motivate adults without a high school diploma to pursue their high school equivalency...

EDUCATE

...by educating them about the resources and support offered by centers and connecting them with information to get started.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Finally getting your HSE is a huge personal achievement. But it feels even more important when you see the impact it has on the people around you.

When You Graduate, They Graduate

'When You Graduate, They Graduate' celebrates the graduates and their hard work to help inspire the **30 million American adults** who have yet to complete high school. The campaign highlights how earning a high school diploma can create a **positive ripple effect** – it not only improves your own life but also benefits your family and community around you.

Since 2010, the campaign has helped connect more than **2 million people** across all 50 states to find free adult education classes, empowering them to earn a HSE or other high school equivalency credential.

By showcasing these success stories, the message encourages adults and their loved ones to seek out the support available through free adult education classes nationwide.



When You Graduate, They Graduate PSAs



May 2022, 'Graduation'



2025, 'Elizabeth'

2024, 'Yearbook'

Jan 2024, 'Ariel'

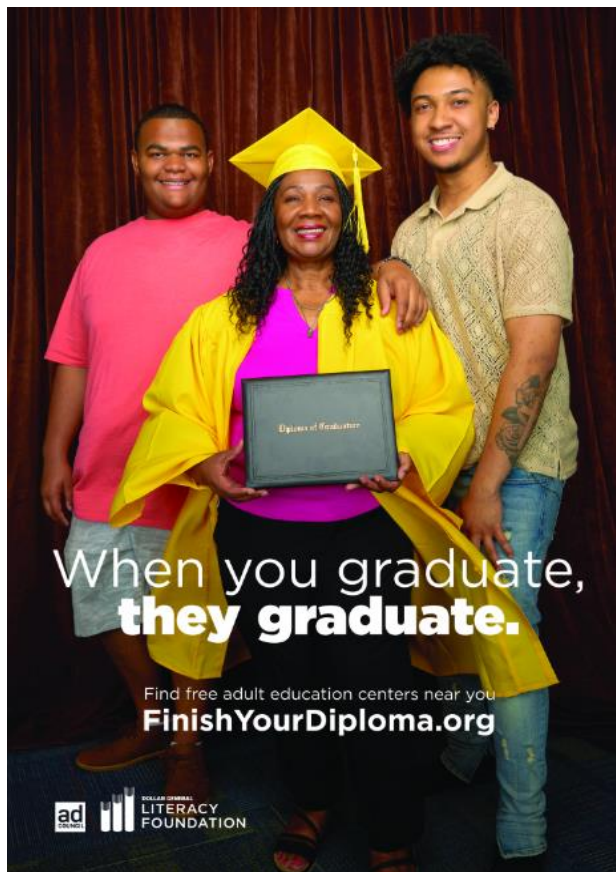


Aug 2024, 'Darlene' & 'Jamie'





OOH, Print, Digital



When you graduate,
they graduate.

Find free adult education centers near you
FinishYourDiploma.org

ad COUNCIL
DOLLAR GENERAL
LITERACY
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"It was time for me to
change my life and the
lives of my family, so I
went back and got my
high school diploma."

- Darlene

Find free adult education
centers near you at
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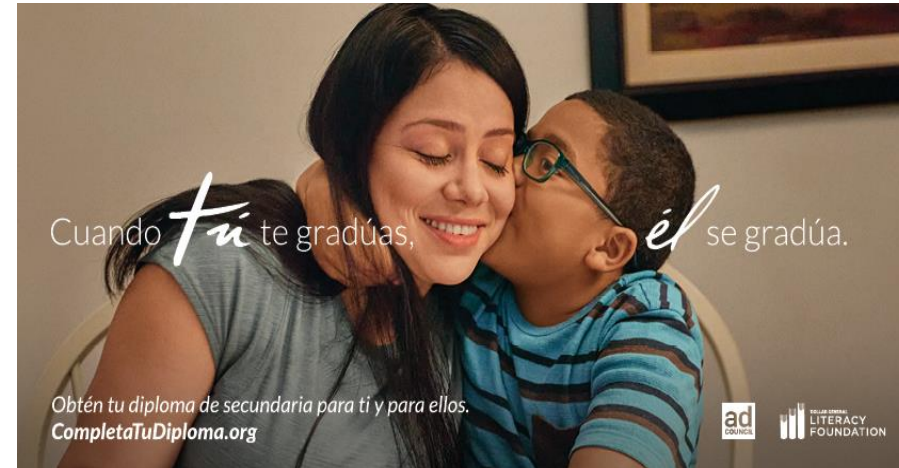


"You can do anything with
a **high school diploma.**"

- Darlene

FinishYourDiploma.org

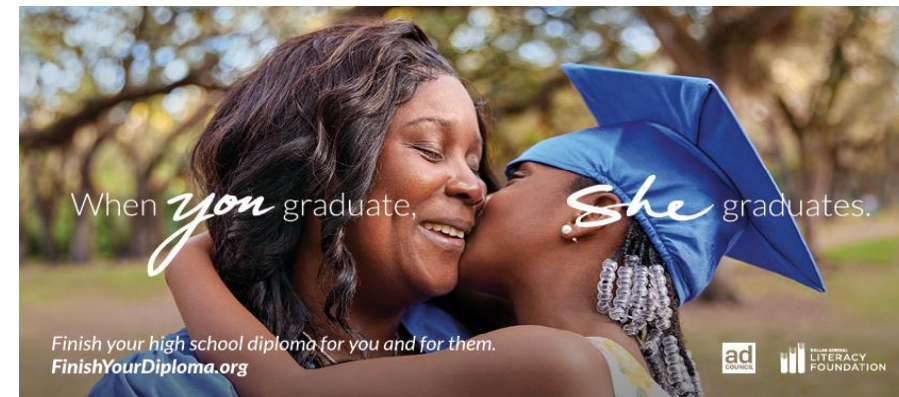
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Cuando *tú* te gradúas, *él* se gradúa.

Obtén tu diploma de secundaria para ti y para ellos.
CompletaTuDiploma.org

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When *you* graduate, *she* graduates.

Finish your high school diploma for you and for them.
FinishYourDiploma.org

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When you graduate,
they graduate.

Find free classes

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Audio

Yearbook - Ariel



:60 English



:60 Spanish

When You Graduate



When You Graduation - Karina



When You Graduate - :15



When You Graduate - Tachonna



Cuando tu te graduas – :30



Cuando tu te graduas – :15

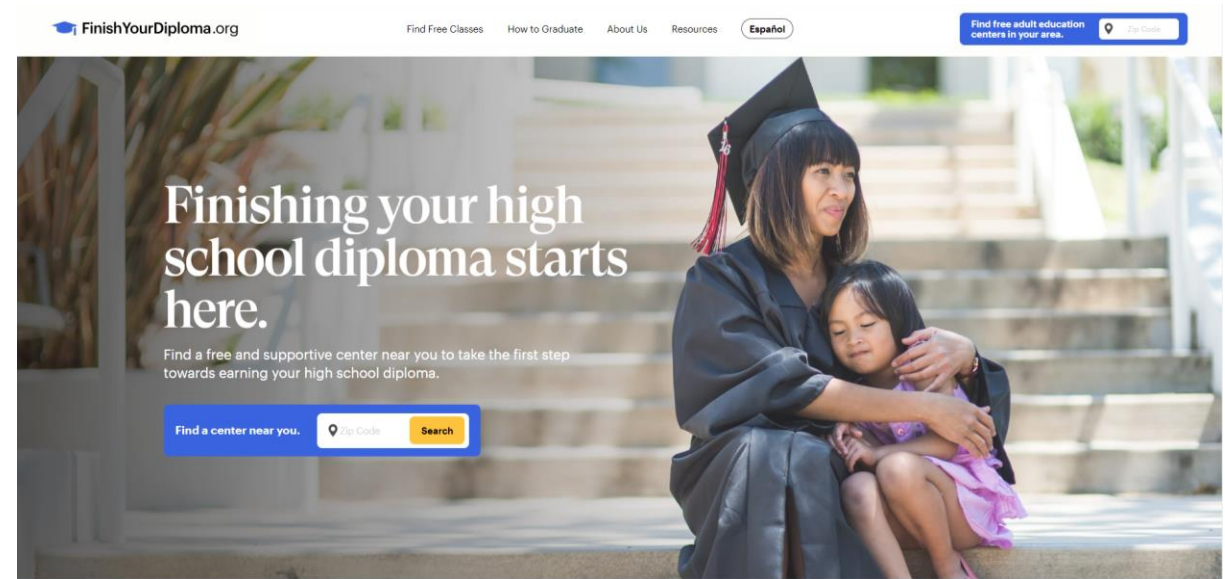
FinishYourDiploma.org & CompletaTuDiploma.org

Main KPI/Metric of Success

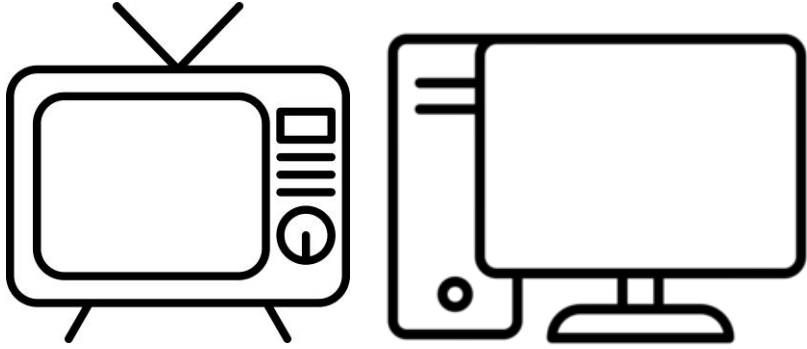
- Driving adults to our website to search their zip code to find adult literacy centers near them

23% Conversion Rate Each Month

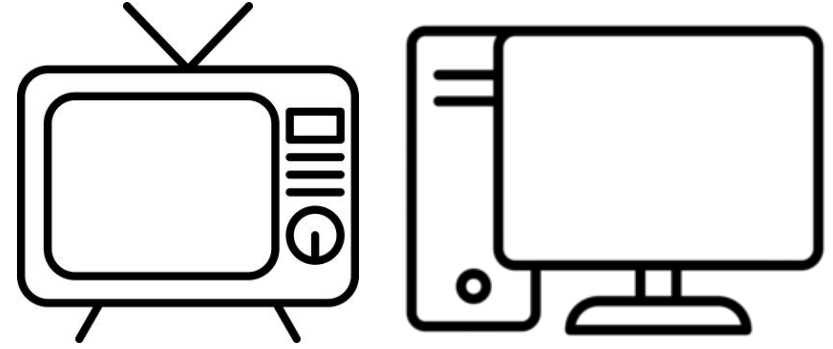
- This conversion rate is higher than the industry average of 2-5%, showing that this campaign delivers what our target audience needs
 - **52K** average visits per month
 - **12K** average zip code searches per month



Key Media Types



TOP TRAFFIC DRIVER



PSA AWARENESS
DRIVER



TOP CONVERSION
DRIVER

Assignment

Your Assignment

OBJECTIVE

Develop a communications campaign based on the Ripple Effect strategy to educate multi-cultural adults 25-45 without a high school diploma to take the first step towards a better future by finishing their high school equivalency.

The new campaign should have a fresh creative idea and tagline (e.g. When You Graduate, They Graduate).

Budget: \$500K

Timing: Key time periods to consider: Back-To-School (late July – early September) and New Year's Resolution timing (January 1)

Messaging Considerations & Watchouts

Do

- Do use a supportive, positive, impactful, optimistic, and an encouraging tone
- Do help the audience feel like they can finish their HSE and there will be a positive outcome as we want to motivate and empower people to go to FinishYourDiploma.org and search their zip code for free classes
- Do highlight the positive ripple effect finishing one's HSE can have for both the graduate and their loved ones and community
- Do include the disclaimer: Brought to you by The Dollar General Literacy Foundation and The Ad Council

Don't

- Don't focus on barriers faced as we don't want to make people feel overwhelmed and that it's not possible for them
- Don't joke or make someone feel bad about not having their HSE as we don't want to imply that those without an HSE will not succeed
- Don't be indifferent about the importance of getting an HSE and the positive impact it can have on the person and their loved ones/community

Submission Overview

- Submission should not exceed 20 pages/slides and should include:
 - **Cover Page**
 - **Brief Overview (1 page)**
 - **Situation Analysis:** What are the key obstacles to success? Explain the problem you're solving OR the key questions that need answers
 - Should include secondary and primary (at least one qualitative or quantitative study) research
 - Upon completing this analysis, explain what the team learned about the challenge through secondary and primary research
 - **Target Audience & Understanding:** Define and describe your core target audience
 - What key insights have you uncovered about this target audience?
 - What did you learn about the target audience and problem perception that helped inform your answer to the brief?
 - **The Challenge**
 - Articulate what your proposal is solving by stating and outlining the communication challenge your campaign is addressing

Submission Overview Cont.

- Submission should not exceed 20 pages/slides and should include:
 - **Communication Strategy**
 - Outline the key tenets of your strategy
 - Briefly explain the rationale for your communication key insights, and the proposed communication strategy
 - **Multicultural Campaign Idea & Creative Strategy**
 - What is the big idea/creative concept that leverages the key insight and solves the communication challenge?
 - **Campaign Idea – Proof of Concept**
 - Demonstrate through 2-3 execution examples (rough mock-ups) how your big idea comes to life
 - Provide a rationale for the selection of these creative tactics
 - Provide your execution examples as concepts with visual support and a rationale
 - Please note: no finalized or finished creative execution will be evaluated by the judges – we only ask for rough mock-ups (i.e. layouts, storyboards, etc.)
 - **Measurement and Optimization**
 - Outline the overall impact you expect your response to the brief to have and that of the specific tactics proposed if they were executed and disseminated
 - Include measurable objectives and propose a methodology to measure them

Award Details & Logistics

Eligibility

- No entry fees
- Open to all undergraduate students in the U.S.
- One entry per university (individual or team entries permitted)
- Submissions must follow specifications outlined in the brief
- No late submissions will be reviewed

Key Dates

- April 2, 2026: HMC portal opens for final submissions
- **April 17, 2026 @ 11:59pm ET: final submissions due**
- May 2026: winners notified via email

Visit <https://hispanicmarketingcouncil.org/awards/studentaward/> for more information

Thank you