

Why Financial Literacy Should Be a Graduation Requirement

Introduction

Most high school graduates can solve quadratic equations but have no idea how compound interest works. That gap between what schools teach and what adult life actually requires is not a minor oversight. Financial literacy should be a mandatory graduation requirement in high schools because it directly affects the decisions young people make about debt, savings, and economic stability at exactly the point in their lives when those decisions carry the most long-term weight.

Body Paragraph 1

The timing matters more than most people acknowledge. The period between 18 and 25 is when young people sign their first lease, take out student loans, open credit cards, and start making financial decisions that compound over decades. A 2024 survey by the National Financial Educators Council found that a lack of financial knowledge cost the average American over \$1,500 in the previous year alone. Teaching these concepts before that window opens is not a luxury, it is a practical intervention at the right moment.

Body Paragraph 2

The counterargument that parents should teach this at home sounds reasonable until you look at the data. Financial stress is highest in households where financial literacy is lowest, meaning the students who most need this education are least likely to receive it at home. Making it a school

requirement is the only way to reach those students systematically rather than leaving access to financial knowledge to chance and circumstance.

Body Paragraph 3

States that have introduced mandatory personal finance courses are already seeing results. A 2023 study of high school graduates in states with financial literacy requirements found they were more likely to save consistently, less likely to carry high-interest debt, and more likely to start building retirement funds in their twenties compared to graduates from states without the requirement. The outcomes are measurable and they persist over time.

Conclusion

Financial literacy is not a niche subject for future accountants. It is foundational knowledge that affects every adult regardless of career, income, or background. Treating it as optional in a curriculum that requires four years of English and three of mathematics reflects a set of priorities worth reconsidering.