

Barriers to Student Success

While it is rare that a student drops out of the Rise Youth Development Program, it does happen for about 5% of students each year. It is easy to assume that if students have the tuition money to continue in school, they should easily graduate high school. However, the reality facing Guatemalan families paints a more nuanced picture of how truly remarkable it is when *any* student graduates successfully.

So what are your students up against?

Generational Poverty: In the communities we serve, more than one third of adults cannot read or write. In fact, three out of four live in deep poverty. Many of our students' parents did not go to school, and grew up in the type of poverty that their children now experience. Our families understand how important education is to breaking this cycle of generational poverty, but sometimes the challenges they face are simply too much and their only choice is to pull their children out of school so that they can work to contribute to the family's income. Obviously, this prevents children from graduating, and the cycle of poverty continues for another generation.

Adolescent Marriage and Pregnancy: Indigenous girls in rural Guatemala are at the very bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. From the time they are born, they face a life of poverty, discrimination, and illiteracy. There is a cultural notion that girls aren't worth educating, since they will never work outside the home. What's more, girls are at a high risk for sexual assault and exploitation at a very young age. More than half are married by age 18. Sadly, it's not surprising that fewer than one in ten girls graduate from high school.

Work and Household Chores: Many families in agricultural communities work seasonally, and don't always know when their next paychecks will come. When disaster strikes or their debt becomes too great, their children may be asked to drop out of school at an early age to help supplement the family income. In Guatemala, more than one in five children ages 5-17 are included in the workforce.

Alcoholism, Drugs, and Domestic Violence: Oftentimes drugs, alcohol, and domestic violence are interconnected, and it is not uncommon to hear about our students dealing with these issues in their homes and sometimes dropping out as a result.

Gang Influence: Some of our communities suffer from the presence of gangs, and youth are oftentimes targeted for recruitment. Families in our communities can also fall victim to extortion or violence that results from gang activity.

Lack of Success Stories/Role Models: When you are going to be the first in your family (or sometimes your community) to finish school, it can be difficult to persist in achieving ambitious goals for yourself. Unfortunately, without good role models and examples of successful professionals in your own community, low expectations become the default.

Rise Youth Development Program

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Malnutrition: All too often, a lack of proper vitamins and nutrients makes it hard for students to focus and do well in their classes. The World Food Programme estimates that 47% of Guatemalans are chronically malnourished, which is one of the highest rates of malnutrition worldwide.

Lack of Adequate Medical Care: There are only 0.9 doctors for every 1,000 people in Guatemala. (For reference, the United States has nearly 3 times this amount.) Even small illnesses in the developing world have severe consequences when access to quality medical care is scarce. When left untreated, common colds, sprained ankles, and minor cuts and bruises could prevent students from being able to go to school.

Cultural Biases: In addition to the everyday hardships that come with living in poverty, Mayan Guatemalans feel the effects of a 36-year civil war that left behind legacies of racism, inequality, and injustice for indigenous people. We've heard horrible stories of Mayan students being mocked and ridiculed by peers and even those in positions of power (like teachers and administrators), making it that much harder to thrive in school.

With the compounding effects of the above barriers, it's an incredible achievement when *any* student graduates. Thanks to sponsors like you, these cycles are being broken more and more every day. Because you invest in these kids and their education, most Rise scholars *do* graduate high school. CoEd strives for a 100% success rate in our programs, but if that milestone were ever actually achieved, it would be a signal that we might not be selecting the right students! We choose students for our Rise Program that have both academic potential *and* the most financial need. This allows us to maximize the impact we have on the communities we serve.

We know it is disappointing when your student drops out of the program. In fact, it can feel like a failure, especially if she drops out due to early marriage or pregnancy. However, we want you to remember that any additional year of education attained reaps so many benefits to students and their families. Your investment in your student has *already* paid off. Statistics tell us that educated mothers are better parents. Even without a diploma, your student will ensure her children are provided better nutrition and medical care, and that her children will go to school. The schooling you provided for her probably delayed her marriage and childbearing significantly beyond what would have happened if she hadn't studied at all.

Your contribution will continue to pay off for students for the rest of their lives and for the next generation. Thank you for taking the time to better understand the barriers our students face in their journeys to break the cycle of poverty through education.