Building a Grad Nation

Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic

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Table of Contents

Open Letter to the American People 5
Executive Summary 6
Building a Grad Nation: Progress & Challenge 22
- **The National Picture** 24
- **State Progress** 26
  - District Level Improvements 34
  - Urban School Districts 37
- **Confronting the Epidemic** 42
  - Accurate Data and Increased Accountability 43
    - Accurate Calculation of and Accountability for High School Graduation Rates 43
    - More Robust Data Systems 43
    - Early Warning and Intervention Systems 44
  - Setting Clear and High Academic and Graduation Standards 46
    - Increasing Compulsory School Age Requirements 46
    - Combating Chronic Abensteeism 46
    - College- and Career-Readiness Standards 47
  - Enhancing Adult Supports Inside and Outside the Classroom 48
    - Teacher Training and Effectiveness 48
    - New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests 49
    - Graduation Pathways and Dropout Recovery 50
    - Parent Engagement 52
    - Broader and Deeper Coalitions to Keep All Students on the Path to Graduation 53
  - Researching and Investing in Innovation to Support Student Success 56
    - Research on What Works and Dissemination of Best Practices 56
- **Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation** 57
- **Conclusion & Next Steps** 65

Methodology and Data: Section I 66
Methodology and Data: Section II 67
Acknowledgments and Notes 69
Appendix I: Change in Number of Dropout Factory High Schools 70
Appendix II: Pearson Foundation Roundtable Participants 71
Appendix III: State Graduation Rate Goals 73
Bibliography 76

Open Letter to the American People

The United States is turning a corner in meeting the high school dropout epidemic. For the sake of our young people, society, economy, democracy, and even national security, it is not a moment too soon.

Over the last decade, our nation has taken important steps to reform education, understand the dimensions of the dropout problem, and begin to fashion a targeted approach to solving it. All 50 governors created a common definition of high school graduation rates, later improved and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education, to chart our progress and challenges across schools and states.

Two seminal reports, *Locating the Dropout Crisis* and *The Silent Epidemic*, brought the dropout crisis to the attention of policymakers and the public. The first report uncovered the fact that in the early part of this decade, half of all dropouts were concentrated in just 15 percent of the nation's schools, enabling a targeted response. The second report shared the perspectives of high school dropouts, giving the nation hope that most dropouts could have graduated from high school and gone on to college and productive work. Reports on the perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents showed a clear understanding among these three vital groups of the causes of and solutions to the high school dropout problem and a strong willingness to address it. A national summit prompted action from federal and state policymakers, and more than 100 summits in all 50 states armed communities with the best research and latest tools to confront their local dropout challenges.

Although by 2008 there were fewer dropout factories and fewer minority students attending them than in the first part of the decade, at least one-fourth of all public high school students and close to 40 percent of minority students (African American, Hispanic, and Native American) continue to fail to graduate with their class. Of our nation's high school graduates, too few are prepared for the rigors of college and the workforce. We must do more to understand what factors have enabled some communities to experience breakthrough improvements and apply what is working to communities that are still languishing.

The report that follows shares some hopeful signs of tangible progress in boosting high school graduation rates, highlighting the gains we are making in communities, states, and the nation. The report also provides a sober assessment of our remaining challenges and launches a "Civic Marshall Plan" to build on the successes of the last decade and the momentum of the Grad Nation campaign launched this year to mobilize America to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and success in the 21st century.

We hope this report both shows that significant progress is possible and sounds the alarm to rally educators, policymakers, other leaders, and the public to keep America's high school dropout crisis as an urgent national priority. The stakes are higher than ever — for our children, families, and prosperity as a nation — in a globally competitive world.

General Colin Powell

Alma J. Powell

Executive Summary

The central message of this report is that some states and school districts are raising their high school graduation rates with scalable solutions in our public schools, showing the nation we can end the high school dropout crisis. America made progress not only in suburbs and towns, but also in urban districts and in states across the South.

Progress in states and school districts has often been the result of rising to a standard of excellence — with clear goals and expectations from the state to the classroom, by challenging all students with a more rigorous curriculum to obtain a meaningful diploma that prepares them for college and work, and through a targeted approach sustained over time that provides extra supports to the school leaders, teachers and students who need them the most. Progress was not the result of a magic bullet, but a weave of multiple reform efforts, sustained, integrated, and improved over time.

Important progress is being made on a range of reforms, policies, and practices at all levels that will help ensure more students graduate from high school, ready for college and productive work. Although this is producing real results, including an increase in the national graduation rate, the pace is too slow to meet the national goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020.[1] We must calibrate our educational system to the greater demands of the 21st century through a Civic Marshall Plan to make more accelerated progress in boosting student achievement, high school graduation rates, and college- and career-readiness for our nation to meet national goals and fulfill the promise of the next generation.

1 In his State of the Union Address on February 24, 2009, President Obama set the goal that by 2020, all Americans would have committed to at least one year or more of higher education or career training and that America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. In March 2010, America's Promise Alliance launched its Grad Nation campaign with the goal of mobilizing America to end the dropout crisis and prepare young people for success in college and the 21st century workforce. This report is written with the plan of increasing the high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 to enable our efforts to begin in elementary school to ensure that these graduates are ready for college and their careers, and to reach the President's goals and strengthen our nation.

The National Picture

High school graduation rates over the last decade have shown significant improvements as state and local reforms begin to take hold, and the number of dropout factory high schools is declining. Some states, school districts, and schools have made real progress, thus shattering the myth that only incremental gains are possible. The overall national picture is still troubling, with more than one million public high school students still failing to graduate with their class every year.

- **The number of dropout factory high schools fell by 261, from a high of 2,007 such schools in 2002 to 1,746 schools in 2008.** This 13 percent decline is important, given that these schools produce half of the nation's dropouts every year. **According to the U.S. Department of Education, the national graduation rate increased from 72 to 75 percent between 2001 and 2008. An additional 120,000 students earned a high school diploma in the Class of 2008 compared to the Class of 2001.**[2]
- **Tennessee and New York led the nation in boosting high school graduation rates, with breakthrough gains of 15 and 10 percentage-points, respectively.** Ten other states had gains ranging from about 4 to 7 percentage-points. These gains were in states that had graduation rates in 2002 that were above, near, and below the national graduation rate, indicating that improvement is possible regardless of starting point.
- **More than half of the nation's states — 29 in total — increased high school graduation rates.** Eighteen states had rates that remained essentially the same, and three states — Arizona, Nevada, and Utah — experienced noticeable declines in their graduation rates.
- **The rate of progress over the last decade — 3 percentage-points — is too slow to reach the national goal of having 90 percent of students graduate from high school and obtain at least one year of postsecondary schooling or training by 2020.** Over the next 10 years, the nation will need to accelerate its progress in boosting high school graduation rates ***fivefold*** from the rates achieved through 2008.

2 The graduation rate refers to the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate calculated by the U.S. Department of Education. Dropout factories are defined as high schools in which the ratio of 12th grade enrollment to 9th grade enrollment three years earlier is 60 percent or less. Low graduation rate schools have a ratio between 61 and 75 percent. This ratio is called promoting power in this report. Grade level enrollment data comes from the Common Core of Data, National Center for Education Statistics. These calculations were made using data from 2008, the last year for which data is available.

- **Accelerated progress over the next decade is possible.** For the first time, graduation rates will be measured accurately across all schools, and all states and districts will be accountable for making meaningful and sustained improvement; the federal government is investing in school transformation; early warning systems are coming online; the nation's governors and mayors have become engaged in the challenge; national non-profits have directed their efforts toward ending the dropout crisis; states are adopting Common Core State Standards to prepare students for college and careers; and a civic awakening to the costs of and solutions to the dropout crisis has spurred concerted action.

A Deeper Look

A deeper look shows progress and challenge by racial and ethnic groups, region, and locale.

- **Ninety-one percent of Asian, 81 percent of White, 64 percent of Hispanic, 64 percent of Native American, and 62 percent of African American students graduated in 2008,** according to the U.S. Department of Education.
- **The largest city school districts in the nation show success in meeting the challenge of the dropout epidemic.** New York City and Chicago show that urban areas are capable of decreasing the percentage of students attending dropout factories, showing a 28 and 19 percentage-point reduction in the number of students attending these high schools, respectively. Los Angeles and Las Vegas both regressed with a 5 and 32 percentage-point increase, respectively, in the number of high school students attending a dropout factory.

- **Most of the decline in dropout factory schools occurred in the South, with 216 of the net decline of 261 schools (about 83 percent of the total decline) found across 9 southern states, led by Texas and Georgia with 77 and 36 fewer dropout factory schools, respectively.** The West, largely driven by increases in Nevada and California, saw a net gain of 21 dropout factory schools.
- **Certain states, like Tennessee, Texas, Alabama, and Georgia, had balanced improvement across locales, potentially signaling the significance of statewide efforts.** Tennessee and Texas experienced a decrease in dropout factories in suburbs, towns, cities, and rural areas. Alabama and Georgia experienced progress in three out of four such locales.
- **Nationwide, 400,000 fewer students (a 15 percent decline) were enrolled in dropout factories in 2008 compared to 2002,** with 7 states accounting for 71 percent of the decline (Texas, New York, California, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Ohio).
- **Most of the decline in dropout factories from 2002 to 2008 (205 of the 261 total net decline, or 79 percent) occurred in suburbs and towns.** School districts within cities or urban fringe experienced a net decline of 38 dropout factory schools, while school districts in rural areas saw a decrease of 18 such schools.
- **Still, some urban districts, which typically have the highest concentration of students in dropout factory schools, are showing success. Twenty-two states had a decline of 127 such schools in urban areas from 2002 to 2008.** Eight states stand out for their improvements in urban areas — Texas (-31 dropout factory schools), New York (-14), Louisiana and Illinois (-8), and New Jersey, Florida, Wisconsin, and Tennessee (-7), collectively accounting for 95 of the 127 net decrease in such schools in urban areas. Improvements in these states were partially offset by an increase in dropout factories in urban areas in other states.

We Know What Works

- **In states and districts that are showing the way forward — like Tennessee; Alabama; Richmond, IN; and New York City — strong leadership, multi-sector collaboration, innovation, and support and technical assistance for research-based solutions are increasing graduation rates.** Rigor and high expectations make a big difference. Committed governors, legislators, and mayors; state and local superintendents and school boards; and principals and teachers are working with teachers unions, the broader community, youth serving organizations, and higher education institutions to set a vision, raise expectations for progress, and build clear pathways to college and career. They are ensuring that policies and practices are aligned, and that evidence-based reforms are supported, effectively implemented, and continually improved. They are also ensuring that schools have the resources and conditions needed to bring effective efforts to scale.
- **Despite real progress, and breakthrough success in some states and communities, the challenge is still large.** In 2008, more than 2 million students still attended a high school in which graduation was no better than close to a 50/50 proposition. Additionally, nearly all of the high-poverty urban school districts that have improved still have graduation rates below the national average. Too many graduates are still unprepared for the needs of college and high-wage employment. With the exception of a few states and communities, solutions have not been found for high-poverty, low-performing rural high schools, which often have only one high school in their district.

Confronting the Epidemic

Over the past decade, America has started to understand the magnitude of its dropout epidemic and take important steps to measure and address it. Educators, administrators, community leaders, policymakers, social entrepreneurs, students, parents, and others have been active at the school, state, and national levels to ensure dropout prevention and recovery and college readiness are part of a comprehensive educational improvement strategy tailored to local conditions. Below is an update on important progress in recent years and challenges that remain.

- **Quality Education as a Top Priority.** National Assessment of Educational Progress results for 4th and 8th grades allow state performance to be compared, the federal No Child Left Behind law mandates improvements, and many states passed extensive reforms in order to compete for the federal Race to the Top grants. Many states are working to establish their high school diploma as proof that students have mastered a high level of knowledge and skills by passing more rigorous graduation requirements and stronger assessments that measure a high level of student achievement. At the same time, they are taking steps to ensure that greater high school demands do not lead to more dropouts by providing more training for educators and greater support for students.
- **Accurate Data.** In 2005, all 50 governors agreed to a common calculation of high school graduation rates, using a "four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate" that divides the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first-time entering 9th graders four years earlier, making adjustments for transfers in and out of schools. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education tightened the calculation set forth by the governors and adopted it. By the end of 2010, 33 states will be using this calculation. The federal government will require the states to use this calculation for the 2010-2011 school year and be held accountable for their progress based on this calculation for the 2011-2012 school year. In order to receive stimulus funds, all of the states agreed to build statewide longitudinal data systems that follow individual students from early childhood through high school, postsecondary education, and into the workforce. This will allow states to track student progress into college to determine what programs earlier in a student's education had the best results for college readiness.
- **Early Warning and Intervention Systems.** Research shows that potential dropouts can be identified as early as late elementary and middle school with the warning signs of poor attendance, behavior, and course performance. Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama are leaders in testing statewide early warning systems. Diplomas Now, a school turnaround model organized around early warning data, combines the Talent Development secondary school transformation model with Communities in Schools and City Year, two organizations that provide community-based supports and interventions for off-track students in middle and high schools. Diplomas Now is currently working in 10 large city school districts and will expand to 60 more schools. Early results show significant declines in absenteeism, poor behavior, and course failure. Students cannot learn if they are not in school so communities have begun to organize to establish the norm that every student should be in school each day. The federal government and states and districts need to track chronic absenteeism, not just aggregate attendance.
- **High Expectations.** Until recently, a majority of states permitted students to drop out of high school at the age of 16, reflecting laws that were passed in the early 20th century. Since 2002, 12 states have raised their compulsory school age from 16 to 17 or 18, now ensuring that 32 states set the expectation that students will graduate from high school. In some states, like Tennessee and West Virginia, students must remain in school until they are 18 to keep their driver's license. Educators, in many schools, are developing school climates with the expectation that all students will graduate high school completely college-ready.
- **Higher Standards.** At least 38 states have adopted Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math, which will standardize learning expectations across elementary and secondary schools and enable comparisons of student achievement across districts and states. Work is now underway on matching assessments and teacher tools to help ensure students are helped to reach these new standards. Also, many states have raised their graduation standards, requiring students to take more rigorous classes, especially advanced math and laboratory sciences, and replacing low-level general basic skills tests with assessments demanding higher levels of knowledge and skills, often as end-of-course exams tied to specific classes.

- **Teacher Effectiveness.** Research shows the importance of having highly effective teachers in student academic achievement. Studies have found that teacher effectiveness has a greater impact on student achievement than any other reform under a school's control. Teacher effectiveness is one of the key strategies for the next decade, building on the past decade's emphasis on leadership and organizational reforms. Current research is examining the qualifications, professional development, preparation, and support in the forms of induction, mentoring, and coaching that help create and retain effective teachers. Research also delves into teachers' perspectives on the dropout challenge, their beliefs about what their students can achieve, the connections between teacher qualities and student achievement, and the incentives that will attract and reward highly effective teachers in lower-performing schools. Districts are working on ways to improve teacher effectiveness.
- **Parent Engagement.** Research shows that students with involved parents, regardless of family income or background, are more likely to do better in school, graduate from high school, attend college, and find productive work. New research shattered the myth that low-income parents of students trapped in low-performing schools do not want to engage in their child's education and provided practical guidance to schools on how they can more effectively engage parents. Some states, like Florida, have comprehensive family engagement laws that incorporate parental involvement in changes being made at the school and district levels and have given parents access to critical data on how students are performing. Districts and schools are experimenting with innovative strategies to engage parents, including utilizing text messaging, establishing parent centers, and recruiting television stations to keep parents informed.
- **New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests.** Over the last decade, public education leaders and policymakers, social entrepreneurs, youth-serving organizations, foundations, and others have transformed the traditional high school experience, making schooling more personalized and relevant, while developing stronger pathways to college and the workforce. Different organizations and formats for teaching and learning have been tried, including public charter schools, early college high schools, theme-based schools (with STEM and high-quality career focuses), well-designed small schools, computerized virtual schools, and schools with special hours for working students. Forty-seven thousand students are enrolled in 208 early college high schools in 24 states that enable students to earn up to two years of transferable college credit. To date, these newly formed early college high schools — though still educating a very small percentage of the nation's 15 million high school students — have achieved an average 92 percent graduation rate. Eighty-nine percent of all early college high school graduates — compared with 66 percent of students nationally — went on to pursue some form of postsecondary education the following fall. Additionally, a number of districts, including New York City, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Atlanta, and Oakland, have worked to systematically increase student choice and replace large low graduation rate high schools with smaller and more focused secondary schools, often in partnership with external reform or support organizations.
- **Graduation Pathways and Dropout Recovery for Over-Age and Under-Credited Youth.** Nationally, there are more than 6 million people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are high school dropouts. Dropout recovery models, such as the U.S. Department of Labor's Job Corps and YouthBuild USA, have had success in re-enrolling dropouts and allowing them to earn a high school diploma or GED while gaining work and community service experience. New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation has achieved significant success in returning youth in this age group to the graduation pathway with a combination of learning, work, and personal, academic, and social support systems. Recently, the federal government has allocated $50 million — 10 times more than the historic amount — for dropout prevention and re-entry programs in high schools with dropout rates higher than state averages. At the same time, schools need to be careful about the academic quality of these programs and that students are held to the same levels of rigor as those in traditional instruction.
- **New Community Coalitions Supporting Graduation.** Over the last few years, the America's Promise Alliance convened more than 100 dropout summits in all 50 states and produced the Grad Nation Guidebook to share best research and practice. It has also provided follow-up assistance to 12 communities, including technical assistance workshops and access to leading education experts. More than 30,000 individuals, from governors and state superintendents to teachers and students from dropout factory and low graduation rate high schools, attended these action-

promoting summits, and nearly 1,700 organizations developed dropout prevention and recovery plans. Leading national non-profit youth service organizations, such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Communities in Schools, City Year, and the United Way of America, have now made addressing the dropout crisis a top priority for their organizations. They now have the opportunity to take this a step further by linking concern for graduating with graduating to high levels of academic knowledge and skills. Community coalitions can help schools establish high expectations that all students graduate prepared for college and high-wage careers and insist that schools maintain advanced levels of rigor.

- **Research on What Works.** The What Works Clearinghouse, established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education, made key recommendations to reduce dropouts: utilize data systems to obtain an accurate picture of students who drop out and those at risk of doing so; assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out; provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance; implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills; personalize the learning environment and instructional process; and provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide them with the skills they need for postsecondary success. Research and development organizations like Mass Insight Education, Jobs for the Future, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University have shown how research on what works and what is needed can effectively inform practice and shape policy. At the state level, the California Dropout Research Project is one example that links research with a coalition of state and local policymakers and practitioners working to raise the state's high school graduation rate and to eliminate differences in rates among ethnic and gender groups. At the district level, the Consortium on Chicago School Research and recent consortia that are emerging in Baltimore, Newark, and New York City have demonstrated the power of a sustained research effort aimed at improving the educational outcomes within a large city.

Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation

In the aftermath of World War II, Secretary of State George C. Marshall instructed George Kennan and his policy planning staff to "avoid trivia" in developing their plan to help rebuild Europe. A coalition of leading institutions has adopted this same approach in developing a "Civic Marshall Plan" to end the dropout epidemic and reach the national goal of having 90 percent of our students graduating from high school and obtaining at least one year of postsecondary schooling or training by 2020. Our Civic Marshall Plan will not be focused on creating infrastructure, but on the strategic deployment of human resources to help school districts and states accelerate improvement. To succeed, it will need to be community based and locally organized, but supported at the state and national levels with human resources paired with evidence-based strategies, guiding research, and accountability structures that propel continuous improvement. What follows is an initial plan, intended to be further informed by the coalition, other interested parties, and the American people. We believe that ending the dropout epidemic is possible because we now know which students are likely to drop out, absent effective interventions, and where these students go to school. We also know that evidence-based solutions exist. Thus, we are left with an engineering problem of getting the right supports to the right students in a timely fashion at the scale and intensity required. To meet this challenge, we need to take a targeted and phased approach, driven by our understanding of where the challenge is greatest and where concerted efforts can have the largest impact.

The Call to Action & Leadership

Goals and Accountability. By 2020, high school graduation rates for those in the 3rd grade today will be 90 percent nationally, mindful of the larger goal that by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. States and school districts, as part of federal accountability, will set targets for continuous and substantial progress in raising graduation rates and increasing college- and career-readiness. Communities and non-profits must work collaboratively with them to reach these goals.

Civic Marshall Plan Leadership Team. A leadership team of organizations with institutional reach into school districts, states, and national advocacy is working together to develop and carry out this plan. In partnership with America's Promise Alliance's Grad Nation campaign, this leadership team will further develop this Civic Marshall Plan and coordinate leadership, expertise, and assets in the targeted school districts, states, and at the national level.

Strategic, Tiered Approach

Dropout Factory and Related Schools. We will first target and help build the capacity of the states and school districts to transform or replace the remaining 1,746 dropout factories and their feeder elementary and middle grade schools that account for half of the nation's dropouts. The plan will also focus on the 3,000 additional high schools with graduation rates between 61 and 75 percent, which account for an additional 35 percent of the nation's dropouts. To reach the high school graduation goal of 90 percent by 2020, 23 states will need to equal the rate of growth achieved by Alabama (7 percentage-points every six years), 9 states will need to equal New York (10 percentage-points every six years), and 7 states will need to equal Tennessee (15 percentage-points every six years). Nevada is the only state that will need a sustained rate of growth in increasing graduation rates greater than Tennessee. If the nation's dropout factories and the 3,000 high schools with graduation rates between 61 and 75 percent collectively increase their graduation rates by 20 percentage-points by 2020 — which amounts to an average of a 2 percentage-point increase per year — the nation will achieve its 90 percent graduation rate goal.

Initial Benchmarks. The Class of 2020 needs to earn 600,000 more high school diplomas than the Class of 2008 (holding population growth constant). To ensure that happens, we will establish a phased approach with clear goals for 2012 — substantially increase the number of struggling students reading at grade level by 5th grade; reduce chronic absenteeism; and conduct needs and capacity assessments of targeted schools. The benchmarks for 2013 include early warning and intervention systems in every targeted school district and state; re-design of middle grades as necessary to foster high student engagement and preparation for rigorous high school courses; and the placement of a trained non-profit school success mentor for every 15-20 students with off-track indicators. The benchmarks for 2016 include transforming or replacing the nation's dropout factories and providing transition supports for struggling students in grades 8-10 in all schools with graduation rates below 75 percent; providing all students (including those who have dropped out) with clear pathways from high school to career training and college; and the compulsory school age being raised to 18 in all states. All of these efforts, while targeted for the Class of 2020, will be done in the context of improving achievement for all students.

Take Action Within Low Graduation Rate Communities

Start with Early Reading. Dropping out is a process that begins long before a student enters high school. Research shows that a student's decision to drop out stems from loss of interest and motivation in middle school, often triggered by academic difficulties and resulting grade retention. Research also shows that a major cause of retention is failure to master content needed to progress on time, which in many cases, is the result of not being able to read proficiently as early as the 4th grade. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than 80 percent of low-income students failed to score proficiently on national exams in 2009. Half of all low-income 4th graders did not reach the basic level. When children make it to 4th grade without learning to read proficiently, they are being put on a dropout track. In order to reach the national goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate, we must ensure that all students, including those for which English is not their first language, are reading on grade level.

Focus on the Middle Grades. Most future dropouts begin to disengage from school during early adolescence, and during the middle grades achievement gaps often grow. By the time these students enter high school, they have one foot out the door and are not prepared to succeed in a rigorous college- and career-readiness high school curriculum. We should start with the feeder middle grade schools to dropout factory and low graduation rate high schools and ensure all students not only stay on track to graduation during the middle grades, but also are engaged in meaningful learning activities that leave them well prepared for high school.

Turn Around or Replace the Nation's Dropout Factories. We need to build on the emerging momentum and continue our efforts to turn around or replace all of the nation's dropout factory high schools. The federal School Improvement Grants program has targeted high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent. We need to build state, district, non-profit, and community capacity to finish the job, building on evidence-based practices, while supporting continued innovation for some of the toughest challenges, such as single high school districts with low graduation rate high schools located in rural or extremely low-income communities.

Harness the Power of Non-Profits to Provide Expanded Student Supports. In dropout factory and low graduation rate high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools, as well as associated alternative schools, there are often hundreds of students in need of intensive supports from caring and committed adults. Often there simply is not enough manpower in high-needs schools to provide these supports at the scale needed. We must call on, and systematically organize, national and local non-profits that can bring skilled and committed young and older adults, community members, and trained social service providers into the lives of all students who exhibit off-track behavior in such schools in a consistent and committed way. National service efforts, like those pioneered by City Year, need to be expanded, as do the mentoring supports provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters, the extended learning supports like those provided by Boys & Girls Clubs and Citizen Schools, and the integrated student supports and wraparound services provided by organizations like Communities in Schools, Children's Aid Society, and Community Schools. Non-profits, in turn, need to commit to using common "on-track-to-graduation metrics" and to being held accountable for improving student outcomes and working collaboratively to integrate their efforts in a strategic and supportive manner with schools.

Link Researchers to Practitioners and Policy. Secondary schools in partnership with colleges and universities should create research consortia that enable practitioners to inform and take advantage of high-quality research. Research should be conducted to, among other issues: understand which high-poverty dropout factory schools and statewide strategies have made the greatest gains in boosting student academic achievement and high school graduation rates; enable communities to develop a fine-grained analysis of who dropouts are, when and why they dropout, and what they need to get back on track in their communities; devise a cost/benefit analysis of the impact of the length of the school day, week, and year on student academic achievement and progress in school; and understand the promise and potential of reducing gang involvement, juvenile crime, teenage pregnancy, and health costs by building strong prevention, intervention, and recovery efforts to keep additional students on the graduation path. Finally, Solution Competitions, modeled on the recent U.S. Department of Education awards for consortia of states to design next-generation assessments, should be implemented in areas where more demonstrations of what is possible are needed, such as pushing high-poverty urban graduation rates above 80 percent and transforming rural, low graduation rate high schools.

Build and Enable State and District Capacity to Improve Graduation and College Readiness Rates

Build Early Warning and Intervention Systems. States, school districts, and schools should collect individualized student data to track early warning indicators of potential dropouts as early as elementary and middle school with regular reports to administrators, teachers, school counselors, and parents to identify students who are off track and need regular or more intensive supports. They also should monitor what students are falling behind on academic knowledge and skills and provide extra help so they will be college-ready by graduation. Schools should collaborate with community-based and national service organizations to provide students with the supports they need inside and outside of school. Interventions can include mentoring and tutoring, targeted literacy and math curricula support, 9th grade academies, extended school time, and a wide range of community-based supports to address academic, social, medical, and mental health needs.

Create a Multi-Sector and Community-Based Effort. The community bears the costs of the dropout crisis and should be deeply involved in its solution. Existing evidence indicates that states and school districts that have made the most progress built multi-sector collaborations that have included significant involvement and support from governors, mayors, legislators, non-profits, and community organizations. Often, the business community, which has the power to highlight the economic impacts of low high school graduation rates and help education become a data-driven enterprise, has also been involved. The United Way has made reducing the nation's dropout rate in half by 2018 one of its top goals, and it and other locally based and nationally supported organizations like Communities in Schools need to play a key organizing role, assisted by the efforts of the America's Promise Alliance on a national level.

Enhance High School and College Graduation Rate Data. School districts, states, and the nation will be required to report by the 2011-12 school year accurate high school graduation rates, disaggregated by gender, race, and ethnicity, as defined by the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. States and school districts should be held accountable for increasing high school graduation rates and student performance data as part of state and federal accountability efforts. Similar data and reporting systems should be built, with accurate tracking of transfers, for colleges, community colleges, and technical schools, with on-time reporting of graduation rates and job placement rates to potential students and the public.

Develop New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests. School districts and states should continue to provide and re-develop innovative alternative learning environments to engage students who have fallen off the path to high school graduation and reenroll students who have already dropped out of high school to place them on a pathway to postsecondary success. Educators should collaborate with the community to develop, monitor, and improve these effective pathways, while taking steps to ensure their academic rigor. Business leaders and associations should also provide students with opportunities for career exposure, exploration, internships, and other opportunities that connect the high school experience to the workforce. Researchers should continue to study these alternative pathways, including charter schools, early college high schools, theme-based programs and schools, back-on-track programs, online education, and other models to determine what is effective and scalable and then share best practices.

Develop Parent Engagement Strategies. School districts should develop parent engagement strategies based on research of what will meaningfully engage them. Such practices should be responsive to cultural differences and include prompt notification of academic, behavioral, attendance, or other problems; earlier contact throughout middle school and in and beyond 9th grade on what constitutes success in high school; a single point of contact at the school; information on high school graduation and college admission requirements, including financial aid and assistance every step of the way in negotiating the roadblocks on the way to college; individualized student plans; homework hotlines; access to learning centers within schools; and flexible schedules for parent-teacher conferences. The U.S. Department of Education and other partners should make information from the Parental Information and Resource Centers more widely available to dropout factory and low graduation rate schools.

Elicit Perspectives of Students, Educators, and Parents. Research shows that students, educators, and parents have different perspectives on the causes of dropout, the role of high expectations, and the interest and engagement of parents and the community in student achievement. School districts with dropout factories, low graduation rate high schools, and their feeder elementary and middle schools should host regular dialogues among these vital constituencies about the causes and cures of high school dropout and involve these constituencies in the development of dropout prevention and recovery plans.

Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Congress should reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and, in the process, build upon good legislation that has emerged in recent years to address the dropout challenge. This includes the Graduation Promise Act, the Graduation for All Act, the Success in the Middle Act, the DIPLOMA Act, the Keeping PACE Act, and provisions from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. There are also key provisions in ESEA relating to graduation rate accountability, adequate yearly progress, the provision of School Improvement Grants, and other issues that will continue to help confront the dropout crisis. Congress should also support funding for the Education Corps within the Serve America Act, which mobilizes national service participants to help students at risk of dropping out. The Race to the Top challenge should continue to catalyze change within and beyond winning states, having proven to be a powerful tool to prompt reforms related to addressing the dropout crisis. These proposed bills and provisions in current law should be included in a coherent framework that maximizes federal resources for the greatest return on investment.

Accelerate Graduation Rates by Strengthening the Public Education System

Build Linked, Common Data Systems and Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making. States and districts should work together to ensure there are linkages across data systems, and to provide appropriate access to all stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, students, parents, researchers, non-profits, and other community-based groups, consistent with student privacy. State leaders must help build the capacity of local stakeholders to use data, including through professional development and training, to ensure that educators can effectively understand and use data to make decisions at the school level. States should also share data across borders, given the highly mobile student population.

Set High Expectations and Provide Engaging Coursework. Research shows that high expectations, a rigorous curriculum, and engaging coursework can boost student academic achievement. Students should have fewer, clearer, and higher standards aligned with college requirements; all students should be expected to graduate from high school and college or career training programs that lead to meaningful employment; every state should adopt a compulsory school age law of 18, coupled with strong anti-truancy efforts in schools and additional supports for struggling students; and states should continue to adopt the Common Core State Standards, together with performance standards with real accountability for meeting them. States should also ensure that their assessments use multiple methods and reflect what students actually need to know and be able to do.

Train and Support Highly Effective and Accountable Teachers. Research has consistently shown that a main factor of the dropout crisis is under-qualified and ineffective teachers who are disproportionately found in low-income schools and schools that exhibit dropout crisis symptoms. More support should be provided by states and the federal government on a competitive basis to school districts that provide incentives to teachers to boost student academic achievement, teach in the lowest-performing schools, and for teacher training and professional development that sustain and further develop teachers as their careers progress. Research should accelerate our understanding of what education, training, credentialing, and practices make for a good teacher, and how we should further measure and provide incentives for such effective practices. Districts will need to strengthen how they recruit, recognize, and reward teachers through mentoring programs, career ladders, and pay tied to agreed-upon measures of performance. We need to recognize teachers as professionals and allow them greater say in how their schools operate in accord with proven practices.

Train and Support Highly Effective and Accountable Principals. Principals, school leaders, and a collegial school environment are keys to raising student achievement. School districts must ensure that experienced principals with high-quality professional training and leadership development have more control over budgeting and scheduling, as well as the hiring, mentoring, development, and, as a last resort when leadership and support have failed to produce desired expectations, the firing of their teachers and staff.

Connect the Postsecondary Completion Agenda with High School Graduation. Data show that while the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in college has increased to nearly 70 percent, the percentage of young adults (aged 25-29) with a college degree remains at around 30 percent. As part of this Civic Marshall Plan, we will collaborate with leaders who are developing a postsecondary completion agenda that addresses issues such as: better aligning incentives toward completion, not just access to college, for students, colleges, and states; engaging colleges and employers to help students balance the demands of work and school; understanding why the powerful market incentive to complete college (higher earning potential) is not inducing more students to complete their degrees; ensuring that colleges track and report on-time completion rates and job placement rates for each of their degrees; and examining how the federal government can improve the collection and reporting of data relevant to college completion.

Next Steps

A National Dialogue and Response. Ending the dropout crisis will take a concerted effort by leaders and citizens at all levels of our communities, states, and nation. Progress over the last decade gives us confidence that good research can continue to guide our efforts, accurate data can prompt appropriate responses, and a targeted approach can help us reach our goals. The futures of millions of children are at stake, as are the health and vibrancy of our communities, economy, and nation. We should redouble our efforts to keep the high school dropout challenge a top national priority; mobilize the will, people, and resources to meet the challenge; and equip next generations with the knowledge and skills they need to find productive work and participate actively in American life. We have created a "Civic Marshall Plan Index" to keep track of our progress and challenges in ending the dropout crisis and building a grad nation.

Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation Index: Where We Stand

Progress	Challenges
National high school graduation rate increases from 72 to 75 percent between 2001 and 2008 — **an average of 0.43 percentage-points per year**	**Needs to increase 1.5 percentage-points per year** over the next 10 years to reach 90 percent by 2020 (or 2 percentage points across the dropout factory and low graduation rate high schools)
Class of 2008 had 120,000 more graduates than the Class of 2001 (holding population change constant)	**Class of 2020 needs 600,000 more graduates** than Class of 2008 for nation to reach 90 percent
29 states saw their graduation rate substantially increase from 2002 to 2008	**21 states did not**
Two states — Wisconsin and Vermont — almost reached a 90 percent graduation rate in 2008	**8 states had graduation rates below 70 percent**
African American, Hispanic, and Native American graduation rates are improving the fastest	**Still 15–18 percentage-point gap with White rates**
261 fewer dropout factories in 2008 than 2002	**1,746 still remain**
400,000 fewer students attended dropout factories in 2008 than 2002	**2.2 million students still attend dropout factories**
25 of the 100 largest city school districts had a 10 percentage-point or greater increase in promoting power	**23 of the 100 largest city school districts had a 3 percentage-point or greater decline** in promoting power
5 states saw a decline in the number of rural dropout factories	**More states did not**
12 states have raised their compulsory school age since 2002	Over the past year, **13 states saw legislation introduced but not enacted**
47 states have the capacity to follow individual students over time	**Only 10 states provide data on student progress** to schools, teachers, and parents
208 early college high schools have opened since 2002	**Less than half of all students nationally graduate college-ready**
3 states have statewide early warning systems; several more states will introduce them soon	**Most states and school districts do not have early warning and intervention systems**
The Serve America Act created an Education Corps to increase national service supports in schools	**Needs to be fully funded so that more national service participants can provide supports**
Federal legislation aimed at ending the dropout crisis was introduced, e.g., Graduation Promise Act, Graduation for All Act, Success in the Middle Act, Keeping PACE Act, DIPLOMA Act	**ESEA needs to be reauthorized** with these initiatives incorporated

Building a Grad Nation: Progress & Challenge

America is finally confronting its high school dropout challenge. Some schools and communities across the United States have seen significant increases in high school graduation rates in recent years and have put in place the innovative schools, whole school reforms, early warning and intervention systems, and student supports that help keep more students on track. Others have languished, making little effort at all, ignoring important data, or hoping one program will address the different reasons students cite for dropping out. Because many schools and communities have successfully boosted student achievement and high school graduation rates, and many states have made significant gains, others can too. This progress should serve as a challenge to our communities, states, and nation.

The last decade has been marked by a quiet revolution in education reform, and the demands on K-12 education have grown significantly... from educate some students to educate all students... from proficiency to college- and career-readiness... from college access to college completion... from preparation for the 20th century American economy to full participation in the 21st century global economy. Leaders, citizens, and educators at all levels have rallied around significant efforts, such as standardizing the calculation of graduation rates; building data systems to track student progress; providing new pathways to high school graduation; raising expectations through early college high schools, dual enrollment, and increasing the compulsory school age; integrating student achievement as a key component of teacher effectiveness; making schools accountable for student progress in reading and math; marrying new data on the predictors of dropout with intensive school- and community-based supports for students; and shaping policies at the school, state, and national levels, such as re-engaging dropouts, encouraging the adoption of college- and career-readiness standards, and providing incentives for more school transformation and innovation. Presidents and the Congress have made education reform a top priority, elevating closing the achievement gap, promoting high school graduation, and fostering college-readiness and completion to the national agenda. Social entrepreneurs, non-profits, and foundations have sparked the creation and replication of innovative school models, re-enrollment strategies for over-age and under-credited students, and re-envisioning the way we teach disengaged students. Administrators, teachers, and leaders from business, non-profit, and other community-based organizations have rallied to create innovative solutions

that ensure coursework is engaging and connected to postsecondary pathways and to ensure more students have the academic and social supports they need to graduate from high school prepared for success.

This action has been further grounded in the reality of what will help struggling students and the educators, parents, and community leaders who try to help them. Research has examined the perspectives of dropouts, parents, teachers, and administrators to understand why they believe students fail to graduate from high school, what reforms and supports could be put in place, and what roles they each have to play in boosting graduation rates. Additional research has been conducted to clarify the scale, location, and magnitude of the challenge that remains. As a result, we know that half of the nation's dropouts are clustered in "dropout factories" — schools where no more than 60 percent of students graduate. We also know that another 35 percent of the dropouts come from the 3,000 schools in which only 61 to 75 percent of students graduate.[3] We know in which states and in which rural, urban, and suburban areas they are located. We know, for individual states and communities, the economic impact of students dropping out. And we are learning more about which students are signaling the early warning signs of potential dropout. New data systems are coming online that will enable the nation to measure progress toward graduation in all of its schools. This leadership, action, and research are translating into meaningful improvements and results nationally, in states, and in urban, rural, and suburban districts.

A primary purpose of this report is to take a critical look at the efforts that have heralded improvements in graduation rates, and those that have failed to do so, in our communities. We present fresh analysis of graduation rate and promoting power data, highlight effective case studies, provide an update on progress on various reforms, and offer a Civic Marshall Plan developed by leaders across the nation based on the best research, evidence, and real-world practice to build upon the momentum of the last decade (see Methodology and Data sections). **We conclude that while the results of the past decade have been mixed, with progress in some areas, and limited improvement in others, these efforts have laid the groundwork for more rapid and systematic progress in the next decade.** We hope that this report will spur our nation, states, and communities to use the momentum of the last decade to implement solutions to help more young people navigate pathways from high school graduation to postsecondary success, preparing them to be productive workers and active citizens.

3 Everyone Graduates Center estimate using promoting power measure based on 2005-2008 enrollment data from Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education, presented at Pearson Foundation Roundtable, March 2010, Washington D.C..

The National Picture

The nation is making progress in confronting its high school graduation crisis. In 2008 (the most recent year for which data is available), the national high school graduation rate of approximately 75 percent represented a 3-percentage-point improvement over the graduation rate in 2001. As a result, about 120,000 additional students in the Class of 2008 earned a high school diploma than the Class of 2001, holding population growth constant. The nation, moreover, reversed a downward trend in high school graduation rates that, as seen in Table 1, had spanned the prior 40 years and reached its modern low in the late 1990s through 2001.

Some of the gains in high school graduation rates have been driven by progress in improving or eliminating dropout factories — high schools in which graduation is often at best a 50/50 proposition.[4] Collectively, these high schools, which represent a little more than 1 in 10 of all high schools, produce half of the nation's dropouts.[5] These schools often serve disproportionate numbers of low-income and minority students. In many communities, they represent the only public high school option. The good news is that there are 261 fewer of these schools now than in 2002, when there were 2,007 of them, a decline of about 13 percent. The challenging news is that 1,746 remain. Indeed, although the national graduation rate has increased and there are fewer dropout factory high schools, the rate of improvement has been uneven across states and school districts. Some areas have seen large gains, others have experienced modest advancements, and some are going in the wrong direction.

Closer examination of the characteristics of dropout factory high schools in 2002 and 2008 reveals that there are three distinct groups of these schools. In the first group, there are about 1,000 dropout factories first identified in 2002 that did not improve between 2002 and 2008. These schools alone account for one-third of the nation's dropouts. The second group is made up of high schools that got better. A little more than 900 high schools that met the dropout factory criteria in 2002 no longer did so in 2008. Of these schools, one-third have experienced substantial improvements and are currently outperforming the national high school graduation average. The third group is high schools that got worse. There are just over 700 high schools that did not meet the criteria in 2002 but did so by 2008. Thus, the 1,746 dropout factory high schools identified in 2008 are composed of one set of schools that have had weak promoting power for a long time and another set that has seen their promoting power decline from above to below 60 percent between 2002 and 2008. The 1,746 dropout factories that remain are, as a group, more urban, larger, and educate student populations that are composed of mostly low-income and minority students.

TABLE 1 National Graduation Rate Over the Years

1970	78%	
1984	74%	Nation at Risk
1994	73%	Goals 2000
2001	72%	No Child Left Behind
2008	**75%**	**New graduation rate regulations**

Source: Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate from the U.S. Department of Education

Graduation Rate Measures, Indicators, and Terms Used in This Report

Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate — Estimates percentage of 9th graders who earn a regular high school diploma

Promoting Power — Compares number of 12th graders enrolled in a school or district to the number of 9th graders enrolled three years earlier

Dropout Factory/Weak Promoting Power High Schools — High schools with promoting power of 60 percent or less

Low Graduation Rate High Schools — High schools with promoting power between 61 and 75 percent

For details, see Methodology and Data Sections.

4 See the Methodology and Data Sections.

5 See the Methodology and Data Sections.

The rate of progress observed during the first decade of the 21st century, though, is not fast enough for the nation to reach its goal of having 90 percent of its students graduate from high school and obtain at least one year of postsecondary schooling or training by 2020. To reach this goal, in the next 10 years, we will need to accelerate our progress fivefold from the progress achieved since 2001. In addition to improving outcomes among dropout factories, focusing on the schools that currently graduate 61 to 75 percent of students will also be key in accomplishing this goal.

Progress has varied considerably by place. Some states and school districts have made tremendous progress and, in so doing, shatter the myth that only incremental gains are possible. If the nation can match and continue the gains achieved by its top-performing states and school districts, the dropout crisis will end. To date, however, many locations have witnessed small improvements that will need to be greatly accelerated, and most disturbingly, some locales have seen their graduation rates decline.

National averages and rates of progress are informative, but they can also cloud more complex realities. The national graduation rate of approximately 75 percent, for example, masks great differences by locale and across racial and ethnic groups. The national graduation rate is the result of a 91 percent graduation rate among Asian students, an 81 percent graduation rate among White students, and graduation rates in the low 60s for Hispanic, African American, and Native American students.[6] These data mirror the 23-percentage-point gap between the percentage of students from affluent and low-income families who obtain a bachelor's degree.[7] The promising news is that, at least in some places, the greatest progress in raising high school graduation rates has occurred in lower income and higher minority population areas. Understanding when, where, and why these gains have occurred is essential to the nation's progress. In the following section, we examine some key trends at the state and district levels, as well as profile examples of substantial progress. The methodology we used is set forth in more detail in Appendix I.

TABLE 2 Number of Dropout Factories in the U.S.

		LESS THAN 60% PROMOTING POWER	
	Total Number of High Schools*	Percentage of High Schools	Number of High Schools
Class of 1993	10,296	12%	1,254
Class of 1996	10,709	16%	1,717
Class of 1999	10,915	18%	1,968
Class of 2002	11,129	18%	2,007
Class of 2005	11,800	15%	1,766
Class of 2008	12,074	14%	1,746

*Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

6 See the Methodology and Data Sections for more details about minority graduation rates.

7 Bowen, W.G., Chingos, M.M., & M.S. McPherson (2009). Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

State Progress

Between 2002 and 2008, 12 states experienced substantial gains in their high school graduation rates. Tennessee and New York had breakthrough gains of 15 and 10 percentage-points, respectively, with 10 states, as seen in Table 3, having gains between 4.3 and 7.3 percentage-points. What is notable about these 12 states is that in 2002 they had graduation rates above, near, and below the national graduation rate, statistics indicating that substantial improvement is possible regardless of starting point.

An additional 17 states witnessed some progress, making gains between 2.0 and 3.9 percentage-points. Seventeen other states stayed the same, having increases or decreases of less than 2 percentage-points. Three states — Arizona, Utah, and Nevada — experienced noticeable declines. As a result, the gap between the highest- and lowest-performing states increased substantially. In 2008, Wisconsin and Vermont were fractions of a percentage-point away from becoming the first states to achieve a 90 percent graduation rate (using a common measure); at the same time, Nevada plummeted into the 50th percentiles, resulting in a 38-percentage-point gap between the highest and lowest states in 2008 compared to a 28-percentage-point difference previously.

Nevada: A Case in Point

Nevada has experienced a combination of factors that may be associated with its decrease in high school graduation rates, including:

- significant population growth, accompanied by school enrollment growth that created a constant need for new facilities and relocating students, and contributed to high schools without sufficient capacity for large student populations;
- a 341 percent increase in the English language learner population between 1998 and 2008;
- a shortage of high-quality teachers in high-poverty schools in districts other than Washoe (Reno), especially of teachers for English language learners;
- a stressed and undiversified economic system;
- a school funding system in need of diversification;
- a labor market that temporarily made it attractive for young adults to work in fields, such as construction, landscaping, and hospitality, that did not necessitate a high school diploma; and
- data that masked the magnitude of the problem.

TABLE 3 Gains in State Graduation Rates between 2002 and 2008

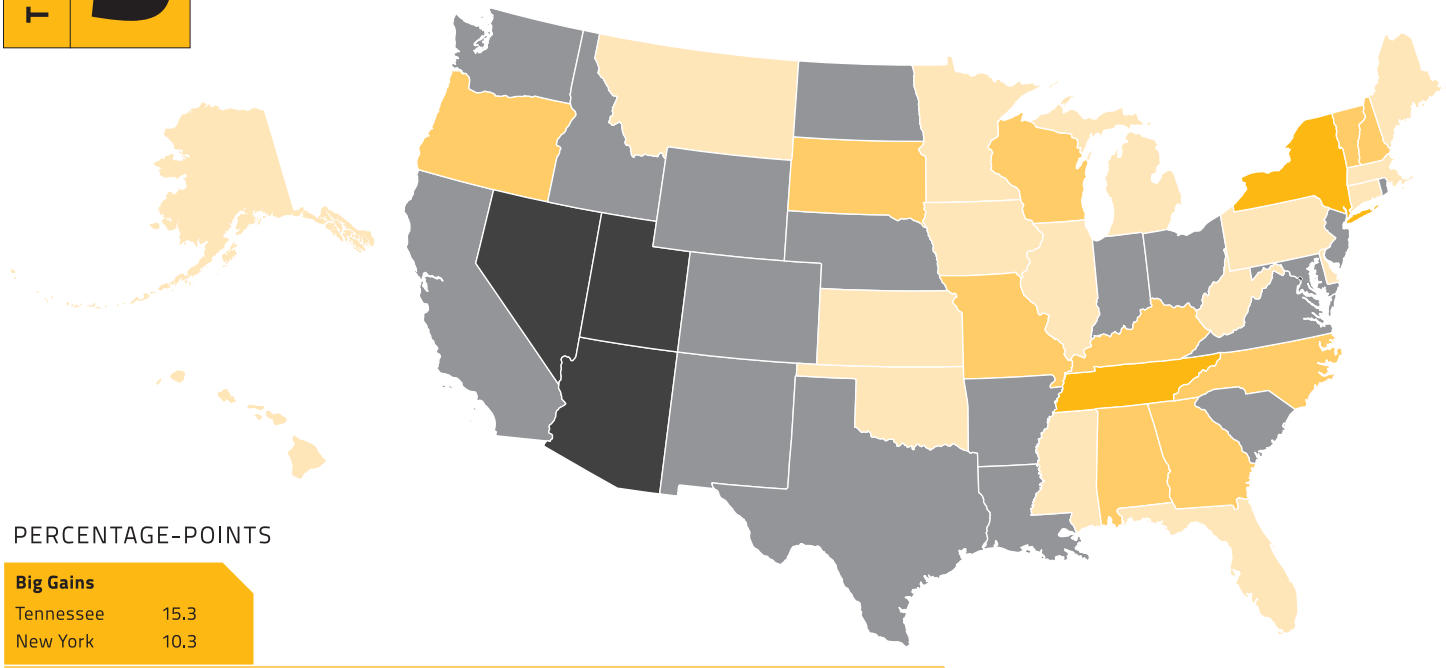
	PERCENTAGE-POINTS			
	Change	2008 Grad Rate	2002 Grad Rate	Estimated Net Gain in Graduates
Nationally	**2.3**	**74.9**	**72.6**	**91,057**
State: Big Gains				
Tennessee	15.3	74.9	59.6	11,749
New York	10.3	70.8	60.5	25,632
State: Moderate Progress				
Vermont	7.3	89.3	82.0	604
Alabama	6.9	69.0	62.1	4,137
Oregon	5.7	76.7	71.0	2,596
Missouri	5.6	82.4	76.8	4,196
New Hampshire	5.6	83.4	77.8	1,007
South Dakota	5.4	84.4	79.0	549
Wisconsin	4.8	89.6	84.8	3,492
Kentucky	4.6	74.4	69.8	2,434
North Carolina	4.6	72.8	68.2	5,265
Georgia	4.3	65.4	61.1	5,487
State: Some Progress				
Hawaii	3.9	76.0	72.1	596
Massachusetts	3.9	81.5	77.6	3,119
Florida	3.5	66.9	63.4	7,796
Maine	3.5	79.1	75.6	584
Michigan	3.4	76.3	72.9	5,133
Illinois	3.3	80.4	77.1	5,548
Alaska	3.2	69.1	65.9	364
West Virginia	3.1	77.3	74.2	701
Mississippi	2.7	63.9	61.2	1,048
Delaware	2.6	72.1	69.5	266
Connecticut	2.5	82.2	79.7	1,169
Minnesota	2.5	86.4	83.9	1,748
Pennsylvania	2.5	82.7	80.2	3,938
Iowa	2.3	86.4	84.1	921
Montana	2.2	82.0	79.8	279
Kansas	2.0	79.1	77.1	777
Oklahoma	2.0	78.0	76.0	965
State: Level				
Arkansas	1.6	76.4	74.8	602
Wyoming	1.6	76.0	74.4	116
Ohio	1.5	79.0	77.5	2,294
Indiana	1.0	74.1	73.1	835
Idaho	0.8	80.1	79.3	165
Colorado	0.7	75.4	74.7	428
Maryland	0.7	80.4	79.7	515
Rhode Island	0.7	76.4	75.7	95
Virginia	0.3	77.0	76.7	302
Nebraska	-0.1	83.8	83.9	-24
Washington	-0.3	71.9	72.2	-257
Texas	-0.4	73.1	73.5	-1,379
New Mexico	-0.6	66.8	67.4	-164
Louisiana	-0.9	63.5	64.4	-487
New Jersey	-1.2	84.6	85.8	-1,348
North Dakota	-1.2	83.8	85.0	-100
California	-1.5	71.2	72.7	-7,898
South Carolina	-	-	57.9	-
State: Decline				
Arizona	-4.0	70.7	74.7	-3,491
Utah	-6.2	74.3	80.5	-2,349
Nevada	-20.6	51.3	71.9	-6,881

Source: Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate from the U.S. Department of Education

TABLE 3

Estimated Net Gain in Graduates by State

Source: Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate from the U.S. Department of Education



PERCENTAGE-POINTS

Big Gains											
Tennessee	15.3										
New York	10.3										
Moderate Progress		Oregon	5.7	South Dakota	5.4	North Carolina	4.6				
Vermont	7.3	Missouri	5.6	Wisconsin	4.8	Georgia	4.3				
Alabama	6.9	New Hampshire	5.6	Kentucky	4.6						
Some Progress		Florida	3.5	Illinois	3.3	Mississippi	2.7	Minnesota	2.5	Montana	2.2
Hawaii	3.9	Maine	3.5	Alaska	3.2	Delaware	2.6	Pennsylvania	2.5	Kansas	2.0
Massachusetts	3.9	Michigan	3.4	West Virginia	3.1	Connecticut	2.5	Iowa	2.3	Oklahoma	2.0
Level		Ohio	1.5	Colorado	0.7	Virginia	0.3	Texas	-0.4	New Jersey	-1.2
Arkansas	1.6	Indiana	1.0	Maryland	0.7	Nebraska	-0.1	New Mexico	-0.6	North Dakota	-1.2
Wyoming	1.6	Idaho	0.8	Rhode Island	0.7	Washington	-0.3	Louisiana	-0.9	California	-1.5
Decline											
Arizona	-4.0	Nevada	-20.6								
Utah	-6.2										

There is hopeful news in this struggle. Both Clark County (Las Vegas) and Washoe County (Reno) received grants from the High School Graduation Initiative in the fall of 2010 for dropout prevention and re-entry programs in high schools with dropout rates higher than their state average. Additionally, other states, like Florida, that are coping with similar issues have been able to make gains in their high school graduation rates.[8]

Examining the rate of progress indicates that only nine out of the 50 states are on a course to reach a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020, if from 2008 to 2020 they maintain the same rate of improvement as they witnessed from 2002 to 2008.

Perhaps more encouraging is the fact that to reach 90 percent by 2020, 23 states would need to equal the rate of growth achieved by Alabama (7 percentage-points every six years), nine would need to equal New York (10 percentage-points every six years), and only seven would need to equal Tennessee (15 percentage-points every six years). Nevada is the only state that would need to experience a sustained rate of growth greater than Tennessee.

8 For more information, see: www.all4ed.org/files/Nevada.pdf; McRobbie, J. & R. Makkonen (2005). Student Achievement and Graduation Rates in Nevada: Urgent Need for Faster Improvement. San Francisco: WestEd.; www.migration-information.org/integration/, and www.doe.nv.gov/.

Tennessee: A Statewide, Continuous Improvement Approach

From 2002 to 2008, Tennessee led the nation in increasing its high school graduation rate. Strong state leadership, multi-sector collaboration, and an emphasis on continually improving and refining statewide supports to improve schools and student outcomes have enabled the state to make progress in meeting its educational goals. A long-term, systematic effort to add 269,000 college-degree holders to its workforce by 2025 has driven reform efforts and contributed to the state increasing the K-12 education budget, despite the economic downturn.

Increased collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, including the Governor, the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the business community, postsecondary institutions, youth-serving organizations, students, teachers unions, and all school districts, enabled the state to win a Race to the Top grant this spring to fund its strategic plan for reaching the goal of 90 percent high school graduation by 2014. The grant signals the state's long-standing commitment to education reform that is associated with the state's progress to date.

The Progress

Between 2002 and 2008:

- Tennessee's high school graduation rate increased from just under 60 percent to 75 percent.
- The state saw a net reduction of 24 dropout factories in its cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas.
- There was a 42 percent reduction in the number of high school students attending dropout factories.

CHART 1

Dropout Factory High Schools

	TYPE OF LOCATION				
	Cities	Suburbs	Towns	Rural	Total Number of High Schools
2002	28	9	11	10	58
2008	21	4	3	6	34

Between 2002 and 2008, Tennessee continued to refine and improve the levers it used to drive improvement statewide.

Setting Clear and High Statewide Expectations

In 2001, legislation that requires 15- to 18-year-old students to remain in school and make progress or have their driver's license suspended went into effect. The law supports the state's compulsory school attendance age of 17 and incentivizes students to remain in school until age 18 and get their diploma.

Effectively Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning

In 1992, an educator at the University of Memphis developed the nation's first value-added assessment system, a longitudinal data system that enabled administrators to review school outcomes data, including end-of-course assessments to improve performance. The State Department of Education began analyzing this data to compile lists of low-performing schools and dispatched experienced technical assistance teams to work with struggling schools. After reviewing and analyzing years of data on what showed improved student achievement, the department created and provided a model of how a "learning organization" operates.

Improving Technical Assistance to Struggling Schools

Beginning in 2003, the Urban Education Improvement Program targeted assistance to the five major urban districts that account for half of the state's economically disadvantaged students and 75 percent of African American students. Coaching support for struggling schools was increased through a newly established Office of Achievement Gap Elimination (AGE) and a system of Exemplary Educators (nearly 100 now) that helped districts use data to improve school management, teaching, and learning.

Building on prior work with a strategic plan for increased progress

Several areas of reform that build upon the work of the previous decade are showing early signs of sustaining and increasing the state's progress in raising graduation rates. These efforts continue to set clear and high statewide expectations, enhance the use of the data to improve teaching practices and analyze what works in raising student achievement, and improve technical assistance provided to struggling schools.

Setting Clear and High Statewide Expectations

- Tennessee aims to have a high school graduation rate of 90 percent by 2014.
- The state adopted a Master Education Plan in 2008 that made recommendations regarding curriculum, instruction, and school organization to provide students with academic and personal support, including 8th to 9th grade transition planning, freshmen academies — which operate in half of the state's 400 high schools — and extended learning time.
- Spurred by the work of ACHIEVE and the Tennessee Diploma Project, all students beginning high school in 2009 began a college- and work-readiness path to graduation that includes four years of math through Algebra II and three years of science, increasing the number of required credits to graduate to 22. In addition to mastering the academic core, every 8th grade student will determine a high school elective focus aligned around his or her interests and establish a plan to reach his or her goals. This one-path diploma builds on a successful pilot in Hamilton County (Chattanooga).
- The K-12 education budget was increased despite the economic downturn.

Effectively Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning

- The state's longitudinal data system will expand to cover students throughout the P-20 educational pipeline from preschool into the workforce. Beginning this year, after professional development provided by institutions of higher education is administered, the value-added data will be accessible to all teachers, rather than just administrators, through a data dashboard.
- New and more rigorous state assessments will be designed and implemented, accompanied by interim and benchmarking assessments that will give formative feedback to teachers, complementing the more rigorous curriculum standards and instructional expectations.

Improving Technical Assistance to Struggling Schools

- An Achievement School District that is run by the state has been set up for the 13 lowest-performing high schools, including some of those in Memphis and Nashville. It will draw upon the strengths of major non-profit partners, new leaders, and dedicated teachers. Eighteen schools (Renewal Schools) will be required to adopt a proven reform model. Schools with persistently low performance will be required to implement one of four turnaround models. The 114 schools newly entering the accountability continuum will be designated Focus Schools and receive support from Exemplary Educators, the AGE consultants, and the targeted assistance teams.

Meeting the Challenge

- Tennessee has already demonstrated the will and the capacity — belief, infrastructure, and human capital — to grow graduation rates by more than 2 percentage-points a year. To reach a 90 percent graduation rate by 2014, the average annual rate of improvement will have to more than triple.

The South Leads the Way

Most of the decline in the number of low graduation rate high schools between 2002 and 2008 occurred in the South. Some 216 of the net decline of 261 high schools with a promoting power of 60 percent or less (a "dropout factory") or 83 percent of the total decline occurred in southern states with broad-based improvements across 9 states (see Table 4). The West, driven by increases in the number of dropout factory high schools in Nevada and California, saw a net gain of 21 dropout factory high schools.

Regional totals, though, mask substantial variation within regions. New York, Indiana, Ohio, and Washington all had substantial declines in the number of dropout factory schools, whereas Virginia and North Carolina stayed the same, and Maryland and Pennsylvania witnessed substantial increases.

Overall, 33 states had 1,000 or fewer students attending a dropout factory in 2008 than in 2002. In turn, eight states saw increases of 1,000 or more students attending dropout factory high schools, resulting in a net decline of 400,000 students nationwide enrolled in dropout factories (a 15 percent decline). The leading states with declines of 20,000 or more students attending low graduation rate high schools, which also witnessed declines in the total number of low graduation rate high schools, were Texas, New York, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Ohio. This was counterbalanced by Nevada, which saw an increase of 53,000 students attending dropout factories, and the sobering reality that nationwide in 2008 close to 2.2 million students still attended high schools where graduation is not the norm.

TABLE 4

Change in Dropout Factory High Schools

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

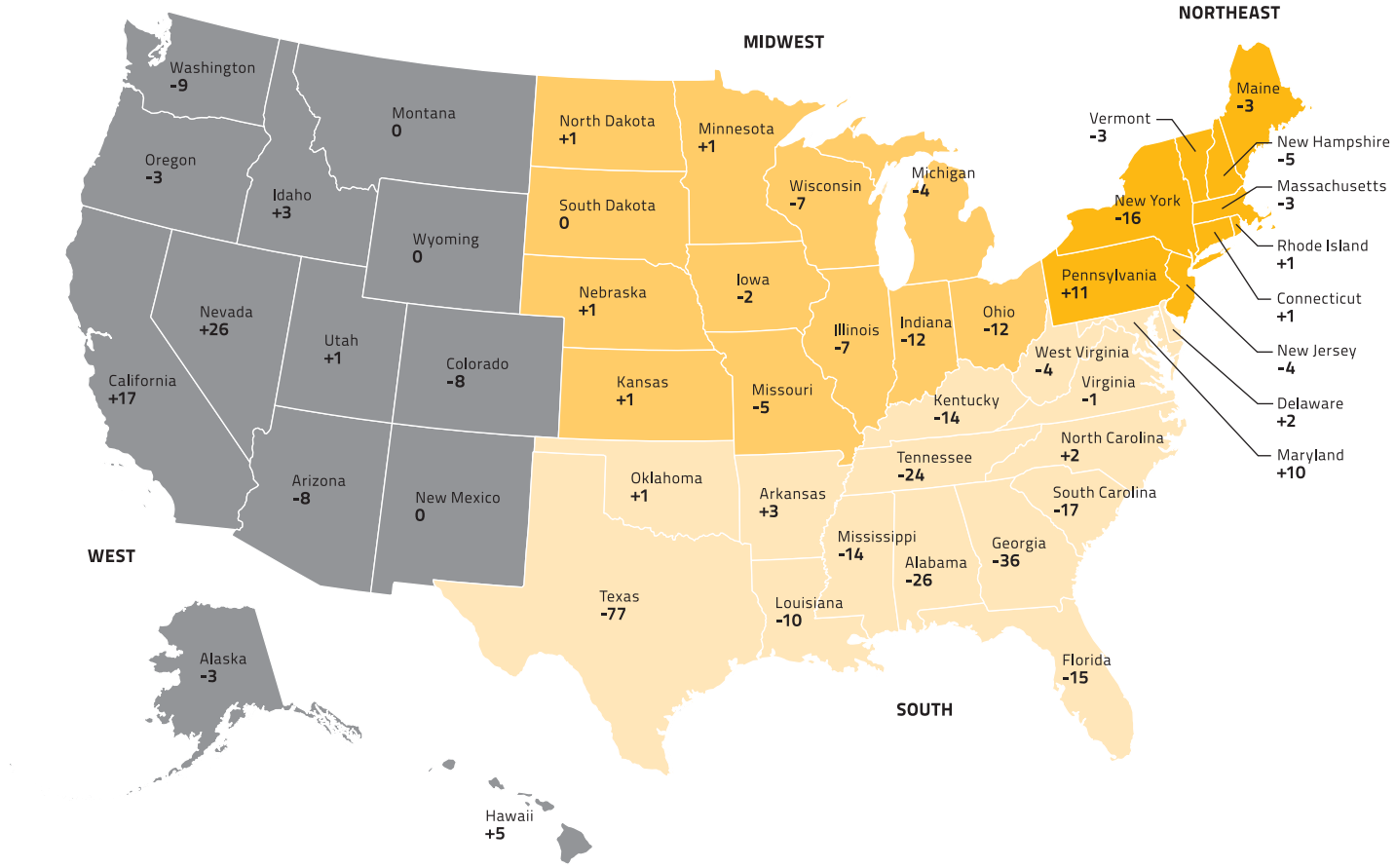


TABLE 4

Dropout Factory High Schools by Region/State

	State	2002 Total Number of Schools	2008 Total Number of Schools	Change	Change in the Number of High School Students Attending a High School with a Promoting Power Ratio of 60% or less
NORTHEAST	New York	145	129	-16	-61,810
	New Hampshire	5	0	-5	-2,298
	New Jersey	24	20	-4	-6,782
	Massachusetts	24	21	-3	-8,274
	Vermont	3	0	-3	-2,311
	Maine	4	1	-3	-1,962
	Connecticut	13	14	1	-3,749
	Rhode Island	7	8	1	461
	Pennsylvania	48	59	11	-3,514
	Subtotal	**273**	**252**	**-21**	**-90,239**
MIDWEST	Ohio	75	63	-12	-23,453
	Indiana	30	18	-12	-12,203
	Illinois	63	56	-7	-7,591
	Wisconsin	16	9	-7	-5,999
	Missouri	25	20	-5	-4,741
	Michigan	79	75	-4	-9,301
	Iowa	4	2	-2	-3,389
	South Dakota	3	3	0	-14
	Minnesota	6	7	1	-862
	Kansas	9	10	1	226
	North Dakota	0	1	1	607
	Nebraska	4	5	1	2,512
	Subtotal	**314**	**269**	**-45**	**-64,208**
SOUTH	Texas	240	163	-77	-90,161
	Georgia	156	120	-36	-30,954
	Alabama	71	45	-26	-18,867
	Tennessee	58	34	-24	-24,283
	South Carolina	101	84	-17	-13,267
	Florida	162	147	-15	-34,874
	Mississippi	52	38	-14	-16,149
	Kentucky	39	25	-14	-14,003
	Louisiana	64	54	-10	-15,800
	West Virginia	6	2	-4	-4,212
	Virginia	26	25	-1	5,223
	Oklahoma	15	16	1	-1,878
	North Carolina	106	108	2	193
	Delaware	8	10	2	824
	Arkansas	5	8	3	2,553
	Maryland	17	27	10	17,444
	Subtotal	**1,126**	**906**	**-220**[1]	**-238,211**
WEST	Washington	32	23	-9	-10,299
	Arizona	37	29	-8	-15,902
	Colorado	32	24	-8	-11,071
	Alaska	9	6	-3	-5,308
	Oregon	7	4	-3	-396
	New Mexico	27	27	0	-3,368
	Wyoming	1	1	0	-585
	Montana	1	1	0	-197
	Utah	1	2	1	385
	Idaho	2	5	3	4,018
	Hawaii	6	11	5	2,182
	California	129	146	17	-22,960
	Nevada	8	34	26	53,790
	Subtotal	**292**	**313**	**21**	**-9,711**
	Total				**-402,369**

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

1 The District of Columbia is not included because it is not a state.
When DC is included in the national total, the number becomes -216 for the South.

Alabama: Raising Expectations, Building Capacity, and Increasing Student Supports

From 2002 to 2008, Alabama experienced significant growth in its high school graduation rate compared to the rest of the nation. Leadership, including the Governor, the legislature, two state superintendents, and the State Board of Education, has placed an emphasis on raising expectations for students and garnering support for improving education outcomes among stakeholders. The state has placed an emphasis on building regional and local capacity for comprehensive school improvement, including a commitment to state-sponsored professional development and training, as well as developing a web of supports and reforms to keep students on the path to high school graduation.

The Progress

Between 2002 and 2008:

- Alabama's high school graduation rate increased from 62 percent to 69 percent.
- The state saw a net reduction of 26 dropout factories.
- The number of struggling readers in K-3 decreased more than 30 percent.
- Gains on the 4th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test were the greatest in the nation in 2005 and sustained in 2007.
- Between 2004 and 2008, the number of African-American and low-income students taking the Advanced Placement (AP) exam increased almost three-fold, and the number achieving passing scores in each case more than doubled.

Alabama's progress during these years can be attributed to developing human capacity to provide enhanced training to teachers throughout the state and focusing on strengthening student performance in reading, math, and science, while providing more supports to keep students in school.

- In the late 1990s, several statewide programs were initiated to improve teaching to enhance student learning, including the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) in 1998 and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) in 1999.
- Alabama facilitates regionalized ARI and AMSTI training for teacher teams and administrators through 11 regional education centers and units of the University System of Alabama.
- The State Department of Education provides initial training to teachers and helps create networks among districts and schools to facilitate the sharing of ideas related to school reform. The department scales back training support as regions and districts develop capacity. Extensive hands-on materials, including reading guides and math and science curricular materials, in addition to kits for instructional efforts, success stories, guidebooks, and organizing templates for comprehensive reform and individualized innovation efforts, are provided.
- In 2006, the state established Preparing Alabama Students for Success, a competitively funded three-year effort that allowed 38 local districts to experiment with innovative graduation rate improvement efforts. Ideas and best practices were shared.
- In 2006, a cadre of 25 graduation coaches were trained and deployed to increase graduation rates at struggling high schools. Dropouts, discipline referrals, and total absences dropped over a three-year period. Pleased by the success of the program, local superintendents have found funds to expand the program. Graduation coaches participate in statewide training. There are now 245 graduation coaches statewide.
- The state also funded a dropout prevention coordinator position within the State Department of Education.

Laying a Foundation For Continued Progress

In recent years, Alabama has taken several key steps that will help the state accelerate progress in increasing graduation rates. These efforts make high school dropout prevention a statewide priority, raise awareness and broaden cross-sector collaboration, set clear and high expectations for student achievement, and support student success.

Making Dropout Prevention and Increased Graduation Rates a Statewide Priority

- The Alabama Select Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts was established to recommend the policies and practices needed to raise state graduation rates.
- Comprehensive school reform, including technical assistance and coaching support structures for struggling schools, was enhanced.

- The Accountability Roundtable (now the State Support Team) was charged with finding ways to better align financial, programmatic, and human resources to help more students graduate and, with the assistance of SERVE, developing the logic model for dropout prevention.

Setting Clear and High Statewide Standards

- In 2009, Alabama raised the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17 for 9th graders entering high school. Additional provisions required the State Department of Education to work with the lowest-performing school districts on specific issues (especially for 9th graders at risk of failure), and advocated for increased availability of AP courses and programs designed to re-engage dropouts. These programs included dual enrollment and flexible programming, in addition to a "fast track to college" similar to an early college high school endeavor.
- Also in 2009, the 1998 revised high school course of study, which requires four years of math, through Algebra II with Trigonometry, in addition to four years of science, English, and social studies, became the state's First Choice default diploma for all students.

Raising Awareness and Broadening Cross Sector Collaboration to End Dropout

- In 2009, graduation improvement summits were held to galvanize public sentiment across the state. The first was sponsored by the Southern Education Foundation. The second was held in collaboration with America's Promise Alliance and the governor's office. The latter was followed by a daylong workshop coordinated by the State Board of Education with 28 districts and more than 1,000 people making plans for next steps. Local summits were held in Mobile and Dothan.
- The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, created and distributed to each school in the state a compelling video in which prisoners speak about why they made the wrong choice and why education, rather than jail, should be the goal of students.
- A statewide public engagement campaign using radio and TV public service announcements is slated to begin this fall, and is sponsored by the state retirement systems.
- The Governor's Dropout Prevention Task Force, coordinated by the Governor's Faith-Based Task Force, gathered the judiciary, health, and welfare agencies to determine how their services could be targeted to dropout prevention.

Providing Supports to Students to Finish High School

- The state created the ACCESS Distance Learning initiative to enable students to take more than 100 courses over the web or through interactive video-conferencing, whether for dual enrollment, AP review, or remediation, with new courses added each year. ACCESS, continuously funded since 2006, was recognized in 2009 as the second-largest U.S. virtual school by enrollment.
- New policies were enacted to replace rigid seat time requirements with online performance demonstration, enabling a flexible 24/7 system of online credit recovery and elective courses fitting students' curricular, family, and work needs. Mobile and Birmingham offer students opportunities through store-front recovery academies.
- The pilot version of the K-12 Alabama Graduation Tracking System will be improved and implemented statewide this school year.

Meeting the Challenge

To achieve a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020, Alabama will need to increase the graduation rate by 2 percentage-points annually, doubling the 1-percentage-point gains of previous years. Alabama must continue to build organizational and human capacity at all levels, within a framework of high expectations coupled with local initiative and ingenuity.

District Level Improvements

In looking at improvement by location — urban areas (cities plus urban fringe), suburbs, towns, and rural areas — it is clear that most of the overall national decline in weak promoting power high schools occurred in school districts located in suburbs and towns. As seen in Table 5, these districts saw a net decline of 205 dropout factory high schools, 79 percent of the total net improvement witnessed between 2002 and 2008. School districts that encompassed cities or urban fringe saw a net decline of 38 dropout factory high schools, and school districts in rural areas saw a net decline of 18 schools. Overall, suburban and town districts saw a 28 percent decline in the number of dropout factories, while urban and rural areas, which on average educate higher percentages of low-income students, saw only about a 5 percent decline.

A closer look, however, reveals more complexity. At the state level, suburban and town districts either saw declines in the number of weak promoting power high schools or stayed the same, except Maryland which saw a 10-school increase. Rural districts in Ohio, Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Washington witnessed net improvement, whereas North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Colorado, California, and Nevada saw an increase of rural dropout factory high schools (see Appendix 1 for more details). Several states stand out for having balanced improvement across locales, potentially signaling the impact of statewide efforts. This can be seen in Table 6, which looks at improvement across locales in Texas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia — the four states with the largest overall declines in the net numbers of dropout factory high schools. In Texas and Tennessee, there is net improvement in each locale; in Alabama and Georgia in three out of four.

TABLE 5 Dropout Factory High Schools by Locale

	TYPE OF LOCATION				
	Cities	Suburbs	Towns	Rural	**Total Number of Schools**
Class of 2002	905	477	247	378	2,007
Class of 2008	867	347	172	360	1,746
Change	**-38**	**-130**	**-75**	**-18**	**-261**

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

TABLE 6 A Closer Look at Statewide Improvement in Four States

STATE	**Change** in the number of high schools with a promoting power of 60 percent or less **(Total number of schools remaining in 2008)**			
	Cities	Suburbs	Towns	Rural
Texas	-31 (103)	-26 (20)	-19 (17)	-1 (23)
Tennessee	-7 (21)	-5 (4)	-8 (3)	-4 (6)
Alabama	1 (11)	-11 (5)	-10 (4)	-6 (25)
Georgia	-5 (29)	-11 (33)	-23 (18)	3 (40)

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

Richmond High School: Civic Will, Capacity, and Collaboration to Turn Around a Dropout Factory

In 2005-06, Richmond High School (RHS) in Indiana (the single public high school in a large-town school district, one of five high schools in Wayne County, and the largest, with 1,500 students, 59 percent of whom were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch last year) graduated 20 percentage-points fewer students than the state average. The community had been concerned for years about improving educational outcomes for its students. After RHS was named a dropout factory, members of the community developed a heightened sense of urgency to improve the educational outcomes of its students. They got to work, harder and smarter, often building on efforts already underway but not yet well connected. New initiatives began as well at the county and school levels, and across sectors. Within Richmond Corporation Schools (RCS), a focus on building strong foundations in the early grades was enhanced by targeting attention to older students' developmental and academic needs, culminating in college- and career-readiness. Teachers made a commitment to learning how to better teach children from poverty.

The Progress

From 2006 to 2009:

- The number of high school diplomas awarded increased 25 percent, from 240 to 300, although the cohort size decreased.
- The school's graduation rate rose from 53 to 80 percent, surpassing the national graduation rate of 75 percent, but still two percentage-points lower than the state average of 81.5 percent.[9]
- The college-going rate of RHS graduates increased from 66 to 77 percent.
- Richmond High School in August 2010 received the Lugar Education Patriot Award awarded by Senator Lugar and the State Department of Education for leadership in improving the academic achievement and career preparation of Indiana students.

Coordinating Community Resources to Improve Student Achievement

- In 2004, the Wayne County Foundation in partnership with the Countywide Partnership for Youth spearheaded the creation of the Wayne County Master Youth Development Plan, which involved more than 30 other partners from government, education, school boards, community agencies, volunteer organizations, business groups, and the mental health and medical sectors.
- In 2006, a galvanizing education summit involving all the partners was held. Out of that summit new energy emerged for coordinating youth support and education.
- The Countywide Partnership for Youth garnered more than $8 million in competitive grants from federal and state sources, including a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant in 2008 that helped double the Communities in Schools presence in the district, enabling a full-time case manager at each elementary and middle school and three at the high school. The grant enabled enhanced training for Communities in Schools' coordinators, and better, more individualized coordination with schools, students, parents, and community resources.
- Ivy Technical Community College, Indiana University East, and Earlham College enhanced their partnership with the high school by facilitating the expansion of dual enrollment opportunities. By 2009-2010, they worked with the district to offer multiple pathways to graduation that enabled over-age and under-credited students to complete graduation credentials outside Richmond High School.

Enhancing Academic Success Before High School

- For the youngest children: Full-day kindergarten started in 2000. Pre-school programming was developed in 2004 and expanded into selected elementary schools in 2008.
- For elementary school students: Early grades literacy received renewed attention through a community-based Third Grade Reading Academy.
- For middle school students: The rocky transitions from small, sometimes isolated elementary schools to larger middle schools were curtailed with an engaging goal-setting initiative that involves tremendous volunteer participation (2008 on). For struggling students who with encouragement will set expectations and gain the skills to go to college, the district established an Early College Prep Academy —

9 In 2006, Indiana legislation that raises the legal dropout age from 16 to 18 went into effect. Students who choose homeschooling are not counted against the school in graduation rate calculations by the state, in contrast to students who drop out. Mobility rates and homeschooling rates have increased statewide since 2006, more pronouncedly in RCS than in many schools. If all homeschooled high school students in Richmond were treated as dropouts, it is estimated that the 2008-09 graduation rate would be 71 to 72 percent, still a significant gain of nearly 20 percentage-points, yet one that points to the ongoing challenge of convincing parents and students that a standards-based high school education focused on college- and career-readiness is a necessity in the 21st century.

requiring parental participation — for 90 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. All students remained enrolled the whole year.

Enhancing Academic Success at the High School

Work is ongoing to increase positive school climate, student support, academic challenge, intrinsic motivation through engagement, and interaction with colleges and careers. The greatest attention is paid to the transition year of 9th grade, but the other grade levels are involved as well.

- In 2005, Richmond High School adopted a trimester schedule with longer school periods, giving students more opportunities for credits during the regular school day and year, reducing transitions during the school day, and increasing the likelihood of establishing adult/student relationships.
- A 9th grade academy was established in 2006. School board members write a personal letter of welcome to each student, and entering 9th graders make a commitment to graduate four years later. Ninth grade math and language arts teachers have weekly time to plan together and address the needs of their students. A keystone course reinforcing high school-level academic and behavioral skills for 9th graders was designed and polished over several years.
- A mentoring effort for struggling students, primarily 9th graders, has engaged hundreds of trained mentors, drawn from the ranks of high school seniors and enthusiastic community members, now going full speed ahead for 2010-11.
- A capstone project for seniors is embedded in 12th grade English.
- Extracurricular opportunities appealing to diverse interests have been expanded since 2008, drawing many students in.
- An intensive credit recovery initiative is effective in getting students back on track.
- A small alternative school for students who choose a learning environment different from that of a large, bustling high school, and for those who must work, learn, and parent simultaneously, is deemed successful by its participants.

Meeting the Challenge

- Build on the Lugar award and expand community and school efforts to set high goals for high school completion and college and career preparation, supported by multiple options tailored to different student needs, especially for older students.
- Fine-tune the early warning data system and quickly provide data to teachers, administrators, and community partners, respecting confidentiality, to enable best targeting of services to struggling students.
- Effectively use the time set aside for teachers to work together collaboratively in all schools.
- Close the achievement gap between students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and their more privileged peers.
- Increase the percentage of Richmond High School students completing Indiana's highly rated Core 40 or Core 40 honors diploma requirements to greater than the state average.
- And most of all, celebrate, and then continue unflaggingly with the unification of educational and community innovation to support youth growth and an increase in the graduation rate to 90 percentage-points or more for all students by 2020.

Urban School Districts

Urban school districts were the most dynamic. Some districts made substantial progress, some stayed the same, and some got worse. There was both more improvement and decline than is indicated by the overall net change of 38 schools. In looking at urban districts, 22 states collectively saw a net decline of 127 schools meeting dropout factory criteria, 12 states saw no net change, and 17 states saw a collective net increase of 89 schools (see Appendix I). Among the 22 states that saw improvement, eight stand out: Texas (-31), New York (-14), Louisiana (-8), Illinois (-8), New Jersey (-7), Wisconsin (-7), Florida (-7), and Tennessee (-7) all saw a net decline of at least seven schools and collectively account for 95 of the 127 net decline.

To understand the urban story in more detail, we closely examined progress across the school districts that encompass the 100 largest cities. Collectively, these cities account for about 25 percent of the nation's estimated dropouts, and about 38 percent of the dropouts from dropout factory high schools. It is clear that dramatically improving high school outcomes across these cities is necessary to reach the nation's graduation rate goal.

Between 2002 and 2008, some districts improved substantially. In 25 of the city/urban districts, district-wide promoting power increased by 10 or more percentage-points, with Newark, New York City, Des Moines, Akron, Stockton, CA, and Tampa/Hillsborough all seeing gains of between 17 and 25 percentage-points, as well as declines in the number of weak promoting power high schools. Thus, within a quarter of the nation's largest cities, real improvement occurred between 2002 and 2008. Another 25 districts saw modest improvements of 5 to 9 percentage-point gains in district promoting power. These changes are counterbalanced by 23 districts that largely stayed the same and 23 others that saw a 3 or greater percentage-point decline in district promoting power. Fifty-two districts saw a decline in the percentage of students attending dropout factories.

The numbers reflect modest progress. Across all of the largest 100 city/urban districts, the number of dropout factories declined from 664 in 2002 to 629 in 2008, or only about a 5 percent improvement. The total number of students attending dropout factory high schools, however, declined at a faster rate, by about 135,000 students, for a 14 percent improvement. Finally, on average, district promoting power increased from 57 percent to 63 percent, a 6-percentage-point gain.

Table 7 provides a detailed look at progress in four of the nation's five largest city school districts — New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Las Vegas. These four mega-districts educate more than one-quarter of the students who attend school in the 100 largest city/urban districts and produce close to 10 percent of the nation's dropouts. As can be seen in Table 7, between 2002 and 2008 New York City has made large progress and Chicago saw substantial gains, while Los Angeles did not improve and Las Vegas regressed. The hope in this data is that if two of the nation's largest cities, which have often been viewed as impervious to improvement, can make substantial strides forward, then real progress in urban areas is possible. The challenge is that, to date, high-poverty urban districts, even after substantial improvement, have not been able to move beyond graduation rates in the 60th percentiles. For the nation as a whole to move forward, we must find ways to both advance the city school districts that have not made substantial progress and accelerate and then maintain the rate of progress in those that have.

Overall, available data on graduation rates and promoting power between 2002 and 2008 paint a complex picture. It is possible to point to states and communities that made substantial progress and those where little or no improvement can be seen. What is most illuminating is that progress occurred not only in locales where the challenge was less daunting — in the nation's suburbs and towns — but also in what have been seen as some of the most challenging environments. These include large cities (where the vast majority of students attended dropout factories) single high school districts with rising poverty, and some of the nation's historically poorest states. This broad spectrum progress clearly demonstrates we can address the dropout crisis and that more students will graduate when they are provided the supports they need. What the case studies illustrate, moreover, is that in areas where progress occurred it was not the result of a single strategy or magic bullet, but rather a weave of multiple reform efforts, sustained, integrated, and improved over time, typically involving multi-sector collaboration.

TABLE 7

Promoting Power in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Las Vegas – Class of 2002 vs. Class of 2008

2002	Number of High Schools	Number of High School Students	District Promoting Power Ratio	Number of High Schools with a Promoting Power Ratio of 60% or Less	Percentage of High School Students Attending a High School with a Promoting Power of 60% or Less	Percentage of Estimated Dropouts Attributed to High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60% or Less
New York City	136	238,039	41%	110	83%	93%
Los Angeles	57	182,869	43%	39	78%	84%
Chicago	62	86,029	51%	42	60%	76%
Las Vegas	24	43,952	62%	6	23%	38%
2008						
New York City	202	260,004	59%	97	54%	76%
Los Angeles	100	170,556	45%	47	83%	95%
Chicago	74	104,028	60%	34	41%	73%
Las Vegas	33	77,279	56%	18	55%	78%
CHANGE FROM 2002 TO 2008			Numbers shown below reflect percentage-points			
New York City	66	21,965	+18	-13	-28	-17
Los Angeles	43	-12,313	+1	+8	+5	+11
Chicago	12	17,999	+9	-8	-19	-3
Las Vegas	9	33,327	-5	+12	+32	+40

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

New York City: Innovating with School Models to Help All Students Graduate

From 2002 to 2008, New York City made significant increases in its high school graduation rate that outpace the majority of the nation's largest city districts. These gains also contribute substantially to New York State's 10-percentage-point gain in graduation rates during this period. Strong leadership, administrative reorganizing, mayoral control, an increased focus on accountability, new leaders and new teachers with development programs for both, and support from the teachers union have enabled the nation's largest school district to make progress. In particular, carefully designed and innovative school models and policies contribute to the city's overall success. The gradual development and redesign of innovative schools and programs has resulted in good gains for students from high-poverty backgrounds. The system of small schools and associated support, which replaced large, comprehensive neighborhood schools, appears to have been key to gains for students from high-poverty backgrounds.

The Progress

Between 2002 and 2008:

- The city's promoting power rose 18 percentage-points to 59 percent, for an average gain of 3 percentage-points per year.
- The state's graduation rate calculation shows a gain of 12.5 percentage-points for the 9th grade cohorts of 2001 to 2005 graduating in 4 years (46.5 to 59.0). For those graduating in five years, the gain was more than 10 percentage-points (55.7 to 66.1), and for those graduating in six years, the gain was 7 percentage-points (58.5 to 65.6).
- The net number of dropout factories declined from 110 to 97, a 12 percent decrease.
- The number of New York City students enrolled in dropout factories declined 29 percent, and the percentage of New York City students attending dropout factories decreased 33 percent as overall enrollment grew.
- The estimated percentage of dropouts produced by weak promoting power high schools declined 38 percent.
- The percentage of minority students attending New York City dropout factories — still dramatically higher than the percentage of White students attending such schools — also dropped substantially.

CHART 2 Percentage of Minority Students in New York City Dropout Factories

	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian / Pacific Islander	Native American
2001 - 2002	8%	68%	68%	49%	24%
2007 - 2008	4%	45%	46%	29%	31%

- The decrease in dropouts occurred even while the percentage of students in dropout factories who were eligible for federal free and reduced-price lunches climbed from 54 to 64 percent.

The Foundation for Education Success, Mid-1990s to 2002

In the early 1990s, the New York City Department of Education and its non-profit partners began to experiment with small, personalized high schools as an alternative to the large, neighborhood schools with high dropout rates. The first set of small schools, which included 34 elementary, middle, and high schools, was created in 1993 by a group now known as New Visions for Public Schools. These efforts paved the way for the New Century High Schools Initiative (NCHSI) launched in 2001. The first 14 schools sponsored by this initiative opened in 2002. By 2005, half of the new schools opened in the city were sponsored by this initiative.

The Education Reform Effort, 2002 to 2008[10]

During 2002 to 2008, high school reform efforts focused on closing large, neighborhood schools, which were no longer seen as effective educational options for students, and replacing them with smaller schools paired with community partners and external support organizations. Building on prior experience, refinements were made to the small school model to enable better student outcomes. These efforts were carried at a sufficient scale and fully integrated within the existing school system so that their collective impact would be great enough to move graduation rates forward citywide. Using data as a guide for decision making, policy and practice changes were implemented to identify and serve the 138,000 over-age and under-credited youth in the city, whose path to successful graduation required additional supports and design of new

10 For more information, see: Quint, J.C., Smith, J.K., Unterman, R., and A. E. Moedano (2010). New York City's Changing High School Landscape: High Schools and Their Characteristics, 2002-2008. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

schools or program initiatives. Actions were also taken to give all students equal access to information and incentives to participate in the emerging new system of high schools. The actions that were taken included:

- Beginning in 2002, gradually dismantling 23 large comprehensive neighborhood high schools with graduation rates of less than 45 percent, primarily located in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx. By 2008, only 52 percent of the New York City high school enrollment attended large high schools.
- Building on the earlier efforts, a system of more than 200 small public schools of choice was created, also primarily located in Brooklyn and the Bronx. These schools emphasize academic rigor, personalization, and community relationships, and are supported in their early years with outside resources, professional development for teachers and leaders, and some latitude in policy applications. The majority of schools are non-selective and theme-based; a small percent are transfer schools (see below).
- A differentiated recovery system was created to support the over-age and under-credited students, both dropouts and those at risk of dropout, who have varied educational needs. All of these options combine work and learning. The success of these options contributes to the increases in five- and six-year graduation rates. Options for students include:
  - 21 transfer schools, small schools for students who are far from graduation;
  - 20 Young Adult Borough Centers, for those who are close to graduation and need assistance in planning for postsecondary options; and
  - Access GED, GED programs with an innovative youth development and instructional approach.
- Implementation and support for a sophisticated choice and placement process for schools students want to attend, based on the student's interests and needs, preceded by information for students and parents. All 8th graders in New York City public schools must choose a set of schools that interest them. By the 2008-09 school year, the school system was able to give almost all rising 9th graders one of their first three choices out of 12.

The Results

The student outcomes are compelling:

- The New Century High Schools Initiative reports that 73 percent of the students in its schools graduate "on-time" compared with 63 percent in a citywide sample. On-time graduation rates for English language learners are 13 percentage-points higher and for special education students, 17 percentage-points higher.
- The external evaluation firm MDRC reports, after a carefully controlled and randomized study, that by the end of 9th grade, 10 percent more of the enrollees of small public schools of choice were on track to graduate in four years than in comparison schools; that these gains were sustained in the next two years; and that by the fourth year, students in these schools had graduation rates that were higher, by 6.8 percentage-points, than comparison populations.
- MDRC also reports that higher percentages of students of small public schools of choice accumulated more credits overall and more credits toward graduation each year than their counterparts in comparison schools, average attendance increased, and the percentage of students attending regularly increased. Five percentage-points more small public schools graduates passed the English Regents exam at the passing score of 75, sufficient for exemption from remedial courses at the City College of New York (there was not an effect for math).
- Students in the small public schools of choice were more than 80 percent low-income, more than 90 percent Hispanic or African American, with 25 percent over age for grade. The outcomes for students, including male youth, suggest that well-designed, non-academically selective schools that students choose help students start to overcome the association among poverty, race, and achievement that too often exists in neighborhood comprehensive schools.
- Transfer high school students graduate at an average rate of 59 percent, compared with 19 percent for similar populations in regular comprehensive high schools.

Meeting the Challenge

In order to continue its momentum and move its graduation rates beyond the 60th percentile, New York City will need to continue to develop new models for the challenges that remain. A clear remaining challenge is to find reform models and strategies that can re-engineer the remaining low graduation rate high schools. A recent court case, moreover, which complicates school closure may indicate that the close- and replace-strategy has reached its limit. Another challenge is to find ways to accelerate student achievement so that all students can meet the requirements of the college readiness-based Regents diploma. Recent analysis by The Schott Foundation has shown that currently less than 30 percent of African American males in New York City meet its requirements. Current efforts by the Mayor's office to spearhead a citywide campaign to combat chronic absenteeism, which is one of the primary drivers of both lower achievement and dropping out, hopefully points to a future of even more multi-sector collaboration to solve the city's remaining challenges.

Confronting the Epidemic

Over the past decade, America has started to understand the magnitude of its dropout challenge and its consequences for individuals, society, and the economy. By 2020, three-quarters of all jobs in America will be high-pay and high-skill with 123 million Americans needed to fill those jobs. However, at current high school and college graduation rates, only 50 million Americans are expected to qualify for them.[11] Jobs that do not require a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential are quickly disappearing, and Americans who hold them are not likely to enter or remain in the middle class. These Americans are less likely to have access to quality health care, save for retirement, or ensure their children have access to higher education.[12]

If the nation cut the dropout rate for minority students living in the nation's largest metropolitan areas in half, the nation's economy would experience increased earnings of $2.3 billion in an average year, an additional 17,450 jobs from the increased spending in their local economies, and increased tax revenues of $249.7 million. These are the savings for just one high school class.[13] Additionally, less than half of high school graduates are prepared for college-level work.[14] And half of all employers must provide workforce readiness programs to address the deficiencies in areas such as critical thinking and problem solving; basic skills in reading comprehension, writing, and math; and creativity, among their newly hired workers.[15]

As these challenges and consequences have become clearer, the nation has begun actively addressing them. The Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse has come forward with key recommendations to reduce dropouts: utilizing data systems to obtain an accurate picture of students who dropout and those at risk of doing so; assigning adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out; providing academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance; implementing programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills; personalizing the learning environment and instructional process; and providing rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide them with the skills they need for postsecondary success.[16] Educators, community leaders, policymakers, and others have been active at the school, state, and national levels to ensure that dropout prevention and recovery is a comprehensive strategy. Below we provide an update on important progress that has been made in recent years and challenges that remain to confront the dropout crisis.

11 Gordon, E. (2009). The Global Talent Crisis. The Futurist 43(4): 34-39

12 Lumina Foundation for Education (2009). A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education: How and Why Americans Must Meet a "Big Goal" for College Attainment. Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation.

13 Alliance for Excellent Education (2010). The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate Among Students of Color in the Nation's Forty-Five Largest Metropolitan Areas. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

14 According to Greene, J. and Winters, M. (2005), only half of high school graduates are prepared for postsecondary education. Similarly, a study by ACT of high school juniors and seniors taking the ACT college entrance exam confirmed that only half of the students were ready for college-level reading assignments in core subjects like math, history, science, and English. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 42 percent of community college freshmen and 20 percent of freshmen in four-year institutions enroll in at least one remedial course. For more information about the cost to states of remedial college education, see: Alliance for Excellent Education (2006). Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

15 Corporate Voices for Working Families (2009). The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training. Washington, D.C.: Corporate Voices for Working Families.

16 Institute of Education Sciences. (2008). Practice Guide, What Works Clearinghouse: Dropout Prevention, 2008. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Accurate Data and Increased Accountability

Accurate Calculation of and Accountability for High School Graduation Rates

Five years ago, the public did not understand the severity of the nation's dropout crisis. Multiple methods for calculating graduation and dropout rates masked the magnitude of the problem and stood as a primary barrier to action. Research even showed confusion among teachers and administrators about the severity of the high school dropout problem nationally and in their own schools.[17] The federal government did not require states to establish graduation rate goals or to set corresponding, meaningful annual growth targets. States were also not required to report the graduation rate for subgroups of students. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education conducted an assessment of graduation rates as part of an analysis of the implementation of No Child Left Behind — which ushered in a new era of accountability and transparency — and found that there was an average of a 9-percentage-point gap between the rate that states reported and the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate. In some cases, there was a nearly 30-percentage-point gap.[18]

In 2005, all 50 of the nation's governors agreed to calculate a common graduation rate and to build the longitudinal data systems that would enable them to accurately collect this information and monitor progress over time. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education, after tightening the rules for moving students between cohorts, adopted this calculation for all schools across the nation.[19] By the end of 2010, 33 states will be using the standard four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that reflects the number of students who receive a diploma four years after they begin high school.[20] The federal government will require states to use this calculation for the 2010-2011 school year. They will be held accountable for their progress based on this calculation for the 2011-2012 school year. Individual states, such as Virginia, have added graduation rates to their state accreditation.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education now requires the states to set long-term goals for graduation rates and annual growth targets that demonstrate continuous and substantial improvement from the prior year in order to achieve adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind law. By the summer of 2010, 46 states had their goals and targets approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education (see Appendix III). For many states, this represented a significant step forward. Previously, more than half of states accepted any improvement in their high school graduation rate — even as low as 0.1 percent — to qualify for adequate yearly progress. In several states, a school could graduate less than half of its students year after year and still make adequate yearly progress by graduating one additional student than the previous year.[21] States now are also required to report graduation rate data for different subgroups of students, such as minorities and low-income students, in addition to an overall graduation rate.[22]

More Robust Data Systems

The Common Core of Data has been the Department's primary database for public elementary and secondary education. However, there were certain populations that were not counted. Since 2008, the U.S. Department of Education has augmented the Common Core of Data with data from the annual American Community Survey. The survey collects information about a broader swath of the population, including all civilians, both non-institutionalized and institutionalized persons, incarcerated persons, and active duty military members, thus creating a more complete picture of who is in school and who is not.

In 2009, in order to receive stimulus funding, all of the governors and chief state school officers pledged to build statewide longitudinal data systems that not only report graduation rates, but also follow individual students from early childhood through high school, postsecondary education, and into the workforce.[23] Many states already have robust systems underway. States not only have the ability to calculate how many of their students graduate from high school, but many can also tell us which groups of students, including minorities,

17 See: Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Balfanz, R. (2009). On the Front Lines of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For the AT&T Foundation and the America's Promise Alliance.

18 See: Stullich, S., Eisner, E., McCrary, J., & C. Roney (2006). National Assessment of Title I Interim Report, Volume I: Implementation of Title I. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education.

19 For more information, see: www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/uniform-grad-rate.pdf.

20 Curran, B. & R. Reyna (2009). Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2009. Washington, D.C.: NGA Center for Best Practices.

21 See: Department of Education (2008). Title I—Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; Proposed Rule. Federal Register 73(39).

22 The No Child Left Behind law did not originally establish a final graduation rate goal or set corresponding, meaningful annual growth targets for the states. Additionally, although the U.S. Department of Education required states to provide test scores broken down by subgroups, they only required an overall graduation rate before the 2008 revision to the measuring and accountability measures.

23 Carson, R., Laird, E., Gaines, E., & Ferber, T. (2010). Linking Data across Agencies: States That Are Making It Work. Washington, D.C.: Data Quality Campaign.

disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities, are falling behind. The Data Quality Campaign, which was launched in 2005, advocates for better collection, availability, and use of data and has accelerated state progress in building robust longitudinal data systems. As of the 2009-2010 school year, 47 states had the state systems needed to track individual students and more accurately calculate the high school graduation rate using the Compact Rate (compared with 14 in 2005); 37 states had the ability to track college-readiness test scores (compared to 7 in 2005); 31 states had the ability to match student records between P-12 and postsecondary systems (compared to 12 in 2005); 24 states matched teachers to students to determine effectiveness (compared to 13 in 2005); and 23 states had student-level course completion and transcript information (compared to 7 in 2005).[24] A growing number of states, like Florida, are using this information to make decisions on matters such as tuition, curriculum, and changes that should be made in their teachers' colleges to improve student outcomes.

In 2009, an additional $245 million was allocated for the Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program. (Since the grant program began in 2006, 41 states and Washington, D.C., have received at least one grant.) This year, all 50 states applied for the grants and 20 were awarded grants to help states, districts, schools, and teachers make data-driven decisions to improve student learning, close achievement gaps, and link up data systems that follow students from childhood to the workforce. Virginia, which won the biggest grant this year, is using the $17.5 million it received to provide teachers with information about their incoming students so that they can cater their lesson plans to students' strengths and weaknesses, electronically send transcripts between high schools and universities, and enable the state to identify characteristics of students that succeed in college and the workforce to allow the state to make better decisions for its students.

Progress is uneven among the states, however, and there remains an important gap between data collection and practitioners. Only 10 states create progress reports with individual student data that provide information educators, parents, and students can use to improve student performance. As of the 2009-2010 school year, none of the states had implemented policies to ensure educators know how to access, analyze, and use data appropriately.[25]

24 Data Quality Campaign, 2009-2010 survey.

25 Ibid.

Earlier this year, Tennessee passed legislation to ensure that educators have access to student achievement data and have the training to use this data effectively at the school level. Additionally, while more states have the ability to do so, K-12 data systems are not generally being tethered to early childhood, postsecondary education, workforce, social services, and other critical state agency data systems.[26] Only eight states, including Washington State, are currently doing this.

Early Warning and Intervention Systems

Dropping out of high school is a process of gradual disengagement.[27] Research has shown that students who eventually drop out of high school exhibit strong predictive warning signs of dropping out, such as infrequent attendance, behavior infractions, and course failure. These warning signs — the ABCs of dropout — more accurately predict whether a student will drop out of high school than do socioeconomic factors and can be used to predict high school graduation as early as the start of middle school.[28] While there is no official measurement of how many communities have developed early warning systems,[29] there has been much movement among state, district, and school officials to harness the predictive power of data to construct early warning and intervention systems to efficiently target students who are at risk of dropping out and better support them on the road to graduation.[30] Individual schools and districts have been examining other data to discern additional warning indicators that are unique to their districts.[31] There has been increasing interest in developing and using indicators that measure a student's preparedness for college.[32] Most importantly, these systems are being paired with school and community resources to provide interventions students need to keep them on a path to graduation.

26 Ibid.

27 Janosz, M., Archambault, I., Morizot, J. & L.S. Pagani (2008). School Engagement Trajectories and Their Differential Predictive Relations to Dropout. Journal of Social Issues, 64(1): 21–40.

28 Balfanz, R. Herzog, L. and D. J. Mac Iver (2007). Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions. Educational Psychologist 42(4): 223-235.

29 The Data Quality Campaign will be collecting information from the states about early warning systems in its survey this year.

30 Gleason, P. & M. Dynarski (2002). Do We Know Whom to Serve? Issues in Using Risk Factors to Identify Dropouts. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk 7(1): 25-41.

31 Also see: Balfanz, R. Herzog, L. and D. J. Mac Iver (2007).

32 Pinkus, L. (2008). Using Early-Warning Data to Improve Graduation Rates: Closing Cracks in the Education System. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

As the states undergo the process of building statewide longitudinal data systems, many are considering using that information to provide early warning information to local districts and schools. Louisiana, South Carolina, and Alabama are three states experiencing success at implementing statewide early warning systems. In 2007, the Louisiana Department of Education adopted the system of a local educator and provided it to Louisiana school districts. The system uses warning indicators based on historical data for dropouts in four areas: attendance, course achievement, behavior, and age. Local educators receive information about at-risk students twice a month.[33] South Carolina began working on building a statewide early warning system that went into effect in 2009 as part of its long-term implementation of the Education and Economic Development Act. The system was tested in 22 districts that year and is scheduled to go statewide this year. During the 2010-11 school year, Alabama is planning on launching a pre-K to 12 early warning system. Other states, like Massachusetts, have issued strategic plans to implement early warning and intervention systems to target at-risk youth and connect them with resources that will follow them throughout their education.[34]

Several local districts throughout the country have implemented their own early warning and intervention systems. Chicago Public Schools has an early warning system used to identify incoming 9th graders who are at risk for dropping out, in addition to students who fall off track to graduation in the 9th grade. Several middle schools in Philadelphia use an early warning system to identify and intervene in the lives of off-track students. In Minneapolis, educators have daily access to a "hot list" that tracks student attendance, behavior, grade point average, and state test data, among other indicators. Additionally, Diplomas Now, a school turnaround model, works with 10 school districts including Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and San Antonio on building and enhancing early warning indicators and deploying the resources of City Year, a national service organization dedicated to reducing high school dropout, Communities in Schools, a youth serving organization that provides high-needs students with community supports to complete their educations, and Talent Development, which reforms curriculum, instruction, school climate, and school leadership, to ensure that students get all of the supports they need to graduate from high school.[35] Early results in multiple sites show significant reductions in absences and behavior problems and increases in student academic achievement in reading and math.

As the number of early warning and intervention systems grow, along with the number of states, districts, and schools trying to build them, a number of important issues arise, including duplication of efforts at additional costs, misalignment of systems, and long-term maintenance of the systems. Civic Enterprises in partnership with the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University will release a report to the nation on early warning and intervention systems in summer 2011. This nationwide study is currently underway to evaluate, among other things, the quality and operation of many different systems, the costs and benefits of each, and their scalability.

33 Ibid.

34 See: Public Consulting Group (2009). Massachusetts Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet Statewide Integrated Data Sharing System: Strategic Plan. Boston: Public Consulting Group.

35 Diplomas Now received a $30 million i3 award in August to rigorously validate its model and increase its scale.

Setting Clear and High Academic and Graduation Standards

Increasing Compulsory School Age Requirements

In our previous research, students identified "too much freedom" as a key factor that enabled them to drop out of high school, and poor attendance is a strong predictor of dropping out.[36] Most states originally enacted compulsory school attendance laws between 1870 and 1910, a time when fewer than 10 percent of 17-year-olds graduated from high school, due in large part to the fact that a high school education was not a prerequisite to participating in the mainstream workforce.[37] Over the last year, extensive research has been conducted at the state level that highlights the growing gap between the areas where states are experiencing job growth and the educational levels of their populations.[38] Students required to attend high school for an additional year experience a 12 percent increase in earnings. These students are also less likely to report being unemployed, having health problems, being depressed, and working in lower-skilled jobs. They are also more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with their lives overall.[39] Many states have responded to these issues by raising the compulsory school age to send the message to students that graduating from high school is absolutely essential.

Since 2002, 12 states have raised the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 or 18.[40] Currently, 21 states have a compulsory school age of 18 and 32 states have a compulsory school age of 17 or 18.[41] In some states that have a compulsory school attendance age of 17, like Tennessee and West Virginia, students must remain in school until they are 18 to keep their driver's license.

A 1991 MIT and Harvard study shows that raising the compulsory school age acts as a constraint on dropping out.[42] Of the 6 states that increased the compulsory school age between 2002 and 2008, two states (Illinois and South Dakota) experienced increases in their graduation rates. Only Nevada experienced a decline.

Despite broad movement on raising the compulsory school age, this movement has not been uniformly embraced within the states. Over the last year alone, 13 states have introduced legislation to raise their compulsory school age to 17 or 18 that has stalled or died in committee.[43] Among the states that were unsuccessful in raising the compulsory school age, opposition from home school educators, parents, students, local businesses, and advocacy groups; an inability to determine if an increase in graduation and attendance rates or decrease in dropout rates can be attributed to increasing the compulsory school age; and the fiscal estimate were cited as critical barriers.[44] In some states where officials cited raising the compulsory school age law as a key tool to set clear expectations at the state level and to drive anti-truancy efforts locally, they also indicated that they feared in some cases parents were home schooling their children to get around the compulsory school age and to enable them to enter the workforce full time at an earlier age.

Combating Chronic Absenteeism

In the past few years, there has been growing awareness that communities with low graduation rates often have very high rates of chronic absenteeism from the early elementary grades forward. Recently, a number of communities have begun to organize to establish the norm that every student should be in school every day. Both Baltimore and New York City have launched joint efforts involving the school system and city agencies to create multi-pronged efforts to provide the range of supports needed to get more students to attend school on a regular basis. In addition, a new national effort called Attendance Counts has launched a website to spread best practices.[45] The federal government and most states and districts, however, do not track or report chronic absenteeism (commonly defined as missing a month or more of school) at the school or district level, instead focusing on aggregate attendance that can often mask serious chronic absenteeism challenges.

36 Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J.J., & K. B. Morison (2006). The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

37 U.S. Bureau of the Census (2002). Mini-historical statistics: Education summary — enrollment. Accessed at: www.census.gov/statab/hist/HS-20.pdf.

38 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2009). Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

39 Oreopoulos, P. (2003) Do Dropouts Dropout Too Soon? International Evidence From Changes in School-Leaving Laws. National Bureau of Education Research Working Paper No. 10155.

40 One state, Minnesota, has lowered its compulsory school age from 18 to 16. Data compiled by the Education Commission of the States.

41 Ibid.

42 Angrist, J.D. & A.B. Krueger (1991). Does Compulsory School Attendance Affect Schooling and Earnings? The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 106(4): 979-1014.

43 Home School Legal Defense Association statistics.

44 See: Maryland State Department of Education (2007). Attending to Learn: The Implications of Raising the Compulsory Age for School Attendance. Final report of the Task Force to Study Raising the Compulsory Public School Attendance Age to 18. Submitted to the Maryland General Assembly and Governor.

45 www.attendancecounts.org

College- and Career-Readiness Standards

Two years ago, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers began developing standards for English language arts and math in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts to provide a common framework to prepare American children for college and the workforce. With the exception of Texas and Alaska, 48 states participated in the writing of the standards. Research shows that the skills necessary for success in college and the workforce are essentially the same.[46] This effort was initiated to replace the variety of academic standards that vary significantly from state to state, are often misaligned with postsecondary expectations within their own borders, and are sometimes significantly lower than national standards.[47]

The Common Core State Standards, which were released earlier this year, will standardize current state benchmarks, making it possible to compare student achievement from state to state, and standardize learning expectations across the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. An analysis by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has found that the standards are stronger than the English standards in 37 states and the math standards in 39 states.[48] Thus far, 38 states have already adopted the standards, including Massachusetts, which is regarded as having some of the best state standards in the country. Three additional states have provisionally adopted the standards. Texas formally opted out of the initiative in January 2010. Leaders from other states, including Virginia, California, and Minnesota, have said they worry that the standards would dilute existing state frameworks and have not adopted the standards. Since the final recommendations were released in June, they have garnered support from governors, state and local school boards, university professors, and prominent national organizations and institutions, such as the U.S. Department of Education, the United States Army, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Business Roundtable. Fifty-five members of the Council of The Great City Schools have urged adoption of the standards. In addition to common core standards, accountability for performance to meet these standards will need to be put in place to ensure that the promise of the Common Core State Standards is actually fulfilled. States must also consider how to support teachers to effectively teach students the new standards and work with those students who will need extra supports. States must also work to ensure that a well-rounded curriculum accompanies the standards.

46 American Diploma Project (2004). Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts. Achieive, Inc, The Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

47 For more information on the misalignment of secondary and postsecondary standards, see: American Diploma Project (2004).

48 Carmichael, S.B., Martino, G., Proter-Magee, K. & W.S. Wilson (2010). The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. For more analyses of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, see Achieve, Inc's Common Core State Standards Comparison Briefs, Accessed at: www.achieve.org/achievingcommoncore_comparison-briefs.

Enhancing Adult Supports Inside and Outside the Classroom

Teacher Training and Effectiveness

Research shows that a knowledgeable and engaging teacher is the single greatest advantage a student can have to raise their academic potential.[49] Researchers have consistently found that an underlying cause of our nation's dropout crisis lies with under-qualified and ineffective teachers in classrooms. Studies also highlight that highly effective teachers are unevenly distributed across school districts, with low-income and minority schools receiving the fewest of these teachers.[50] The importance of having high-quality teachers has been empirically proven in research studies over the last few years, and helped place teacher effectiveness at the center of high school research and reform efforts. [51]

Research has highlighted the perspective of teachers on the dropout crisis and the barriers they face in the classroom. Our nationally representative survey of public high school teachers showed that while there is confusion over graduation rates nationally and in their schools, teachers recognized the complexity of the dropout problem and demonstrated strong support for reforms to increase high school graduation rates, such as alternative learning environments, reducing class size, putting in place early warning systems to identify students early who need extra supports, connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences, and increasing the school's parental outreach programs.[52] However, teachers also cited daunting challenges in the classroom: students with significant variation in preparation coming into their grades and classes; feeling alone in their efforts to be teachers; being asked to take on the additional roles of parents and social workers; and the need for more supports at all levels.[53]

Research is also illuminating what qualifications, training, and professional development help create and retain effective teachers in the face of these barriers. Research has shown that high school teachers with demonstrated knowledge of their subject are more likely to produce stronger student achievement results, especially in mathematics and science.[54] During the past decade, a deeper knowledge base has emerged on the components of effective professional development, including peer coaching and the formation of professional learning communities, as well as the power of teacher teams. Induction programs that combine mentoring, professional development and support, and formal assessment for teachers in their first two years improve teacher effectiveness and reduce turnover rates.[55] Promising comprehensive induction models include the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Educational Testing Service's Pathwise® Framework Induction Program. While there remains a gap between the number of states that require some form of mentoring program for beginning teachers and the number that finance these programs, some states are developing comprehensive induction programs.[56] For example, the University of Alaska and the Alaska Department of Education initiated a statewide teacher mentoring program in 2003 that has shown effectiveness in teacher retention and student achievement.[57] Similarly, Michigan has required three years of mentoring for its teachers since the 1990s.

Teachers themselves have also cited supportive school leadership as absolutely essential to their retention.[58] Research shows that teachers thrive in environments in which leaders establish the conditions for teachers to have frequent interactions with peers and instructional coaches over content and pedagogy. Teachers are also more likely to

49 Berry, B. (2004). Recruiting and Retaining "Highly Qualified Teachers" for Hard-to-Staff Schools. NASSP Bulletin 88: 5-27.

50 Overall, only about 15 percent of expert teachers who have proven they can produce above-average gains in student achievement teach in high-poverty, underachieving schools. See: Amrein-Beardsley, A. (2007). Recruiting Expert Teachers Into Hard-To-Staff Schools. The Education Digest, 73(4): 40-44.

51 Aaronson, D., Barrow, L. & W. Sander (2007). Teachers and Student Achievement in the Chicago Public High Schools, Journal of Labor Economics, 25(1). Also see: Gordon, R., Kane, T.J., & D.O. Staigler (2006). Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

52 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J. & Balfanz, R. (2009).

53 Ibid.

54 Goldhaber, D. & D. Brewer (2000). Does Teacher Certification Matter? High School Teacher Certification Status and Student Achievement. Educational Evaluation and Student Achievement, 22(3): 129-145. See also: Monk, D.H. (1994). Subject Area Preparation of Secondary Mathematics and Science Teaches and Student Achievement. Economics of Education Review, 13, 125-145.

55 Alliance for Excellent Education (2004). Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education. See also: Villar, A. (2004). Measuring the Benefits and Costs of Mentor-Based Induction: A Value-Added Assessment of New Teacher Effectiveness Linked to Student Achievement. Paper prepared for the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference.

56 Recent studies have found that 30 or more states have some form of required mentoring programs for beginning teachers, but only 16 states finance these programs. Only 5 states provide the program for a minimum of two or more years. Overall, only 1 percent of teachers receive comprehensive induction. See: American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2006). Teacher Induction Programs: Trends and Opportunities. Policy Matters, 3(10).

57 Adams, B. (2008). Alaska Statewide Mentor Project: Research Summary 2004-2008. Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the University of Alaska.

58 Scholastic (2010). Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools. A Project of Scholastic for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. See also: Johnson, S. M. et al. (2004). The Support Gap: New Teachers' Early Experiences in High-Income and Low-Income Schools. Article prepared for the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego: CA.

thrive and remain in a school where they can serve alongside administrators as leaders in making school decisions.[59] Many recent studies have shown that merit pay can be a beneficial factor in reducing teacher attrition and increasing student achievement.[60] Research has found that support for merit pay is greater among new teachers, teachers in charter schools, and teachers in low-income communities.[61]

Private foundations and the federal government have placed an emphasis on funding research that will illuminate the connection between teacher training and incentives and performance in the classroom, as well as innovative practices that show early promise. States are also working on linking student achievement to teachers as part of their efforts to create statewide longitudinal data systems. In hopes of securing part of the $4.35 billion Race to the Top funding, several states have approved bills to include student performance on standardized tests in teacher evaluations.[62] The federal government has also placed an emphasis on discerning ways to evenly distribute effective teachers within districts. At the local level, collaboration between teachers unions and districts has resulted in contracts that reward effective teachers. Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, the two largest teachers unions, have been at the forefront of national efforts to combat the dropout crisis.

New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests

The leading reason dropouts cited for their decision to leave school is that school was boring and they could not see the connection between classroom learning and their own lives and career dreams.[63] They wanted more challenging, engaging classes. Many dropouts also cited real-world events, like needing to get a job and make money, becoming a parent, or having to care for family members, that caused them to leave school.[64] In other research, teachers emphasized that the objective of high school is to prepare students for careers in the 21st century, and they highlight the importance of innovating to reach today's student.[65] It was clear that for many dropouts, the traditional high school experience was not working for them or preparing them for postsecondary success.

Since *The Silent Epidemic* was released, there has been significant action among social entrepreneurs, youth serving organizations, national organizations, and businesses to supplement the traditional high school experience and show clear pathways to college and the workforce. There have been a myriad of programmatic responses that have proliferated to make curriculum more engaging and relevant for postsecondary pathways.[66] Some states are exploring ways to connect rigorous academic preparation with real-world experience in fields such as engineering, arts and media, and biomedical and health sciences.[67] Many of these programs have specifically focused on working with low-income and minority students and have emphasized the importance of individualized student plans. Some of them have a significant impact on increasing the chances of a student graduating from

59 Learning from Leadership Project (2010). Investing the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto for the Wallace Foundation.

60 Some studies have found that a significant teacher salary increase leads to better student achievement and decreased teacher attrition rates. See: Amrein-Beardsley, A. (2007); Clotfelter, C., Glennie, E., Ladd, H. & J. Vigdor (2007). Would Higher Teacher Salaries Keep Teachers in High-Poverty Schools? Evidence from a Policy Intervention in North Carolina. Sanford Institute of Public Policy, Duke University; Bond, C.K. (2001) Do Teacher Salaries Matter? The Effects of Teacher Salaries on Teacher Recruitment, Teacher Retention and Student Outcomes. Dissertation Abstracts International, A: The Humanities and Social Sciences, 62(2); Hanushek, E., Kain, J. & S. Rivkin (2004). Why Public Schools Lose Teachers. Journal of Human Resources, 39(2): 326-354. Other studies have found that financial incentives do not substantially increase teacher performance and retention: Piercynski, M., Matranga, M. & G. Pettier (1997). Legislative Appropriation for Minority Teacher Recruitment: Did It Really Matter? Clearing House, 70(4):205-206; Figlio, D. & L. Kenny (2004). Individual Teacher Incentives and Student Performance. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. W12627.

61 Scholastic (2010).

62 In Delaware, one of the two states to secure funding in the first round of Race to the Top grants, teachers will not receive a designation of "effective" if they do not meet targets connected to test-score improvement. In Tennessee, the other state to win a first-round grant, student test scores will account for 50 percent of teacher evaluations. Additionally, states that adopted the college- and career-readiness standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers received additional points on their applications. In all, 17 states have proposed reforms to their teacher evaluation systems by including student achievement, among other criteria.

63 Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J.J., & K. B. Morison (2006). The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

64 Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J.J. & K. B. Morison (2006).

65 Scholastic (2010).

66 For an example of these programs, see: RoadTrip Nation (roadtripnation.com). Launched in 2008, the organization utilizes an innovative curriculum to assist students in discovering their career goals and taking the steps necessary to achieve those goals. The program is set to reach 100,000 students this academic year and has gained support from organizations like The College Board and the U.S. Department of Education.

67 See: Alliance for Excellent Education (2010). The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

high school and going on to college.[68]

National organizations and foundations have led the way in creating different school models for low-income and minority students who may not have access to a quality education in their neighborhood. Among the most popular of these school models have been charter schools, publically financed schools that are independently run and free to experiment in classrooms. Over the last decade, the number of students who are enrolled in charter schools has tripled to 1.3 million students.[69] In 72 cities, charter schools enroll 10 percent of public school students.[70] This year, 14 states amended laws to ease restrictions on charter schools in hopes of securing Race to the Top funding. While these schools serve a disproportionate number of minorities and low-income students (more than half of their students are African American or Hispanic and more than a third qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch), their academic results have been decidedly mixed.[71] Although 17 percent of these schools provide a superior education to traditional public schools, half of them offer an education that is comparable, and more than a third of them provide an education that is significantly worse than the local public school.[72] Beyond charter schools, Rhode Island has sponsored replication of the innovative MET School with state funds and support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. North Carolina has concentrated on the North Carolina New Schools Project, an effort carried out in collaboration with the Governor's Education Cabinet, which features several small school models, often with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math, with innovative curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

A growing number of successful schools are targeting students who are struggling academically, sometimes from as early as middle school, and putting them on a rigorous pathway to a college education.[73] There are currently 208 of these "early college high schools" in 24 states and Washington, D.C. that serve 47,000 students.[74] Early college high schools are collaborations between the school and a local postsecondary institution that develop an integrated academic program that enables all students to earn a high school diploma and one to two years of transferable college credit simultaneously. The schools boast a 92 percent high school graduation rate. In 2008, 89 percent of all early college graduates went on to pursue some form of postsecondary education that fall, compared with 66 percent of students nationally.[75] North Carolina is a national leader in implementing successful early college high schools.

Graduation Pathways and Dropout Recovery

Dropout prevention and recovery programs that emphasize multiple pathways to graduation for students have also become a matter of national importance. Over the last decade, 31 states have expanded alternative education possibilities for students who are at-risk for dropping out, including students who have a large number of absences or who are significantly over age for their grade level.[76] Last spring, the National Education Association, National Urban League, Illinois State Council on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School, Chicago Urban League, Alternative Schools Network, and the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services jointly proposed a federal grant program — called the Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education (HOPE USA) grant plan — that would incentivize states to support programs that re-enroll 480,000 high school dropouts each year into comprehensive programs to assist them in earning a high school diploma. As this proposal is implemented in

68 For example, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a college-readiness system designed to increase the number of students who enroll in four-year colleges. Of the nearly 19,000 students who participated in the 2008-2009 school year, 76 percent were accepted to a four-year college. Also, Big Picture Learning (www.bigpicture.org/schools), a national program that is based on the principles that learning must be individualized, curriculum must be related to the real world, and students should be measured by the quality of their work, has a 92 percent high school graduation rate. Of those who graduate, 95 percent are accepted into college.

69 Aud, S., Hussar, W., Planty, M., Snyder, T., Bianco, K., Fox, M., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., Drake, L. (2010). The Condition of Education 2010 (NCES 2010-028). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

70 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools statistics.

71 Aud, S., Hussar, W., Planty, M., Snyder, T., Bianco, K., Fox, M., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., Drake, L. (2010).

72 See: Center for Research on Education Outcomes (2009). Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States. Stanford: Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University.

73 Research suggests that high school students in the lowest quartile of performance post higher test score gains when placed in more rigorous courses, and that with proper supports low-achieving students are as likely to pass challenging, rigorous classes as they are less challenging remedial courses in which they are typically placed. See: Barth, P. & K. Haycock (2004). A Core Curriculum for all Students. In Richard Kazis et al, Double the Numbers: Increasing Postsecondary Credentials for Underrepresented Youth. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

74 Data compiled by Jobs for the Future.

75 Nodine, T. (2009). Innovations in College Readiness: How Early College High Schools are Preparing Students Underrepresented in Higher Education for College Success. Boston: Jobs for the Future.

76 Almeida, C., Le, C., Steinberg, A. & R. Cervantes (2010). Reinventing Alternative Education: An Assessment of Current State Policy and How to Improve It. Boston: Jobs for the Future.

Illinois and gains traction on the national level, many of the co-sponsors of the proposal and other national organizations are spearheading initiatives to work with this population. The U.S. Department of Labor's Job Corps provides work training and education in the form of a high school diploma or GED to young adults ages 16-24 while allowing them to explore career paths. Three-quarters of participants are high school dropouts. Nearly 90 percent of participants graduate with a job placement, full-time education, or military engagement.[77] YouthBuild USA engages young adults ages 16-24, most of whom have dropped out of high school, in programs that allow them to earn a GED and gain work experience by building houses. The building sites aim to provide a strong community, individualized support, and real world experience connected to academics. More than half of participating students receive their GED or high school diploma. Nearly 70 percent of the participants who complete the program are placed in jobs or further education.[78] Jobs for the Future is working with YouthBuild USA and the National Youth Employment Coalition to strengthen their programs that enable students to earn a GED, gain work experience, and prepare them for entry, persistence, and completion in postsecondary programs.[79] The federal government has allocated $50 million — 10 times more than the usual amount — to the High School Graduation Initiative, which provides grants for dropout prevention and re-entry programs in high schools with dropout rates higher than their state average. (This initiative received no funding for fiscal years 2007-2009.) These funds are also set aside for middle schools that feed into these persistently underperforming high schools to bring to scale the programs and practices that have had success in keeping students on the path to graduation and in re-enrolling and graduating dropouts often by combining education with workforce training, service opportunities, and postsecondary education. This fall, 29 states and districts were awarded grants through this initiative.

Turning around the 2,000 (now 1,746) dropout factories has remained a priority of the federal government. Lowering dropout rates at a school takes a comprehensive strategy that addresses the academic, social, and personal needs of students; the teaching style and quality of instructors; and the utilization of family and community supports.[80] Of the schools that have had success in raising student achievement after implementing a turnaround model, they undergo systemic change that results in: effective school leadership; high-quality and effective teachers; rigorous, standards-based curriculum and formative assessment to understand student learning and guide instruction; targeted, ongoing professional development to ensure instructional quality and the sharing of best practices; safe school environments and supportive climates of mutual trust; and an alignment of their fiscal and human resources to support student achievement. They also have widespread buy-in for whatever the turnaround model is.[81] The federal government has allocated more than $3.5 billion for School Improvement Grants, an unprecedented amount, to aid underperforming high schools, in addition to elementary and middle schools, in their turnaround efforts. More than half of these funds are going to secondary schools for school turnaround. The U.S. Department of Education has also set aside $650 million to invest in innovative programs that are proven to improve student achievement and growth, close achievement gaps, increase high school graduation rates, or increase college enrollment and completion rates. Among the highest-rated applicants released in August were Talent Development Secondary, Diplomas Now, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools, all of which aim to bring innovative ideas for turning around low graduation rate high schools to scale. One of the greatest areas for concern is the uneven capacity to support transforming low graduation rate high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools that exist at the state, district, and school levels.

77 Shochet, P., Burghardt, J., & S. McConnell (2008) Does Job Corps Work? Impact Findings from the National Job Corps Study. American Economic Review, 98(5): 1864-1886.

78 Hahn, A., Leavitt, T.D., Horvat, E.M., & J.E. Davis (2004) Life After YouthBuild: 900 YouthBuild Graduates Reflect on Their Lives, Dreams, and Experiences. Brandeis University Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Center for Youth and Communities and Temple University College of Education for YouthBuild USA.

79 For example, see Jobs for the Future's GED to College initiative, accessed at: www.jff.org/projects/current/education/ged-college/841.

80 Institute of Education Sciences (2008).

81 WestED School Turnaround Center. (2010) School Transformation and Turnaround: The WestED Approach. Accessed at: www.wested.org/schoolturnaroundcenter/docs/school-turnaround-center.pdf

Parent Engagement

Research has shown that students with involved parents, regardless of their family income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level classes, attend school and pass their classes, develop better social skills, graduate from high school, attend college, and find productive work. The opposite is true for students whose parents are less engaged.[82] When we spoke to dropouts, they told us that they felt more parental involvement would have been helpful in keeping them on track to graduate.[83] When we spoke to parents, we found that regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or school their children attend, parents share common beliefs about the importance of education and that parents with less education, lower incomes, and children in low-performing schools were the most likely to see a rigorous education, and their own involvement, as critical to their child's success.[84] Despite these shared views, we found that teachers, administrators, and parents often talk past one another when it comes to parental engagement. We found that there was a dramatic difference in how well parents felt that schools were engaging them to support their student's education, with low-income parents feeling that schools were not doing enough.[85] Similarly, large majorities of teachers felt a lack of parental engagement was a key factor in cases of dropout.[86] In focus groups that brought these constituencies together, both parents and teachers were frustrated with a lack of strategies to effectively engage parents.[87]

Finding effective ways to engage the 25 million parents (or other family members who are raising children in the absence of parents) with students in American high schools and elicit their feedback on what's working, and what's not, in their school has become a top priority of researchers, the federal and state governments, and individual districts and schools as they embark on reform efforts. Research suggests that there are practical and meaningful ways to engage parents, such as: a single point of contact in schools; information on high school graduation and college admission requirements; formation of action teams focused on increasing parental involvement in targeted ways driven by local needs; individualized student plans; homework hotlines; access to technology and information in learning centers within schools; and flexible schedules for conferences.[88]

Currently, 39 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws directing school districts, boards of education, or schools to implement family engagement policies.[89] The substance of these laws, however, varies greatly throughout the states.[90] In Florida, the Family and School Partnership for Student Achievement Act is a comprehensive law passed in 2003 that specifies the components of effective family engagement at the state and local levels. The law requires districts to work in collaboration with families, educators, and the community to develop family engagement policies. The state also provides parents with access to information from the statewide data system. The Texas Education Agency and the Texas PTA collaborated to produce a training manual in 2007 for improving parental involvement in the education of their children.[91] Colorado and Wyoming require evidence of family and community involvement in order for local schools to renew their accreditation. At least four states — Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, and New Mexico — have laws that include sanctions against school districts that fail to comply with specified requirements, such as parental involvement. Sanctions could include the withholding of state funds.[92]

At the national level, the proposed Family Engagement in Education Act of 2010, introduced this May, would incentivize schools and districts to use research-based practices to meaningfully engage families and improve student achievement, establish family engagement coordinating councils, restructure Parental Information and Resource Centers to provide technical assistance to districts and schools to scale up innovative practices and reach more families, and

82 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., Streeter, R.T. & J.R. Mason (2008). One Dream, Two Realities: Perspectives of Parents on America's High Schools. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

83 Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J.J. & K. B. Morison (2006).

84 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., Streeter, R.T. & J.R. Mason (2008).

85 Ibid.

86 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J. & Balfanz, R. (2009).

87 Bridgeland, J.M., Balfanz, R., Moore, L.A. & R.S. Friant (2010). Raising Their Voices: Engaging Students, Teachers, and Parents to Help End the High School Dropout Epidemic. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the AT&T Foundation and the America's Promise Alliance.

88 Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., Streeter, R.T. & J.R. Mason (2008). Also see: Henderson, A., Johnson, V., Mapp, K.L., & D. Davies (2007) Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships. New York: New Press.

89 National PTA (2010). State Laws on Family Engagement in Education: Reference Guide. Washington, D.C.: National PTA. The 11 states that lack family engagement laws are Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

90 Ibid.

91 Accessed at: http://www.esc16.net/users/0020/docs/Parent Involvement in Every School Manual_new.pdf.

92 National PTA (2010).

improve professional development for family engagement, among other areas. As part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U.S. Department of Education has proposed two competitive grants, Promise Neighborhoods and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, to provide supports to students and their families to help them succeed. Another competitive grant, Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students, mandates districts to develop and implement a state- or district-wide school climate needs assessment to evaluate school engagement based, in part, on the feedback of parents and other custodial guardians. The federal government is proposing to double funding for parent engagement from 1 to 2 percent of Title I funding, which would amount to about $270 million, as part of ESEA reauthorization.

Some districts, including those with high concentrations of students from low-income families and students who have limited English proficiency, are having tremendous success in engaging parents to support their children academically. Notably, the Brownsville Independent School District in Texas, which received the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2008, considers parents partners in the district and central to achieving their mission. Parents are included in every schools' continuous improvement planning process, the district provides workshops and courses to increase parent education, and parent centers exist in all district schools in addition to a weekly newspaper and local television station that is broaD.C.ast in both English and Spanish. Other districts and schools throughout the country are experimenting with different ways to engage parents. These activities have included using text messaging to ensure parents receive information about enrollment and homework due dates,[93] parent academies that share information with parents on how to effectively engage in their child's education, employing parent outreach coordinators, and partnering with community-based non-profits that teach parents how to engage with the school system and effectively advocate for their child.[94] The National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University has been evaluating promising programs and practices for engaging parents and supporting a network of 25 state departments of education, 145 school districts, and more than 60 organizations and 1,100 schools working on implementing effective practices for building school, family, and community partnerships since 1996.

Broader and Deeper Coalitions to Keep All Students on the Path to Graduation

Over the last decade, the economic and social costs of high school dropout and inadequate academic preparation have come into clear focus.[95] As high school dropout has become an issue of national importance, established youth serving organizations have repurposed their missions toward the goal of increasing the number of students on track to graduate with the skills necessary for postsecondary success. One of them is the America's Promise Alliance.

On April 1, 2008, the America's Promise Alliance embarked on an initiative to convene more than 100 dropout prevention summits in all 50 states and in more than 50 of the largest metropolitan cities to build a sense of urgency about the dropout crisis, to secure a commitment to action from leaders in all sectors, to strengthen current efforts, and to initiate new strategic activity to help more young people graduate from high school prepared for college and career. To date, these summits have attracted more than 30,000 attendees (from governors and state superintendents to principals, teachers, and parents of children from dropout factory schools), and engaged nearly 1,700 organizations in summit planning and subsequent community action plan development. The campaign has generated unprecedented awareness about the dropout crisis.[96] The *Grad Nation Guidebook,* which includes information on the latest research, innovations, reforms, and practices, was developed and made available to each of these communities to give them the tools they need to understand the dimensions of the dropout challenge in their regions, rally their community to address it, develop an effective plan to combat high dropout rates and prepare youth for advanced learning in and after high school, and to build sustainable partnerships to maintain progress over time.[97]

93 Jeffs, T. (2006). Assistive Technology and Literacy Learning: Reflections of Parents and Children. Journal of Special Education Technology, 21(1), 37-44.

94 For an example, the Dallas Concilio works specifically with Hispanic parents to help them be an advocate for their student and support them through high school. Accessed at: www.dallasconcilio.org.

95 See: Barton, P. E. (2005). One-Third of a nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities, Policy Information Center: Educational Testing Service. Also see: Orfield, G., ed. (2004). Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

96 According to an analysis conducted by the America's Promise Alliance, between August 1, 2008 and July 13, 2009 (the first 16 months of the organization's Dropout Prevention Campaign), media coverage of the dropout crisis has increased by sixfold: www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Dropout-Prevention/Awareness.aspx.

97 Balfanz, R, Bridgeland, J., Fox, J., & M. McNaught (2008) Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis. Everyone Graduates Center and Civic Enterprises for the America's Promise Alliance.

According to an evaluation conducted by Duke's Center for Child & Family Policy, the summits have successfully achieved their stated goals of securing commitment from multiple stakeholders and initiating new activity in many communities.[98] A month after Alabama held its summit in 2009, the state legislature created the Alabama Select Commission on High School Graduation and Student Dropouts. The following month, Governor Bob Riley signed a bill into law that raised the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 that went into effect for the class of freshmen entering school in 2009. The New Jersey state summit helped launch the New Jersey High School Graduation Campaign in 2009, which is focused on increasing public awareness of the dropout and college-readiness crisis, securing commitment for collaboration, and engaging schools to strengthen their efforts to help disadvantaged youth. This effort helped spawn new initiatives such as the statewide Truancy Reduction Pilot Project in Camden, Newark, and Trenton, and The Broader, Bolder Approach School Reform Initiative. In North Carolina, Communities in Schools followed up with each of the 77 counties represented at the summit to provide technical assistance on developing wraparound supports for students. As a result of communities' requests at the state summit, Communities in Schools is providing 20 communities with more intensive training and technical assistance. America's Promise Alliance has continued its work by supporting 12 communities with training and guidance as they seek to improve local graduation rates.

Below is a look at youth serving organizations that have focused their efforts on tackling the dropout crisis and have significant reach throughout the country. These organizations address the academic, psychosocial, emotional, and physical health factors that influence a student's success at school.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a non-profit organization that pairs at risk children with an adult mentor to help children ages six to 18 reach their potential through professionally supported one-to-one relationships. The organization currently serves 245,000 children in its community- and school-based programs in all 50 states. Many local Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies are working with other best practices youth serving organizations to ensure that students have the supports they need to grow up to be successful adults. Similarly, many agencies work closely with the school system to place students on a path to high school graduation, starting in elementary school. Their Youth Outcome Survey, launched in 2009, enables agencies to track the progress of individual children in their program in three key areas: academics, relationships, and at-risk attitudes and behaviors.

Boys & Girls Clubs

Boys & Girls Clubs is a national organization that seeks to provide at-risk youth with a safe place to learn and grow, ongoing relationships with caring, adult professionals, life-enhancing programs and character development experiences, and hope and opportunity. The organization currently works with 4.5 million youth through 4,300 chartered clubs and community outreach in all 50 states. The organization has a presence in small towns, big cities, on Native American and Native Alaskan lands, in public housing, in public and private schools, and on U.S. military bases around the world. In 2008, the organization launched Impact 2012, which focuses on making an impact in three primary outcome areas: academic success, healthy lifestyles, and good character and citizenship. It has also recently launched a Be Great Graduate initiative specifically aimed at middle grade school students who exhibit off-track-to-graduation indicators.

City Year

City Year is a national service organization working in 20 cities across the United States that uses the power of national service to help students succeed in school. The organization's corps members serve as tutors, mentors, and role models, as well as leaders of after-school programs. City Year's full-time members serve students in grades 3 through 9 to help improve student attendance, behavior, and course performance, the three critical indicators of a student's likelihood of graduating from high school. The organization's Whole School, Whole Child model ensures that corps members provide students flagged by early warning indicator systems the academic support, attendance monitoring and incentives, positive behavior support, after-school programming, and in-school programs and activities, such as assemblies and celebrations, that improve the overall school environment.

Communities In Schools

Communities In Schools (CIS) is a non-profit organization working in 25 states to serve nearly 1.3 million students and their families each year. The schools they serve are in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Almost 50

98 Gifford, B. & Cogswell, C. (2009) America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summits. Durham, NC: Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University.

percent of its sites are located in rural communities with high dropout rates. Recognizing that dropping out is a slow process of disengagement from school that begins well before 9th grade, CIS provides a continuum of services for students in grades K–12. Through three decades of work in this space, Communities In Schools has emerged as a national organization proven both to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates in the schools where its model is implemented with high-quality, proven practices.

Public Education Network

Public Education Network is a national association of local education funds and individuals working to advance public school reform in low-income communities across the country. In the United States, the network builds public demand and mobilizes resources on behalf of 12 million children in 32 states and Washington, D.C. The network specifically focuses on engaging community members in dialogue about public education, building constituencies between various stakeholders in education, engaging practitioners, collaborating with districts, analyzing education policies, engaging in legal strategies to bring about key change, and engaging youth. Recently, the organization adopted a network-wide goal to keep all kids on-track to graduate from high school with the skills necessary for college and postsecondary success.

United Way

United Way is a non-profit organization with nearly 1,800 community-based affiliates in 45 countries aiming to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities to advance the common good. In 2008, United Way initiated a 10-year program to improve education and cut the number of high school dropouts in America by half. By utilizing a birth-to-21 continuum, the organization is working to ensure that students enter school ready for success, read proficiently by the 4th grade, make a successful transition to middle school, and graduate from high school on time with the skills they need to succeed in college, work, and life.

U.S. Army Accessions Command and the National Association of State Boards of Education

In 2009, the U.S. Army Accessions Command and the National Association of State Boards of Education partnered with the intention of improving the educational experiences, graduation rates, and postsecondary preparedness of the nation's high school students, particularly those in underperforming schools. The partnership specifically focuses on building a comprehensive understanding of postsecondary choices for students, improving graduation rates, improving the health and fitness of high school students, expanding career exploration and test preparation resources for educators and students, and training teachers. One of the three projects already underway, Project PASS, specifically targets high schools and middle schools located in districts with very high dropout rates.

Researching and Investing in Innovation to Support Student Success

Research on What Works and Dissemination of Best Practices

At the beginning of the decade, there was a significant gap between the wealth of information being collected and which educational programs, practices, and policies were having real success in promoting student academic growth. Similarly, the research that was being conducted on these programs was often not rigorous enough to prove or disprove the effectiveness of interventions.[99] Over the last few years, the federal government has placed an emphasis on improving the quality and relevance of research and on evaluations of innovative programs that could dramatically improve student learning. Additionally, there are a growing number of city-based consortia that are fostering deep and active partnerships between researchers and schools that conduct locally tailored research and effective responses. Overall, however, there remains a critical barrier among researchers and practitioners that must be bridged in order for reform efforts to be successful.

Funding high-quality research of education programs and encouraging the use of research evidence in local decision making has become a priority at the federal level. Over the last decade, the Institute of Education Sciences has prioritized funding and promoting randomized controlled trials to better evaluate student programs, and has placed an emphasis on funding research that provides districts with practical information that will be useful to them, such as the effect of technology in improving academic achievement and textbook adoption decisions.[100] Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act placed an unprecedented demand on districts and schools to use scientifically based research in their decisions about curricula, instructional programs, and professional development. Race to the Top emphasizes the use of research in education, and the Investing in Innovation Fund emphasizes program evaluation for scaling up programs to improve the nation's schools.

The What Works Clearinghouse was established in 2002 by the Institute of Education Sciences to serve as a trusted source of evidence for programs and bridge the gap between practitioners and researchers to improve student learning and reduce dropout rates. The clearinghouse distills research information into practice guides that provide practical recommendations on reducing dropout rates, turning around low-performing schools, and other issues.[101] At the state level, the California Dropout Research Project links the latest research with a coalition of policymakers and practitioners at the state and local levels who are, according to its clear mission, working to raise the state's overall high school graduation rate and to eliminate differences in rates among ethnic and gender groups. At the district level, there are a growing number of research-based consortia, such as the Consortium on Chicago School Research, that have demonstrated the power of a sustained research effort aimed at improving the educational outcomes within a large city.

While these examples provide us with hope, research has found that practitioners believe there is a gulf between research design and real-world practice and that research findings have limited applicability to their local contexts.[102] Although practitioners regard evidence as a key factor in decision making, local research, local data, personal experience, information from personal communications, the experience of others they trust, and gut instinct are the forms of evidence they rely on in addition to research evidence.[103] Practitioners note the lack of relevance of research to local contexts and that much research is not timely for their needs. Research has found that practitioners lack the time and expertise to acquire, interpret, and apply research evidence to their own situations.[104] National foundations, including the William T. Grant Foundation and the Spencer Foundation, have recently begun to invest in research to understand how various types of data are used in the education system. It is clear that more work must be done to connect practitioners to researchers so that research is relevant to and actionable in their communities.

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100 Dynarski M., Agodini, R., Heaviside S., Novak T., Carey N., Campuzano L., et al. (2007) Effectiveness of Reading and Mathematics Software Products: Findings from the First Student Cohort. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences

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104 Ibid.

Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation

We must ensure that all students in America graduate from high school ready for college, work, and life. Too much is at stake: individual opportunity and happiness; stable neighborhoods and communities; a productive workforce and robust economy; and a country that can compete in the world and maintain its national security and democracy. All of us, including educators, administrators, parents, students, business professionals, non-profit leaders, teacher representatives, college and university officials and instructors, and officials in federal, state, and local governments, have a role to play to increase high school graduation rates and college- and career-readiness. In the pages that follow, we outline the core elements of a Civic Marshall Plan to address gaps in student achievement, high school and college graduation, and skills to meet the demands of a changing economy, and to begin to identify ways for all of these stakeholders to effectively address this national challenge. This plan is dynamic and will continue to be informed by leaders at all levels.

Based on our review of progress made to date in improving graduation rates and putting the programs, policies, and people in place to end the dropout crisis, we believe there are several fundamental reasons why greater progress is possible over the next decade:

- For the first time, graduation rates will be measured accurately across all schools and all states, and districts will be accountable for making meaningful and sustained improvement in their graduation rates;
- The federal government is investing billions of dollars to support the fundamental transformation of the nation's dropout factories and their feeder middle schools;
- The advent and spread of early warning indicators mean we will be able to intervene at the first sign that students are falling off the path to graduation;
- The nation's governors and mayors have become engaged in the challenge and see it as vital to the success of their states and communities;
- The emergence of national non-profits with significant reach into the communities that face the greatest dropout challenge and that are directing their efforts and putting boots on the ground to keep more students on track to graduation;
- States are adopting Common Core State Standards to prepare students for college and careers; and
- A civic awakening to the extent of the dropout crisis and its costs, and the realization that it can be solved through systematic and sustained civic action.

As a result, we believe the evidence also suggests that the dropout crisis can end if we collectively work to put in place and sustain the key actions outlined in this plan.

The Call to Action & Leadership

Clear, Measurable, and Achievable Goals. By 2020, high school graduation rates for those in the 3rd grade today will be 90 percent nationally; by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. Such an approach is consistent with national goals, and highlights the importance of an approach targeting the school districts with dropout factory high schools and low graduation rates, focusing intensive efforts early in their feeder elementary and middle schools (and associated alternative schools) and sustaining efforts through completion of high school and college.

Civic Marshall Plan Leadership Team. A group of organizations with significant institutional reach into school districts and states have agreed to work together in the Grad Nation campaign of the America's Promise Alliance to further develop this Civic Marshall Plan and to bring their leadership, expertise, and assets to bear on boosting student academic achievement and high school graduation rates in the targeted schools. This is the first time that such a coalition has come together to develop a common plan and to mobilize their institutions to help address the high school dropout crisis. Local school districts, community-based institutions, and states will be at the center of reform.

Regular Reports to the Nation on Progress and Challenges. This report is the first in a series of regular reports that will be issued over the coming decade on how communities, states, and the nation are meeting the dropout, graduation, and college- and career-readiness challenges, highlighting progress that is being made to meet the goals, reporting on challenges that remain, and sharing best practices among states and schools.

Establish a Strategic, Tiered Approach

Dropout Factory & Low Graduation Rate Schools and Their Feeder Elementary and Middle Schools, and Associated Alternative Schools. We will identify and target the states and school districts that house the nation's 1,746 dropout factories and the additioinal 3,000 schools with graduation rates between 61 and 75 percent. We will also focus on their feeder elementary and middle schools and associated alternative schools. Taking a phased approach, building from signs of success, and mindful of return on investment, we will segment the states and school districts that have substantial numbers of dropout factories and other low graduation rate schools with the highest numbers of students that have already begun to make progress. We will help them accelerate to be on track to meet the goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020. To reach this high school graduation goal, 23 states would need to equal the rate of growth achieved by Alabama (7 percentage-points every six years), 9 states would need to equal New York (10 percentage-points every six years), and only 7 states would need to equal Tennessee (15 percentage-points every six years). Nevada is the only state that would need to experience a sustained rate of growth in increasing graduation rates greater than Tennessee.

Initial Benchmarks. To achieve the national goal, the following benchmarks must be met:

- The Class of 2020 earns at least 600,000 more high school diplomas than the Class of 2008, holding population change constant;
- By 2012 (when the Class of 2020 enters 5th grade), there has been a substantial increase in the number of struggling students in the Class of 2020 who read at grade level by the beginning of 5th grade; schools, communities, and parents have been engaged in reducing chronic absenteeism for the Class of 2020 in grades 3 to 5 and, more broadly, for all students; and an analysis of the needs, strengths, and capacities of schools in high dropout communities has been conducted;
- By 2013 (when the Class of 2020 enters 6th grade), every state and school district with low graduation rates has implemented an early warning and intervention system with indicators for attendance, behavior, course performance, and college- and career-readiness; evidence-based and replicable models for the re-design of middle grades to foster both high engagement and preparation for rigorous high school courses have been developed; at least one trained non-profit mentor who can provide daily support for every 15-20 students with off-track indicators has been placed in schools; school-based social service supports for the highest-needs students have been expanded; substantial progress in having community-based partners and non-profit supports fully integrated into the school day and after-school programs, driven by the needs and capacities of school districts with low graduation rates, has been made; state and district policy reviews have been conducted to eliminate policies that are barriers to high school graduation; and
- By 2016 (when the Class of 2020 enters 9th grade), all dropout factory schools are in the process of being transformed or replaced, and options for most students to attend high-performing schools have been expanded; all high schools with graduation rates below 75 percent are providing transition and success supports to all students with off-track indicators in grades 8 and 10; progress is being made in providing students with clear pathways from high school to college and career training programs; the compulsory school age has been raised to 18 in all states; an expanded research base and additional programs to support second chance and dropout recovery options for students have been created; and a cost-benefit analysis that shows the value of integrating funds for juvenile justice, gang prevention, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and teenage pregnancy prevention into effective on-track-to-graduation efforts has been completed.

Action Within Low Graduation Rate Communities

Start with Early Reading. Dropping out is a process that begins long before a student enters high school. Research shows that a student's decision to drop out stems from loss of interest and motivation in middle school, often triggered by academic difficulties and resulting grade retention. Research also shows that a major cause of retention is failure to master content needed to progress on time, which in many cases, is the result of not being able to read proficiently as early as the 4th grade. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than 80 percent of low-income students failed to score proficiently on national exams in 2009. Half of all low-income 4th graders did not reach the basic level. When children make it to 4th grade without learning to read proficiently, they are being put on a dropout track. It is crucial that in order to reach the national goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate, we must ensure that all students, including those for which English is not their first language, are reading on grade level.

Focus on the Middle Grades. Most future dropouts begin to disengage from school during early adolescence, and during the middle grades achievement gaps often begin to grow. By the time students enter high school, they have one foot out the door and are not prepared to succeed in a rigorous college- and career-readiness high school curriculum. We should start with the feeder middle grade schools to low graduation rate high schools and ensure all students not only stay on track to graduation during the middle grades, but also are engaged in meaningful learning activities that leave them well prepared for high school.

Turn Around or Replace the Nation's Dropout Factories. We need to build on the emerging momentum and continue our efforts to turn around or replace all of the nation's dropout factory high schools. The federal School Improvement Grants program has targeted high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent. We need to build state, district, non-profit, and community capacity to finish the job, building on evidence-based practices and tailoring strategies to the circumstances of each community, while supporting continued innovation for some of the toughest challenges, such as single high school districts with weak promoting power high schools located in rural or extremely low-income communities. We need to recognize that while a number of dropout factories have improved substantially in some locales, there is a sub-set of dropout factories that have not improved in years. These high schools will need to be paired with external support providers with a track record of success in similar schools who are empowered with control over the staffing, schedule, and budget, while being held accountable for rapid progress or they will need to be replaced with new schools.

Harness the Power of Non-Profits to Provide Expanded Student Supports. In dropout factory high schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools, there are often hundreds of students in need of intensive supports from caring and committed adults. Often there simply is not enough manpower in high-needs schools and communities to provide these supports at the scale needed. We must call on, and systematically organize, national and local non-profits that can bring skilled and committed young and older adults, community members, and trained social service providers into the lives of all students who exhibit off-track behavior in weak promoting power high schools and their feeder schools in a consistent and committed way. National service efforts, like those pioneered by City Year, need to be expanded, as do the mentoring supports provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters, the extended learning time supports of non-profits like Boys & Girls Clubs, Citizen Schools, and 4H, the integrated student supports and wraparound services provided by groups like Communities in Schools, Children's Aid Society, and Community Schools, along with the postsecondary readiness supports from groups like College Summit and AVID and the best-in-field summer learning support organizations. Non-profits, in turn, need to commit to using common on-track-to-graduation metrics, to being held accountable for improving student outcomes, and to working together to integrate and strategically deploy their resources in useful and supportive ways in schools.

Link Researchers to Practitioners and Policy. Secondary schools in partnership with colleges and universities should create research consortia that enable practitioners to inform and take advantage of high-quality research. Research should be conducted to: understand which high-poverty dropout factory schools and statewide strategies have made the greatest gains in boosting student academic achievement and high school graduation rates; enable communities to develop a fine-grained analysis of who dropouts are, when and why they leave school, and what supports they need to get back on track in their communities; devise a cost/benefit analysis of the impact of the length of the school day, week, and year on student academic achievement and progress in school; and understand the promise and potential of reducing gang involvement, juvenile crime, teenage pregnancy, and health costs by building strong prevention, intervention, and recovery efforts to keep more students on the graduation path. Finally,

Solution Competitions, modeled on the recent U.S. Department of Education awards for consortia of states to design next-generation assessments, should be implemented in areas where more demonstrations of what is possible are needed, such as pushing high-poverty urban graduation rates above 80 percent and transforming rural dropout factory high schools.

Build and Enable State and District Capacity to Improve Graduation Rates

Build Early Warning Systems with Appropriate Interventions. School districts should collect individualized student data to track early warning indicators of potential dropout as early as elementary and middle school, including attendance, behavior, grades in reading and math, and benchmark test scores, and regularly report this information to teachers, school counselors, administrators, and parents to identify individual students who are off track and need both moderate and more intensive interventions. Schools should collaborate with the community to develop these effective pathways. School districts and states should collaborate to compare how they define these indicators — for example, what constitutes a "truant" or how is "daily attendance" or a "behavioral infraction" defined? School districts should collaborate with community-based organizations and national service participants to provide students with the supports they need inside and outside of the classroom, especially during critical junctures along the educational pipeline like the transition between elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary education and training. Interventions should be integrated and organized along a whole-school, targeted, and intensive continuum. Depending on the needs of students in a school and community, these interventions could include mentoring and tutoring, participating in after-school programs, twilight and Saturday schools; developing plans with parents to boost student attendance; targeted literacy and math curricula to help students performing below grade level; 9th grade academies, career academies, and interdisciplinary teaming of teachers to promote student engagement and teacher effectiveness; and the wide range of more intensive community-based interventions to address special needs. State officials and local postsecondary institutions should provide technical assistance to districts and schools to put such data and early warning systems in place and combine them with appropriate interventions by trained educators, working in partnership with community-based organizations. Systems should also be developed that provide early warning indicators for college- and career-readiness by grade and align interventions around them.

Create a Multi-Sector and Community-Based Effort. The community bears the costs of the dropout crisis and should be deeply involved in its solution. Existing evidence indicates that states and school districts that have made the most progress built multi-sector collaborations that have included significant involvement and support from governors and mayors, legislators, non-profits, and community organizations. Often, the business community, which has the power to highlight the economic impacts of low high school graduation rates and help education become a data-driven enterprise, has also been involved. The United Way has made reducing the nation's dropout rate in half by 2018 one of its top goals, and it and other locally based and nationally supported organizations like Communities in Schools need to play a key organizing role, in partnership at the national level with the America's Promise Alliance.

Enhance High School and College Graduation Rate Data. School districts, states, and the federal government should report accurate high school graduation rates, disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status as defined by the National Governors Association Graduation Rate Compact and tightened and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education. States and school districts should be held accountable not only for academic performance, but also for graduation rates as a part of making adequate yearly progress. Similar data and reporting systems should be built, with accurate tracking of transfers, for colleges, community colleges, and technical schools, with the reporting of on-time graduation rates, not three years for community colleges and six years for four-year colleges.

Develop New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests. School districts and states should continue to provide and develop innovative alternative learning environments to engage students who are at risk of dropping out and re-enroll students who have already dropped out of high school to place them on a pathway to postsecondary success. Schools and communities should collaborate to develop these effective pathways. The business community should also help provide students with opportunities for career exposure, exploration, internships, and other opportunities that connect the high school experience to the workforce. Researchers should continue to study these alternative pathways, including charter schools, early college high schools, theme-based programs and schools, online education, and other models to determine what is effective and scalable and share best practices.

Develop Parent Engagement Strategies. School districts should develop clear parent engagement strategies, including for other family members who are assuming this role in the absence of parents, based on research of what will meaningfully engage them. Such practices should be culturally responsive and include prompt notification of academic, behavioral, attendance or other problems and access to information from early warning and intervention systems to see patterns of progress and challenge over time; earlier contact in 8th and 9th grades on what constitutes success in high school; a single point of contact at the school for parents; information on high school graduation and college admission requirements; individualized student plans; homework hotlines; access to technology and information in learning centers within schools; and flexible schedules for conferences. Non-profits and local government agencies should be engaged to provide parents with the supports they need to be effectively engaged in their student's education. Where research supports it, home-visiting programs should be expanded. Efforts should be undertaken to connect the dropout factory and low graduation rate schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools to Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), which help implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that lead to improvements in student academic achievement and that strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the education needs of children. We note that, by law, recipients of PIRC grants are required to use at least half of their funds to serve areas with high concentrations of low-income children and to use grants to serve both rural and urban areas and to start parental engagement early in the student's education.

Elicit Perspectives of Students, Educators, and Parents. Research shows that the perspectives of students, educators, and parents on the high school dropout epidemic are not always aligned. Disconnects among them emerge on the causes of dropout, the role of high expectations for students at different skill levels, and the interest and engagement of parents in student achievement. Without cooperation among students, teachers, and parents, prospects for meaningful reforms are diminished. Dialogues among these three vital constituencies can lead to collaborations that can boost student prospects for achievement in school. School districts with dropout factory and low graduation rate schools and their feeder elementary and middle schools and associated alternative schools should be encouraged to bring students, educators, and parents into regular dialogues about the causes and cures of the high school dropout challenge.

Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Congress should reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and, in the process, consider legislation that has emerged in recent years to address the dropout challenge. Many good bills merit consideration, such as:

- the **Graduation Promise Act** to help turnaround low-performing schools with research-based reforms and to help struggling students and dropouts;
- the **Graduation for All Act** to boost adolescent literacy through research-based reading programs, trained literacy coaches to assist teachers across the curriculum, and to prompt the development of individual graduation plans, with support from parents, for those students at risk of dropping out;
- the **Success in the Middle Act** to improve the performance of the middle schools that feed into the dropout factory high schools, including support for the development of early warning data and intervention systems;
- the **Keeping PACE Act** to provide integrated student supports in high-needs schools;
- the **DIPLOMA Act** to engage communities through local public-private partnerships and help them meet the challenges influencing student achievement in and outside of school; and
- provisions from the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** that make dropout prevention and recovery a priority.

There are also key provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act relating to graduation rate accountability, adequate yearly progress, the provision of School Improvement Grants and other issues that will continue to help confront the dropout crisis. Congress should also support funding for the Education Corps within the **Serve America Act**, which mobilizes national service participants to help students at risk of dropping out. The **Race to the Top** challenge should continue in full force, having proven to be a powerful tool to prompt reforms related to addressing the dropout crisis. These proposed bills and provisions in current law should be included in a coherent framework that maximizes federal resources for the greatest return on investment.

Accelerate Graduation Rates by Strengthening the Public Education System

Build Linked, Common Data Systems and Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making. Statewide data systems should track and link student data K-16. These data systems should have the capacity to share and link data with other key systems in the state, including child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health, to ensure schools respond appropriately to at-risk and highly mobile students. States should share data across borders, given the highly mobile student population. States and districts should work together to ensure there are linkages across data systems. States should provide appropriate access to all stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, students, parents, researchers, investors, non-profits, and other community-based groups, consistent with student privacy. States must help build the capacity of stakeholders to use data, including through professional development and training, to ensure that educators can effectively understand and use data to make decisions at the school level.

Set High Expectations and Provide Engaging Coursework. Research shows (including research from the perspectives of students who did not complete high school) that high expectations, a rigorous curriculum, and engaging coursework connected to student interests are critical to student academic achievement. The expectations and confidence of teachers in their students' ability to learn and the teachers' belief in their capacity to effectively teach have shown powerful effects in boosting student achievement. Students should have fewer, clearer, and higher standards aligned with college requirements so that every student has the opportunity to graduate ready for a postsecondary education. It is critical that dropout factory and low graduation rate schools and their feeder elementary, middle, and associated alternative schools reject the idea of "educational predestination" by assuming certain students can more readily achieve than others, especially since research has shown that students rise to the level of expectation once they sense they are considered smart and capable and are provided appropriate support. Every state should adopt a compulsory school age law of 18, coupled with strong anti-truancy efforts in schools and additional support for struggling students and their families. This should be coupled with ambitious statewide high school graduation and college completion goals. The states should continue to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers and provide teachers with the professional development support they need to effectively implement the standards in the classroom. Performance standards, with real accountability for meeting them, should be coupled with Common Core State Standards. States should also develop complementary curriculum to ensure that all students are prepared for the rigors of college and the workforce.

Train and Support Highly Effective, Accountable Teachers. Research has consistently shown that a cause of our nation's dropout crisis is having under-qualified and ineffective teachers in classrooms. Studies have shown the uneven distribution of quality teachers across school districts — with low-income schools that disproportionately make up the nation's dropout factories having the fewest of these effective teachers. Educational researchers have called the "inadequate training of teachers … the single most debilitating force in American high schools." Research also shows that middle and high school teachers with demonstrated knowledge of their subject are more likely to produce better results in student achievement, especially in math and science, demonstrating the need to eliminate out-of-field teaching. More support should be provided on a competitive basis to districts that provide higher salaries and other incentives to teachers on the basis of criteria relating to student academic achievement and performance growth, including standardized test scores, in-classroom observations, and evaluations of lesson plans. Small and low-wage districts without human capital or resources to implement such systems should receive special support. School districts and states should provide funding and intensive teacher training, coupled with experienced on-site instructional coaching, to enhance the connection between teacher practices and student performance, including showing the relevance of classroom learning to student interests and career ambitions and aligning teaching methods with what we know about student learning styles and youth development. They should also foster environments that facilitate and support ongoing teacher development. Schools should be organized to foster frequent professional dialogue among teachers of the same students, and teachers in the same subject areas. Administrators should place a vigorous emphasis on what makes a good teacher, how we can better prepare, guide, and equip teachers for the task, and how we should measure and incentivize effective practices. More research to ensure a high-quality teacher in every classroom should be a national priority.

Train and Support Highly Effective, Accountable Principals. Principals and school leaders have been cited as the second most important factor in student achievement, behind teacher quality, and they must be a driving force behind recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers and setting clear priorities and expectations, including boosting student achievement across grades and increasing high school graduation rates and college readiness, admission, and completion. Research has shown the lack of experience of principals in high dropout rate schools, with principals in such schools having, on average, 3.6 years of administrative experience compared to 9.6 years by their peers in low dropout rate schools. Research also has shown that the most effective principals at increasing student achievement and reducing their school's dropout rate are those with more freedom to hire and fire teachers, set budgets, and avoid micromanagement that often has the effect of incapacitating school principals. Like teachers, principals also need high-quality professional and leadership development. School districts must ensure that principals have more control over the hiring, firing, and development of their staff.

Connect the Postsecondary Completion Agenda with High School Graduation. Boosting high school graduation and college readiness rates are only a first step toward creating a better-educated citizenry and workforce. Data today show that even gains in high school graduation rates will not translate into the postsecondary achievement that is necessary to meet the demands of a globally competitive workforce. As part of this Civic Marshall Plan, we will convene leaders to develop a robust postsecondary completion agenda that addresses issues such as: better aligning incentives toward completion of, not just access to, college for students, colleges, and states; engaging colleges and employers to help students balance the demands of work and school; understanding why the powerful market incentive to complete college (i.e., higher earning potential) is not inducing more students to obtain their college credentials or degrees; ensuring colleges track on-time completion rates and job placement rates for each of their degrees and make sure these rates are available to potential students and the public; and examining the ways in which the federal government can improve the collection and reporting of data relevant to college completion.

Conclusion & Next Steps

America is waking up to its dropout and career readiness challenge. After decades of progress in boosting high school graduation rates and leading the world in college graduates, we have slipped in our ambitions and progress to the detriment of millions of individuals, our economy, and society as a whole. Some states, districts, and schools have demonstrated that significant gains in high school graduation rates are possible in the very communities where the dropout problem has been most severe. America is beginning to meet its educational challenges and with a concerted effort can prepare millions of its young people to enhance their own lives, compete in the global economy, and strengthen our prosperity and security as a nation. With more dialogue around the progress we witness and the challenges we face in meeting the dropout epidemic, with the further development and implementation of the Civic Marshall Plan, and with continuing collaboration among leaders at the local, state, and national levels, we can stem the dropout tide, meet national goals, and take important steps in ensuring our next generations are educated to meet the increasing demands of our society, economy, and democracy.

Methodology and Data
Section I

Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic uses two indicators to describe students' progress through high school, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) and promoting power, which are calculated from grade-level enrollment numbers (AFGR and promoting power) and district level data on the number of diplomas awarded (AFGR only). These enrollment and diplomas numbers are provided by the states for every public school and school district in the country to the Common Core of Data (CCD) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

We use both indicators in this report for important reasons. The AFGR is available on an annual basis at the state level, as calculated by NCES, but cannot be calculated at the school level. Conversely, promoting power can be calculated at the district and school levels. Together, these two measures enable us to examine progress and challenges at the state, regional, district, and school levels. (Also, see www.every1graduates.org and www.all4ed.org.)

Analyzing outcomes from 2002 to 2008 allows us to focus on the impact of efforts made to raise high school graduation rates that began in 1998, when students of the Class of 2002 entered the 9th grade, through 2008 when the class which entered high school in 2004-05 graduated from high school. Data from 1998 to 2008 spans the first wave of attempts at high school reform and confronting the dropout crisis. It includes the initial impact of:

- No Child Left Behind legislation;
- Federally sponsored high school reforms spurred by Smaller Learning Communities grants, targeted to high schools with 1,000 or more students, for organizational reforms (academies, small schools within schools and advisory structures that increased personalization and student support), coupled with reforms in instruction and teacher support;
- Efforts supported by states, districts, and non-profits to create more relevant instruction, greater personalization and support for students, in which new and smaller high schools, often thematically focused, replaced larger, low-performing neighborhood high schools;
- State, district, and school recognition of the importance of 9th grade in determining the odds of high school success, whether through local efforts or those spurred by evidence-based external reform models and organizations;
- District and school efforts to create more relevant instruction and tighter connections to the world of work through career academies, alternative learning environments, and multiple pathway options;
- Increased leadership involvement in education reform, with significant involvement of governors, mayors, and legislators in improvement efforts; and
- The first wave of data-driven efforts to develop recovery and second-chance options for students who fell behind or dropped out, building from models that in some cases had been in place for years.

In short, during the first decade of the 21st century, the nation began to realize it had a high school graduation crisis, and the first attempts to implement solutions began with some states and districts being more successful than others. By analyzing where improvement did and did not occur, we can develop a more informed roadmap to drive future success and more accelerated gains.

Methodology and Data
Section II

The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) is calculated by the NCES for each state, and uses a formula that was recommended by panels of experts convened in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education as the best available interim indicator for graduation rates, until individual longitudinal student data is available. AFGR averages 9th grade enrollment with the enrollment in the previous-year — 8th grade — and the subsequent year — 10th grade — and divides this average by regular diplomas granted in 12th grade. AFGR differs from recommendations of the National Governors Association Graduation Rate Compact (2005) in that it does not follow students over time, adjusting for transfers in and out, and youth who do not receive a "regular" diploma are not counted. AFGR also captures all diplomas awarded in a year, so it includes students who have graduated in three, four, five, or six or more years. Soon there will be greater clarity. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education put into effect regulations that require states to shift to a new common cohort measure (the adjusted cohort graduation rate), using their state longitudinal data systems to follow individual students over time, and to make this part of required 2011-2012 reporting on 2010-2011 student outcomes. This will end a decade in which a multitude of different graduation rate inputs and formulas have been used (such as varying state methods, the Editorial Projects in Education Cumulative Promotion Index, and Greene's Graduation Indicator, for instance).

Promoting power is the ratio of the number of 12th graders enrolled in a given year, divided by the net number of 9th graders enrolled three years earlier (two years earlier for 10th to 12th grade high schools). Promoting power is a proxy indicator for high schools with low and high graduation rates and can be computed for all public schools (including charters) using grade enrollment data from the Common Core of Data, NCES. Schools with fewer than 300 students, or schools that do not have four years of data, or those schools that are highly specialized schools (alternative and special education schools) are excluded from our sample.

Dropout Factories and Weak Promoting Power High Schools. High schools that have a promoting power of 60 percent or less are termed "dropout factories" or "weak promoting power" schools. They are high schools in which the senior class has 40 percent or fewer students than the freshman class three years earlier. Research has shown that grade retention is a strong predictor of not graduating. Thus, schools with large numbers of students not progressing in a timely fashion from 9th to 12th grades have a high probability of significant graduation rate challenges. Schools that have a promoting power between 61 and 75 percent are termed "low promoting power" schools.

Considerations Related to Using Promoting Power. The promoting power indicator, like AFGR, does not adjust for transfers in or out of schools. Thus, it may underestimate graduation rates in schools experiencing a significant net decrease of students due to transferring out and overestimate them in schools with a significant net increase of students due to transferring in. However, analysis has shown that most schools do not have net in and outflow of students greater than 5 to 10 percent.

The promoting power indicator also overestimates graduation rates in districts and schools in which substantial percentages of students are promoted to 12th grade but do not have sufficient credits to graduate. In this report, as change is being examined over time at the national, regional, state, and district level, single-year counts of high schools meeting the dropout factory criteria are used rather than the three-year averages used in some reports subsequent to *Locating the Dropout Crisis*.

Why Use an Enrollment Cut-Point of 300 Students? In this report, we focus on regular and vocational high schools with 300 or more students that have at least four years of data for the graduating class of 2002 through the graduating class of 2008. The cut-point of 300 students per school is the same cut-point used in the 2004 *Locating the Dropout Crisis* report. This allows us to have a comparison of similar schools to determine progress between 2002 and 2008. Additionally, this cut-point guards against the fluctuations in promoting power that can occur when smaller-enrollment schools experience enrollment increases or decreases that would not be significant in a larger school.

Comparing Promoting Power in Different Size Schools. Studies have been done of high schools with enrollments of 100 or more, specifically to enable examination of smaller rural schools, but generally such enrollments are too low to guard against fluctuations. However, when the cut-point of 100 students was used for a national 2002 to 2008 comparison, the same trend of reduction in the number of dropout factories was seen over time, with a slightly higher number of schools (2,254 in 2002 and 2,075 in 2008, compared with 2,007 and 1,746 for 300-plus student schools). Overall, high schools with enrollments between 100 and 299 students with promoting power of 60 percent or less enrolled 62,842 students in 2008, or about 3 percent of all students enrolled in such schools.

Minority Graduation Rates. Data presented on minority graduation rates in this report is taken from NCES reports that are published annually using the AFGR measure. Differences between the graduation rates reported in this report, in particular for African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, and those reported by others may be associated with two factors, although the improvement trends are similar across different calculation methods. The AFGR rate used in this report is more likely than other measures to capture students who graduate in five, six, or more years. Thus, in some cases, it may be closer to a total rather than a four-year, on-time graduation rate. Emerging evidence shows that depending on circumstances, for instance the availability of multiple pathways and recovery options as in New York City, counting five- and six-year graduates increases graduation rates by 3 to 10 percentage-points. Ultimately, both real progress among African American, Hispanic, and Native American students and the difference between on-time and total graduation rates explain the difference between prior reports which have stated African American, Hispanic, and Native American graduation rates are in the 50 percent range and this report's statements that they are in the low 60 percent range.

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Through increasing awareness, advocating for children, and engaging in a few powerful initiatives, America's Promise Alliance uses the strength of their partnership network to more effectively and strategically bring the power of the Five Promises to America's children — enabling them to have the resources they need to lead happier, healthier, and productive lives and build a stronger society.

Civic Enterprises is a public policy development firm dedicated to informing discussions of issues of importance to the nation.

The Everyone Graduates Center seeks to identify the barriers that stand in the way of all students graduating from high school prepared for adult success, to develop strategic solutions to overcome the barriers, and to build local capacity to implement and sustain them.

The views reflected in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Target, AT&T, and the Pearson Foundation.

Appendix I:

Change in Number of Dropout Factory High Schools

Change in Number of Low Graduation Rate High Schools in Urban Areas

	State	2002 Cities	2008 Cities	Change
NORTHEAST	New York	128	114	-14
	New Jersey	12	5	-7
	Massachusetts	16	13	-3
	Connecticut	11	9	-2
	Vermont	1	0	-1
	Maine	0	0	0
	New Hampshire	0	0	0
	Rhode Island	4	4	0
	Pennsylvania	40	47	7
	Subtotal	**212**	**192**	**-20**
MIDWEST	Illinois	54	46	-8
	Wisconsin	14	7	-7
	Indiana	16	12	-4
	Iowa	4	1	-3
	Ohio	52	51	-1
	Missouri	13	13	0
	North Dakota	0	0	0
	South Dakota	1	1	0
	Minnesota	4	6	2
	Nebraska	3	5	2
	Kansas	4	7	3
	Michigan	37	41	4
	Subtotal	**202**	**190**	**-12**
SOUTH	Texas	134	103	-31
	Louisiana	18	10	-8
	Florida	51	44	-7
	Tennessee	28	21	-7
	Georgia	34	29	-5
	Mississippi	9	5	-4
	Virginia	18	15	-3
	Maryland	11	10	-1
	West Virginia	1	0	-1
	Delaware	1	1	0
	South Carolina	10	10	0
	Alabama	10	11	1
	Arkansas	2	4	2
	Kentucky	6	8	2
	Oklahoma	12	14	2
	District of Columbia	2	6	4
	North Carolina	16	26	10
	Subtotal	**363**	**317**	**-46**
WEST	Alaska	0	0	0
	Arizona	18	15	-3
	California	74	101	27
	Colorado	16	14	-2
	Hawaii	1	2	1
	Idaho	0	3	3
	Montana	0	0	0
	Nevada	1	13	12
	New Mexico	7	8	1
	Oregon	2	1	-1
	Utah	0	0	0
	Washington	9	11	2
	Wyoming	0	0	0
	Subtotal	**128**	**168**	**40**
	Total	905	867	**-38**

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

Change in Number of Low Graduation Rate High Schools in Rural Areas

	State	2002 Rural	2008 Rural	Change
NORTHEAST	Maine	3	1	-2
	New Hampshire	2	0	-2
	New York	6	5	-1
	Massachusetts	1	0	-1
	Rhode Island	0	0	0
	Vermont	0	0	0
	Connecticut	0	1	1
	New Jersey	0	1	1
	Pennsylvania	1	3	2
	Subtotal	**13**	**11**	**-2**
MIDWEST	Ohio	7	3	-4
	Missouri	3	0	-3
	Michigan	11	9	-2
	Indiana	3	2	-1
	Kansas	1	0	-1
	Minnesota	2	1	-1
	Illinois	0	0	0
	Iowa	0	0	0
	South Dakota	1	1	0
	Wisconsin	1	1	0
	Nebraska	0	0	0
	North Dakota	0	1	1
	Subtotal	**29**	**18**	**-11**
SOUTH	Alabama	31	25	-6
	Kentucky	14	9	-5
	Tennessee	10	6	-4
	Florida	35	32	-3
	South Carolina	48	46	-2
	West Virginia	3	2	-1
	Virginia	6	5	-1
	Texas	24	23	-1
	Mississippi	21	21	0
	District of Columbia	0	0	0
	Delaware	1	1	0
	Arkansas	1	1	0
	Oklahoma	0	1	1
	Maryland	1	2	1
	Georgia	37	40	3
	Louisiana	18	22	4
	North Carolina	48	55	7
	Subtotal	**298**	**291**	**-7**
WEST	Washington	6	0	-6
	Idaho	2	1	-1
	Oregon	1	0	-1
	Utah	1	0	1
	Alaska	4	4	0
	Arizona	9	9	0
	Montana	1	1	0
	New Mexico	7	7	0
	Wyoming	0	0	0
	Hawaii	0	1	1
	California	5	7	2
	Colorado	0	2	2
	Nevada	2	8	6
	Subtotal	**38**	**40**	**2**
	Total	378	360	**-18**

Regular and vocational high schools with more than 300 students whose first class entered no later than 2004-05.

Appendix II:
Pearson Foundation Roundtable Participants

In March 2010, leaders in the education, non-profit, and business communities gathered for a daylong strategy session to chart a common path to ensure every child graduates from high school ready for college, work, and life. The ideas from that day served as the inspiration for the Civic Marshall Plan. Below are the people who have shaped and informed the discussion.

Adam Ray
Director of Communications and Alliances
Pearson Foundation

Adria Steinberg
Vice President, Pathways to Postsecondary
Jobs for the Future

Alexander Kress
Fellow and Director of Policy Development and Outreach
George W. Bush Institute

Alma Powell
Chairman
America's Promise Alliance

Andrew Rotherham
Co-Founder and Partner
Bellwether Education Partners
Editor
Eduwonk

Andy Calkins
Senior Program Officer
Stupski Foundation

Anthony Colon
President and CEO
AJC Consulting Group, Inc.

Antoinette Malveaux
Managing Director, Strategic Engagement and Initiatives
Casey Family Programs

Arthur Rothkopf
Senior Vice President, Education & Workforce Development
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Beto Gonzalez
Head of the Division/College of Education and Kinesiology
Texas A&M University at San Antonio

Bibb Hubbard
Program Officer
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Bill Miles
Director of Programs
National Education Association Foundation

Bob Wise
President
Alliance for Excellent Education

Carmita Vaughan
Chief Strategy Officer
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Carolyn Spaht
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Dan Cardinali
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Executive Director
American Association of School Administrators

Dane Linn
Director, Education Division
National Governors Association

Darin Simmons
Senior Project Associate, High School Redesign
National Association of State Boards of Education

David Park
Senior Vice President, Communications and Marketing
America's Promise Alliance

Delia Pompa
Vice President, Education
National Council of La Raza

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National Association of Elementary School Principals

Gene Wilhoit
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Council of Chief State School Officers

Gerald Tirozzi
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National Association of Secondary School Principals

Harriet Sanford
CEO
National Education Association Foundation

J.D. Hoye
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Jim Balfanz
Chief Operating Officer
City Year

Jim Nelson
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Civic Enterprises
Former Director
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Karen Mathis
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Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

Kathy Hurley
Senior Vice President, Strategic Partnerships
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Kevin Bruggeman
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Laura Moore
Project and Policy Manager
Civic Enterprises

Laura Sanford
President
AT&T Foundation

Lyndsay Pinkus
Policy Manager
Data Quality Campaign

Margaret Spellings
President and CEO
Margaret Spellings & Company
Former U.S. Secretary of Education

Marguerite Kondracke
President and CEO
America's Promise Alliance

Mark Nieker
President
Pearson Foundation

Mary McNaught Yonkman
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Civic Enterprises

Mel Riddile
Associate Director, High School Services
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Michael Brown
Co-Founder and CEO
City Year

Michael Quesnell
Senior Manager, Coporate Social Investment
Nokia

Nina Sazer O'Donnell
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Randi Weingarten
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Ronald Blackburn-Moreno
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ASPIRA Association

Russell Quaglia
President and Founder
Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations

Russell Rumberger
Director
California Dropout Research Project

Ryan Reyna
Senior Policy Analyst, Education Division
National Governors Association

Trish Hatch
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Director, School Counseling Program
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Appendix III:
State Graduation Rate Goals

State	Goal	Target
Alabama	90	10 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate
Arizona	80	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous-year
California	90	The difference between the previous year graduation rate and the statewide goal of 90 percent, divided by the number of years between the previous year and 2020
Colorado	80	60 percent* or an increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Connecticut	85	70 percent* or an increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Delaware	90	84 percent* (target increases 1.5 percentage-points each year) or improvement of 2 percentage-points (Schools with rates < 84 do not make AYP unless the rate has improved 2 percentage-points from the previous year.)
District of Columbia	85	10 percent reduction in the percent of non-graduating students from the previous year
Florida	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Georgia	100	80 percent* (target increases 5 percentage-points each year) or 10 percen increase from previous year; 60 percent minimum threshold (Schools with rates < 60 do not make AYP; schools with rates ≥ 60 but < 80 do not make AYP unless they have improved 10 percent from the previous year.)
Hawaii	90	85 percent
Illinois	85	78* percent (Schools with rates < 78 do not make AYP.)
Iowa	95	80.9* percent (target increases 2 percentage-points each year) or increase of at least 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Indiana	90	Schools between 80 and 89.9 percent: 90 percent or increase at least 3 percentage-points; schools between 65 and 78.0 percent: 90 percent or increase at least 4 percentage-points; schools below 65 percent: 90 percent or grow at least 5 percentage-points
Kansas	80	Schools < 50 percent: increase of at least 5 percent of the previous-year graduation rate; schools > 50 percent but < the goal, increase of at least 3 percent of the previous graduation rate
Kentucky	98	86.75 percent* (target increases 2.25 percentage-points each year) or 2-percentage-point increase from the previous year
Louisiana	80	63 percent* (target increases approximately 2 percentage-points each year) or gap reduction (Schools with rates < 63 do not make AYP unless they have met growth targets.)
Maine	90	80* percent (target increases 3 percentage-points each year)
Massachusetts	95	70 percent* (target increases 5 percentage-points every other year) or increase of at least 2 percentage-points from the previous year (Schools with rates < 70 do not make AYP unless they have improved 2 percentage-points from the previous year or meet the five-year rate target.)
Massachusetts: 5-year	100	75 percent* (target increases 5 percentage-points every other year) (Schools that do not meet the four-year rate targets may make AYP if they meet the five-year rate target.)
Maryland	90	85.5 percent* (target increases 2.25 percentage-points every two years) or growth target based on the distance of a school's graduation rate and the goal of 90 percent divided by the number of years left to reach the goal by 2014

State	Goal	Target
Michigan	80	25 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate
Michigan: 5-year	80	School must meet the 80 percent goal to make AYP using the 5-year rate.
Michigan: 6-year	80	School must meet the 80 percent goal to make AYP using the 6-year rate.
Minnesota	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Missouri	85	Schools between 75 and 85 percent expected to improve at least 2 percentage-points per year; schools with rates < 75 percent expected to improve at least 5 percentage-points per year
Mississippi	85	63 percent* (target increases 3 percentage-points in 2011 and then 5 percentage-points every other year) (Schools with rates < 63 do not make AYP unless they meet the five-year rate target.)
Mississippi: 5-year	85	65 percent* (target increases toward the goal)
Montana	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Nebraska	90	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Nevada	85	10 percent reduction in the percent of students leaving school without a standard diploma
New Hampshire	95	75 percent* (Schools with rates < 75 do not make AYP.)
New Mexico	85	63 percent* (target increases 2 percentage-points each year) (Schools with rates < 63 do not make AYP.)
New York	80	10 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate; at least 1 percentage-point increase required
North Carolina	80	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
North Carolina: 5-Year	80	Increase of 3 percentage-points from the previous year
North Dakota	89	10 percent reduction in non-graduates against the goal from the previous-year graduation rate
Ohio	91.2	73.6 percent* (target increases toward the goal) or improvement of 2 percentage-points (Schools with rates < 73.6 do not make AYP unless the rate has improved 2 percentage-points from the previous year.)
Oklahoma	100	67.8 percent* or 10 percent of the difference between the previous-year graduation rate and the goal
Oregon	90	65* percent (target remains 65 for 2009–10 and 2010–11 and then increases 3 percentage-points each year) (Schools with rates < 65 do not make AYP.)
Pennsylvania	85	82.5 percent* or 10 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate (Schools with rates < 82.5 do not make AYP unless their rates have increased by 10 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate.)
Puerto Rico	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Rhode Island	90	76.7 percent* (target increases 3.3 percentage-points each year) (Schools with rates < 76.7 do not make AYP.)
South Carolina	88.3	78 percent or an increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year

State	Goal	Target
South Dakota	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Tennessee	90	Individual targets identified by subtracting the 2003–2004 rate from the state goal and dividing by the number of years between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014. If a school does not meet this target, it can also make AYP by meeting all three of the following: 1) graduation rate is within 2 percentage-points of the target; 2) graduation rate is maintained or improved from the prior year; and 3) overall improvement on the event dropout rate.
Texas	90	75 percent* (target increases each year to reach 90) or 10 percent decrease in the difference between the previous-year graduation rate and the goal (Schools with rates < 75 do not make AYP unless they have met their growth targets.)
Texas: 5-year	90	80 percent* (target increases each year to reach 90) (Schools with rates < 80 do not make AYP unless they have met their growth targets.)
Utah	85.7	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Washington		73 percent* (target increases 3 percentage-points each year) (Schools with rates < 73 do not make AYP unless the rate has improved 4 percentage-points from the previous year.)
Washington: 5-year	85	73 percent* (Schools with rates < 73 do not make AYP unless the rate has improved 4 percentage-points from the previous year.)
West Virginia	90	10 percent of the difference between the goal and the previous-year graduation rate
Wisconsin	85	Increase of 2 percentage-points from the previous year
Wyoming	80	Increase of percentage-points based on current graduation rate; increases required range from 6 percentage-points for schools with rates between 65 and 75 percent to 11 percentage-points for schools with rates lower than 25 percent

Source: U.S. Department of Education

*Target for adequate yearly progress (AYP) determinations based on 2009–2010 assessment results.

Approvals for Arkansas, Idaho, Vermont, and Virginia are pending. New Jersey was previously approved to use high school dropout rate as its other academic indicator for AYP determinations based on 2009–2010 assessment results. It will submit for Department approval its graduation rate goal and targets for use in AYP determinations based on 2010–2011 assessment results in fall 2010. In order for an amended graduation rate goal and targets to take effect in Alaska, they must become part of state regulation. The required procedures for making changes to its state regulations prevented Alaska from being able to implement an amended graduation rate goal and targets for AYP determinations based on 2009–2010 assessment results. The state has indicated its intent to make the requisite changes with respect to its graduation rate goal and targets for AYP determinations based on 2010–2011 assessment results.

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