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POLICY in FOCUS

High School Graduation: State Policies Driving Transparency and Success

Highlights

State Leadership Brings Graduation to the Front Lines of Accountability; States on Pace to Hit 90 Percent High School Graduation Rate by 2020

According to Louisiana State Superintendent John White, graduation is an important element of educational accountability, "Along with students' readiness for the world beyond graduation, I can't think of anything that's more important. It's one of the leading indicators of whether we're doing our jobs the right way" (J. White, personal communication, November 7, 2012). So it comes as welcome news that high school graduation rates are at their highest level since 1974. According to the U.S. Department of Education, during the 2009-10 school year, 78.2 percent of high school students nationwide graduated on time, which is a substantial increase from the 73.4 percent recorded in 2005-6. Graduation rates were up for all ethnic groups in 2010, and that the graduation rate for Hispanic students "has jumped almost 10 points since 2006" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a).

Not only are graduation rates up – they are rising despite states' having raised graduation standards by requiring more coursework in math and science, instituting tests for graduation, and making courses more rigorous. Across all racial and ethnic groups, "record shares of young adults are completing high school, going to college, and finishing college," according to a Pew Research Center analysis of newly available census data (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Additional encouragement is found in the recently released 2013 Building a Grad Nation report showed that for the first time the U.S. is on track to meet the national Grad Nation goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by the class of 2020 (Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Fox, J. Hornig, 2013). In fact the report found that two states, Wisconsin and Vermont, have already met the goal and lead the nation with graduation rates of 90 percent (See Figure 3: Are States On Pace to Reach 90% Graduation Rate Goal by 2020?, Balfanz, et al. 2013).

These national data are extremely encouraging. However, closer analysis using more detailed data shows that graduation rates, although rising, continue to be a concern. When the U.S. Department of Education released the first-ever state-to-state graduation rate comparison using a common graduate rate definition in November 2012, the data clearly showed there is much work to be done. Although there are some high graduation rates—88 percent in Iowa; 87 percent in Vermont; and 86 percent in Indiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Tennessee—there are also some extremely low graduation rates, such as 59 percent in Washington, DC (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a).

Additionally the U.S. Department of Education recently released a new school-level graduation rate data to "help state, district and school leaders better gauge progress and support their work to help more students graduate on time, ready for college and careers" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). This new data "provides a more accurate snapshot of high school graduation and can inform schools' efforts

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Consistency in Defining "Graduation" Ensures Transparency?

One of the most confusing pieces of the high school graduation picture is the changing definition of who counts as a high school graduate and what is the high school graduation rate. States have used several different definitions over the past decade as federal policies changed and state data systems became more sophisticated.

The most recent shift resulted from a 2008 change in the federal regulatory requirements under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), requiring states to keep track of every single student at every single public school, including those who leave the state or the country. This has required a great deal of behind-the-scenes work to build the necessary data systems. For example, every student and school must have a unique identification number. But only recently have state data systems developed the level of sophistication necessary to accurately keep track of students as they move from school to school, district to district, or state to state. Systems also must be in place for at least four years to have enough data to track a

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State Data Systems Create Student Supports

Research by the federally funded National High School Center and others shows that it is possible to intervene with students who are at risk of dropping out of school before they drop out. The key is to be able to identify these students in time to intervene.

Virginia's work was prompted by its own data. "We were very concerned about graduation rates," said Kathleen Smith, director of the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Improvement. "We were holding schools accountable only through test scores, but we wanted high schools to also be held accountable for graduation rates. We had to look at how to make it a fair indicator".

In school year 2007–08, the Virginia State Board of Education revised the state's school accreditation standards to include graduation and completion requirements. "As we looked at changing the accreditation standards, we knew we had to have some support. We wanted to help principals identify which kids are most at-risk," (K. Smith, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Thus began the Virginia Department of Education's work on the Virginia Early Warning System (VEWS), a tool to help schools and districts identify at-risk students and then intervene appropriately. The department partnered with the National High School Center and several of its school divisions to pilot and build out VEWS.

- Specifically, VEWS relies on data that schools already collect to
- predict which students are at risk for dropping out of high school
- target resources to support off-track students while they are still in school, before they drop out
- examine patterns and identify school climate issues

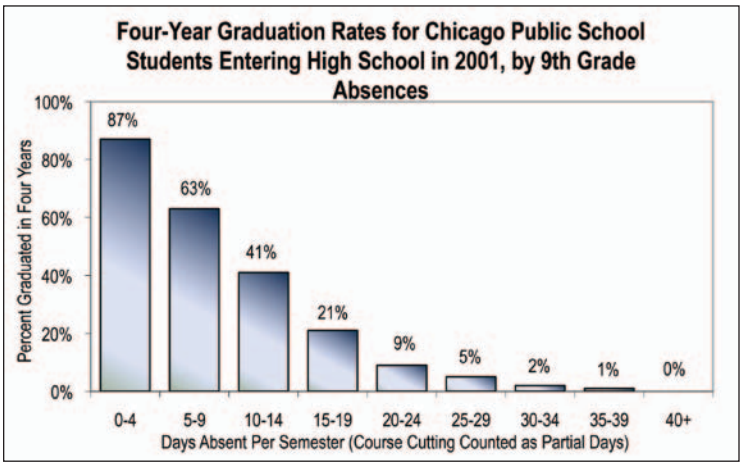
VEWS targets ninth-grade students. Research suggests that ninth grade is critical—a "make it or break it" year—because more students fail ninth grade than any other high school grade, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out. VEWS allows schools to look at specific indicators that can predict whether students are likely to complete high school. The tool brings together information on student engagement (attendance), course performance (grades and credits earned), an "on-track" indicator (students' grades in core courses required for graduation and the credits earned in those courses), and discipline referrals.

Virginia based its system on national research, such as the work done by the Chicago Consortium for School Research. As the following chart from the Chicago Consortium shows, student absenteeism is a major indicator of lack of student engagement—and of whether students are likely to graduate from high school. Until VEWS, schools in Virginia had to pull these data together for themselves. VEWS automates the process.

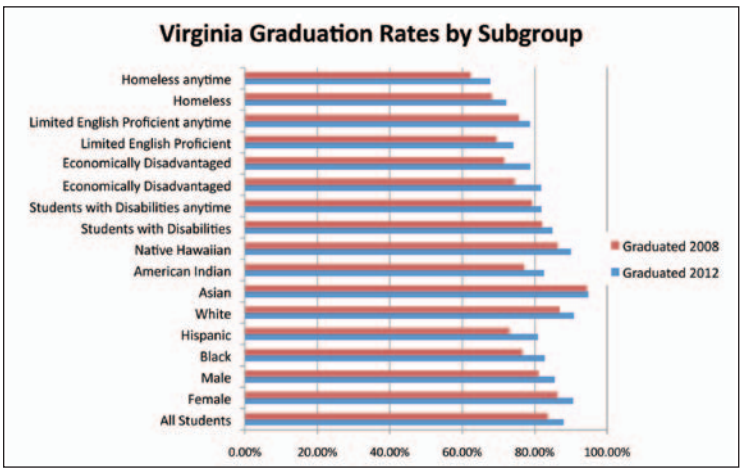
VEWS not only pulls the data together, it also provides a way to assign students to interventions and track their progress. "Principals can sort their students by intervention and see if each intervention is working. We can't wait until the end of the year to see how these students are doing," (K. Smith, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

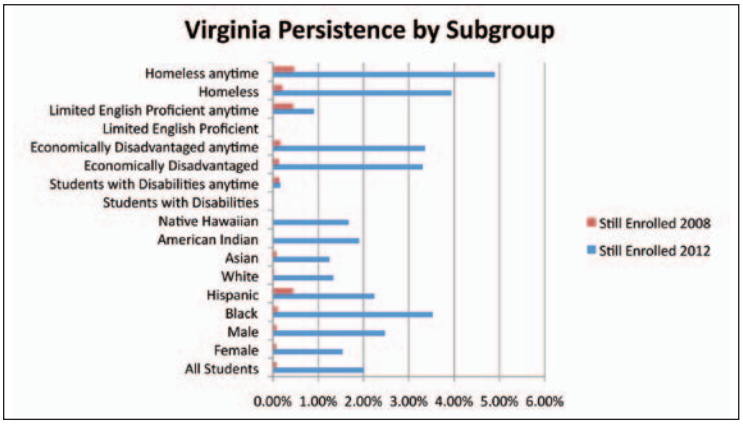
Early Success

By any measure, the state's changed policy—backed up by VEWS—has been a tremendous success. As the following charts show, not only are graduation rates up for every group of students, but more students are persisting in high school, even when it takes more than four years. "Those students would have been dropouts before. Now they are on the path to a high school diploma," (K. Smith, personal communication, November 30, 2012).



(Source: Allensworth & Easton, 2007)





(Source: K. Smith, personal communication, November 29, 2012)

State Highlights: Louisiana and Georgia Leverage Accountability Systems to Improve Graduation

While many states are working to improve high school graduation rates by leveraging their accountability systems, much can be learned by looking at Louisiana and Georgia.

Louisiana

"Graduation isn't necessarily distinct from everything else we're doing," explained Louisiana State Superintendent John White. "It's not something separate." Instead, graduation is at the heart of the Louisiana Department of Education's work.

Louisiana expanded its focus on graduation rates through an ESEA waiver and added the cohort graduation rate in the school-grading formula. "We included the cohort graduation rate in our accountability system to show how much value we place on it," (J. White, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

The adjustment to the accountability system is just the latest component of the state's relentless focus on high school graduation. Louisiana's 2011 cohort graduation rate is 70.9 percent. An unofficial calculation by the Louisiana Department of Education based on 2001 data reveals that in the past 10 years, Louisiana has improved its cohort graduation rate by 9.6 percentage points—a nearly 16 percent increase. Between 2010 and 2011 alone, the cohort graduation rate improved by 3.7 percentage points—meaning that approximately 1,800 more students earned a diploma in 2011 than in 2010. More than 60 percent of schools improved their graduation rates between 2010 and 2011.

Louisiana's revised A–F grading system sets an annual graduation rate target for all students, starting with the current rate and demanding annual improvements.

"A state's most powerful lever for achieving change in particular measures is its own accountability system and the way it allocates resources," said White. "If you want people to focus on something, hold them accountable and give them the funding that allows them to focus."

"When the state included the cohort graduation rate in its school-level accountability and included a bonus for schools that had above a certain graduation rate, we started to create an incentive that is not only about getting kids across the finish line, but also about getting the data right. There has been steady progress as a result of a lot of things. But the major jump was due to a real leveraging of the accountability system," (J. White, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Georgia

Likewise, Georgia—still in the process of developing a complex new accountability framework—has embedded graduation indicators within all three levels of its index: elementary, middle, and high school. Georgia also has included a number of other readiness indicators in their new accountability system, the College and Career-Ready Performance Index, which will be launched in 2013.

"It's been a journey to raise graduation rates," said Martha Reichrath, Georgia's deputy superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. "We can't separate it from our journey to raise student achievement."

"For the last decade, Georgia has been in turnaround mode with the way we focus on rigor in academic programs. We've increased rigor in order to become nationally competitive. This is our challenge as Americans."

Along the way, Georgia was able to fund a graduation coach in every middle school and high school—an initiative that, although currently funded at a much lower level, allowed the state to develop graduation momentum. The role of the graduation coach was to pay specific attention to struggling students.

"Every year," Reichrath said, "we push acceleration opportunities. Our AP data are stellar; we're very proud. We have more and more students taking AP courses and scoring higher on the exams. We've also seen districts doing more to partner with community colleges and technical colleges through dual enrollment."

These efforts laid the groundwork for Georgia's new College- and Career-Ready Performance Index. Georgia started with high school, Reichrath explained, because it was the greatest challenge under NCLB and the level in which the state had made the least progress. "We made a very specific connection to college- and career-ready."

At the elementary level, the index optimizes students' preparation for middle school. Then, at the middle school level, the index optimizes students' preparation for high school. And at the high school level, the index rewards schools for students earning diplomas with meaning that will carry them to wherever they want to go in life.

"We are working day and night to make this a success," Reichrath said. "This is a far better, far broader approach. Before, all high schools had to do was meet annual measurable objectives and graduation rate. This index is a far more comprehensive story of progress and accomplishments. We are asking a whole lot more of our schools" (M. Reichrath, personal communication, November 8, 2012).

The first index scores will be rolled out in March 2013.

student through all four years of high school.

The ACGR, the currently required high school graduation rate, is stricter than the rate used by researchers and the U.S. Census Bureau; it counts only students who graduate from high school with a regular diploma and with the cohort of students that entered with them four years earlier as "on-time graduates." In other words, students who are held back, earn a GED, or earn an alternative diploma (for special education students) are not counted as on-time graduates. Because states have had to change their definitions of a "high school graduate" to reflect the ACGR definition, some have recently reported lower graduation rates.

But in many states, this change means that current graduation rates cannot be compared with older rates. In Georgia, the shift to the new definition caused graduation rates to drop from 80 to 67.4 percent. Georgia State Superintendent of Schools John Barge said, "What we try to make sure folks understand is that it is not that we graduated any fewer children. The same number graduated. The calculation method changed. The best way to communicate that I've found is to use the analogy of a thermometer. When you look at a mercury thermometer, it shows one temperature. The number is different on the Fahrenheit side than on the Celsius side. Celsius is always lower. The formula is different, but the temperature is the same" (J. Barge, personal communication, October 30, 2012).

We tend to talk about students in terms of either on-time (four-year) graduates or dropouts and other noncompleters. However, there are multiple potential outcomes for high school students:

- graduating with a regular diploma and with the original cohort (i.e., four years after entering freshman year)
- graduating with a regular diploma, but later than the original cohort (i.e., in more than four years)
- dropping out
- graduating with a special or alternative diploma, either on time or later
- obtaining a GED

Although graduation rates may appear to be dropping, it is important to understand that the students who are not counted as graduates under the new ACGR definition (but were counted as graduates under states' previous definitions) are often graduating from high school and certainly are not dropping out.

Beyond Four Years... Who Are Late Graduates?

Late graduates are those who take more than four years to graduate from high school. They are more likely to be minority or language-minority students, live in a poorer household, and have two or more risk factors associated with dropping out.

Late graduates end middle school and start high school with skills comparable to those who will eventually drop out or receive a GED; in the eighth grade, they are no more prepared to go on to high school math or English. Late graduates fall further behind their on-time classmates in ninth grade, where they mainly take nonacademic math courses.

In high school, late graduates start making better grades than those who will eventually drop out or receive a GED—even though their achievement on standardized tests stays mainly the same. These results may suggest that late graduates exhibit more persistence.

How Do Late Graduates Fare?

In post-secondary education

Late graduates distinguish themselves not so much by enrolling in college but in completing a degree. Although they are not significantly more likely (59 percent) than GED recipients (51 percent) to enroll in college, they are much more likely to go on and obtain either an associate's or bachelor's degree.

In employment

More late graduates than GED recipients and dropouts are employed, and more hold full-time jobs. Late graduates are also less likely to earn incomes at the low end of the income scale.

Late graduates are significantly better off in terms of job benefits. Of the late graduates who were employed after 1994, close to two-thirds (63 percent) held a job that offered retirement benefits, compared to just over half of GED recipients (53 percent) and less than half of dropouts (45 percent). Seventy-six percent of late graduates also had health insurance coverage, compared to 66 percent and 61 percent of GED recipients and dropouts, respectively.

In civic participation

Although late graduates are no more likely to be registered to vote than GED recipients, late graduates are significantly more likely to have voted in a recent election (40 percent versus 29 percent).

(Center for Public Education, 2009)

Understanding Dropout Rates

Dropout rates are not the opposite of graduation rates, and the dropout rate plus the on-time graduation rate does not add up to 100 percent —students do not fit neatly into one of these two categories. Some students take 5 or 6 years—or more—to graduate; others drop out and then return to school. But because these students do not graduate with their ninth grade cohort, they do not count as on-time graduates under the ACGR.

Students in special education who earn a different type of diploma or certificate of completion also do not count as graduates because they did not earn a regular diploma.

It is also tricky to understand who qualifies as a dropout. There is no national definition of a dropout, and school districts often have difficulty tracking the status of a student who has left the district (and sometimes the state or country). Under the ACGR, students who cannot be accounted for are counted as dropouts.

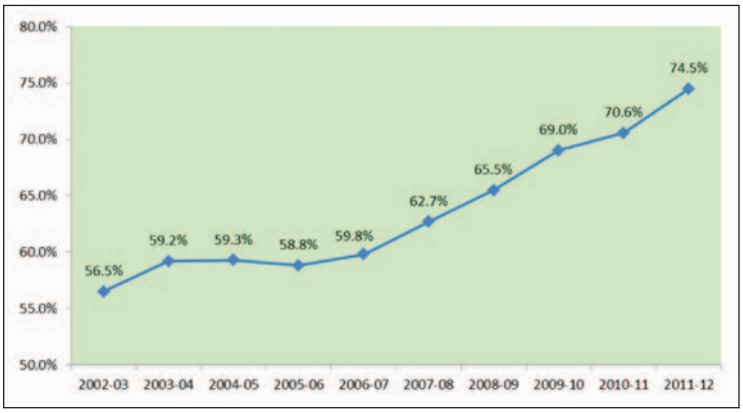
to improve going forward" to promote greater accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b).

"By using this measure, states will be more honest in holding schools accountable and ensuring that students succeed," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Ultimately, these data will help states target support to ensure more students graduate on time, college and career ready" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b).

State departments of education welcome the data, both encouraging and challenging. It simply reinforces the work they are already doing in this critical area.

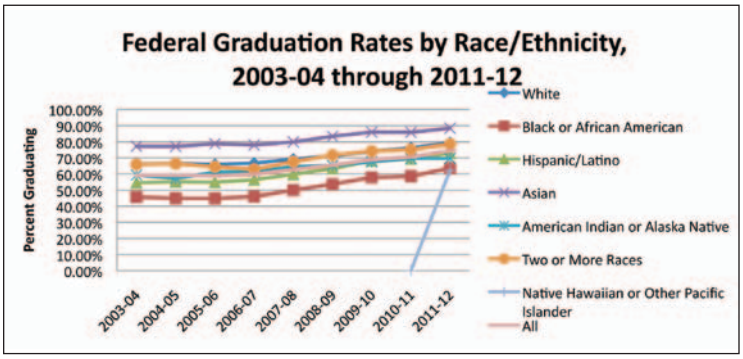
More Students Graduating

Although there is no consistent data to compare growth in graduation rates across all states on the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), which is the measure states are required to use under the department's 2008 regulations, some states have been able to report graduation rates using the ACGR for several years. These states have shown meaningful growth in the number of graduates. Florida, for example, has seen an 18 percent growth in high school graduation since 2002–03.



(Source: Florida Department of Education, n.d.)

Importantly, this growth also applies to subgroups of students.



(Source: Florida Department of Education, n.d.)

Each year, states publish their student graduation rates by race and ethnicity as well as several other demographic categories. These state report cards, which are available to the public, show that although there are persistent gaps among the graduation rates of different student groups, states are making progress. As the articles in this issue show, states are acting in a variety of ways to continue making progress.

Tennessee, the state with the highest growth in graduation rates over the past decade, has shown this growth across a number of groups: African American students, Native American students, economically disadvantaged students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.[1] New York, which has the second-highest growth rate, has set the same graduation rate goal for all students—80 percent. Although some groups have yet to reach that goal, the state has shown continuous progress for a number of groups: American Indian students, African American students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, and economically disadvantaged students.[2]

As Louisiana State Superintendent John White reminds us, graduation rate is just the top-level accountability indicator; there is much more going on. States are working at all levels—from promoting early childhood education in Missouri, to implementing early warning systems in Virginia, to incorporating graduation rates into school rating systems in Georgia and Louisiana—to raise graduation rates while also continuing to raise standards, increase graduation requirements, and raise expectations at all levels of K-12 education.

"The number itself is not the important piece—but that we do something about it," said Missouri Commissioner of Education Chris Nicastro. "We see where we are, whether or not we are making progress, and whether we are getting more and more of our kids through that first credential [a high school diploma]" (C. Nicastro, personal communication, November 1, 2012).

State Accountability Systems

State accountability systems are built with many goals in mind—and prominent among these is raising high school graduation rates. Although all states must use the same standard graduation rate, states do have options. For example, in 2008, the U.S. Department of Education gave states the option of having an extended graduation rate, which allows them to count students who graduate from high school, but not within four years.

Another area of flexibility is in how to factor graduation rates into state accountability systems. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), graduation rate was simply one of many measures, along with student achievement in reading and math and the percentage of students tested. As states developed next-generation accountability systems, many have added other content areas, such as science, and extended-year graduation rates.

Louisiana's accountability system includes both the standard four-year graduation rate and an extended-year rate. Graduation is worth 50 percent of high school accountability points. As Louisiana State Superintendent John White explained, "Twenty-five percent is the cohort graduation rate, while another 25 percent is the graduation index. The graduation index essentially weights different types of graduates. Five-year graduates earn a school significantly fewer points than four-year graduates. Four-year graduates who have taken Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework earn higher points, and a four-year graduate who has passed AP or IB tests earns the highest points for a school" (personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Giving schools credit for students who take and pass advanced coursework helps them set goals that aim for more than simply graduating students. Schools also have an incentive to continue to work with students who do not quite fit the graduation formula, either because they are in special education or because they need more time to complete the necessary credits.

Research shows that it is beneficial for students who need extra time to remain enrolled. According to the Center for Public Education, "The extra work late graduates and their schools put toward earning a high school diploma pays off—not only in academic outcomes, but in every aspect of life including work, civic, and health. Late graduates do markedly better than GED recipients and dropouts. And when the data is controlled to compare students of equivalent socioeconomic status and achievement level, late graduates come close to on-time graduates' achievement" (Center for Public Education, 2009).

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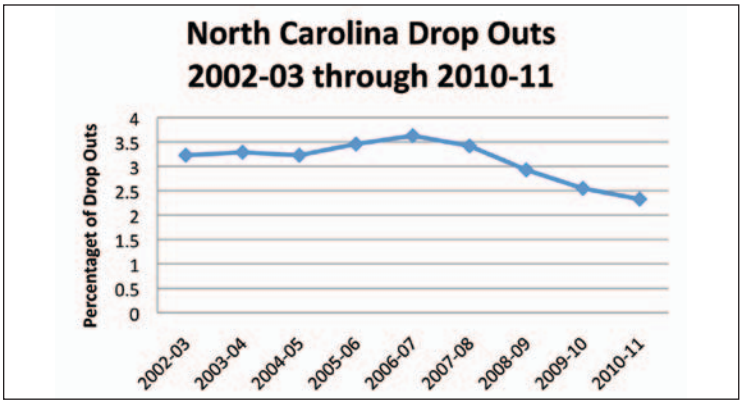
[1] To see Tennessee's report card, visit http://www.tn.gov/education/reportcard.

[2] To see the state of New York's report card, visit https://reportcards.nysed.gov.

State Highlights: North Carolina Shifts Thinking on Graduation, Celebrates Success

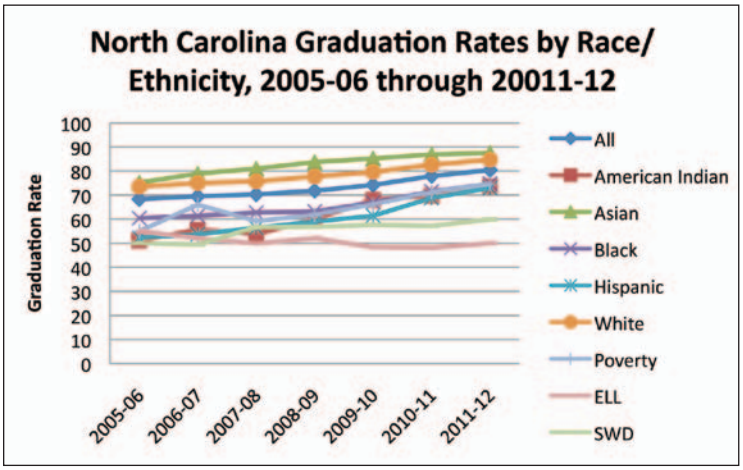
North Carolina is shifting its thinking about graduation rates. Rather than watching dropout rates, the state's board of education is instead focusing more on graduation rates, at the suggestion of Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson. "A dropout rate is an annual event," explained Atkinson. "If I'm principal of a high school, and I have 20 students drop out in the ninth grade—that will affect my rate this year, but I start over next year. There isn't an incentive built into the dropout rate to really graduate students" (J. Atkinson, personal communication, September 19, 2012).

As schools work to raise graduation rates, dropout rates are lowering.



(Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.b)

As a result, the conversation in North Carolina has changed. For example, many districts are now working harder on how to get students who already dropped out back into school so they can get a diploma. According to Atkinson, this approach is more strategic—and one reason that North Carolina's graduation rate has risen from 68.3 percent in 2005–06 to 80.4 percent in 2011–12.



(Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a)

In the last decade, the state has developed a portfolio of strategies to help schools meet their graduation goals. Many North Carolina schools have created ninth-grade academies to provide students with smaller learning environments, where the teachers know every student. "In our state, research shows that ninth-grade academies work for keeping ninth graders in school," said Atkinson, noting that ninth grade is when the largest numbers of students drop out.

The state also has developed a series of choices for high school students. North Carolina has 76 early-college high schools, the largest number of any state in the nation. Early-college high schools are small schools where students can earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor's degree. That shortens the time needed to earn a college degree and dramatically reduces college costs. "Many of our schools having 100 percent graduation rates are our early colleges," Atkinson said. "We focus on first-generation college-goers. Early college provides them with a small learning environment in comparison to a large traditional school."

Other schools focus on career and technical education (CTE), another proven strategy for keeping students in school. According to Atkinson, in a survey of students who had taken four or more courses in a career cluster, 80 percent said the major reason they had stayed in school was access to CTE.

And the state used its impressive data system to create an early warning system similar to Virginia's. Using research-based risk factors, North Carolina created a program that allows every school to generate within three to five minutes a list of students who may be at risk of dropping out of school. This began as a pilot project with 27 or 28 districts; it is now in use in all 100 North Carolina districts. "It's a way to focus on the students who are at risk rather than having to spend the time to figure that out," Atkinson explained.

And—in a state that wants schools and districts to shift their thinking—it comes as no surprise that the state rewards schools that are increasing graduation rates. Each year, the state has a graduation achievement ceremony, during which Atkinson recognizes schools with 100 percent graduation rates; the highest graduation rate by cohort size; the small, medium, and large school districts with the highest graduation rates; and the top 10 school districts that have the highest graduation rates in the state.

"It never fails that since we started having that ceremony I hear superintendents saying 'It'll be me next year!'" Atkinson said.

"That small thing—graduation recognition—has created some good friendly competition in our schools to raise graduation rates," (J. Atkinson, personal communication, September 19, 2012). Every little bit helps when the goal is to change the way schools and districts think about graduation.

State Highlights: Students Graduating Just Once Isn't Enough for Missouri Chief

Graduating from high school is not enough anymore, at least not to Missouri Commissioner of Education Chris Nicastro. "We've altered our focus on that issue in the last couple of years," she explained. "While we believe that graduation clearly matters and that it is essential, graduation from high school is not sufficient. We've started talking about the fact that every child has to graduate twice: once from high school and once from something else, whether it's a two-year or four-year technical school, an advanced apprenticeship program, or a college. Students need two credentials if they're going to be successful in the 21st century."

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education joined forces with Harvard University and created Pathways to Prosperity Missouri, becoming one of six Pathways to Prosperity states. Through the Pathways to Prosperity Network, Missouri has been working with employers, educators, and policymakers to create pathways that link work and learning and meet current and projected state labor market demands.

"I think the common core state standards will demand that kind of ability to apply knowledge and skills. We want to allow all of our kids to do that," Nicastro explained.

In 2012, the Pathways work focused on 24 school districts around St. Louis, with the longer-term goal of creating a statewide system of career pathways that can serve a majority of students. Initial focus was on industry areas with high workforce demand, including healthcare, biotech, agriculture, finance, and information technology.

Over the summer, St. Louis-area districts piloted an "asset mapping" process. "They interviewed everyone in the region," explained St. Louis Superintendent of Schools Kelvin Adams, who also serves as the co-chair of Pathways to Prosperity Missouri. "They asked, what are the assets we have and how can they be utilized to assist students in attending college and getting students ready for college and career" (K. Adams, personal communication, November 28, 2012). For example, the regional business council provided information on what kind of jobs will be available in five years, which allows a school district to align its K-12 programs with those potential careers.

"It's important for districts like St. Louis to participate [in initiatives like Pathways to Prosperity]," Adams said. "Number one, we can give students more incentives to graduate, when they know they have opportunities for internships, etc. Number two, students know they have viable options once they've graduated."

The emerging pathways look very different depending on the schools and districts involved. One school, for example, is partnering with Barnes Jewish, a large healthcare network in the St. Louis area, to develop a health occupations pathway that could start as early as junior high. It starts preparing kids in terms of academic coursework, and students can go on in a variety of ways—certificate, employment, community colleges, and some to four-year college or even beyond.

During discussions with students and parents, one particular issue emerged—motivation. "Students have to see a reason for them to get these credentials; they have to see what comes next. Back in the old days, we thought that high school graduation was enough incentive in itself. But that isn't enough. Kids today want the answer to the 'So what?' question. Pathways to Prosperity is one way to make that happen," Nicastro said.

"That's the way we're looking at graduation now," Nicastro said. "This is different for us. In K-12, we've always focused on high school graduation as the goal. Now, Missouri has taken on ownership toward making sure our kids graduate not once—but twice" (C. Nicastro, personal communication, November 1, 2012).

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding High School Graduation

Are graduation rates a true measure of accountability? Are they representative of students being college- and career-ready?

Graduation rates are critical to understanding whether schools and districts are serving our children. All states include graduation rates as a critical component of their accountability systems. States are now going beyond just graduation rates and are considering additional factors that are strong indicators of college and career readiness to potentially incentivize in their schools and districts. These measures include AP exams, IB exams, college entrance and placement exams, ACT scores, and college credit earned during high school. By incorporating these measures into their accountability systems, states are driving behaviors that will truly lead to graduating students who are prepared for college and careers.

Are states retreating from graduation rate accountability under ESEA waivers?

No, states that have received ESEA waivers are continuing to hold schools accountable for graduation. In all waiver states, schools that have a graduation rate of less than 60 percent are identified and are required to implement a set of rigorous interventions. In fact, some states, such as New Jersey, require interventions for schools with an even higher graduation rate.

Do states' accountability indexes approved under ESEA Flexibility provide an incentive to "push out" underperforming students?

States' new systems move beyond a simple pass/fail determination based on limited achievement data, resulting in an entirely new incentive for keeping all students in school. States now incorporate graduation rates, for example, as one of the major measures of accountability, recognizing that all students, regardless of the level at which they perform, are an important part of the accountability determination. In fact, some states like Louisiana also hold schools accountable for continuing to work with students who do not graduate in the typical four-year time period. This provides added incentive to educators to work with students at all levels to see improvement.

Additional Resources on High School Graduation from National Policy/Research Organizations

America's Promise Alliance is a partnership of more than 400 national organizations representing nonprofits, businesses, communities, educators, and policymakers.

Grad Nation: http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation.aspx

Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic (February 2013) http://www.americaspromise.org/~/media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/BuildingAGradNation2013Full.ashx

The Alliance for Excellent Education publishes briefs, reports, and fact sheets, and issues regular releases providing national- and state-level data and information about the impact of improving educational achievement and attainment levels for secondary school students.

Graduation Rates and Data Fact Sheets http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/Schools/Graduation+Rates+and+Data/Fact+Sheets

Diplomas Count is *Education Week's* essential guide to graduation policy and rates. The 2012 edition focused on Latino students. http://www.edweek.org/ew/dc/index.html

Everyone Graduates Center, housed at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Education's Center for Social Organization of Schools in Baltimore, Maryland, generates analyses and reports around graduation rates and dropouts. http://new.every1graduates.org/

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network is a clearinghouse on issues related to dropout prevention; it offers strategies designed to increase the graduation rate in America's schools. http://www.dropoutprevention.org/

National High School Center, housed at the American Institutes for Research, serves as a central source of information and expertise on high-school-related issues for all students, with a special focus on students with disabilities, students with limited proficiency in English, and students at-risk of school failure. http://www.betterhighschools.org/

Promising Practices Network is a group of individuals and organizations that are dedicated to providing quality evidence-based information about what works. They have a specific section dedicated to high school graduation. http://www.promisingpractices.net/resources_highschoolgrad.asp

The School Turnaround Learning Community, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education, created a guide to assist school leaders and leadership teams in planning how to implement effective organizational structures and routines within the school to address the early warning indicators of dropping out.

Organizing Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Work Groups for Dropout Prevention: A How-to Guide for Schools http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/tool_4_ewii_guide_final.pdf

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