Building a Grad Nation

Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic

2010 — 2011 Annual Update

Written by
Robert Balfanz
John M. Bridgeland
Joanna Hornig Fox
Laura A. Moore

Table of Contents

Introduction

America continues to make progress in meeting its high school dropout challenge. Leaders in education, government, nonprofits and business have awakened to the individual, social and economic costs of the dropout crisis and are working together to solve it.

Last year, we reported that the number of "dropout factories" — those high schools that graduate 60 percent or less of their students — had declined from 2,007 in 2002 to 1,746 in 2008. We are now able to report that from 2008 to 2009 (the most current data available), the number of dropout factory high schools decreased by an additional 112 schools to 1,634, representing an annual rate of progress approximately three times as fast as the previous period.

By 2009, approximately 580,000 fewer students attended a dropout factory high school compared to the beginning of the decade. Although the national high school graduation rate is still too low[1] and too few of our graduates have the skills they need to succeed after high school, an essential foundation has been laid to significantly increase graduation rates to 90 percent for the Class of 2020 and concerted efforts to rise to a standard of excellence are bearing fruit. This report is the first in a series of annual updates that will be provided through 2020, as the nation makes progress and confronts challenges to meet this national goal.

Important developments in confronting the dropout crisis will help us accelerate our progress. This year, all states, districts, and schools are required by law to calculate high school graduation rates according to a common formula and reporting standards and, for the first time, be held accountable for setting goals and meeting annual targets. Forty states and the District of Columbia have raised their standards to help more students graduate with the skills they need to compete in the global economy. The federal government has made strategic investments in secondary education and has provided states with incentives to enact reforms and fuel innovation that will help sustain momentum. All the states have pledged to build longitudinal data systems to track student progress over time, and a growing number of states and school districts are using early warning data so that those students who exhibit the first signs of dropping out receive the academic and community-based supports they need. In turn, nonprofits, education associations, businesses, and foundations are aligning their thought capital and assets with a "Civic Marshall Plan" to keep students on track to graduate from high school and ready for college and work.

---

1 The national high school graduation rate for 2008 (the latest year for which the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate has been calculated by the U.S. Department of Education) was 75 percent, up from 72 percent in 2001.

Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation

The Civic Marshall Plan aims to end the dropout epidemic and establishes concrete goals and benchmarks for measuring progress along the way. 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. To meet this challenge, a targeted and phased approach is suggested, driven by an understanding of where the challenge is greatest and where concerted efforts can have the largest impact. State and school districts, as part of federal accountability standards, are setting goals and targets for continuous and substantial progress in raising graduation rates and increasing college and career-readiness. Communities and nonprofits are mobilizing their assets on an unprecedented scale to work collaboratively to reach these goals.

The framework of the Civic Marshall Plan is shared below, prompting action within low graduation rate communities, building and enabling state and district capacity to improve graduation and college readiness rates, and accelerating graduation rates by strengthening the public education system.

Take Action Within Low Graduation Rate Communities	Start with Early Reading
	Focus on the Middle Grades
	Turn Around or Replace the Nation's Dropout Factories
	Harness the Power of Nonprofits to Provide Expanded Student Supports
	Link Researchers to Practitioners and Policy

Build and Enable State and District Capacity to Improve Graduation and College Readiness Rates	Build Early Warning and Intervention Systems
	Create a Multi-Sector and Community-Based Effort
	Enhance High School and College Graduation Rate Data
	Develop New Education Options Based on Student and Community Needs and Interests
	Develop Parent Engagement Strategies
	Elicit Perspectives of Students, Educators, and Parents
	Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Accelerate Graduation Rates by Strengthening the Public Education System	Build Linked, Common Data Systems and Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making
	Set High Expectations and Provide Engaging Coursework
	Train and Support Highly Effective and Accountable Teachers
	Train and Support Highly Effective and Accountable Principals
	Connect the Postsecondary Completion Agenda with High School Graduation

Members of the Class of 2020, now in third grade, will need to meet a series of benchmarks to reach the national goal of high school graduation (see chart below). A coalition of national, state and local organizations are pooling their resources to bring evidence-based strategies, guiding research, and accountability structures to the challenge of a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020. To succeed, the effort will need to be data-driven, community based and locally organized and supported nationally with human resources and capital.

Despite progress in meeting the dropout epidemic, many challenges remain. Although more than 580,000 fewer students attend dropout factories, there are still more than two million students who attend these schools. Although six states had a reduction of at least 10 dropout factories from 2008 to 2009, three states experienced an increase of five or more. While there have been significant federal and state investments in education reform over the last year, the absence of stimulus funding may stymie efforts as states recalibrate their own budgets. In addition, reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and funding levels for various reforms remain uncertain.

Civic Marshall Plan Initial Benchmarks

- To earn 600,000 more diplomas for the Class of 2020 than the Class of 2008, we set benchmarks along the way:

  - By 2012, more students reading on grade level by beginning of 5th grade; chronic absenteeism significantly reduced; needs assessments conducted for all dropout factory communities

  - By 2013, each low graduation school district has an early warning & intervention system; re-design of middle schools; a non-profit mentor for every 15-20 off-track students

  - By 2016, all dropout factories in process of being transformed or replaced; transition student supports in grades 8-10; compulsory school age increased to 18 in all states; clear pathways to college and career

Building a Grad Nation Index: Where We Stand

In spite of these challenges, the net reduction of 373 dropout factories between 2002 and 2009 — close to a 20 percent improvement — serves as a testament to the hard, strategic work of the last decade. The remaining 1,634 schools serve as a challenge for all of us to learn from our successes, recalibrate our efforts where we have failed, and maintain the momentum of the last few years. Ensuring that more students graduate from high school both preserves investments made in early childhood education and prepares a generation for the rigors of college and the workforce. Increasing high school and college readiness rates helps individuals lead more productive lives and strengthens our economy and nation. This report provides an update on our progress in implementing the Civic Marshall Plan and highlights the challenges that remain as our nation works to meet its goal.

National Progress and Challenge in Reducing the Number of Dropout Factories

Progress	Challenges
112 fewer dropout factories in 2009 than in 2008	1,634 remain
183,701 fewer students attended dropout factories in 2009 than in 2008	2.1 million students still attend dropout factories
Six states (California, Connecticut, Illinois, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) had a reduction of at least 10 dropout factories in the last year	Three states (Georgia, New York, and Ohio) experienced an increase of five or more dropout factories
All 50 states have the capacity to follow individual students over time.	Only 23 states provide data on student progress to schools, teachers, and parents.
212 early college high schools have opened since 2002	Less than half of all students nationally graduate college-ready
16 states produce early warning indicator reports using student-level longitudinal data	Most states do not have early warning and intervention systems and do not yet track attendance or behavior
The Serve America Act created an Education Corps to increase national service supports in low-performing schools	Congress is considering a bill to eliminate funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service
A range of federal and state legislation aimed at reducing the dropout crisis has been introduced	ESEA should be reauthorized and other legislation that could help reduce the dropout crisis should be considered by Congress and state legislatures

Dropout Factories

Change in Nation	
	Total Number of High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60% or below
Class of 2008	1,746
Class of 2009	1,634
Change in Number of Schools	-112
Percent Change	-6.4%

Examining the number of students attending dropout factories shows even greater improvement, indicating not only a reduction in these schools, but also a decline in the number of students attending those that remain. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of students attending dropout factory high schools in which graduation is too often no better than a 50-50 proposition declined by 8 percent (or 183,000), from 2,243,000 to 2,060,000 students. Overall, the number of students attending dropout factories declined from 2.6 million in 2002 to 2.1 million in 2009.

When examining state level changes between 2008 and 2009, some similarities and some differences to the changes observed between 2002 and 2008 emerge. As was reported in *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic,* national level improvement is built on divergent outcomes at the state level. As seen in Table 2, between 2008 and 2009, 18 states witnessed a decline of three or more dropout factories. A greater number of states — 23 in total — essentially stayed the same with changes of plus or minus two or fewer dropout factories. Unfortunately, nine states experienced increases of three or more dropout factories.

Change in Dropout Factory High Schools 2008 to 2009

Dropout Factory High Schools by State/Region

Region	2008 Total number of schools	2009 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[2]
Northeast				
Connecticut	14	1	-13	-14,492
Pennsylvania	59	53	-6	-9,307
New Jersey	20	16	-4	-5,930
Rhode Island	8	8	0	-54
New Hampshire	0	1	1	444
Vermont	0	1	1	511
Maine	1	2	1	411
Massachusetts	21	24	3	2,311
New York	129	139	10	6,178
Subtotal	252	245	-7	-19,928
Midwest				
Illinois	56	36	-20	-25,599
Missouri	20	17	-3	-383
Kansas	10	7	-3	-4,533
Indiana	18	16	-2	-3,954
South Dakota	3	1	-2	-2,848
Minnesota	7	5	-2	-2,478
Iowa	2	1	-1	-1,283
North Dakota	1	1	0	4
Nebraska	5	5	0	-286
Wisconsin	9	12	3	1,667
Michigan	75	78	3	-5,397
Ohio	63	68	5	2,269
Subtotal	269	247	-22	-42,821
South				
South Carolina	84	59	-25	-29,294
North Carolina	108	92	-16	-13,783
Tennessee	34	24	-10	-11,877
Florida	147	138	-9	-29,682
Texas	163	159	-4	5,999
Alabama	45	41	-4	-1,560
Kentucky	25	22	-3	-2,243
Delaware	10	8	-2	-4,217
Louisiana	54	54	0	-529
West Virginia	2	2	0	991
Oklahoma	16	18	2	2,320
Maryland	27	29	2	2,966
Mississippi	38	42	4	4,918
Virginia	25	29	4	4,736
Arkansas	8	14	6	2,932
Georgia	120	130	10	9,492
Subtotal	906	861	-45	-58,831

Region	2008 Total number of schools	2009 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[2]
West				
California	146	121	-25	-60,811
Nevada	34	28	-6	-6,045
Arizona	29	26	-3	3,614
Colorado	24	21	-3	-1,218
New Mexico	27	24	-3	-2,115
Oregon	4	3	-1	-1,343
Idaho	5	4	-1	-198
Wyoming	1	1	0	-1
Utah	2	2	0	975
Hawaii	11	11	0	-52
Washington	23	24	1	1,375
Alaska	6	7	1	2,364
Montana	1	2	1	1,384
Subtotal	313	274	**-39**	-62,071
TOTAL	**1,740**	**1,627**	**-113**	**-183,651**

2   Promoting power is the ratio of the number of 12th graders enrolled in a given year, divided by the number of 9th graders enrolled three years earlier (two years earlier for 10th to 12th grade high schoolers).

The 2009 results diverge from the trends observed earlier in the decade in two notable ways. First, several of the states that witnessed significant gains between 2002 and 2008 had some backsliding in 2009, whereas some states that had minimal improvement or even went backwards prior to 2009 experienced substantial improvements. Together, these facts illustrate that reform is seldom a linear process (see Appendix 2 for 2002 to 2009 changes).

Challenges and Successes

States where number of High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60% or below have increased by 5 or more	
	Change from 2008 to 2009
Georgia	10
New York	10
Ohio	5

States where number of High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60% or below have decreased by 10 or more	
	Change from 2008 to 2009
California	-25
South Carolina	-25
Illinois	-20
North Carolina	-16
Connecticut	-13
Tennessee	-10

Change in the number of Low Graduation Rate Schools by Region

Change by Region				
	Midwest	**Northeast**	**Southeast**	**West**
Class of 2008	269	252	912	313
Class of 2009	247	245	868	274
Change in Number of Schools	-22	-7	-44	-39
Percent Change	-8.2%	-2.8%	-4.8%	-12.5%

Change in the number of Low Graduation Rate Schools by Locale

Change by Locale				
	Cities	**Suburbs**	**Towns**	**Rural**
Class of 2008	879	385	133	349
Class of 2009	849	367	123	295
Change in Number of Schools	-30	-18	-10	-54
Percent Change	-3.4%	-4.7%	-7.5%	-15.5%

Whereas the improvements witnessed through 2008 were primarily driven by gains in the South and within suburbs and towns, the gains between 2008 and 2009 were also driven by improvements in the West and Midwest and within urban and rural areas. While it is important not to overstate the significance of gains in a single year, it is noteworthy that urban and rural schools that had proven to be the most challenging to reform are showing, at least in some locales, signs of forward movement and are possibly pointing to progress for the future.

 Overall, the results for the Class of 2009 reinforce the main conclusions of *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic*, which looked at change from 2002 to 2008. The nation is making progress in reducing the number of dropout factories and the percentage of students who attend them. This progress, however, has been uneven. Some states showed significant improvements, which highlights that progress is not always incremental. Others, however, saw more modest gains, some were stagnant, and a few moved in the wrong direction. This reinforces the notion that actions at the school, community, and state levels matter, particularly when efforts are made to comprehensively apply what evidence tells us works. Refining and customizing broad "lessons learned" to address local experiences, resources and conditions, and staying with it over time – six, eight, ten years – leads to sustained improvements. More limited or scattershot efforts do not. We need to continue to study the nation's success stories (additional case studies are included in this report) and work to develop the capacity of the districts, communities, and states that continue to struggle. More broadly, the nation needs to continue to accelerate its efforts to stay on track to meet its education goals.

Baltimore: Revitalizing a School System

The upswing in the high school graduation rate in Baltimore City Public Schools is a story about reversing urban school system decline through the re-design of secondary schooling, enhanced parental and student choice, strong community partnerships, and sustained strategic effort. During the last half of the 20th century, Baltimore saw great change. Its population declined 30 percent as both white and black middle class families fled to the suburbs, and public school enrollment dropped 60 percent. Eight selective city-wide high schools serving 30 percent of high school students maintained relatively high graduation rates, while graduation rates at the comprehensive high schools plummeted.

From 1994 to 1997, Maryland identified seven of the nine comprehensive Baltimore high schools as "reconstitution-eligible." In 1997, legislators created a city-state partnership that brought additional resources to the city schools while re-tooling management and accountability and creating a Board of Commissioners jointly appointed by the governor and mayor. With the structure set, there was room to build on work that began in the 1990s and continuing effort has caused achievement and graduation rates to rise district-wide.

Signs of Significant Improvement

Baltimore City Public Schools' high school graduation rate increased from 42.6 percent in 1996 to a four-year adjusted cohort rate of more than 60 percent for the class of 2010 and a five-year graduation rate of 64 percent for the class of 2009. The Baltimore schools saw other significant improvements:

- The number of major disciplinary events fell by nearly 58 percent between 2004 and 2009.
- School enrollment stabilized in 2006 at 81,000, and by 2009-10, rose to 83,000.
- The improvement in the African-American male graduation rate largely drove the graduation rate increase. In 2006-07, the city schools had almost equal numbers of African American male graduates and dropouts; by 2010, the ratio was almost three graduates to one dropout.
- With the resolution of a long-standing federal lawsuit and the 2010 end of court oversight, service delivery and outcomes have improved for the system's special education students, who make up 15 percent of the student body.
- Enrollment in Advanced Placement courses more than doubled between 2005 and 2010, and the number of students receiving a score of 3 or higher increased by 25 percent. Similarly, the number of students who passed the Maryland High School Assessments doubled from 2005 to 2010 and tripled for students in poverty.
- Middle school student achievement on required Maryland assessments continues to improve, and the percentage of students scoring at the advanced level in mathematics and reading has more than doubled in the last four years.
- Beginning in 2007, rising high school students could choose their high school. In 2010, elementary students and their families began choosing middle schools.
- In 2009, the school system was removed from state "corrective action."
- The School Board received the 2010 Council of Urban Boards of Education Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence for its efforts to guide the system with a steady hand.

The Foundations for Progress 1997-2010

Reforms

Reforms in the 1990s focused on the elementary grades, while Baltimore's subsequent progress during the 2000's began when many comprehensive high schools were broken up into smaller schools or replaced with new innovation high schools. Large middle schools were then phased out, leaving only four remaining in 2011, and were replaced by K-8 and 6-12 schools. The current superintendent accelerated these efforts and brought them to scale through the creation of new middle, high, and alternative schools. The current and prior superintendents also reorganized and reduced central office staff and budgets, culminating in the shifting of budget control to schools through the introduction of weighted per pupil student funding and mandatory parental involvement in forming school budgets, empowering principals and school leadership teams. A few of the most important features underlying progress include:

- The 2001 "Blueprint for Baltimore's Neighborhood High Schools" established the plan for small, independent "Innovation High Schools." Though its ideas have been modified, it provided a sustained framework for action and established a rigorous review process for proposed new schools.
- Reform was not "one size fits all." The school district encouraged innovation, development of new capabilities over time, and sought out partners.

- The combination of school choice, student-based budgeting, non-selective admissions, new schools, and school-based empowerment propels continuous improvements as schools now compete for students.

Lessons Learned

External partners and funders played a consistently supportive role in Baltimore school redesign, operation, and outcomes. Some lessons learned include:

Districts can't do it alone. Significant funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and nine local foundations managed through Baltimore's Fund for Educational Excellence provided resources for the creation of innovation high schools and new smaller high schools. Federal Small Learning Communities grants assisted with the breakup of large schools. Federal School Improvement Grant funds are helping to re-start and turnaround the few remaining large middle and high schools. Race to the Top funds are supporting extensive professional development and data driven reform efforts.

Schools can't do it alone. Innovation schools were uniformly co-operated with external partners, including groups at Johns Hopkins University, Coppin State University, the University of Maryland School of Law, the National Academy of Finance, and the New York City-based Replications, Inc. Later, transformation schools and alternative schools followed this same pattern of partnership, and both national non-profits like Diplomas Plus and local non-profits injected additional capacity.

Wise partners can influence policies. The Open Society Institute (OSI) and the school district partnered with other reform and community partners to examine and redesign the district's discipline and suspension policies to get students back into classrooms and on-track to graduate. They later turned their attention to attendance issues, supporting a Student Attendance Workgroup that closely examined data on chronic absenteeism and organized a multi-agency response. Outcomes to date include a dramatic decrease in chronic absenteeism in the middle grades, coinciding with an overall decline in suspensions.

Partners can assist with understanding data. The Baltimore Education Research Collaborative, composed of representatives from Morgan State University, Johns Hopkins University, and Baltimore City Public Schools and supported by local and national foundations, conducts strategic data analysis and rapid response studies to inform decision-making.

Partners can assist in driving continuous improvement. The new Baltimore mayor is a major leader of education reform, committed to better aligning city services to support improved attendance, graduation rates, and literacy. The landmark teachers' contract approved by union membership in 2010 positions Baltimore as one of the country's leading districts in acknowledging and rewarding teacher achievement.

Meeting the Graduation Challenge

With expanded options for families and students, solid partnerships, increased autonomy, and competition at the school level, Baltimore has set a path of school improvement that embraces collaboration and community partnerships. Baltimore City Public Schools have continued to lay the groundwork for long-term partnerships among city administrators, teachers, unions, business leaders and foundation partners to drive student achievement, reduce absenteeism, and raise the graduation rates of Baltimore City Public Schools.

Civic Marshall Plan Update

The Call to Action and Leadership

In March 2010, leaders in the education, nonprofit, and business communities gathered for a 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, part of the overall Grad Nation initiative, and focused on the strategic deployment of human resources to help school districts and states accelerate improvement in increasing the number of students who graduate from high school prepared for the global economy.

In the fall of 2010, a coalition of more than 30 groups, including education associations, national nonprofits, prominent foundations, members of the business community, state associations, and policy organizations, formed the Leadership Council of the Civic Marshall Plan and began organizing a concrete plan of action to align their initiatives, assets and resources toward the goal of increasing high school graduation rates to 90 percent for the Class of 2020 – those students who are in the 3rd grade today. (See Appendix I for a full list of initial Leadership Council members).

Since the November 2010 release of *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic*, this Leadership Council has started to develop the significant institutional changes that will help implement the plan, highlight and accelerate federal policy, craft strategies to speed up progress at the state level, and prompt action supporting the Civic Marshall Plan at the community level.

Institutional Plays in alignment with the Civic Marshall Plan

Leadership Council members have begun to identify and engineer "big institutional plays" that will have a wide-ranging and substantial impact on improving the educational outcomes

in our most troubled schools. For example, these groups are developing efforts on a scale of magnitude similar to the **National Governors Association (NGA)** and its Graduation Rate Compact, which was supported by all 50 governors in 2005. All governors agreed to use a common, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate formula and to build data systems that would allow them to track progress of individual students over time. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education articulated the NGA recommendations in rule-making that addressed differences in state regulations, required states to change their procedures, and stipulated that all states must submit graduation goals and targets based on this new, more accurate calculation. This year as

---

NGA and the Civic Marshall Plan

In 2005, all governors agreed to:
1. Use a common, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate formula;
2. Build state data collection and reporting capacity;
3. Develop additional student outcome indicators; and
4. Report annually on progress toward meeting these commitments

Progress to Date:
2005 → 4 states publised 4-year cohort data
2008 → U.S. Department of Education adopts 4-year cohort
2010 → 26 states published 4-year cohort data
     • 46 states had their graduation goals and targets approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education
2011 → 45 states will publish 4-year cohort data

Four-year Cohort Graduation Rate =	students graduating within a four years with a high school diploma
	first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier (minus transfers out, plus transfers in)

---

these regulations go into effect, 45 states will publish four-year cohort data, compared to four that did so in 2005. Through their leadership, the nation's governors and the U.S. Department of Education ensured that every state, district and school calculated graduation rates based on common definitions, creating an accurate and clear picture of where progress is being made and where more supports are needed.

The **National Conference of State Legislatures**, a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the states, commonwealths, and territories, has just issued a call of action to state legislatures to be leaders on the issue of dropout prevention and recovery. Appointed in 2009, the organization's Task Force on School Dropout Prevention and Recovery issued key

policy recommendations in late 2010 to ensure that all children have a path to high school graduation and are prepared for success in college, work, and life. The recommendations include: creating and sustaining urgency to improve high school graduation rates; insisting on high expectations and a rigorous curriculum for all students; providing options and pathways to engage all students; putting excellent teachers, principals, and other caring adults in schools; increasing the compulsory school age to 18; and eliminating counterproductive policies.[3]

Another example of a significant institutional play by a Leadership Council member that propels the Civic Marshall Plan forward is **City Year,** a national nonprofit organization that mobilizes youth in a full year of national service and provides human capital strategies to accelerate school improvement in cities with the highest concentration of low-performing schools. City Year is explicitly aligning its efforts with the Civic Marshall Plan's benchmarks. It is targeting dropout factories and local

feeder patterns (City Year now operates in 24 high-poverty, high minority school districts that have high concentrations of low-performing schools), promoting the use of early warning indicators that include attendance, behavior, and course performance, and providing trained near-peer mentors and tutors to provide students with the academic, social and emotional supports they need to thrive in school.

Similarly, **Jobs for the Future's** (JFF) institutional play also aligns with the Civic Marshall plan by providing off-track and out-of-school youth with an array of services, including a Back on Track to College school model that enables such youth to reengage and graduate college-ready, and to make effective transitions to postsecondary education and career credentials. JFF is likewise helping districts and states to better serve off-track and out-of-school youth by helping them develop off-track identification systems, grow educational options, provide coaching services, and advocate for this population.

---

3   Deye, S. (2011). A Pathway to Graduation for Every Child: State Legislative Roles and Responsibilities. National Conference of State Legislatures.

City Year and Civic Marshall Plan Alignment

Alignment Area	The Civic Marshall Plan calls for...	City Year is...
Target Dropout Factories	Turning around 1,746 dropout factories, which produce 50% of the nation's dropouts and two-thirds of its minority dropouts	Operating in 24 high-poverty, high minority school districts, which have high concentrations of high-need, low-performing secondary schools, and engaging in intensive new site development in cities, such as Milwaukee and Denver.
Target local feeder pattern/middle schools	Targeting improvement efforts in middle-schools that feed into low graduation rate high schools	Committed to working in local feeder patterns—following students through elementary, middle and high school
Focus on early reading	Implementing targeted early reading interventions	Providing one-on-one literacy tutoring to struggling students
Implement EWI systems	Using an Early Warning Intervention system by 2013 to identify and support potential dropouts	Promoting the use of the Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) of attendance, behavior and course performance to develop data-informed focus lists
Improve collaboration between schools & non-profits	Partnering with community-based and national service organizations to provide off-track students with the appropriate research-based interventions	Delivering targeted interventions to off-track students at the required scale and intensity
Provide trained non-profit mentor for every 15-20 off-track students	Calling for a trained non-profit mentor for every 15-20 students who are showing off-track indicators by 2013	Providing academic and socioemotional supports to thousands of off-track students through critical mass of human capital
Increase support for teachers	Increasing support for teachers and consistently high expectations that all students will graduate from high school	Enabling teachers to differentiate instruction, create stronger relationships with students and increase instructional time
Improve parent management	Increasing parent engagement in students' middle and high school experience	Increasing a school's capacity to engage parents and the community with student learning
Reach 90% graduation goal by 2020	Reaching a 90% graduation rate by 2020 (today's 3rd graders)	Enhancing the nation's urban graduation pipeline through its In School & On Track Campaign
Build a community-wide campaign to end the dropout crisis	Collaborating with non-profit/community-based organizations, governors, and the private sector in order to fuel a community-wide campaign to raise graduation rates	Mobilizing stakeholders in 20 urban communities—including school districts, mayors, community leaders, educators and private sector champions

Ohio: A Tale of Two Improving Urban Districts

Ten percent of Ohio's high school students populate the eight largest urban districts. Known as the Ohio 8, these districts include Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. Among these districts, Canton and Cincinnati stand out for raising graduation rates more than 20 percentage points from 2000 to 2010, using the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) calculation methods.[4] While their top rates are still lower than the state rate, both districts sustained an upward trend over 10 years, in contrast with a decline in the state rate that began in 2006.

Canton

Canton's schools are the story of a small mid-western district that recognized its weaknesses, re-organized around existing strengths and new ideas, and built on a community's commitment to its students. The city has nearly 80,000 people, with a poverty rate nearly twice, and fewer educated adults than, the Ohio average. In the early 2000s, Timken High School was identified as one of the nation's 2,000 dropout factories. McKinley High School, an athletic powerhouse, with a shining reputation among its alumni and the local community, had graduation rates that were almost as low.

Progress, 2000 to 2010

- Canton raised its district-wide ODE graduation rate from 53 percent in 2000 to more than 80 percent in 2010. McKinley and Timken High School raised ODE graduation rates from 60.5 and 59.7 percent in 2000 to 92.1 and 87.7 percent in 2010, respectively.

- More than 50 percent of the graduates in the first two classes of Canton Early College High School (CECHS) also earned associates degrees, substantially higher than the Ohio average for such schools. CECHS had its highest success rates for African American students from high-poverty backgrounds; of those who earned associate degrees in the first two years, 67 to 80 percent were the first in their families to obtain a college degree, varying by year and gender.

Choices for Students and Personalized Schools

Between 2004 and 2008, Canton's two large comprehensive high schools broke into smaller ninth grade academies and themed academies for grades 10 to 12. Both schools received federal Small Learning Communities awards for restructuring, and McKinley received an additional grant from the Gates Foundation and Knowledge Works Foundation. Among other reforms, both freshman academies have daily common planning time for teachers to plan instruction and address student needs. Additionally, with local backing and Knowledge Works' support, Canton started CECHS in 2005, one of nine early college high schools in Ohio, to accelerate academic progress for students who often struggle. In early college high schools, students aim to earn a high school diploma and a two-year associate degree from a partner community college in five years.

With these restructured and new schools, students have access to multiple pathways to success. McKinley has a strong academic focus and 11 Advanced Placement offerings across its upper grades academies. CTE is the jewel in Timken's crown with 19 course sequences, concentrations, and structured, mentored internships in its upper-grade academies, while CECHS offers college access to students in the upper grades. All Canton high schools are viewed positively and compete for the attention of eighth-graders in well-publicized events that prepare students to select a school.

Targeting help to needs

Significantly raising graduation rates often means helping students get back on track with extra help. Assistance for struggling Canton high school students is delivered using multiple strategies at the comprehensive schools and through a system of alternative programs.

McKinley and Timken

- Within the comprehensive schools, an 8th-9th and 9th-10th transition program is offered to students expected to have difficulty because they lack skills needed for high school success. An adult advocate helps students establish new goals and practice new strategies. Credit–recovery labs are available, and the district offers a summer program for seniors who have met "seat time" requirements but who have not passed the Ohio Graduation Tests.

- A master teacher/literacy coach works full-time in each high school to assist other teachers in developing students' reading comprehension in specific content areas.

- At Timken, regular Career Technolog Education (CTE) students whose academic and behavioral skills are below expectations take a Career-Based Intervention course taught by a certified teacher. It combines credit recovery and academic support, especially in reading, with skills needed in the workplace.

---

4   Beginning in 2010-2011, Ohio will shift to four-year adjusted cohort rate required by the U.S. Department of Education. Other methods of calculating graduation rates show the same positive trends for both districts, but with lower starting and ending points.

The alternative system

Four-hundred to 600 students a year benefit from the Compton Learning Center (CLC), offering a variety of programs for students of different grade levels, ages and needs. Special care is taken in placement, monitoring and progress review, and faculty members have dedicated time on Friday afternoons for common planning, review of student data, and dialogue about student needs. Personalization is increased by separating the programs within the building and by staggering arrival and dismissal times. CLC initiatives are supported by partnerships with the family court system, county services, and counseling agencies. CLC programs include:

- A traditional alternative high school for sophomores and juniors that aims to help students gain enough credits to return to their regular high school in one or two semesters, and a companion middle school for students needing help with behavioral skills before high school.

- Two on-line offerings, including one for older students who have earned at least two-thirds of the credits needed for graduation, and a virtual school for 7th to 12th graders uncomfortable in regular classrooms.

- A referral- and competency-based recovery program for 18- to 21-year-old students who have previously dropped out, and two schools for special education students, one teaching functional skills enabling the transition from school to work, and the other providing structured emotional and social supports.

What is Taught and How it is Taught

Recognizing that relevance, choice, and personalization may not be enough, the Canton community recently embarked on several efforts to understand what should be taught and how it could be taught to help more students succeed in the 21st century. A seven-member team from the central office, the schools, the Board of Education and the community participated in Harvard's ExEL program, to define the skills Canton graduates will need and what they will be able to do.

- Later, a team composed of the superintendent, a deputy superintendent, a union representative and a teacher worked with Harvard educators and with representatives from other Ohio districts to learn more about instruction that would best support students in meeting 21st century skill standards. The teams practiced a process for analyzing and understanding teaching, which was later adapted for future expansion in several Canton schools.

- An accelerated licensure program at Cleveland State University (CSU) helps develop future leaders for Canton schools. The district provides tuition scholarships. School-level instructional coaches support teachers.

The Future Challenge for Canton City

Graduation rates at the two comprehensive high schools have risen substantially and in a sustained manner. Graduation rates at CECHS are high and contribute to improved graduation rates at affiliate high schools, especially for African-American and economically disadvantaged students. However, graduation rates in the two diploma-granting alternative schools are much lower. When Ohio shifts to the U.S. Department of Education-required graduation rate calculation for 2010-11, graduation rate numbers may drop district-wide, but the gains Canton has made over the past decade are real. Canton has made important progress and has already shown the innovation and initiative that suggest it can continue to chart a course toward more improvement.

Cincinnati

Supporting Cincinnati's rising high school graduation rate are a school district and community with visionary leaders committed to a few strategies to support children from cradle to career. A focus on data-driven choices and change management evolved, supported by infrastructure, processes and accountability. Outcomes included re-organizing the school system and schooling; re-connecting schools with the communities served; developing a system of wrap-around supports for children and parents; and creating a community process for targeting resources to needs. The Cincinnati community is bifurcated: on the one hand, adult citizens are better educated than the Ohio average, and, on the other hand, the poverty level is twice the Ohio average and nearly 70 percent of the Cincinnati school population is eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch.

High School Progress, 2000 to 2010

- The ODE-calculated graduation rate for Cincinnati rose from 51 percent in 2000 to 80.4 percent in 2009.

- The graduation rate gap between African American and white students narrowed from 14.6 percent in 2003 to 4 percent in 2009, with African-American students graduating at higher rates than white students in two of those years.

- Cincinnati is the first Ohio 8 district to attain the "effective" district rating on the ODE report card. Five Cincinnati high schools also attained that rating, and two were honored as 2009 MetLife "Breakthrough Schools." One, Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School, received the 2010 U.S. Blue Ribbon School Award.

- The college enrollment rate increased 10 percentage points in the last four years.

Improvement Prior to High School Across the Last Four Years

- There has been a 15 percentage point gain in 8th grade reading scores, a 14 percentage point gain in 4th grade math scores and a seven percentage-point gain in 4th grade reading scores.

- Thirteen of 16 schools in the superintendent's Elementary Initiative for the lowest performing elementary schools made significant progress after two years: six made Adequate Yearly Progress and seven jumped two categories in Ohio school rankings.

- Nearly 90 percent of children in birth to three programs are developmentally "on track" and there has been a nine percentage-point gain in young children's preparation for kindergarten.

Foundations for Progress in the High Schools

The Cincinnati conversation about improving graduation rates began in the late 1990s, and emphasized making high schools and their offerings more accessible and relevant to students. In 2001-02, the smallest of the comprehensive neighborhood high schools started reorganizing into an academy for 9th- and 10th-graders and a themed senior institute for the two upper grades. The larger comprehensive high schools, supported by a Gates Foundation grant and federal Small Learning Communities grants, followed suit dividing into two small schools on one campus and selecting themes and academies by 2005-06.[5] Significant changes associated with early efforts included:

- Cincinnati educators accessed new ideas about district and school cultures, structures and learning through the Gates Foundation grant and regional networking meetings.

- Schools, academies and institutes adopted themes that motivated students to engage and learn and students could choose high schools based on interest, not where they lived.

- Smaller schools, academies, and institutes fostered better communication and relationships among high school administrators, teachers, and students. Common planning time for teachers enabled analysis of student needs and targeted assistance.

- Administrators at Taft fostered adult/student relationships to support learning for students, while Aiken High School educators empowered 11th and 12th graders to mentor 9th graders, leading to positive benefits for both mentors and mentees.

Businesses contributing to school progress

Business partners became important allies in motivating student performance. For example:

- Cincinnati Bell helped transform a low-performing neighborhood school, Taft, into a highly desirable non-selective citywide school with a waiting list by supplementing school-based reforms with a technology center, laptops, cell phones and progress incentives that became an integral part of the school's intense technology focus.

- About 1000 GE volunteers contribute services throughout Cincinnati Public Schools, with 60 providing extensive tutoring and mentoring at Aiken College and Career Center.

Building the pipeline to the future

High school initiatives were supported by re-tooling the feeder lower grades.

- The district eliminated troubled middle schools and, with only a few exceptions, replaced them with pre-K-8 schools that kept students in the same school longer and reduced challenges from student mobility and transfers.

- The superintendent instituted an Elementary Initiative focusing on best practices for 16 of the lowest-performing preK-8 schools. A "Fifth Quarter" extended learning time into the summer for struggling elementary students.

- Federally supported 21st Century Learning Center programs at 28 schools gave many students enrichment and extra help after school.

Reorganizing How the District Did Its Work

In 2006, the GE Foundation provided the largest non-governmental grant ever to Cincinnati schools — $20 million over five years — to apply proven business strategies to educational systemic change. The grant focused on growing a partnership with Cincinnati Public Schools that values building district capacity for a culture of collaboration, innovation, quality

---

5 Budget cuts for 2011 may force administrative consolidation of schools.

improvement and accountability, using improving mathematics and science education as the first focus. Numerous specific endeavors were launched, including:

- Broad capacity-building initiatives that include leadership development for teachers and administrators in a partnership with the University of Virginia; an executive coaching program for principals supported by the Cincinnati Business Committee; development and implementation of a rigorous professional learning community model for teachers; development of content-specific specialists and expert leaders to guide systematic change; math and science curriculum redesign; and improvements in central office efficiencies. These efforts are guided by a three-member team consisting of a GE program manager, a district administrator and a teacher leader, setting a model for collaborative decision-making.

- The central office practices data-driven decision-making and provides data assistance teams to extend this practice in schools. Data is built into professional learning and made accessible through dashboards that provide users with relevant data. The school system sets high and measurable expectations for student achievement, attendance, and behavior. High schools give common exams in core subjects so all students are held to the same high standards, and a weighted funding formula and student achievement drive resource allocation to ensure equitable student support.

Reorganizing Community Support for Schools

District capacity-building efforts were reinforced by community efforts to improve children's health and well-being.

- Beginning in 1999, United Way partnered with Cincinnati Children's Hospital and the Community Action Agency to provide monthly home-visit services by nurses and paraprofessionals for "at risk" children and their mothers from pre-birth to age three.

- The Strive Partnership, now a broad-based southern Ohio and northern Kentucky effort with more than 300 partners dedicated to supporting Cincinnati area children from cradle to career, emerged in 2006 from the vision of three university presidents, three superintendents, Knowledge Works, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and the United Way of Greater Cincinnati. The United Way's Agenda for Community Impact laid the foundation for using evidence to select priority strategies. Over time, The Strive Partnership narrowed its goals to five

(school readiness; 4th and 8th grade reading and math achievement; high school completion, college enrollment, and college completion). Every goal is measured and reported annually.

- A collaborative data-management system — the Learning Partner Dashboard — is being designed by The Strive Partnership, Cincinnati Public Schools and Microsoft Academic. Academic and non-academic student data will be incorporated in one web-based system so a comprehensive picture of student learning through all programs, in and out of school, is available to stakeholders. A loaned executive from Procter and Gamble spearheads the development effort.

- The process for developing one agenda from many benefits works best when it is structured. The Strive Partnership organized Student Success Networks, later called Collaboratives, and provides data analysts and facilitators to help multiple agencies arrive at a single agenda with a few goals, as well as metrics for assessing outcomes.

- School-based Community Learning Centers (CLCs) emerged as a pivotal support initiative around which partners could coalesce. All schools have at least one "wrap around support" community agency; there are also full-time resource coordinators at 27 schools[6] and co-located mental health providers at 45. The partnership developed a shared outcome measurement tool to gauge program effectiveness.

- Partners continually seek new and innovative solutions. As an example, The Strive Partnership and the United Way of Greater Cincinnati recently received a $2 million grant from the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF). Fourteen Cincinnati foundations contributed matching funds. The Bridging the Gap initiative of the Cincinnati Arts and Technology Center (CATC) was one of nine sub grants and provides graduates with training and mentoring for meaningful employment. CATC serves approximately 400 at-risk students annually, and 97 percent earn needed credits. Graduation rates for seniors at CATC topped 95 percent for 2009-10.

- In fall 2010, The Strive Partnership gathered community support for the district and union to work together patiently to resolve contract issues. More recently, The Strive Partnership issued a call for 2,000 reading tutors to support the superintendent's Elementary Initiative; 500 responses were received in the first few weeks.

---

6   Budget restrictions with the 2011 loss of stimulus funds may mean a reduction in these important service delivery organizers.

Lessons Learned for Progress

In becoming a national model for a results-producing partnership between school districts and community agencies, Cincinnati has learned that:

- Creating a common vision takes work. The right leaders must be engaged, and all efforts must focus on getting better results for children, without other agendas.

- Driving decisions with data reduces the politics in decision-making.

- Collaborating on key goals driven by careful needs assessment and evaluated by measurable benchmarks is essential.

- Effective collaboration requires a process and infrastructure for organizing multiple service providers.

- Creating sustainable investments is critical to success, as is engaging funders early and often, publicly and privately, as partners.

- Starting with the district's youngest children is essential for long-term results.

- Effective communication is vital and produces results.

Cincinnati's Continuing Challenge

Ohio graduation rate calculations will change with the implementation of the U.S. Department of Education regulations in 2010-2011, and, as in Canton, may cause a drop in Cincinnati's reported graduation rates. Yet the gains Cincinnati has shown are real, and the district has made effective and innovative changes to its schools. Federal School Improvement Grant funds, strong funding partnerships with local and national partners, and outcomes of past grants put Cincinnati in a position to continue to implement forward-looking reforms. Feeder schools will likely require attention as Cincinnati attempts to further raise its graduation rates. Despite the difficulties ahead, the city's community partnerships, collaborative culture, and willingness to innovate bode well for Cincinnati.

Progress on Initial Benchmarks

In order to reach a goal of 90 percent high school graduation by 2020, there will need to be 600,000 more high school diplomas for the Class of 2020 than the Class of 2008. Since November 30, 2010 when benchmarks were set to chart progress, there has already been significant movement on those established for 2012 and 2013.

Early Reading

Not being able to read proficiently by the end of fourth grade can put students on a path to dropping out by triggering academic difficulties resulting in grade retention. In 2009, more than 90 percent of low-income students failed to score proficiently on national reading exams.[7] Half of all low-income fourth graders did not even reach the basic level.[8] This foundational skill must be mastered to succeed in high school. In fall, 2010, **Target** launched its Read With Me initiative to unite Americans in increasing the number of students who read proficiently by the end of third grade. This initiative, which is part of Target's plans to donate more than $500 million by the end of 2015, includes a pledge that students commit to a regular reading schedule, a donation of up to two million books to underserved youth, and re-designing libraries to establish innovative reading centers in schools with high numbers of students reading below grade level.

The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** is leading The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a collaboration among dozens of funders across the nation to: close the gap in reading achievement that separates many low-income students from their peers; raise the bar for reading proficiency so that all students are assessed by world-class standards; and ensure that all children, especially children from low-income families, have an equitable opportunity to meet those higher standards. A major contributor to this problem is the fact that a large number of children have not achieved reading proficiency before leaving third and entering fourth grade. The Campaign will provide an avenue for philanthropic leaders to think, lead, influence and act together.

The **Pearson Foundation** has also committed additional funding to support literacy, educational leadership, and great teaching. Pearson has several initiatives that help children foster a love of reading, such as We Give Books and Jumpstart's Read for the Record. Additionally, in March 2010, they hosted the Pearson Dropout Prevention Roundtable, a summit of U.S. education leaders where the concept for the Civic Marshall Plan was conceived.

Chronic Absenteeism

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that communities with low graduation rates often have very high rates of chronic absenteeism from the early grades onward. Research shows that three out of four students who are severely chronically absent in the sixth grade never graduate from high school.[9] Last month, **New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg** launched Wake Up! NYC — a component of a larger campaign to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism in New York City schools. Students who have missed 10 or more days of school are targeted with automated phone calls with pre-recorded wake up messages from celebrities. The initiative, developed by the city's Interagency Task Force on Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism, also draws upon its radio and television partners to encourage school attendance. Early results from fall 2010 show that the broad effort to reduce chronic absenteeism (which includes deploying teams of success mentors from participating non-profits such as City Year, Reserve Corps, and Citizen Schools to work consistently to get students with prior histories or early warning signs of chronic absenteeism to attend school regularly) is having significant effects for participating elementary and middle schools. Specific strategies include weekly principal-led data review and problem-solving sessions in schools and coordinated outreach from community-based organizations and city agencies, including work in homeless shelters. Chronic absenteeism has been reduced by 24 percent; for participating middle schools, it was down by 16 percent. Similar programs are starting to emerge in other school systems as well.

---

7   Annie E. Casey Foundation analysis of data from the NAEP Data Explorer, accessed at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/
8   Ibid.

9   New York City Department of Education, accessed at http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2010-2011/truancyprevention.htm

Early Warning and Intervention Systems

Research has shown that students who eventually leave high school before graduating exhibit strong predictive warning signs of dropping out, such as infrequent attendance, behavior infractions, and course failure. These warning signs — the ABCs of dropout prevention — more accurately predict whether a student will drop out of high school than any other socioeconomic factors and can be used to predict high school graduation as early as the start of middle school.[10] Given this reality, states are enhancing the quality of the data they are collecting and are building longitudinal data systems.[11] This is prompting the adoption of early warning systems throughout the country at the state, district, and school levels. According to the Data Quality Campaign, 16 states report that they produce academic early warning indicator reports using student-level longitudinal data. In fall 2011, Civic Enterprises and the Every-one Graduates Center will release a report on the effectiveness of first-phase early warning systems and their connection to interventions in implementing and responding to these systems. The report will include recommendations for policymakers and administrators to put effective systems in place.

The National School Board Association's Center for Public Education has developed school board training in the effective use of data in school governance. The "Data First" training includes a two hour module called "High School and Beyond." This module helps school boards use data to shape effective policies related to graduating all students college- and career-ready, and to engage community support toward making it happen. To date, trainers representing 15 state school board associations have participated in workshops enabling them to provide this training to school boards in their states, and demand is growing. "Data First" was developed and piloted with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Middle Grades

Most future dropouts begin to disengage from school during early adolescence, and during the middle grades achievement gaps often begin to accelerate. In February 2011, the **George W. Bush Institute** unveiled its Middle School Matters initiative. The institute worked with top researchers to identify 11 elements that are crucial to driving middle school success and the evidence-based practices that lead to improvement, including school

leadership, effective teachers, the use of data to drive instruction, interventions in reading, writing, and math, and the engagement of parents and community-based supports to help struggling students stay on track. Over the next few years, in a pilot demonstration to lay the groundwork for later expansion, this program will provide 10-15 schools that serve large low-income and minority populations with a customized needs assessment and implementation support to improve educational outcomes through the comprehensive application of evidence based practice.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) works with a community of volunteers and school partners to provide at-risk youth with the socio-emotional supports they need to be engaged and motivated in school and successfully transition through middle school and towards graduation. The volunteer and donor supported mentoring programs run by BBBS achieve positive youth outcomes that have been substantiated through independent rigorous random control trial studies. The BBBS network of 370 local agencies refined its nationwide strategy to align with the Civic Marshall Plan in four key ways by: being accountable for educational outcomes; focusing on children most in need; investing in data, research and innovation in partnership with schools; and engaging community volunteers.

Wraparound Supports

In dropout factory high schools and their feeder schools, there are often hundreds of students in need of intensive supports from caring and committed adults. Often there is not enough manpower in high-needs schools and communities to provide these supports at the scale needed. Several Leadership Council members are undertaking efforts to expand the availability of high quality wraparound services to students who need them the most. For example, the **United Way Worldwide** will focus on recruiting one million new adults over the next three years to serve as mentors focused on early reading, successful transitions to middle and high school, and high school graduation — three critical benchmarks of the Civic Marshall Plan. This specific effort is part of the United Way's system-wide goal of cutting the number of dropouts in half by 2018, so efforts will target the nation's dropout factory high schools and their feeder schools.

In addition, **Communities In Schools (CIS)** has embarked on a network-wide quality assurance campaign to ensure their model of integrated student services is embedded in all 3,400 CIS primary and secondary schools across the country by 2015. According to a recently completed 5-year external evaluation

---

10   Janosz, M. Archambault, I., Morizot, J. & L.S. Pagani (2009). School Engagement Trajectories and Their Differential Predictive Relations to Dropout. Journal of Social Issues, 64(1): 21-40.
11   Data Quality Campaign 2011 survey.

conducted by ICF International, their model has been externally proven to increase graduation rates, keep students in school, increase student proficiency in math and reading, and lead to stronger school level outcomes in promotion, attendance, graduation, and credit completion.

Similarly, **Boys and Girls Clubs of America** developed a formula for impact to transform their clubs from "outcome-intended" to "outcome-driven." Two years ago, the organization developed a pilot program, BE GREAT: Graduate. The program targets young people in communities with the highest dropout rates and the students who are most at risk of dropping out of school. Program components include mentor/youth relationships; intentional tracking of the early warning signs of attendance, behavior, and course failure and targeted interventions for potential dropouts; and enhancing club/school/home partnerships to share information and resources. To date, the 30 pilot clubs across the country have enrolled more than 1,500 middle school aged youth. Communities with low graduation rates are intentionally targeted and a rigorous evaluation will follow. By 2014, if the pilot succeeds, the project will scale to at least 95 Clubs implementing BE GREAT: Graduate, supporting a minimum of 4,750 youth.

Foundations have emerged to support this work and the larger efforts of the Civic Marshall Plan. **AT&T** is giving a $1 million contribution to Boys and Girls Clubs of America for its BE GREAT: Graduate program and has made an additional $1 million commitment to Grad Nation in support of the Civic Marshall Plan. This includes $250,000 to conduct site visits, measure and report on progress of the plan, build national coalitions, and keep high school graduation and college readiness high on the public agenda; $250,000 to conduct research on and report to the nation on high quality early warning and intervention systems; and $500,000 to the Data Quality Campaign to improve the quality of data and information collected on students and their ability to achieve.

In January 2011, the **National Association of State Board Educators** (NASBE) and the U.S. Army launched Project PASS (Partnership for All Students Success), which is designed to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of middle and high schools students, to increase their chances of graduating from high school and to prepare them for post-secondary success through the cultivation of leadership and citizenship skills with academic support. There are currently 1,275 students enrolled in five sites in Kentucky, Kansas, Georgia, and Florida with waiting lists at all five sites. NASBE will seek to expand services to existing PASS sites and to increase the number of districts across the country that establish PASS programs in their schools and communities.

Hillsborough: Collaborating and Fine-Tuning for Success

The School District of Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa) serves 193,000 students, making it the country's eighth largest urban/suburban district. The student body is diverse with a population that is half white and a quarter each Hispanic and African-American. More than 45 percent of its high school students are eligible for free or reduced- price lunch.

Progress, 1999-2000 to 2009-10

- Hillsborough achieved a graduation rate of 82.3 percent in 2009-10 (up from 69.5 percent in 1999-2000), using the formula agreed upon by the National Governors' Association.[12]

- Between 2002 and 2009, the district experienced an 18 point gain in promoting power from 52% to 70%. Thirteen of the 19 high schools for which there is data registered double digit gains in promoting power during this time period. Four had single digit gains and two had small declines.

- Twelve of 25 high schools have a 2010 graduation rate of 90 percent or higher and 11 schools have graduation rates of 80 percent or higher for at-risk students.

- Three high schools improved their State of Florida ratings from D to A in the last four years, one improved from D to B, and one from C to A. Overall, eight high schools earned the A grade.

- The number of students taking Advanced Placement tests in the last three years has nearly doubled, and the number of students receiving a three or higher increased by 30 percent.

- Hillsborough was awarded the largest grant ever made to a public school system by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for Empowering Effective Teachers, a proposal that was developed with the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association. The Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association also received a grant to establish a virtual professional learning community.

Foundations for Progress, 1999-2000 to 2009-10

The present superintendent is in her seventh year and there have been only four superintendents in 42 years. Sustained leadership has meant that leaders at all levels can fine-tune systems for achieving expectations. Among the contributors to Hillsborough's high graduation rates for diverse students are:

- Careful pupil placement and promotion in accord with a district plan and review of data. Students are placed in the most challenging classes possible and students in upper grades are aggressively encouraged to enroll in Advanced Placement.

- All middle and high schools offer the AVID program, which assists "students in the middle" of academic achievement to take rigorous courses in preparation for college.

- Magnet programs have been established in the most urbanized areas, with 16 programs in 10 high schools. Students and parents also may choose out-of-boundary non-magnet schools (Choice) or Career-Technical schools.

- Students in upper grades are offered multiple acceleration options, including dual enrollment, early admission, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and virtual/on-line school.

- Each high school has a college/career counselor who helps students focus on college readiness and prepare college and job applications.

- Every school has a reading coach (with a science and math coach at the elementary and middle schools, and in some high schools). Intensive reading support is provided at all grade levels for those who need it.

- Students who have failed a course are often assigned to another course that teaches the same skills in a different way. Students who receive grades of D or F in a course may have grades replaced if they later earn a grade of C or higher in a comparable course.

- Beginning in 2010-11, principals and assistant principals interested in leading an urban school participate in an Urban Academy in which they share ideas and shadow present leaders.

- Hillsborough has long emphasized teachers' central role in advancing student achievement. All teachers have an early release day for participation in professional learning communities twice a month. Past grants enabled mentoring for math and science teachers in schools in which principals were paired with a local CEO to introduce business strategies into school improvement operations.

---

12 Currently Florida regulations allow students 16 and over who transfer into adult education programs not to be counted in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation. This will change next year when the state begins using a graduation rate calculation based on the 2008 US Department of Education regulations.

- Through the new Gates Foundation grant, new teachers are assigned a mentor, an experienced veteran on full-time leave; in 2011-2012, similar support for second year teachers will be provided.

- Principals receive a short summary of teachers' strengths that can be used as the basis for professional development. Other initiatives supported by the Gates Foundation grant include enhancement of the professional development system, incentivizing teachers who work with the highest needs students, and by 2013, developing a career ladder and new compensation system.

- In addition to the student database, which informs placement and promotion, the district uses data to examine attendance, to inform an early warning system, or understand teacher needs for professional development. Hillsborough knows, for instance, that there are few differences in attendance by gender or race; and that the percentage of students absent 20 days or more doubles in high school. The district also works with teachers to develop a comprehensive professional development program tailored to their needs.

Challenges for the Future

District-wide, the graduation gap between white and Hispanic students is 11.4 percent and between white and African-American students is 12.8 percent. The graduation rate gap between at-risk students and the school as a whole varies considerably by high school, as small as five points at two schools and as large as 18 percentage points at one. The pupil progression policy does not require high school students to pass both math and English in 9th and 10th grades, although research shows that students who fail one of these classes in 9th grade are, without interventions, unlikely to graduate. Hillsborough has shown that it has the effort and the stamina to get all schools in its district to a 90 percent graduation rate by continuously challenging and supporting all students with an infrastructure, guidance, literacy, careful placement, and interesting and rigorous learning opportunities taught by dedicated teachers.
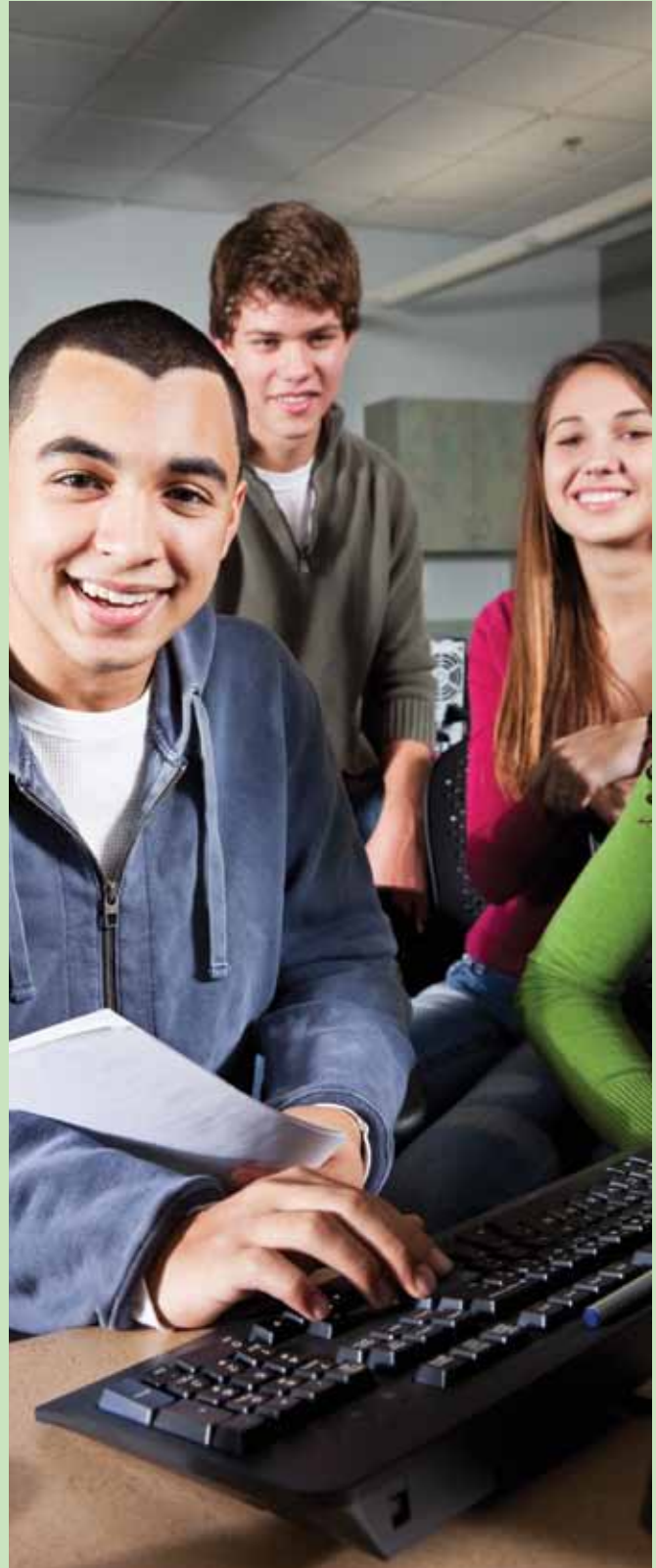
Federal Policy

Mindful of the federal fiscal crisis and the need to utilize existing funds more efficiently, the leadership of the Civic Marshall Plan is identifying opportunities for federal policy to help address the dropout challenge. Secondary schools are not a significant component of of current federal education policy. For example, only 10 percent of Title I funds go to high schools, yet they serve nearly one-quarter of the nation's low-income students. As the U.S. Congress and White House move to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, an increased emphasis must be placed on middle and high schools to ensure we can reach the national goal of a 90 percent national high school graduation rate by the Class of 2020. We recommend that the following principles be enacted as part of federal policy to maintain the progress we have experienced to date and ensure that the benchmarks of the Civic Marshall Plan are met:

1. **High standards:** Graduate all students from high school on time and ready for college or a career as the goal for the U.S. education system.

2. **Focus on the lowest performing schools:** Support major efforts and investments geared toward improving the most challenging low performing middle and high schools through the continuation and expansion of school improvement grants and a greater emphasis on secondary schools in existing federal programs.

3. **Graduation rate accountability:** Hold states, districts, and schools accountable for graduating all students from high school and getting them ready for college or a career. Build from the 2005 National Governors Association Compact and the 2008 graduation rate regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Education to implement a consistent graduation rate calculation and rigorous but attainable annual growth goals as proposed by the Every Student Counts Act. Require dropout factory high schools to identify their feeder middle schools so that early warning systems can take hold early.

4. **Flexibility and data-driven decision-making:** Shift away from the current one-size-fits-all school improvement system prescribed by the federal government to one that strengthens state and district capacity and allows states and districts to determine the best reform strategies based on data and tailored to the unique needs of their low-performing middle and high schools.

5. **Wraparound services:** Address the wide array of factors in and out of schools that influence student achievement through outcome-focused partnerships between schools and community based organizations.

6. **Community-led efforts:** Provide federal support for district, community, and statewide efforts to raise high school graduation and college- and career-readiness rates, such as Race to the Top (including participation from school districts), High School Graduation Initiative, and Promise Neighborhoods.

7. **National service:** Capitalize upon the nation's strong history of volunteering and strengthen the capacity of schools and communities to support student success by fully funding the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which includes an Education Corps.

Since 2002, 12 states have raised the compulsory school age from 16 to 17 or 18. Currently, 21 states have a compulsory school age of 18 and 32 states have a compulsory school age of 17 or 18. 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 drivers licenses. Since November 2010, at least six new state legislatures are considering raising the compulsory school age to 18 as well. Research shows that raising the compulsory school age acts as a constraint on dropping out.[13]

---

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

Conclusion

Although it has only been four months since the initial release of *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidmic*, significant progress continues to be made both in implementing the Civic Marshall Plan and ensuring that more students will graduate from high school prepared for the rigors of college and the workforce. Maintaining this momentum and sustaining the reforms that have already been put in place, particularly at the federal and state levels, will be critical (updated Grad Nation indexes for all 50 states can be found at www.every1graduates.org).

The many states, districts, and schools that have boosted high school graduation rates and the net reduction in 373 dropout factories over the last decade serve as both a challenge to others that can make similar progress and a beacon of hope for our work. This progress would not be possible without strong collaborations among the public and private sectors. These efforts show that, working collaboratively in local communities and across the nation, we can stem the dropout tide, meet national goals, and take important steps in ensuring the next generations of students are educated to meet the increasing demands of our society, economy, and democracy. To help make this vision a reality, we encourage states, districts, schools and communities to adopt the Civic Marshall Plan framework and benchmarks to organize and accelerate their efforts. Our progress as a nation depends upon it.

Appendix I — List of Leadership Council Members

Organizing Partners

America's Promise Alliance

Civic Enterprises

Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University

Alliance for Excellent Education

Members

American Association of School Administrators

American Federation of Teachers

AT&T

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Boys and Girls Clubs of America

City Year

College Board

Communities in Schools

Council of Chief State School Officers

Data Quality Campaign

Deloitte

Forum for Youth Investment

George W. Bush Institute

Jobs for America's Graduates

Jobs for the Future

National 4-H Council

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of State Boards of Education

National Conference on State Legislatures

National Council of La Raza

National Education Association

National Governors Association

National PTA

National School Boards Association

National Urban League

Pearson Foundation

Public Education Network

Rural School and Community Trust

State Farm

United Way Worldwide

Urban League

Voices for National Service

YMCA

Appendix II — Change in Dropout Factory High Schools 2002 to 2009

Low Graduation Rate High Schools by Region/State

Region	2002 Total number of schools	2009 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				
Connecticut	14	1	-13	-18,241
New Hampshire	5	1	-4	-1,854
New Jersey	20	16	-4	-12,712
Maine	5	2	-3	-1,551
Vermont	3	1	-2	-1,800
New York	140	139	-1	-55,632
Massachusetts	25	24	-1	-5,963
Rhode Island	6	8	2	407
Pennsylvania	46	53	7	-12,821
Subtotal	264	245	-19	-110,167
Midwest				
Illinois	62	36	-26	-33,190
Indiana	28	16	-12	-16,157
Ohio	76	68	-8	-21,184
Missouri	25	17	-8	-5,124
Iowa	4	1	-3	-4,672
Wisconsin	14	12	-2	-4,332
Michigan	80	78	-2	-14,698
South Dakota	3	1	-2	-2,862
Kansas	9	7	-2	-4,307
Minnesota	6	5	-1	-3,340
North Dakota	0	1	1	611
Nebraska	4	5	1	2,226
Subtotal	311	247	-64	-107,029
South				
Texas	240	159	-81	-84,162
South Carolina	100	59	-41	-42,561
Tennessee	63	24	-39	-36,160
Alabama	74	41	-33	-20,427
Florida	163	138	-25	-64,556
Georgia	154	130	-24	-21,462
Mississippi	62	42	-20	-11,231
Kentucky	42	22	-20	-16,246
North Carolina	108	92	-16	-13,590
Louisiana	66	54	-12	-16,329
West Virginia	6	2	-4	-3,221
Delaware	8	8	0	-3,393
Virginia	28	29	1	9,959
Oklahoma	16	18	2	442
Arkansas	5	14	9	5,485
Maryland	14	29		20,410
Subtotal				-297,042

Region	2002 Total number of schools	2009 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
West				
Arizona	40	26	-14	-12,288
California	135	121	-14	-83,771
Washington	33	24	-9	-8,924
Colorado	30	21	-9	-12,289
New Mexico	27	24	-3	-5,483
Alaska	9	7	-2	-2,944
Oregon	5	3	-2	-1,739
Wyoming	1	1	0	-586
Montana	1	2	1	1,187
Utah	1	2	1	1,360
Hawaii	8	11	3	2,130
Idaho	1	4	3	3,820
Nevada	7	28	21	47,745
Subtotal	298	274	-24	-71,782
TOTAL	**2,022**	**1,627**	**-395**	**-586,020**

Acknowledgements and Notes

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 AT&T.

Building a Grad Nation Annual Update

Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenges in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic was first published in November 2010 to inform the nation on the dropout crisis, present a plan of action in the Civic Marshall Plan, and report hopeful signs of progress in boosting high school graduation rates. This Annual Update is the first in the series of reports that will be issued each spring to update the nation on our progress toward reaching the goal of 90% high school graduation by 2020.

This report was made possible through
the generous support of our sponsor:

AMERICA'S PROMISE
ALLIANCE

CIVIC
ENTERPRISES

EVERYONE
GRADUATES CENTER

ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION