



Straight A's™

Public Education Policy And Progress



MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: Report Evaluates States' Progress on Developing High-Quality Data Systems

In 2005, all fifty of the nation's governors signed the National Governors Association (NGA) Graduation Counts Compact. As part of that commitment, they agreed to implement a common, accurate graduation rate and create better systems and methods of collecting, analyzing, and reporting graduation and dropout data. Currently, forty-two states have the data systems in place to calculate the NGA's graduation rate, and all states except one (Idaho) will report the NGA graduation rate by the 2010–11 school year, according to *Measuring What Matters: Creating Longitudinal Data Systems to Improve Student Achievement*, a new report from the Data Quality Campaign (DQC).

“The Data Quality Campaign has brought focus to the benefits of good data systems,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**. “Today, thanks in part to the DQC, forty-two states have already done the hard work necessary to have systems in place to calculate a more accurate and reliable graduation rate, and almost every other state is on track to have systems developed by 2011. Information is a powerful motivator for change, and I'm pleased that these states have put together systems that will empower parents and policymakers throughout the country to work to reverse low graduation rates.”

Each year, the DQC surveys all fifty states and the District of Columbia to gauge their progress toward implementing the DQC's ten essential elements of a longitudinal data system, which are outlined in the box below. The number in parentheses is the number of states that report having that element in place in 2008. In order to calculate the graduation rate defined in the NGA compact, states must have elements one, two, eight, and ten in place.

The Data Quality Campaign's Ten Essential Elements of a Longitudinal Data System

1. A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years (48)
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information (49)
3. The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth (48)
4. Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested (41)
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students (21)
6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned (17)
7. Student-level college-readiness test scores (29)
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data (50)
9. The ability to match student records between the P–12 and higher education systems (28)
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability (45)

Measuring What Matters

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Since the survey began in 2005, states have made impressive gains. In 2005, no state reported having all ten elements in place; this year, six states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, and Utah) have all ten. Additionally, forty-eight states have at least five elements in place and forty-seven states expect to have eight or more elements in place within the next three years.

The report also finds that states have made progress toward developing the tools they need to use the data, although it is not clear how states are actually taking advantage of the data to improve student performance. For example, forty-four states can identify students in public prekindergarten programs and link that information with K–12 education data, and twenty-eight can follow K–12 students into postsecondary education. Such data give states the capacity to improve alignment throughout the P–20 education pipeline, but the DQC is not able to report on whether states are actually using this data to improve student performance.

And there is other important work that still needs to be done. According to the report, only twenty-one states have the ability to match teachers to students by classroom and subject, a critical element for understanding the connection between teacher training and qualifications and student growth. This connection can make it possible to determine which teacher preparation programs produce graduates whose students have the strongest academic growth. It also can allow districts to analyze the experience levels of the teachers in high-poverty schools and compare them with those of teachers in schools serving more affluent students.

Currently, only seventeen states collect student-level course completion information, which provides the number and percent of students, including low-income and minority students, who enroll in and complete rigorous courses in high school. Such information will tell states which middle schools do the best job of preparing students for high school and whether students in more rigorous courses in high school have been more successful in college or the workforce.

“The DQC’s report demonstrates that major progress has been made during this first phase of the campaign, but the road ahead remains a long one,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “The next step is for states to ensure that the data collected are accessible, understandable, and strategically used to address individual student needs.”

The Data Quality Campaign was launched in November 2005 as a collaborative effort of national organizations to help states develop high-quality data systems that collect information about how individual students are doing over time, from prekindergarten through twelfth grade and into postsecondary education. Such data, called longitudinal data, give policymakers and educators the information they need to assess the effects of their efforts and adjust policies and practices to improve student achievement. The managing partners of the DQC include the Alliance for Excellent Education, Achieve, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, among others.

More information on the Data Quality Campaign, the ten essential elements of a longitudinal data system, and *Measuring What Matters* is available at <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/>.

Alliance Sheds Light on High School Graduation Rates

Almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing and highest-paying jobs require some postsecondary education, but one third of the nation's students—about 1.2 million each year—do not even graduate from high school. Unfortunately, these unacceptably low graduation rates, particularly among poor and minority students, have been obscured by inaccurate data, calculations, and reporting, and inadequate accountability systems at the state and federal levels.

To help individuals understand exactly who is (and who is not) graduating, the Alliance for Excellent Education has released “Understanding High School Graduation Rates,” a series of easy-to-read, one-page documents for all fifty states and the District of Columbia. These profiles provide the latest graduation rate statistics, illustrate graduation gaps between demographic groups, highlight discrepancies in graduation rates reported by government and independent sources, and examine the economic costs of dropouts to individuals and society.

To access national and state profiles, visit http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/understanding_HSgradrates.



MISSION NOT YET ACCOMPLISHED: Achieve and Ed Trust Seek to Make College- and Work-Readiness the Goal for High Schools

To help close the gap between what is expected of a high school graduate and what the postsecondary world demands, state leaders must develop policies to equate earning a diploma with college- and work-readiness. This is the theme of a new report, *Making College and Career Readiness the Mission for High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers*, that was co-written by education nonprofits Achieve and The Education Trust as part of Measures That Matter, a project that helps guide state decisionmakers in crafting policies with college- and work-readiness at their core.

“The time has come to rethink not only what we expect of our students but also what we ask of our high schools and the leaders who are responsible for them,” said **Matt Gandal, executive vice president of Achieve**.

The report argues that the global nature of today's economy dictates that all students have a high level of preparation—regardless of their ultimate goals—if they are to meet the demands of family- supporting jobs—many of which require postsecondary education. Additionally, the challenges of financial decisions and even everyday citizenship mean that workers will need to know more and be able to apply that knowledge to succeed both in and outside of the workplace.

“The old dichotomies of ‘college bound’ and ‘work bound’ no longer apply,” the report reads. “Academic proficiency alone is insufficient; so is focusing on giving students narrow skills needed for certain jobs. Students need to know more, they need to be better equipped to apply that knowledge, and they must be prepared to tackle increasingly complex issues and problems.”

To help students meet these challenges, the report makes five recommendations for state policymakers: align high school standards with the demands of college and careers, ensure that all students enroll in a college- and career-ready course of study, provide high-quality curriculum and teacher-support materials, build better assessments to measure student learning, and establish information and accountability systems that value and reward college- and career-readiness.

Mission Not Yet Accomplished

(Continued from p. 3)

Acknowledging that aligning standards with college and career demands is a challenging process, the report emphasizes that it is necessary to ensure that all students are prepared for postsecondary education and work. It calls on state policymakers to involve their two- and four-year colleges in helping to determine what baseline knowledge and skills incoming freshmen need to begin college without remediation. It also suggests that policymakers go through a similar process with employers, and that they make sure that the standards ultimately guide instruction in the earlier grades, as well.

The report also recommends that all students take a college- and work-ready curriculum. It notes that although many states have requirements for a diploma (e.g., four years of English, three of math, etc.), a student can take the requisite number of courses in each area and still not be college- and work-ready, particularly if the courses are not challenging. Instead, Achieve and The Education Trust say that high school students should take math through Algebra II and four years of rigorous English as part of a well-rounded curriculum that includes classes in science, the arts, social studies, and foreign languages.

States have made progress in this area, according to the report. Three years ago, for example, only Texas and Arkansas required students to complete a college- and work-ready curriculum, which included four years of rigorous English and a math course beyond Algebra II, for a diploma. Today, however, eighteen other states and the District of Columbia have such requirements. Further, through its American Diploma Project, Achieve has worked with twenty-eight states to help them align their standards.

State leaders must make sure that courses are rigorous not only in name, but also in content. Inconsistency is widespread, and as the report points out, an Algebra I course taught in one school can be much more or much less challenging than one taught in another. It calls for policymakers to provide more leadership regarding curricula and instructional supports.

Because current state tests fail to adequately measure college- and work-readiness, the report also suggests that states develop better high school assessments. It cites a National Center for Education Statistics report that found that 40 percent of students who take placement tests at the beginning of college are told they are not ready for college work, even though they likely passed their state tests in high school.

The report also finds that the establishment of meaningful assessments could help postsecondary schools and employers link incentives to strong results. It cites examples such as California, where the state university waives the placement test requirement for students who score at college-ready levels on the statewide eleventh-grade exam, and New York, where the state university uses Regents exam results for admissions and placement decisions.

The report concludes that states are at all different stages of implementing and mandating a college- and work-readiness curriculum, but stresses that even the furthest-along states are “at best, only halfway to the goal of a truly aligned system.”

“There is a lot of work for states to align standards, assessments, and accountability with the demands of life after high school,” noted **Ross Wiener, vice president of The Education Trust**. “But these changes alone won’t be enough to get everyone pulling in the same direction. The next generation of state policy needs to give teachers and students meaningful goals to aim for, and needs to provide more useful information and stronger curriculum and instructional support to help them succeed.”

To download the full report, visit <http://tinyurl.com/6non96>.

More information on Measures That Matter can be found at <http://www.achieve.org/measureshatmatter>.



REPORT FINDS NO IMPROVEMENT IN TEXAS’ HIGH SCHOOL ATTRITION RATES SINCE 1985–86

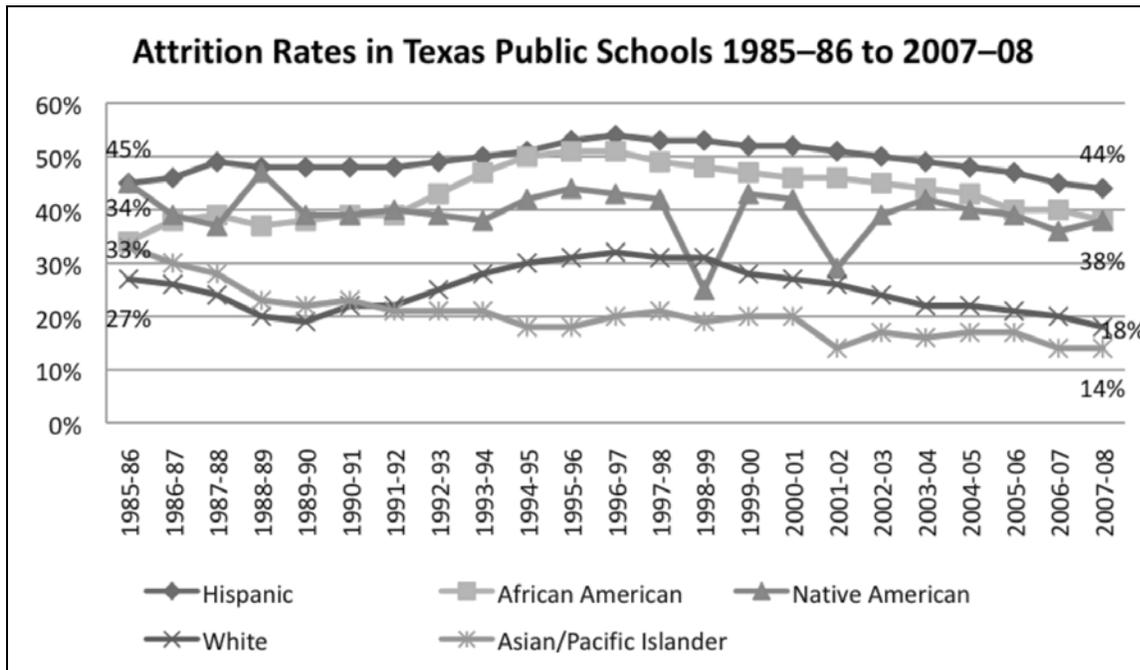
One of every three students from Texas’ freshman class of 2004–05 left high school before earning a high school diploma. So says the *Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2007–08*, the latest in a series of reports by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), a nonprofit organization based in San Antonio, Texas, dedicated to strengthening public schools to work for all children. The report focuses on attrition rates, which IDRA says are an indicator of a school’s “holding power,” or ability to keep students enrolled in school and learning until they graduate.

Although attrition rates have declined in recent years, IDRA finds that no improvement has occurred since the 1985–86 school year. Texas’ 33 percent attrition rate for 2007–08 continues the recent decline from the high of 43 percent in the 1996–97 school year and represents the seventh consecutive year that the overall statewide attrition rate in Texas public schools was less than 40 percent. However, the 33 percent rate for 2007–08 is the same as it was when IDRA first began its reports on student attrition back in the 1985–86 school year, meaning that the state essentially has made no progress in improving the attrition rate in the last twenty-two years.

Nor has the state made any improvement in closing the gaps between white students and their African American, Hispanic, and Native American peers. According to the report, the attrition rates for Native American and Hispanic students have decreased since 1985–86, but they have not declined as much as those of Asian/Pacific Islanders and whites. Meanwhile, the attrition rate for African American students has actually increased over the last twenty-two years, rising from 34 percent in 1985–86 to 38 percent in 2007–08.

As a result, the gaps between the attrition rates of white students and African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are increasing. As shown in the chart on page six, the gap between the attrition rates of whites and African Americans increased from 7 percentage points in 1985–86 to 20 percentage points in 2007–08. Similarly, the gap between white and Hispanic students has grown from 18 percentage points to 26 percentage points. On the other hand, the gap in attrition rates between Asian/Pacific Islanders and whites has reversed, going from a 6 percentage point deficit in 1985–86 to a 4 percentage point advantage in 2007–08.

Report Finds No Improvement in Texas' High School Attrition Rates Since 1985–86
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Although African American students are the only subgroup whose attrition rate has risen, Hispanic students, at 44 percent, continue to have the highest attrition rate. Asian/Pacific Islanders, at 14 percent, have the lowest attrition rate. Native Americans, at 38 percent, are at the higher end while white students, at 18 percent, are much lower.

The report also finds that attrition rates for males, which were already higher than those for females, have gotten worse, going from 35 percent in 1985–86 to 36 percent in 2007–08. During the same time period, the attrition rates for females have improved, declining from 32 percent to 29 percent and increasing the gap in male and female attrition rates from 3 percentage points to 7 percentage points.

“It is high time that Texas take a new course,” said **Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, president and CEO of IDRA.** “Investment in change must go beyond discrete dropout prevention programs. It must reflect our full commitment to providing for quality public schools in all neighborhoods for children of all backgrounds.”

During the twenty-two-year period that it has performed these calculations, IDRA estimates that more than 2.8 million students have dropped out of Texas’ secondary schools.

The complete report is available at <http://tinyurl.com/5omvva>.

New Report Encourages Policymakers to Support Entrepreneurship Education

Every year, the nation fails to graduate approximately 1.2 million students from high school. These individuals will face severe obstacles to employment, livable wages, and civic participation and will often drift into crime or be incarcerated. Even students who do manage to earn their diploma are often unprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education or work. For these young people, the lack of an adequate education means a lost opportunity to enjoy successful and rewarding careers; for the American companies looking to hire qualified workers, they mean a tremendous deficit in productivity and a greater competitiveness disadvantage with international rivals that are able to draw from a better educated pool of workers.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Education in America: A Policymaker's Action Guide, a new publication from the Aspen Institute Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group (YES Group) examines this disconnect between what employers want and what America's youth bring to the table. Far too often, it notes, the nation's young people lack the skills that American companies look for to allow them to compete in a global economy. The skills deficit is particularly noticeable in science and math, as well as the ability to work in teams, think creatively, or to interact effectively.

According to the guide, an "entrepreneurial mindset," which it defines as a "critical mix of success-oriented attitudes of initiative, intelligent risk-taking, collaboration, and opportunity recognition," can help students develop these skills. Entrepreneurial education, it argues, is a mutually beneficial solution that can benefit students and American companies alike and must be included with the host of different solutions that will "better engage young people in their education," while also building "stronger connections between communities, businesses, and schools."

"Preparing today's students for success and eventual leadership in the new global marketplace is the most important responsibility in education today," write **Stephanie Bell-Rose, YES Group chairperson and managing director of Goldman, Sachs, and Co.**, and **Thomas W. Payzant, YES Group vice chairperson and professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education**, in the foreword to the guide. "Providing them with guidance and opportunity at the most critical junctures along their educational journey can have a profound impact. Entrepreneurship education is an important tool to achieving these objectives."

The report notes that entrepreneurial education programs are in place in some communities across the nation and have a "proven track record of keeping kids in school, and providing them with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to start their own ventures...." However, it adds that most American youths have little to no access to this training.

The goal of the YES Group is to ensure that all high school graduates from low-income communities have educational opportunities to explore their entrepreneurial potential. To this end, the YES Group's "I Said Yes" campaign seeks to help educators and policymakers adopt statewide standards for youth entrepreneurship education, and revise existing education statutes, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, the Higher Education Act, and Workforce Investment Act, to include entrepreneurship skills as a desired competency in educational standards.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Education in America: A Policymaker's Action Guide is available at <http://tinyurl.com/6njamb>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America's six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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Beginning in January 2009, Straight A's will only be available electronically. Don't miss a single issue!

To give you the latest information on secondary school improvement from Washington and around the nation faster—and to reduce paper consumption—the “snail mail” delivery method will soon end.

Because the Alliance for Excellent Education already has your email address on file, it will automatically switch you to the electronic version beginning in January 2009. If you have any questions, or want to make sure that the Alliance has your correct email address on file, please email Jason Amos at jamos@all4ed.org by December 15, 2008.

