



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



A COMMON UNDERSTANDING: Final K–12 Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics Released on June 2

On June 2, 2010 the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the final version of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics at an event held at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Georgia. The standards for grades K–12 were developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including content experts, states, teachers, school administrators, and parents.

“The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents have a roadmap for what they need to do to help them,” said **Steve Paine, state superintendent of West Virginia schools and president of CCSSO**. “Further, these standards provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live, and allow states to more effectively help all students to succeed.”

The June 2 release event in Georgia featured supporters of the common standards effort from various circles within the education community, including [Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue](#), [Delaware Governor Jack Markell](#), [Florida Commissioner of Education Eric J. Smith](#), [American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten](#), [Baltimore City Public Schools Chief Executive Officer Andres Alonso](#), and [National Education Association Vice President Lily Eskelsen](#).

(Links go to remarks given by the highlighted individual).



The event also featured a [panel discussion](#) moderated by **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. During the panel, **Leah Luke, a high school Spanish teacher and the Wisconsin 2010 Teacher of the Year**, discussed how common standards will be an effective tool in the classroom and noted that the standards were beautiful in their brevity. “It’s not that the standards we’ve had in Wisconsin were bad. It’s just there are so many of them. The sheer number of them has been overwhelming,” she said.

Steve Rohleder, group chief executive of Accenture’s Health and Public Service operating group, brought the perspective of the business community and noted that the United States is losing its competitive advantage on the global stage. However, he added that common standards provide a way for the nation to do something bold and innovative that will be the first step in changing the way the United States competes on a global scale for talent. He also said that whether a state has adopted common standards could play a role in key decisions by businesses.

“If implemented correctly and quickly, [adoption of the Common Core State Standards Initiative] could be the standard that businesses use to relocate,” Rohleder said. “If they’re moving from one state to the next and a state isn’t involved or hasn’t adopted ... I think that’s going to be a key criteria.”

Another panelist, **Byron V. Garrett, chief executive officer of the National Parent Teacher Association**, discussed the long-standing understanding that parents have had about the importance of common standards, especially as they move their children from community to community or from state to state. He said the common standards will “equalize the playing field and [allow parents to] not have to guess or wonder where their child will be in the academic process.”

Additional panel speakers included **Michael Wotorson, executive director of the Campaign for High School Equity**, who discussed the importance of common standards for the civil rights community and **William Bradley Bryant, a member of the Georgia State Board of Education**, who talked about the role that state boards of education will play in implementing the standards.

To learn more about the Common Core State Standards Initiative, or to view the final common standards in English language arts and mathematics, go to <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

States Already Moving to Adopt the Common Core State Standards Initiative

In February, [Kentucky](#) became the first state to formally adopt the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. In the following weeks, three other states—[Hawaii](#), [Maryland](#), and [West Virginia](#) announced their formal approval of the standards.

Since the morning of June 2, several other states have also indicated their commitment to adopting the standards including [Louisiana](#), [North Carolina](#), [Ohio](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Wisconsin](#). (Click on a state listed above to read more about its adoption of the Common Core State Standards.)

To learn whether a state has plans to adopt the Common Core State Standards, and, if so, which entity in each state has formal adoption authority for standards, download the Alliance for Excellent Education’s common standards state cards at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/commonstandardsstatecards.



DIPLOMAS COUNT: New Report Finds High School Students Today Graduate at About the Same Rate as in the Early 1960s

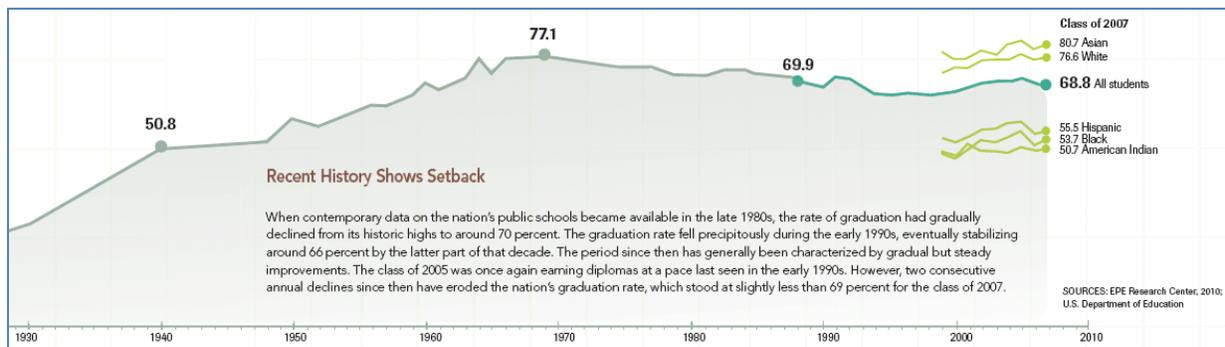
Nearly 1.3 million students from the Class of 2010 will fail to graduate with their classmates, according to a new analysis from the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center. The report, *Diplomas Count 2010: Graduation By the Numbers—Putting Data to Work for Student*

Success, pegs the national graduation rate at 68.8 percent, which represents a slight drop (0.4 percent) from the 69.2 percent graduation rate reported last year.

“The continuing decline in the nation’s graduation rate is very troubling in light of the muscular response mounted around the dropout crisis in recent years,” said **EPE vice president Christopher B. Swanson**. “Stalled progress on a nationwide scale speaks at least as much to the deep and broad roots of the dropout problem as it does to the strength of our collective response.”

Diploma’s Count 2010 traces high school graduation rates all the way back to 1870 when only 2 percent of American seventeen-year-olds possessed a secondary level education. According to the analysis, it was not until 1940 that the graduation rate surpassed 50 percent for the first time and, continuing its climb, reached a historical high point in 1969 when it peaked at 77 percent.

In the decades following, the report notes, the graduation rate “eroded incrementally at certain times and fell significantly at others, including a sharp drop during the first half of the 1990s.” As indicated in the image below, the nation made some progress between the late 1990s and 2005, but after two consecutive declines, now graduates students at about the same rate as it did in the early 1960s. (Click on the image below to enlarge it.)



Female students, with a graduation rate of 72.9 percent, received their diplomas at a higher rate than males, who graduated at a rate of only 66 percent. When breaking graduation rates down by race and ethnicity, the report finds that Asians (80.7 percent) and whites (76.6 percent) were much more likely to graduate from high school than Hispanics (55.5 percent), blacks (53.7 percent), and American Indians (50.7 percent).

The report notes that the low graduation rates of minority students is especially troubling as the public school population continues to consist of fewer traditionally higher-performing white students and more members of historically underserved groups. It points out that the Hispanic student population, which currently lags 21 percentage points behind whites, has grown by 50 percent in the past decade alone.

“All else being equal, population growth among groups with low average graduation rates will tend to suppress improvements in the overall graduation rates,” the report reads. “Put simply, the challenge of improving high school graduation rates is analogous to swimming upstream against a rapid and generally unfavorable demographic current.”

Diploma's Count 2010 also breaks graduation rates down at the state level. It finds that five states have graduation rates above 80 percent while seven states and the District of Columbia have graduation rates below 60 percent, as shown in the table below.

Top Five and Bottom Five Graduation Rates by State

State	Graduation Rate	State	Graduation Rate
New Jersey	83.3%	Nevada	41.8%
Vermont	82.3%	New Mexico and South Carolina	54.9%
Wisconsin	81.0%	Louisiana	57.4%
North Dakota	80.9%	Georgia and North Carolina	57.8%
Iowa	80.2%	District of Columbia	59.5%

When examining graduation rates at the school district level, the report finds that twenty-five of the nation's roughly 11,000 school districts serving secondary students account for one in every five high school dropouts. These districts, which the report calls the "epicenters of the dropout crisis," consist of a combination of traditional big-city districts such as New York City and Los Angeles, and large countywide school systems, such as Clark County, Nevada, and Miami-Dade County, Florida. Acknowledging that turning around the lowest-performing school districts will not be easy, the report notes that cutting the dropout rate in half in just those twenty-five districts would yield an additional 128,000 graduates and raise the national graduation rate by 3 percentage points.

As evidence that it is possible for school districts to successfully graduate large percentages of at-risk students, the report offers twenty-one urban districts that "beat the odds." These districts have demographics similar to those of the nation's largest urban school systems but possess graduation rates that are 10 percentage points higher than the anticipated rate based on district size, poverty level, and other characteristics. The six school districts with the biggest difference between their expected graduation rate and their actual graduation rate are in the table below.

School District	Location	Actual Graduation Rate	Expected Graduation Rate	Difference
Newport-Mesa Unified	Newport Beach, CA	86%	57%	+29
David Douglas	Portland, OR	83%	63%	+20
Texarkana ISD	Texarkana, TX	77%	58%	+19
Memphis	Memphis, TN	62%	43%	+18
Visalia Unified	Visalia, CA	74%	56%	+18
Jonesboro	Jonesboro, AR	80%	63%	+18

More information on *Diplomas Count 2010* is available at www.edweek.org/go/dc10.



ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE: Alliance Study Finds that Fewer Dropouts Means Higher Spending on Homes, Cars, and Investments

Lowering the high school dropout rate will greatly increase the economic vitality for some of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, according to a dramatic new study that the Alliance for Excellent Education released on June 9. The results are the latest in the Alliance's continuing work linking improved educational outcomes to economic returns. Combined with the [study the](#)

[Alliance released in January](#) on the nation's forty-five largest metro areas, the June 9 release brings the number of cities for which the Alliance has data to over eighty-five.

The city-by-city findings include the growth in jobs, home ownership, levels of spending and investment, and car sales, among other findings, that would likely result from cutting the high school dropout rate in half. For example, in the Tampa metropolitan area, an estimated 14,100 students dropped out from the Class of 2008 at great costs not only to themselves but to their communities as well. If Tampa's high school dropout rate were cut in half, graduates in the Tampa metropolitan area would likely have:

- seen \$77 million in increased earnings in the average year;
- spent an additional \$57 million and invested an additional \$20 million each year;
- created an additional 700 jobs from the increased spending in their local areas and increased the gross regional product by as much as \$107 million;
- boosted home sales with an additional \$183 million in mortgage capacity over what they would spend without a diploma;
- spent an additional \$6.8 million each year purchasing vehicles; and
- boosted tax revenue by \$6 million.

And, after earning a high school diploma, 56 percent of these new Tampa graduates would likely continue on to pursue some type of postsecondary education—an especially important finding considering that over two thirds of new jobs and nearly 90 percent of new high-growth and high-wage jobs will likely go to workers with at least some education after high school.

In the Cincinnati metropolitan area, if half of the estimated 7,600 students who dropped out from the Class of 2008 had earned their diplomas instead, these new graduates would likely have:

- seen \$42 million in increased earnings in the average year;
- spent an additional \$29 million and invested an additional \$10 million each year;
- created an additional 350 jobs from the increased spending in their local areas and increased the gross regional product by as much as \$53 million;
- boosted home sales with an additional \$95 million in mortgage capacity over what they would spend without a diploma;
- spent an additional \$3.5 million each year purchasing vehicles;
- and boosted tax revenue by \$5.7 million.

According to **Bob Wise, Alliance president and former governor of West Virginia**, these findings clearly prove that everyone benefits from improved education. “As these results demonstrate, the best economic stimulus package is a high school diploma,” he said. “If the U.S. is to improve its competitiveness in the global economy, it must have an education system that meets the fast-growing demand for high-level skills,” concluded Wise.

The economic model used to generate this report was developed by the Alliance for Excellent Education with the generous support of State Farm® and in partnership with Economic Modeling Specialists Inc.

“As a business leader, I’m committed to a quality education for all children and to strengthening the vitality of our communities,” said **Edward B. Rust Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of State Farm®**. “The new findings from the Alliance for Excellent Education conclusively demonstrate that graduating from high school has significant positive economic and financial consequences for the business community and not just for the individual getting the education. Assuring that all of our students graduate from high school with the skills necessary to compete in a global economy is something all businesses—small and large—should see as a priority.”

The June 9 release contained data for the following metro areas: Akron, OH; Anchorage, AK; Baton Rouge, LA; Billings, MT; Birmingham, MT; Bismarck, ND; Boise, ID; Bridgeport, CT; Burlington, VT; Casper, WY; Cedar Rapids, IA; Charleston, WV; Cheyenne, WY; Cincinnati, OH; Columbia, SC; Des Moines, IA; Dover, DE; Fargo, ND; Huntington, WV; Iowa City, IA; Jackson, MS; Little Rock, AR; Manchester, NH; Morristown, TN; Pittsburgh, PA; Portland, ME; Providence, RI; Raleigh, NC; Richmond, VA; Rochester, NY; Salt Lake City, UT; Scranton, PA; Sioux Falls, SD; Spokane, WA; St. Louis, MO; Stockton, CA; Tampa, FL; Toledo, OH; Trenton, NJ; Wheeling, WV; and Yakima, WA.

For more information and specific statistics for each of the metropolitan areas listed above, visit the Alliance’s website at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/EconMSA2.



OPPORTUNITY AT THE TOP: New Report Finds that Concentrated Efforts to Retain and Expand the Reach of the Nation’s Top Teachers Could Vastly Improve Education

A new report from Public Impact, a national education policy and management consulting firm based in Chapel Hill, NC, finds that current reform efforts in the areas of teacher improvement are not enough to significantly improve the education for the majority of American children. The report, *Opportunity at the Top: How America’s Best Teachers Could Close the Gaps, Raise the Bar, and Keep Our Nation Great*, finds that one overlooked resource could raise the education bar, close achievement gaps, and improve the nation as a whole: the top 25 percent of U.S. teachers.

According to the report, the country’s top performing teachers, which include more than 800,000 professionals, are in a position to help all students exceed current academic standards and graduate from high school ready for college and careers. It cites major research, which reveals that the disparity in educational performance between student groups such as high-income and low-income students could be closed in just five years if lagging children gained access to today’s top teachers.

The report acknowledges that two challenges stand in the way. The first challenge is retaining the nation’s best teachers. Currently, about 8 percent of the best teachers leave the profession every year. That outflow translates into a loss of about 64,000 teachers every year.

To better retain the nation’s best teachers, *Opportunity at the Top* calls for teacher evaluation systems that differentiate between teachers based on performance. It notes that current evaluation

systems make it possible for both the best-performing teacher and the worst-performing teacher in a single school to receive a rating of “satisfactory” or higher. Additionally, the report finds that teacher rewards and benefits rarely take into account a teacher’s job performance and ability to help students progress academically throughout the school year. According to the report, less than one penny out of every dollar of teacher compensation is based on performance or on any other factor other than experience or advanced degrees. Instead, teacher compensation systems are designed to mainly reward teachers to stay in the classroom and accumulate experience. As a result, great teachers are generally compensated at the same level as poor teachers. To correct this system, the report authors suggest building an “opportunity culture” that provides teachers with plenty of avenues by which they may gain personal achievement, make impacts on children, and earn increased pay in proportion to their contributions to student learning.

The second challenge identified in the report is a school system that is ill-equipped to fully leverage the top-performing teachers’ talents. The report finds that even if a highly effective elementary teacher stays on the job for thirty years, her instruction will only reach six hundred students over the same period. It identifies several hurdles to expanding excellent teachers’ reach, including state legislation that places a limit on the number of students per classroom, compensation systems that do not reward teachers who are reaching more students, funding systems that allocate resources in the form of staff positions rather than in the form of dollars, and limits on teaching across state lines. Due to these limitations, the vast majority of great teachers reach the same number of students as their less effective peers.

Opportunity at the Top has several recommendations for retaining high performing teachers and expanding their reach, including aggressively recruiting more high performers to the teaching profession; tripling dismissals of the least effective teachers; cutting the turnover rate among the top teachers in half; and boosting top performing teachers’ reach by:

- Changing instructional roles and how schools are organized to maximize the best teachers’ talents;
- Using technology to enable great teachers to engage directly but not in person with students; and
- Using video of great teachers and software based on their insights and practices to deliver great teaching to students.

To read the full report, visit

http://opportunityculture.org/images/stories/opportunity_report_web.pdf.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events 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 national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. For more information about the Alliance, visit <http://www.all4ed.org>.