

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization: Graduating America

Useful Facts for the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Hearing
May 4, 2010

Strengthening the nation's high schools must be a primary goal of ESEA reauthorization. High schools are neither held appropriately accountable nor supported by current law, despite the growing awareness that almost one third of high school students do not make it to graduation day with their class. Fortunately, this is a solvable problem. Through targeted investments in reform, high schools that now perpetuate the cycle of poverty can be transformed into engines of prosperity.

THINGS TO KNOW

The United States is in the midst of a high school dropout crisis.

- Thirty percent of all high school students do not graduate with their class. For students of color, on-time graduation is a fifty-fifty proposition.¹
- Fewer than two thousand high schools (12 percent of all high schools) produce nearly half of all dropouts; these schools produced 420,000 dropouts from the Class of 2008 by the beginning of senior year alone.²
- Despite common perception that dropouts are only an urban problem, just 51 percent of the lowest-performing high schools (those with a graduation rate of 60 percent or less) are urban, while 21 percent are rural.²

High schools are largely overlooked by federal education policy.

- High schools only receive 10 percent of Title I funds but educate 23 percent of the nation's low-income students.³
- Nearly one-third (31 percent) of the lowest-performing high schools are neither eligible for Title I or School Improvement Grants, the primary federal source of funding to turnaround low performing schools.⁴

The best stimulus package is a diploma.

- Without improvements to the nation's high schools, twelve million students will drop out in the next decade at a cost of more than \$3 trillion to the U.S. economy.⁵ (For further reading, see *Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy* at <http://all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>.)
- Over the course of their lifetimes, if the dropouts from the Class of 2009 had graduated, they would have earned an additional \$335 billion.⁶
- In the nation's fifty largest cities, earning a high school diploma will increase a dropout's annual salary by \$10,000. On average, college graduates annually earn almost three and a half times more than high school dropouts.⁷

Graduation rates can, and must be, increased.

- Students at risk of dropping out can be identified as early as the sixth grade using academic factors known as "early warning data," "risk factors," or "on-track measures."⁸
- Talent Development High Schools (TDHS) produce measurable increases in graduation rates. For example, the first TDHS class in Baltimore had a graduation rate of 84 percent, compared to the city-wide average of 60 percent. In Philadelphia, TDHS increased the graduation rate of Strawberry Mansion High School from 43.9 percent to 85.2 percent.⁹
- Illustrating that high school is not too late to support struggling students, the Institute for Student Achievement implements a robust school reform model including a rigorous curriculum, strong professional development, and a safety net of support services that yields a graduation rate among participants that is 25 percent higher than comparison students.¹⁰

FLAWS IN THE CURRENT LAW

- Although the current version of ESEA—also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—holds schools accountable for increasing test scores of student subgroups based on race, ethnicity, disability, and poverty, it does not require meaningful accountability for the graduation rates of those student subgroups.
- The accountability system set up by NCLB does not adequately identify or address the nation's lowest-performing high schools.
- Current school improvement approaches outlined in ESEA are not sufficiently driven by data indicating the nature or severity of the problems in these schools. Thus, they often do not lead to improvement efforts that can reasonably be expected to be effective for turnaround.
- There is no dedicated funding stream aimed toward the turnaround and continuous improvement of low-performing high schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A reauthorized ESEA should:

- Codify the goal of graduating all students from high school on time and ready for college and careers.
- Establish accountability for meaningful progress on graduation rates and college and career readiness for all students and subgroups in all high schools, regardless of receipt of Title I funds.
- Leverage state- and district-led improvement systems that are differentiated, data driven, and prioritize the lowest-performing high schools, as proposed by the Graduation Promise Act (S. 1698, H.R. 4181).
- Provide a regular, formula-based funding stream to support solutions to address the needs of all low-performing high schools, prioritizing those that are lowest-performing.
- Build the capacity of states and school districts to provide targeted, comprehensive, and systemic supports and interventions to schools, school staff, and students.

For additional legislative recommendations, visit

<http://www.all4ed.org/files/ESEARECS.pdf>.

¹ Editorial Projects in Education, "Diploma Counts: 2009 Broader Horizons," special issue, *Education Week* 28, no. 34 (2009); ² T. Tucci, "Prioritizing the Nation's Lowest-Performing High Schools" (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010); ³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume VI-Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds* (Washington, DC, 2009); ⁴ Alliance analysis of data from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University and the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data; ⁵ J. Amos, *Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation's Economy* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008); ⁶ Alliance for Excellent Education, "The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools" (Washington, DC: Author, 2009); ⁷ Christopher Swanson, *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap: Educational and Economic Conditions in America's Largest Cities* (Bethesda, Maryland: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2009); ⁸ L. Pinkus, "Using Early-Warning Data to Improve Graduation Rates: Closing Cracks in the Education System" (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008); ⁹ Talent Development High Schools, *Results from Talent Development High Schools* (Baltimore: Author); ¹⁰ Seventy-nine percent of ISA students graduated in four years, compared with 65 percent of comparison students. For additional information, visit www.studentachievement.org.