

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of Special Populations

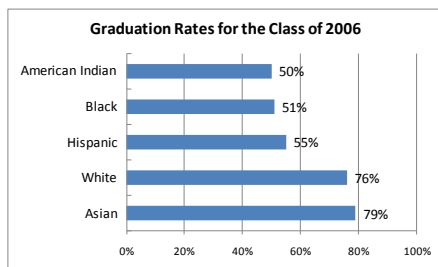
Useful Facts for the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Hearing
April 29, 2010

Each year, roughly 1.3 million students leave high school without a diploma.¹ Special student populations such as those who are traditionally underserved or face significant non-academic challenges—including students of color, low-income students, students with limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, and foster, migrant, and homeless students—often have lower achievement and graduation rates than their peers. Confronting the dropout crisis and graduating all students college and career ready requires addressing the needs of these special student populations.

THINGS TO KNOW

Students from historically underserved populations (including poor students and students of color) have lower graduation rates than their peers.

- Students of color have significantly lower graduation rates than their white peers¹ and are more likely to attend one of the nation's lowest-performing schools where the graduation rate is less than 60 percent.²
- Students in the lowest quartile of family income are seven times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers in the highest quartile.³



Special needs populations are at high risk of dropping out of high school. These populations include students with limited English proficiency, a disability, experiencing homelessness or housing instability, in foster care, and children of migrant farm workers.

- Seventy-three percent of English language learners and 61 percent of students with disabilities read below a basic level on NAEP.⁴ This indicates low literacy skills which is a key risk factor for dropping out.
- Young adults who were formerly in foster care are three times as likely as their peers **not** to have a high school diploma or GED, and one fifth as likely to have a college degree.⁵
- Homeless students—who totaled nearly one million during the 2008–09 school year and are growing in numbers—are less likely to graduate than their peers. In Virginia, for example, students from the Class of 2009 who were homeless at any point during high school had a graduation rate that was 25 percent lower than the state's average graduation rate.⁶
- A recent study finds that among low-income students of color—students already at risk of dropping out—highly mobile students were half as likely to earn a regular diploma than those who moved no more than once.⁷

Students at risk of dropping out can be identified using academic factors known as “early warning data,” “risk factors,” or “on-track measures.”

- For example, for Chicago Public Schools, the number of credits earned and the number of failures in core courses by the end of the ninth grade were used to accurately identify 80 percent of eventual dropouts.⁸
- Implementing early warning systems has been an effective strategy in many school districts to identify and intervene when students fall off track to graduation.⁸

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.
- Under NCLB, states are not required to report achievement or graduation rate data for highly mobile student populations, homeless students, or children in foster care.
- Current law does not do enough to leverage the use of funds (including through Title I, school improvement grants, or various staff development programs) to support the use of diagnostic and other data to drive decisionmaking, such as the utilization of early warning data to identify students who have fallen off track to graduation and intervene quickly and effectively to address academic and non-academic needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A reauthorized ESEA should:

- Establish the goal of college and career readiness for all students, and encourage and support states in implementing standards aligned to college and career readiness.
- Require the reporting of graduation rates for all special populations.
- Continue investments in statewide longitudinal data systems in order to support the development of district-level early warning and intervention systems.
- Build the capacity of states and school districts to utilize data and provide targeted, comprehensive, and systemic supports and interventions for students from special populations, their teachers, and their schools.
- Support policies that promote the educational stability of homeless students and students in foster care, including processes to facilitate credit transfers and school completion such as those proposed by the Fostering Success in Education Act (S. 2801) and the Educational Success for Children and Youth Without Homes Act of 2009 (S. 2800).

For additional legislative recommendations, visit
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/ESEARECS.pdf>.

¹Editorial Projects in Education, “Diploma Counts: 2009 Broader Horizons,” special issue, *Education Week* 28, no. 34 (2009); ²T. Tucci, “Prioritizing the Nation’s Lowest-Performing High Schools” (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010); ³U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2009* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010); ⁴U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation’s Report Card: Reading 2009* (NCES 2006-451) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010). ⁵M. Courtney, et al., *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 23 and 24*, (Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2009); ⁶Project HOPE Virginia, Fall 2009 Newsletter <http://education.wm.edu/centers/hope/publications/newsletter/fall%2009%20newsletter%204.pdf>; ⁷S. Ou and A. Reynolds, “Predictors of Educational Attainment in the Chicago Longitudinal Study,” *School Psychology Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2008): 199-229; ⁸L. Pinkus, “Using Early-Warning Data to Improve Graduation Rates: Closing Cracks in the Education System” (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008)