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Public Education Policy And Progress



DIPLOMAS COUNT: Report Finds that 1.23 Million Students Will Fail to Graduate in 2008

An estimated 1.23 million students, or almost 30 percent of the class of 2008, will not graduate with their peers, according to a new report from *Education Week*. *Diplomas Count 2008: School to College: Can State P-16 Councils Ease the Transition?* pegs the national graduation rate at 71 percent but finds that several states have graduation rates lower than 60 percent.

“The nation and many states face severe challenges in graduating students from high school,” said **Editorial Projects in Education Research Center Director Christopher B. Swanson**, who conducted the graduation rate analysis. “With the graduation rate rising less than one percentage point annually in recent years, we still have much work to do.”

Nationwide, the report finds that about 71 percent of ninth graders earn a diploma four years later. And while five states had graduation rates higher than 80 percent, five states and the District of Columbia (57.6 percent) had graduation rates lower than 60 percent, as shown in the table below.

States with the Highest Graduation Rates		States with the Lowest Graduation Rates	
State	Graduation Rate	State	Graduation Rate
New Jersey	83.3%	Nevada	45.4%
Iowa	82.8%	New Mexico	54.1%
Wisconsin	80.5%	Louisiana	54.7%
Pennsylvania	80.4%	South Carolina	55.6%
Vermont	80.2%	Georgia	58.1%

The report also finds that Hispanic (57.8 percent), African American (55.3 percent), and Native American students (50.6 percent) graduate at significantly lower rates than Asian American (81.3 percent) and white students (77.6 percent). In some states, the graduation rate gaps between white students and African American and Hispanic students were over 40 percent. For example, in South Dakota and Alaska, the Hispanic graduation rate trailed the white graduation rate by 61.3 percent and 50 percent, respectively. In Minnesota and South Dakota, African Americans graduated at rates 44.5 percent and 42.3 percent, respectively, lower than white students.

In addition to providing graduation rates by state, *Diplomas Count* also includes graduation rates by school district and, for the first time, graduation rates for each of the 435 Congressional districts in the nation. At the high end, three Congressional districts in New Jersey boast graduation rates over 92 percent, whereas one district in Louisiana and one in New York have

Diplomas Count (Continued from p. 1)

graduation rates lower than 30 percent. Overall, most of the Congressional districts with graduation rates lower than 65 percent are located in the Southeast and Southwest.

The report also includes a special analysis of P–16 councils, noting that these councils and their variants are “one of the most popular vehicles for strengthening the connections between public schools and higher education.” It finds that forty P–16 councils have been formed in thirty-eight states and provides case studies of councils in Arizona, Kentucky, and Rhode Island. The report also examines state policies in three key areas: definitions of college and workforce readiness, high school completion credentials, and exit exams.

The complete report, as well as access to graduation briefs for each state and EdWeek maps, which allows users to zoom in on each of the nation’s schools and districts, is available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2008/06/05/index.html>.

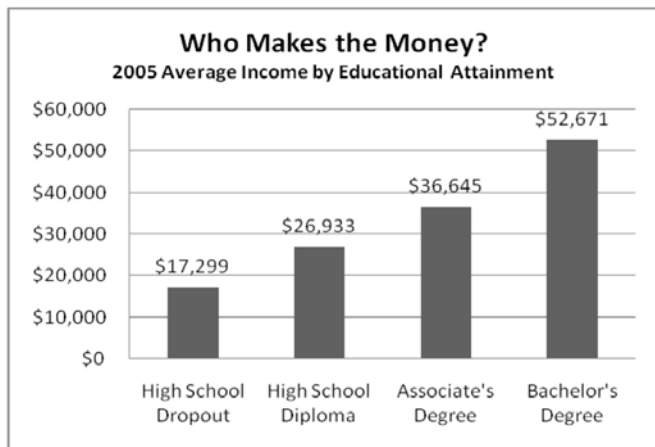


“THE HIGH COST OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS”: Alliance Pegs Cost of 2008 Dropouts at \$319 Billion

Had the more than 1.2 million students who dropped out of the Class of 2008 graduated, the nation’s economy would have benefited from an additional \$319 billion in income over the course of their lifetimes. So says “The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools,” a newly released issue brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

“Each class of high school dropouts damages the economy,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “If candidates running for federal office are truly committed to saving the nation’s economic future, they must commit to saving America’s high schools. The best economic stimulus package is to increase the number of students who earn a high school diploma.”

The brief, which is based on research from *Diplomas Count* and a study by **Cecilia Rouse, professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University**, notes that the majority of high school dropouts see the result of their decision to leave school most clearly in the slimness of their wallets. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was nearly \$10,000 less than that of a high school graduate, as indicated in the chart to the right.



According to the brief, dropouts not only earn less income, but they are also far more likely than graduates to spend their lives periodically unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in

and out of the prison system. The brief notes that, by contrast, everyone wins with increased graduation rates. The graduates, on average, will earn higher wages and enjoy more comfortable and secure lifestyles. At the same time, the nation benefits from their increased purchasing power, collects higher tax receipts, and sees higher levels of worker productivity.

Included in the brief is a state-by-state analysis that shows how each class of dropouts can affect a state's economy. Vermont (at the low end) would see its economy increase by \$439 million; Mississippi (near the middle) would add \$3.98 billion to its economy, and California's economy (at the high end) would accrue an additional \$42 billion over the lifetime of each graduating class. The brief notes that these figures are conservative and do not account for the added economic growth generated from each new dollar put into the economy.

The complete brief is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE?: Urban Institute Report Finds Positive Results for Teach for America High School Teachers

At the high school level, Teach for America (TFA) teachers are more effective than experienced teachers across subject areas, but particularly in math and science classes, according to a recent report from the Urban Institute's National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER). The report, *Making a Difference? The Effects of Teach for America in High School*, finds that programs such as TFA that focus on recruiting and selecting academically talented recent college graduates and placing them in schools serving disadvantaged students can help reduce the achievement gap, even if teachers only stay in teaching for a few years.

“School systems working to improve their neediest schools may find that focusing on teacher selection has a greater payoff in high schools than focusing on teacher retention,” said **Jane Hannaway, director of the Urban Institute's Education Policy Center and the CALDER**. “In our study, we don't know whether it was the strong academic credentials of TFA corps members or some kind of special motivation that came with being a TFA teacher that made the difference, but the results were clear: students performed better when they had an inexperienced TFA teacher than when they had a veteran educator at the blackboard.”

In performing their analysis, the report's authors examined individual-level student data linked to teacher data in North Carolina from the 2000–01 through 2005–06 school years. Specifically, they looked at TFA teachers in high schools, and especially in math and science. As they explain, North Carolina was a particularly attractive location because of its rich administrative databases and its requirement that schools administer subject-specific end-of-course exams at the end of the school year.

Among those studied, TFA teachers were more highly qualified in several areas than non-TFA teachers. For example, significantly more TFA teachers have graduated from “most selective” or “very selective” higher education institutions than non-TFA teachers (64 percent versus 23 percent). In addition, TFA teachers have higher average scores on the PRAXIS, a series of tests that states use as part of their teacher licensure and certification process, and are more likely to

Making a Difference (Continued from p. 3)

be licensed in the subject area that they teach (90 percent to 82 percent in science subjects, 73 percent to 69 percent in math subjects, and 89 to 67 percent in English).

The report also finds that TFA teachers are more likely to be assigned to classrooms with higher minority concentrations (80 percent to 49 percent) and are more likely to be assigned to more academically challenged classrooms. And although students of TFA teachers are less likely to be limited English proficient, they are more likely to be racial or ethnic minorities, and less likely to have parents with bachelor's degrees or higher. They also tend to have lower standardized scale scores on end-of-course assessments across all subjects.

However, the report finds that, in terms of test scores, TFA teachers can more than offset their lack of teaching experience with their better academic preparation in particular subject areas or with other unmeasured factors such as motivation. On average, high school students taught by TFA corps members performed significantly better on state-required end-of-course exams, especially in math and science, than students taught by more experienced instructors.

Without adjusting for classroom characteristics, the researchers find that having a TFA teacher is associated with about 0.12 standard deviations improvement in end-of-course performance. Adding classroom variables reduces TFA effects to 0.07, but it reduces the effect of teacher experience even more, resulting in a TFA effect on student achievement that is just below three times the effect of teachers with three or more years of experience.

“Our findings show that secondary school TFA teachers are more effective than the teachers who would otherwise be in the classroom in their stead,” the researchers write. “Other things being equal, the findings suggest that disadvantaged students taught by TFA teachers are better off than they would be in the absence of TFA.”

The report does have some criticisms of the program, noting that most TFA teachers have not received traditional teacher training and are therefore not as prepared for the demands of the classroom as traditionally trained teachers are. In addition, TFA only requires a two-year teaching commitment, and the majority of corps members leave at the end of that commitment. The report's authors also point out that their findings do not mean that there is no value to teacher training and hypothesize that TFA teachers could be even more effective with more pedagogical training.

The complete report is available at <http://www.urban.org/publications/901157.html>.



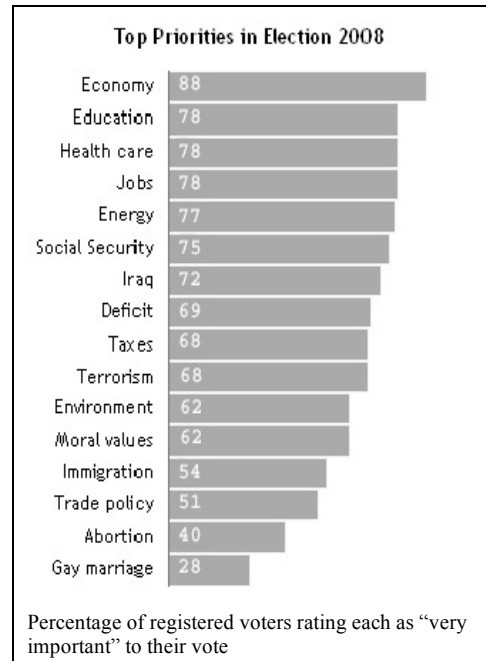
EDUCATION IN '08?: Education Not an Issue During Primaries, but Signs Point to Higher Profile in McCain-Obama Matchup

During the races for the Democratic and Republican presidential nominations, the issue of education played a very small role. In fact, **Roy Romer, chairman of ED in '08 and former governor of Colorado**, has pointed out that there were 160 questions asked of candidates in the presidential debates before one dealt with education, and that question was “Who was your favorite teacher?” Indeed, even when education was discussed on the campaign trail, candidates

were more likely to have mentioned the “importance of a good education” or the “need for a competitive workforce,” than they were to get into substantive discussions about education policy.

However, if recent polling is any indication, the issue of education could enjoy more attention in the coming weeks. According to a May 29 poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, education ranks second in a list of voters’ priorities for the 2008 election. As shown in the chart to the right, education, at 78 percent, tied with health care and jobs as the number two priority in voters’ minds, trailing only the economy, but ranking ahead of issues such as Iraq, taxes, and immigration.

Already, the candidates (or at least their representatives) have started talking about education. At a June 6 event held by the Association of Educational Publishers (AEP) billed as the AEP Great Education Forum, senior education advisors representing **Senators John McCain (R-AZ)** and **Barack Obama (D-IL)** fielded questions from a panel of education experts. Interestingly, when asked why education had not been an issue in the campaign, both of the education advisors said that their candidates are talking about education, but that no one is listening.



Jeanne Century, director of science education at the University of Chicago, who represented Senator Obama, said that Obama always talks about education and believes that education is the key to fixing many of America’s problems. Senator McCain’s representative, **Lisa Graham Keegan, former Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction**, said that the campaign thus far has just been the media talking to the media, and Americans have not been given the chance to weigh in. She added that McCain will be much more detailed in his education plan in the coming weeks and will be putting forth new proposals. (Obama has announced that he will devote the week of June 16 to laying out his proposals for making the “workforce more competitive by reforming our education system.”).

When asked to provide a closing statement that would describe their candidate’s position on education, each sounded familiar refrains from the campaign trail. Century echoed Obama’s theme of change and hope: “We can’t build ourselves an education system for the future using strategies we’ve had in the past,” she said. “We know a great deal about what works and we need to have the courage and the will to take responsibility for every single child in this country to realize the dream of American public education.”

Keegan, meanwhile, focused on McCain’s independence and willingness to take tough positions: “Senator McCain has proven himself in his career to be somebody who does not care if you are angry with him,” she said. “He does not care if you don’t agree with him, especially in places

Education in '08? (Continued from p. 5)

where you'd expect him to. He is going to be somebody who will absolutely confront the barriers in education that keep us from saying one thing but being unwilling to actually act on it.” (The complete video from the forum is available at <http://www.aepweb.org/>.)

As a June 11 *Education Week* article points out, the education issue could emerge more clearly in the general election campaign, especially as the candidates begin to discuss their positions on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). According to the article, both candidates express support for NCLB goals and its use of testing to measure schools' success. However, whereas McCain would “promote market forces as a way to spur school improvement, and would likely seek to freeze education spending as part of a review of the effectiveness of federal programs,” Obama “promises to search for new ways of assessing students and to invest significantly in efforts to improve teacher quality.”

And, if the differences in McCain and Obama's positions on education do not emerge over the course of the summer, it is safe to assume that both candidates will ratchet up their discussions on education reform as the media begins to focus on the topic in late August and early September when students go back to school.

The Pew poll is available at <http://people-press.org/report/425/mccain-obama-negatives>.

“Candidates Are at Odds Over K–12” is available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/06/11/41election.h27.html>.



THE CONTINUED COLLAPSE OF THE TEEN JOB MARKET: Summer Employment Rates Among Teens Expected to be Lowest in Sixty Years of Counting

The average monthly number of unemployed persons during the January–March period was 600,000 higher than a year ago. And, according to *The Continued Collapse of the Nation's Teen Job Market and the Dismal Outlook for the 2008 Summer Labor Market for Teens: Does Anybody Care?*, a new report from the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, the deterioration of the national labor market has accelerated the collapse of the teen job market across the country.

The report finds that teen employment rates have been declining sharply since late 2006, well before the national job market began to decline, and the drop has accelerated in recent months. During the first three months of 2008, only 33.5 percent of teenagers (ages sixteen through nineteen) were employed in any type of job during an average month—the lowest recorded since the government started counting in 1948 and a drop of 3.6 percentage points since 2006.

The report notes that job losses for teens over the past eight years have been quite severe for nearly all demographics, but especially for the nation's sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, males, African Americans, Hispanic, and low-income youth. “Low-income, black, and Hispanic teens face the equivalent of a Great Depression,” the report reads.

The report cites several reasons why teen employment is important for the nation, including gaining more experience and higher earnings down the road. “The more teens work this year, the

more they work next year,” it reads. “Less work experience today leads to less work experience tomorrow and lower earnings down the road. Disadvantaged teens who work in high school are more likely to remain in high school than their peers who do not work.” It adds that teens who work in high school have an easier time transitioning into the labor market after graduation and that pregnancy rates for teens are lower in metropolitan areas where employment rates for teen girls are higher.

The report says that the outlook for the nation’s teens for the summer 2008 job market is even worse than last year and predicts that the summer teen employment rate will be 34.2 percent, which is below last year’s historical low and 11 percentage points below 2000’s summer employment rate. “Our summer jobs outlook poses serious problems for many teens hoping to find work this summer,” the report reads. “Younger teens, males, black and Hispanic youth, and low-income youth are most at-risk of joblessness this coming summer.”

The complete report is available at <http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/>.

Students, Graduates Play Role in Sharpest One-month Unemployment Rate Increase in Twenty-Two Years

A June 6 employment report from the Labor Department finds that, last month, the U.S. unemployment rate posted its sharpest one-month increase since February 1986, going from 5.1 to 5.5 percent. This information sent the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling by 394.64 points, resulting in a 3.1 percent drop and the biggest single-day drop since February 27, 2007. The jobs report, combined with comments from analysts and the growing tension between Israel and Iran, also resulted in a \$10.75 increase (8.8 percent) in the price of crude oil futures.

The *Wall Street Journal* noted that the jobs report was especially troublesome because labor markets are key to the economic outlook. “Until last month, they had maintained enough resilience to support consumer spending despite big drags from the housing slump and soaring energy prices that have sapped demand for big-ticket items. ... But that could change, and economists worry that households can’t withstand the mix of falling employment and soaring prices for food and energy much longer, especially if labor markets weaken.”

Some economists cautioned that the jobs report tends to be volatile between April and July because of an increase in the number of young people trying to find jobs, a view seconded by **U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao**, who said the increase “reflects the fact that unusually large numbers of students and graduates are entering the labor market.”

The jobs report also saw increases in the unemployment rate for individuals at all levels of education over last year. For example, 5.9 percent of high school dropouts were unemployed in May 2007, compared to 8.3 percent this year; 4.1 percent of high school graduates were unemployed last year, compared to 5.2 percent in 2008. College graduates saw the smallest change, as only 1.9 percent were looking for jobs in May 2007, compared to 2.2 percent this year.

A recent survey by Capital One finds that recent college graduates are skeptical of the current job market, with less than half (48 percent) saying that, although there are some jobs available, there are not enough for all new graduates; 44.8 percent believe that there are fewer job opportunities than in there were in previous years. Despite this skepticism, 85 percent expect to find a job within six months.

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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In this issue:

- *Diplomas Count*: Report Finds that 1.23 Million Students Will Fail to Graduate in 2008
- “The High Cost of High School Dropouts”: Alliance Pegs Cost of 2008 Dropouts at \$319 Billion
- *Making a Difference?*: Urban Institute Report Finds Positive Results for Teach for America High School Teachers
- Education in ‘08?: Education Not an Issue During Primaries, but Signs Point to Higher Profile in McCain-Obama Matchup
- The Continued Collapse of the Teen Job Market: Summer Employment Rates Among Teens Expected to be Lowest in Sixty Years of Counting



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