



February 13, 2006

Delegates Ana Sol Gutierrez and Salima Siler Marriott
Maryland House of Delegates
219 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Dear Delegates Gutierrez and Marriott:

We, the undersigned organizations, congratulate you on introducing in the Maryland House of Delegates H.B. 71 regarding graduation rate formulas. We believe this legislation supports the intent of the National Governors Association Graduation Rate Compact—an agreement signed by governors of all 50 states to establish a common national definition for high school graduation rates.

High school graduation is one of the most important indicators for measuring a student's educational progress and his prospects for future success. Yet, for too long, national and state measures for four year high school completion rates have been unreliable due to differences in calculation methods and data quality. These critical differences have served to undermine our understanding of how students and schools are performing. Ultimately, a lack of accurate data impedes our ability to achieve universal high school graduation and prepare a diverse student body for college and work in the 21st century.

H.B. 71 helps to overcome this problem by initiating a process, by which Maryland can collect, maintain, analyze and report data relating to the graduation rates of public high school students seeking a regular 4-year diploma. This process is essential for measuring and closing the achievement gap among the nation's diverse student populations.

Important features of this legislation include requiring that a state:

- implement a standard 4-year graduation rate definition and data collection protocol;
- count as graduates only those students earning high school diplomas, not those earning credentials by passing General Education Development (GED) tests, earning certificates of completion or other alternatives to a diploma, for the purpose of this definition;
- build and maintain capacity for collecting, analyzing and reporting graduation rate data at the school, district and state levels and by race/ethnicity, native language, income and disability status;
- educate the public about the need for collecting, analyzing and reporting graduation rate data; and,
- establish an interim graduation rate formula until they have the necessary data to implement the cohort graduation rate definition.

We believe that these objectives represent a solid first step toward holding schools accountable for graduating students on time with a regular diploma and toward achieving a standardized system of calculating graduation rates, both of which will ultimately enhance efforts to improve high school education.

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Delegates Gutierrez and Marriott

We congratulate you for introducing this legislation and the Maryland General Assembly for giving it careful consideration. We look forward to working with you on your efforts to improve the quality and accuracy of graduation data collected and reported by the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education

The Education Trust

National Center for Educational Accountability

National Education Association