

High School Graduation Rates Model Legislation

Based on Maryland Bill: Public Schools - Graduation Rate Formula - Collecting, Maintaining, Analyzing, and Reporting

Background. This legislative initiative was lead by Maryland State Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez as part of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) Joint Closing the Gaps Project.*

Significant contributors to the development of the model template include: Dan Losen, Harvard Civil Rights Project; Ross Wiener and Daria Hall, The Education Trust; Chris Swanson, formerly with the Urban Institute; as well as bill writer, Sara Fidler, of the Maryland Department of Legislative Services, Maryland General Assembly.

Legislative Actions: The Maryland bill was pre-filed on December 2, 2005, by Delegates Salima Siler Marriott (D-40, Baltimore City) and Ana Sol Gutierrez (D18 Montgomery County) in the Maryland House, and by Senator Gwendolyn Britt (Baltimore City) in the MD Senate. It will be heard during the upcoming session, which starts on January 11, 2006.

This Graduation Rates model legislation will be introduced in all seven states (IL, IN, MD, NM, NY, OH, TX) that are actively participating in this NHCSL/NBCSL Closing the Gaps project with Black/Latino Legislator Education Teams working on legislation to address the achievement gap. A number of other state legislators representing over 20 states have also expressed strong interest in sponsoring this graduation rates model legislation.

Bill Summary. The Graduation Rates model template aims to translate into legislative language the NGA Compact signed by 45 governors at the NGA Summit in July 2005. (See attached NGA document.) The bill template defines the basic formula and terminology for calculating graduation rates using a four-year adjusted cohort. Recognizing that some districts and states do not have student tracking information systems in place, the bill proposes using an interim formula for calculating graduation rates for four years.

Purpose: The bill requires a State Education System to adopt and implement a certain formula for use in calculating certain information about "on time" graduation rates from the State's public high schools; requires a State Education System to undertake certain activities with respect to graduation rates from the State's public high schools; and relates generally to the collection, maintenance, public reporting and analysis of data relating to graduation rates from the public high schools of the State.

Contact Information:

Maryland State Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez
219 Lowe House Office Building, Annapolis, MD 21401-1991
Tel in Annapolis after Jan 11, 2006: 301-858-3181
Email: ana_gutierrez@house.state.md.us

District/Home Office: 3317 Turner Lane, Chevy Chase, MD 20815
Tel 301-718-0707 (District Office)

* *The NBCSL/NHCSL Closing the Gaps* is a national legislative and grassroots campaign that addresses the achievement gaps and disparities in education. The National Black Caucus of State Legislators is a broad-based, nonpartisan organization with approximately 600 members in 44 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. More information, www.nbcsl.com. The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that continues to grow in political influence with nearly 300 members in 29 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For more information, please visit www.nhcsl.com

###

ACCURATE REPORTING ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO IMPROVING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Every year, across the country, a dangerously high percentage of students – disproportionately poor and minority—disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school. Independent scholars across the country agree that when graduation rates are calculated based on enrollment and diploma data, approximately 68-70% of all students who enter 9th grade will graduate “on time” with a regular diploma in 12th grade. White students tend to graduate in slightly higher rate (75%), while Black Latino and Native Americans only have about 50-50 chance of earning a real diploma. Black, Latino and Native American males fare even worse with rates of 43%, 47% and 48% respectively. Yet, because of misleading and inaccurate reporting graduation rates, the public remains largely unaware of this educational and civil rights crisis.

“Excellence in education for all” only holds meaning when disadvantaged children have a fair opportunity to earn a high school diploma. But poor and minority youth often hit a tremendous wall when they enter high-poverty high schools.ⁱ These schools often face acute problems with inexperienced out-of-field teachers, broken down facilities, and grossly inadequate educational resources. Many of our high schools would have an impossible space, resource, and teacher crisis if even 90% of the students who entered as 9th graders showed up on the same day in 12th grade. If our public system of education is the ark that can carry disadvantaged children away from a cycle of poverty to more hopeful futures, then educators and the public must know when and where our children are lost at sea.

The costs to our society of so few poor and minority children earning diplomas is staggering. Specifically, researchers say that dropouts earn about 30% less than graduates, and the earnings gap is getting substantially larger. Moreover, dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be incarcerated, and are far more likely to depend on public assistance. This translates into literally billions in lost wages and annual losses of millions due to increased incarceration costs and higher levels of crime.

THE PROBLEM IS WORSE THAN IT LOOKS

- **Our nation’s high schools are plagued by extremely low rates of graduation, especially in poor school districts.** There are large districts in California, Georgia, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New, York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas where 40% or less of the entering 9th grade cohort graduates on time with a diploma.
- **The crisis is more severe than it looks because school districts and states routinely overestimate their graduation rates.** Most states and school districts underestimate the size of their dropout rates, especially for minority students. This is primarily due to the fact that most state reports of graduation rates rely on officially reported dropout numbers, which are very inaccurate undercounts of the numbers of students who actually leave school without ever earning a diploma. For example, the Black dropout rate was officially reported to be 3.9% in Florida and only 2.6% in Texas, while estimates based on enrollment data show that only about 50% of the entering cohort of 9th graders in these states earned a diploma.

- **Our nation's failure to deliver excellence in education perpetuates the cycle of poverty in America.** For example, the economic implications of failing to earn a high school diploma are staggering, and increasingly so as our economy continues to grow into the service and information age. GED recipients also have a much higher rate of unemployment and are much more likely to need welfare or other forms of government assistance.
- **Without required dropout and graduation rate reporting schools can escape meaningful accountability.** Without information on these critical indicators of success the public will remain in the dark about the effectiveness of school reform measures. We need to ensure that academic gains are the result of progress by *all* students, not the result of lower performing students leaving school. Successful schools ensure that all students are taught up to state standards and are leaving with a high school diploma in-hand.

Recommendations to State Legislators:

- **Introduce Graduation Rates Model Legislation--States must ensure that accurate graduation rates are reported to the public, and that these rates are disaggregated for all major student subgroups.**
- **Improve Student Information Systems--States should institute longitudinal tracking of all students through a unique common identifier system that would follow students throughout their schooling.**
- **Establish Meaningful Performance Goals and Measures---States should establish honest and equitable graduation performance goals and public accountability measures.**
- **Establish Rewards for Schools Significantly Closing Graduation Gaps--States should establish rewards tied to significant and steady improvement in graduation rates over a period of years.**

¹ Meredith Maran, *Class Dismissed: Senior Year in an American High School*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000; Christina Rathbone, *On the Outside Looking In: A year in an Inner-City High School*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998; Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1999; Richard Boyd, et.al, *Are Ohio's Youth at Risk: Urban and Suburban Schools in the Buckeye State*, Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappan, 1999

<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.6c9a8a9ebc6ae07eee28aca9501010a0/?vgnnextoid=41d89bacc7ce7010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=6d4c8aaa2ebbf00VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>

NGA NEWS RELEASE

12/02/2005

Governors Give Unanimous Support to High School Graduation Rate

Governors Endorse Graduation Counts Compact

Contact: [John Blacksten](#)
Office of Communications

WASHINGTON—Governors from each of the fifty states have adopted a common definition for their high school graduation rate, the National Governors Association announced today. Fifty governors and 12 national organizations have signed onto *Graduation Counts: A Compact on State High School Graduation Data*.

The compact stems from a report released earlier this year, *Graduation Counts: A Report of the NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data*. The report outlines five task force recommendations states should use to develop a high-quality, comparable high school graduation measure, as well as complementary indicators of student progress and outcomes and data systems capable of collecting, analyzing and reporting the data.

Through the compact, governors and organizations represented on the task force agreed to implement the following recommendations:

- begin implementing a standard four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate;
- lead efforts to improve state data collection, reporting and analysis, and link data systems across the entire education pipeline from preschool through postsecondary education;
- take steps to implement additional indicators that provide richer information and understanding about outcomes for students and how well the system is serving them; and
- report annual progress on the improvement of their state high school graduation, completion and dropout rate data.

"The unanimous support of our nation's governors for the *Graduation Counts* compact provides momentum for our efforts to ensure all students graduate from high school ready for college and work," said John Thomasian, director of the NGA Center for Best Practices. "This compact will help us to improve the quality of education for American high school students."

The NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data was convened earlier this year in Washington. The task force included representatives from: eight governors' offices, the American Federation of Teachers, the Business Roundtable, the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, the Educational Testing Service, the Education Trust, Holland & Knight, the Manhattan Institute, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Education Association, Standard and Poor's, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, and the Urban Institute. Although they represented different constituencies, task force members found substantial consensus on which to build their findings and recommendations.

"Governors, chief state school officers, higher education executive officers, legislators, state boards of education, district officials, principals and teachers together must lead the charge to create better systems and methods of collecting, analyzing and reporting graduation and dropout data," the report said.

The NGA Center for Best Practices will work with states as they implement the compact and its provisions, and will share best practices with governors and the education community. For a copy of *Graduation Counts: A Report of the NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data* and the language of the *Compact on State High School Graduation Data*, please visit www.nga.org.

#
