

REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY SOUTHEAST

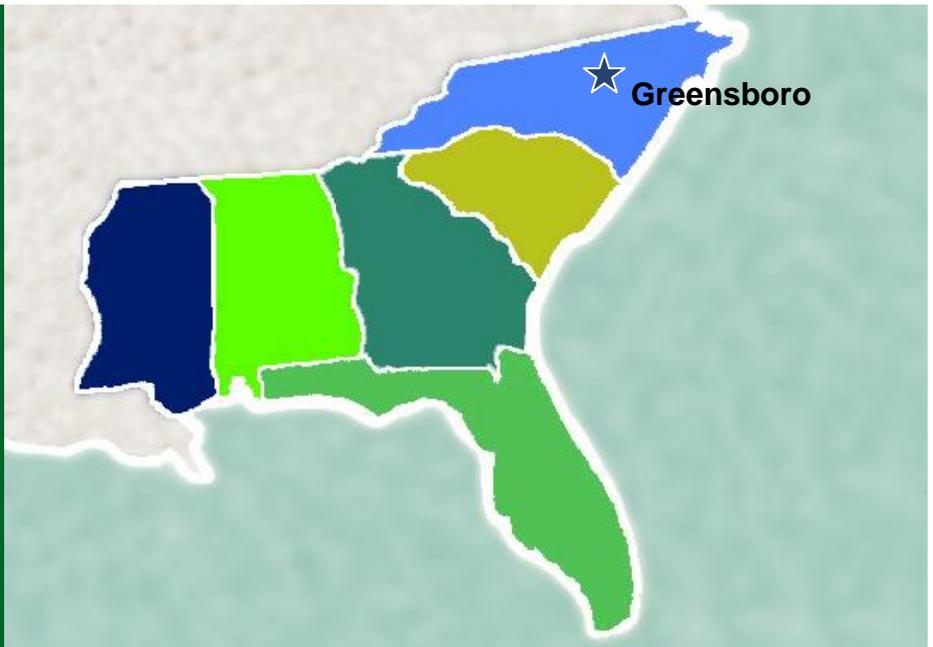
SERVE Center

September 2008, EBE #359

EVIDENCE BASED EDUCATION REQUEST DESK

OUR GOAL

To assist educators and policymakers in their efforts to apply the evidence base to decisions about policies, programs, and practices they encounter.



REQUEST:

Which states are currently implementing a “Graduation Coach” initiative as a response to the dropout issue and how do the initiatives compare on a number of dimensions?

“GRADUATION COACH” INITIATIVES AT THE STATE LEVEL

This EBE response describes characteristics of graduation coach initiatives in three states (Georgia, Alabama, and California). REL Southeast has received over 19 requests for information on various initiatives, programs or research related to improving graduation rates. For example, we received requests from two state departments interested in finding out what other states in the region were doing to improve graduation rates. We responded by compiling a state by state listing of some dropout prevention efforts underway in the six southeastern states. Given the high level of interest in initiatives to improve graduation rates, this response provides descriptive information on one state-level initiative identified (state funding for “graduation coaches”) that was common to two southeastern states.

On average, in the southeastern states, a third to one half of students do not graduate high school in four years (EPE Research Center, 2006). In the Regional Educational Laboratory – Southeast (REL-SE) service area, four of our six states have four-year graduation rates lower than 60% (Swanson, 2004). In light of these statistics on graduation rates, there is increasing interest among state leaders in providing additional support to secondary students. Georgia has a fully operational, statewide graduation coach

initiative, and Alabama has recently completed their pilot phase. Mississippi and South Carolina have recently initiated statewide efforts to require district dropout prevention strategies that include student mentoring components, similar to graduation coaches in intent. In May 2008, the North Carolina legislature jointly funded Communities in Schools North Carolina Inc. (CIS) and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for over \$6 million dollars to place 100 graduation coaches in either middle or high schools (HB 2277).¹

There are other states outside the Southeast that are also exploring options for additional support to address high dropout rates. For example, Oklahoma's governor endorsed a bill in 2008 asking for the creation of a graduation coach position, but the bill did not pass. In a 2008 survey, Louisiana asked its principals if they would be interested in adding graduation coaches to their staff (http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/initiatives/princsurvey_test.aspx). Ohio has a career-based intervention specialist in many high schools with similar job duties to graduation coaches, and Texas has a High School Transformation Project that allows its grantees to spend funds on graduation coaches. These state level activities suggest that descriptive information on implemented graduation coach initiatives could be helpful to state and district decision-makers.

Findings

What states are providing funding and other support for graduation coach positions in high schools? We conducted a search process and identified Alabama, California, and Georgia with graduation coach initiatives that were operational over the 2007-08 academic year. The information in the tables summarizes basic implementation features of these programs and reflects the kinds of information readily available on web sites and in reports. No formal interviews were conducted. The information is organized into three tables discussed briefly in the text.

Table 1: Overview of State Initiatives

Table 2: Roles and responsibilities

Table 3: Data collection and coaches' reports

Overview of State Initiatives

Table 1 includes text from program descriptions describing the purpose or mission. The three state initiatives had similar goals: improving graduation rates, decreasing dropout rates, re-enrolling dropouts into the educational setting, meeting individual student needs and ensuring those who graduate are prepared for either postsecondary education or a career.

Georgia began implementing a new statewide graduation coach initiative in 2006.

¹ However, North Carolina will not be included in this brief, as the initiative has not been fully implemented.

- Alabama looked at their data, took note of the efforts in Georgia, and began piloting their own Dropout Prevention Advisor program in 2007. There was no legislation regarding the program and its funding.
- California built its programs upon previous initiatives, some going back as early as 1981 (School-Based Coordination Act, SB 77, statutes of 1981).

The job title and coordinating section within the state department are also shown in Table 1. Although not in Table 1, some information on the funding of the initiatives is provided to give a sense of the scope of these programs. Georgia's initiative is the largest investment of state funds.

Georgia provides funding to all interested middle and high schools (those opting to participate) for a dedicated graduation coach position. The funding for the Georgia initiative was approximately \$16 million in 2006-07, \$43 million in 2007-08, and \$52 million for 2008-09.

Alabama allocated funds for a dedicated coach position to pilot sites. Alabama piloted the Dropout Prevention Advisor (DPA) Program in high schools that were deemed eligible for the funds by virtue of having a graduation rate below 95% during the 2006-2007 school year. As of August 2007, 25 schools in Alabama had been identified for implementation of the DPA pilot program and each site received \$68,750. As of August 2008, the program was renamed the Graduation Coach Dropout Prevention Initiative and each site that receives a graduation coach will receive \$50,000 for their salary, benefits, and travel.

California allocates funds to school districts and county offices of education based on previous allocations to programs included in the Pupil Retention Block (Pupil Retention Block Grant FAQs). The Pupil Retention Block Grant combines funding for programs that target students who need additional support to succeed in school; for example, intensive reading, intensive algebra instruction, public safety, tenth grade counseling, dropout prevention and recovery, and early intervention programs. The State General Fund provided \$16.6 million in 2005-2006 for the Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program (M&M), and there was \$2.5 million for 50 school districts to operate Alternative Education Outreach Consultant Programs (AEOC).

Table 1. Overview of State Initiatives			
Initiative Components	Alabama	California	Georgia
Job Title of Position Funded	Graduation Coach (formerly called Dropout Prevention Advisor/Coaches)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dropout Prevention Specialist (Outreach Consultant) 2. The Alternative Education Outreach Consultant (AEOC) 	Graduation Specialist/ Coach
Coordinating State Department Section	Division of Instructional Services, Prevention and Student Services Section	Curriculum & Instruction Branch, Learning Support & Partnerships Division	School Improvement Division
Start Date	Summer 2007	1981	Summer 2006
Stated Purpose or Mission	<p>"...to ensure students' successful graduation from Alabama's public school system" (p. 3). Alabama State Department of Education (2008). <i>Local Educational Agency (LEA) Application, Graduation Coach Dropout Prevention Initiative</i>. Division of Instructional Services, Prevention and Support Services Section.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the <u>School-Based Pupil Motivation and Maintenance</u> program is to prevent pupils from dropping out of school through the hiring and assigning of outreach consultants. • The purpose of the <u>Alternative Education and Work Center</u> program is to prevent and recover dropouts through instruction in basic academic skills and employment orientation or reentry orientation. Outreach consultants provide direct services, such as educational referrals and counseling, to students. <p>California Department of Education (n.d.) <i>SB 65 Program Summary</i>. Available online: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/dp/sb65progsu mm.asp</p>	<p>"The mission is to ensure the successful transition of all students from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to some form of post-secondary education or work. The initiative is designed to provide a comprehensive prevention/intervention process for students at risk of grade retention and/or dropping out of high school" (p. 1).</p> <p>Georgia Department of Education. (May 29, 2008). <i>Guidance document for middle and high school graduation coach initiative</i>.</p>

Table 2 summarizes information from websites and reports on the implementation of the funded positions. Information on roles/responsibilities, required qualifications, and professional development for “graduation coaches” is provided. While titles may differ from state to state (e.g. graduation coach, graduation specialist, dropout prevention advisor, dropout prevention specialist, outreach consultant, etc.), their roles/responsibilities are similar as shown in Table 2. The graduation coach/specialist role is to support students in an effort to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates at the school level. This may include work with students in schools as well as re-enrolling students who have dropped out and supporting their efforts to get back into an educational or vocational setting and making academic and social service referrals.

Roles/Responsibilities

There are two common features of the roles/responsibilities of graduation coaches across the three states. The first is to profile students who are at-risk for dropping out or not graduating from high school. The second is to find and match students with the appropriate resources so that they are able to remain in school and graduate. The students served by these coaches are those most at-risk for: (a) not transitioning from middle to high school, (b) dropping out or (c) not being eligible for graduating from high school. Therefore, one major responsibility is examining student data and determining which students need services and the types of assistance a student or students might need, allowing for flexibility in the types of interventions and services brought into a school. Georgia’s and Alabama’s coaches focus on providing services to individuals, groups of students (small and large) and if needed the whole school. But the most at-risk students are intended to receive the majority of the resources.

Job qualifications. Overall, the professional qualifications that states require for these positions are similar. None of the states require that graduation coaches be classroom teachers. However, coaches are expected to understand instructional strategies, available community resources, and be knowledgeable of all the available dropout prevention interventions as well as supplemental and remedial services.

Professional development for coaches. All three states have professional development for their coaches. In the cases of Alabama and Georgia, the state programs were finalized late in the summer and the initial training of the first cohort of coaches did not take place for most coaches until after the first school year of implementation had begun. In California, most of the training takes place during the summer and is structured for a school team’s participation (Educational Options Office, 2000, p. 27). More detailed information pertaining to job descriptions, job qualifications, and professional development for coaches is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Roles and Responsibilities			
Initiative Components	Alabama	California	Georgia
Roles/ Responsibilities of Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify students as being at-risk. Develop and/or sustain school-wide support and interventions that include guiding students in meeting graduation requirements. Develop a local Collaborative Graduation Team. Develop transitional programs and vertical teams. Develop family and community, and other relationships. Share success stories in various forms of medial. Evaluate and report. <p>Excerpted from: Alabama State Department of Education (2008). <i>Local Educational Agency (LEA) Application, Graduation Coach Dropout Prevention Initiative</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dropout Prevention Specialist, "...reaches out to the community for help and resources (outreach) and who is also a resource, a catalyst, or a change agent for the total school staff (consultant). By quickly identifying the school's students who are most at risk and marshaling the resources of the school and the community, she or he can meet the needs of the students in at-risk situations" (p. 1). The AEO Consultant recruits school dropouts to AEOC and assists with the assessment and referral of dropouts and potential dropouts to appropriate settings. <p>Educational Options Office, California Department of Education (2000). <i>SB 65 School-Based Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program Guidelines</i> (2000-01 edition). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify students in need of additional support and work with them to achieve academic and social success. Work to ensure that all identified students receive the resources/services needed to be successful along their path to graduation. Gather and analyze data for individual students; identify potential barriers to graduation; develop and implement intervention strategies; and develop a graduation plan with students to meet academic goals. <p>The information above was summarized from: Georgia Department of Education. (May 29, 2008). <i>Guidance document for middle and high school graduation coach initiative.</i></p>
Qualifications for Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valid licensure and/or certification in his/her chosen professional field. Appropriate background check. Successful experience working with students at risk (not restricted to the classroom). Working knowledge of appropriate strategies for reducing at-risk student behaviors. Ability to effectively communicate with students, families, and other adults. Ability to develop, analyze, implement, and track prevention and intervention strategies and plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledgeable of local alternative educational programs that are available to respond to the differential needs and unique learning styles of pupils. Knowledgeable of local community agencies and community programs that are available to assist in the physical or psychological remediation of pupils. Knowledgeable of local school programs, options, and opportunities that are available in locating, securing, or retaining employment. Knowledgeable of techniques that enhance interpersonal communication, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Professional Standards Commission certification in teaching, service (e.g. school counseling, school psychology and/or school social work, etc.), leadership or paraprofessional certification A bachelor's degree At least 3 years experience in secondary school in one or a combination of the certificated areas Successful experiences working with secondary students who exhibit risk factors Working knowledge of appropriate

Table 2. Roles and Responsibilities

Initiative Components	Alabama	California	Georgia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of and the ability to analyze and utilize data to effectively impact student progress. • Knowledge, understanding, and ability to access available alternative education opportunities and community resources to further improve students' ability to succeed. • Ability and willingness to advocate for each student at risk of becoming a dropout to stay in school. (p. 3) <p>Excerpted from: Alabama State Department of Education (2008). <i>Local Educational Agency (LEA) Application, Graduation Coach Dropout Prevention Initiative</i></p>	<p>self-understanding, self-disclosure, and depth-level sharing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable of methods to create circumstances necessary so that change is permitted and encouraged in individuals, programs, and institutions. • Capable of supervising, instructing, conducting negotiations with, and advising pupils and adults. (p. 6) <p>Excerpted from: Educational Options Office, California Department of Education (2000). <i>SB 65 School-Based Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program Guidelines</i> (2000-01 edition). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.</p>	<p>strategies for transforming behaviors, beliefs, and habits that put students at risk of not graduating from high school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate effectively with youth, adults, and members of the community • Ability to analyze, develop, implement, and track intervention plans and strategies • Knowledge of and the ability to analyze data, including data available from the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and other sources • Ability to identify, access, and utilize the multiplicity of social services available in the community to support students at risk of not graduating • Knowledge of alternative opportunities for reclaiming credits and school support (p. 2) <p>Excerpted from: Georgia Department of Education. (May 29, 2008). <i>Guidance document for middle and high school graduation coach initiative.</i></p>
<p>Professional Development Provided to Coaches</p>	<p>The Graduation Coaches/Advisor program began in November 2007. There was one-day training. Topics included collaboration, building teams, state data, and planning.</p>	<p>Statewide M&M Training conferences</p>	<p>Professional Development is provided in collaboration with the Communities in School organization. A complete list of topics can be found on the GaDOE website, http://gadoe.org/tss_school_improve.aspx?PageReq=TSSGraduationCoach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing follow up includes: meetings with Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), school visits, telephone calls & emails • Graduation Coach Consortium – Facili-

Table 2. Roles and Responsibilities			
Initiative Components	Alabama	California	Georgia
			tated by the five GaDOE Regional Leaders and hosted by each of the 16 RESAs.

Data Collection and Coaches' Reports

Table 3 includes information found on the status of data collection. The three states are gathering various kinds of implementation data, primarily related to reports from coaches. No recently completed evaluation reports of program impact were identified. Completed evaluation reports describing the implementation and/or impact of these initiatives are limited in part because two of the states are in the early stages of the initiative (Georgia has just completed its second year, and Alabama has just completed its pilot phase). However, Communities in Schools has started to describe the Georgia program and provide initial implementation reports (Communities in Schools of Georgia, Evaluation Department, October 2007). California had an evaluation completed in 1992 entitled *Implementing Innovation*.

Reports from coaches. California and Georgia collect in-depth data from their coaches, and the results are available for California on the California Department of Education website (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/dp/>), and for Georgia on the Communities in Schools (CIS) (<http://www.cisga.org/partnerships/coach.php>) and Georgia Department of Education websites (http://gadoe.org/tss_school_improve.aspx?PageReq=TSSGraduationCoach). One unique method is the Georgia Graduation Coach Work Management System (WMS), an online application that assists with the identification of at-risk students, helps coaches manage their caseloads and provide appropriate support, and meets the evaluation needs of the initiative. Coaches continuously interact with the WMS. There are three parts to the online application:

- Candidate Roster (includes all students in a school, not just a list of their caseload),
- Service Session Log (the strategies and interventions in place for students), and
- Quarterly Reporting Questionnaire (the implementation and perception data from coaches) (Communities in Schools of Georgia Evaluation Department, December 18, 2007).

The Work Management System reflects the work that the graduation coaches are doing with their caseload students, as well as with the whole school. It provides a glimpse of what coaches are reporting in terms of strategies used in working with students.

Table 3. Data Collection and Coaches' Report		
Alabama	California	Georgia
<p>The suggested formative and summative evaluation measures are laid out in the application (p. 4).</p> <p>The formative evaluation guidelines mention the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations specific to the daily activities of the program 	<p>The state asks for year-end reports from the schools and clusters that receive funds.</p> <p>Schools wishing to continue receiving funding must set and reach student performance goals for their M&M program. Student outcome standards are required to show improvement in</p>	<p>Coaches are required to enter student data into the Work Management System. The Georgia Graduation Coach Work Management System (WMS) is an online application that assists with the identification of at-risk students, helps coaches better manage their caseloads and provide appropriate support, and</p>

Table 3. Data Collection and Coaches' Report		
Alabama	California	Georgia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective discussions • Various assessments (e.g., ongoing check points or benchmark assessments) • Anecdotal information • Pre-test and post-test <p>The summative evaluation guidelines mention the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on specific program implementation • Post-test assessment(s) as compared to pre-test data • Surveys • Other data • Anecdotal information <p>Excerpted from: Alabama State Department of Education (2008). <i>Local Educational Agency (LEA) Application, Graduation Coach Dropout Prevention Initiative</i></p>	<p>three areas of performance data: student attendance, attitude, and achievement.</p> <p>For middle and elementary schools, evidence of success is expected to be shown in increased performance in reading and mathematics and in reduced numbers of grade retentions, suspensions, and expulsions and other similar indicators of negative behavior.</p> <p>For high schools, meaningful improvement is expected to be shown by higher graduation rates.</p> <p>California Department of Education (n.d.) <i>SB 65 Program Summary</i>. Available on-line: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/dp/sb65progsumm.asp</p>	<p>meets the evaluation needs of the initiative. There are three applications in the WMS: candidate roster, session logs, and quarterly questionnaires.</p> <p>The Work Management System reflects the work that the graduation coaches are doing with their caseload students, as well as with the whole school. It provides a glimpse of what strategies are and are not working for students.</p> <p>The information above was summarized from: Communities in Schools of Georgia, Evaluation Department (October 2007). <i>Georgia High School Graduation Coach Initiative, Final Report</i>.</p> <p>Communities in Schools of Georgia, Evaluation Department (December 18, 2007). <i>Georgia's Graduation Coach Initiative, Fall 2007 Progress Report</i>.</p> <p>Georgia Department of Education. (May 29, 2008). <i>Guidance document for middle and high school graduation coach initiative</i>.</p>

Summary

The fundamental reason for “graduation coach” programs is to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. After reviewing the graduation coach programs in Alabama, California, and Georgia, there are some common threads. While the specific definitions may vary, all three state programs include four responsibilities of the coach/advisor position: (1) identifying students at-risk of dropping out and/or those who already have, (2) building on resources within the school and surrounding community to support those students, (3) smoothing transitions between grades and/or programs, and (4) identifying and addressing barriers to successful outcomes for these students.

There are several common professional qualifications for coaches across the states. Those individuals hired as coaches/advisors are expected to be able to: communicate effectively with students, educators and community members; understand the resources available to students at-risk; identify and implement strategies that reduce at-risk beha-

viors; analyze and utilize data to impact student progress; and act as an advocate for struggling students. Although professional development is provided to the coaches in all three states, the extent of professional development that coaches/advisors receive varies. In terms of impacts of the graduation coach initiatives, there are currently no reports on effectiveness but there is information collected by states on the coaches' activities and work with students.

Appendix A: Methodology

The development of this EBE response occurred over four steps. The first step involved the development of an information-gathering protocol. The second step involved following the protocol to conduct a search for “graduation coach” initiatives across all 50 states. The third step involved gathering descriptive information on the three states that had a state-wide initiative. Finally, the fourth step involved summarizing the findings.

Step 1: Development of an information-gathering protocol.

The initial request was made by several states in the Southeastern region and received through the REL-SE Evidence-Based Education (EBE) Request Desk. The question they wanted an answer to was, “What states are providing funding and other support for graduation coach positions in high schools?” The authors scanned the information available on the two states in the REL-SE region that were known to have a graduation coach initiative, Alabama and Georgia, so they could identify the existing characteristics of the graduation coach programs and establish a protocol and set criteria for the kinds of information that would be included in the search for other states undertaking similar endeavors. A template was created to provide consistency in the search results between REL-SE staff, including aspects of the programs that were deemed of interest to other states and agencies. Therefore, the protocol focused on: authorization, legislation/policy, intended purposes, funding, roles/responsibilities, job qualifications, professional development, and evaluation plan/implementation monitoring. Based on the available information from Alabama and Georgia, it was decided to search other states in the nation to determine if there were similar programs when comparing the determined criteria for the protocol.

Step 2: Search for statewide “graduation coach” initiatives. Using the template and protocol that was established in Step 1, two staff members searched State Education Agency websites using key terms, including dropout prevention, dropout, dropout rates, graduation coaches, graduation advisors, at-risk, truancy, graduation requirements, and graduation. When no information was easily available, a search of the Part B Annual Performance Report (APR), Indicator 2 was reviewed for information on dropout prevention efforts in each state.² The authors also searched the Council of Chief State School Officers' and the National Conference of State Legislators' websites. Initial findings were

² According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), states are required to report on their progress on Part B State Performance Plan. The authors found that, in some cases, Indicator 2—Percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school compared to the percent of all youth in the State dropping out of high school—included information about dropout prevention efforts for all students, including those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). For more information on the APR, visit <http://www.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbspap/index.html#ga>.

then provided to the lead author who reconciled any inconsistencies found in the information. During this step, one additional state (California) was identified as having an existing program during the 2007-08 school year. Information was gathered under each identified criteria under the protocol.

Step 3: Gathered information on Alabama, California, and Georgia. After all the information was collected for those states with an identified statewide initiative, a cross-state table was drafted to compare the information gathered for the protocol. Each REL staff member that assisted with the search process then provided any additional information needed to complete a summary table. The tables included descriptive information: authorization, legislation/policy, intended purposes, funding, roles/responsibilities, job qualifications, professional development and evaluation plans/implementation monitoring. When questions arose, contact was made to SEA personnel directly involved in the initiative. The profiles and tables were reviewed by the REL-SE's state outreach staff and the highlighted states for accuracy.

Step 4: Summarizing Findings

After the search was completed and information gathered, it was then up to the authors to summarize and sort the information gleaned into categories reflecting the predetermined topical areas. For ease of use by the reader, the information found on the three state initiatives was arranged using three organizing tables: overview of state initiatives, roles/responsibilities of the graduation coach, and data collection and coaches' reports.

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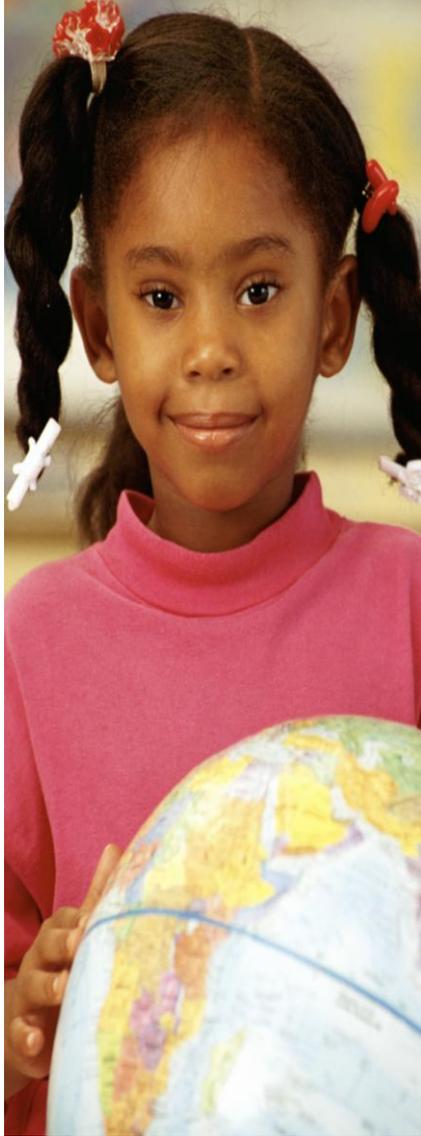
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