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## **Graduation Counts: Compact and Task Force Report Guidance on State Implementation and Reporting**

Since July 2005, all 50 state governors have signed the National Governors Association's Graduation Counts Compact on State High School Graduation Data. Furthermore, 30 states have now received Honor States grants, for which implementation of the Graduation Counts Compact is a core requirement. This is a significant step forward, but much work remains to be done. Among the commitments made, governors agreed to report annually their progress on improving their graduation and dropout data. In order to fulfill this important obligation, states need to assess their status relative to the commitments in the compact and use this assessment to identify and take the steps necessary for full implementation.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices is working with governors, their advisors, and other state officials to ensure timely and effective implementation of the compact. Through the NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data, the NGA Center can draw on the knowledge of experts from across the country to provide technical assistance to states as they implement the compact.

The NGA Center will also assist states in assessing their progress toward full implementation. Each spring, the NGA Center will send governors' offices a reporting request and form, based on the attached action steps and questions. Honor States grantees should include updates of their progress in their quarterly reports to the Center. NGA Center staff will use the state reports to compile brief summaries of state progress for a report that will be released each summer. The NGA Center will work to assess implementation progress in a manner that is both the least burdensome and most accurate.

States should consult the full task force report, which provides some critical elaboration on the formula and definitions to be used in calculating the graduation rate, the data systems and capacity states need, and the additional indicators states should collect and report. The full report is available online at: <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0507GRAD.PDF>. The NGA Center will also create a "Frequently Asked Questions" page on our Web site as a resource for states during implementation. The Data Quality Campaign, of which the NGA Center is a member, will provide tools and resources states can use as they develop quality longitudinal data systems and better graduation and dropout data. The resources will be available online at: <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/>.

### **In the compact, governors agreed to:**

- Take steps to implement a standard, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. States agree to calculate the graduation rate by dividing the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier. Graduates are those receiving a high school diploma. The denominator can be adjusted for transfers in and out of the system, and data systems will ideally track individual students with a longitudinal student unit record data system. Special education students and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency can be assigned to different cohorts to allow them more time to graduate.
- 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. Additional indicators include five- or six-year cohort graduation rates, completion rates for those earning alternative credentials, in-grade retention rates, a college-readiness rate, and a high school dropout rate.
- Report annual progress on the improvement of their state high school graduation, completion and dropout rate data.

## **A Framework for State Implementation of the Graduation Counts Compact**

The following framework is designed to help states assess their status relative to the compact commitments and identify important next steps. States should plan to report on their current status and to document progress each spring. Honor States grantees should include progress updates in their quarterly reports to the Center.

### **1. Assemble or work through an existing team representing multiple state agencies and stakeholders. Develop a plan and timeline for completing the rest of the action steps.**

Who in the state has primary responsibility for ensuring implementation of the Graduation Counts compact?

Who needs to be engaged in the implementation effort? Are they all involved in the current leadership team? How will the assembled team engage other necessary groups or individuals? The team could include a governor's advisor, state legislators, state board of education members, the chief state school officer, additional state education agency personnel with responsibility for data collection and reporting, postsecondary education officials, business leaders, and local education officials. An existing leadership team or P-16 council might want to consider which additional data officials need to be included in this work.

What is the timeframe for implementation of each of the specific compact commitments? Is this timeframe publicly available?

### **2. Conduct an audit or assessment of the state's current data definitions and formulas, data collection and analysis, and data system capacity.**

Is the state currently using a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate? If not, what formula is the state using? What graduation-rate definition or formula is currently being used for state reporting and

accountability purposes? And if different, what definition or formula is used to meet federal reporting and accountability requirements?

Does the state have a longitudinal student-unit-record data system already in operation? If not, what are the timeframes for development and full implementation of one? Have you reviewed your state's status with regard to the "Ten Essential Elements" of a state longitudinal data system? (For state results, see [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/activities/survey\\_result\\_2005.cfm](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/activities/survey_result_2005.cfm)).

What is the first year for which the standard, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate *based on data from the student-unit-record system* will be calculated? Are these timeframes publicly available?

Does the state's current graduation-rate definition include an expectation of graduation within four years for all but a small group of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency? Does this definition include a requirement that all students counted as graduates have received a standard diploma (not a GED or other, non-standard credential)? Are students whose transfer status cannot be verified counted as drop-outs?

Based on the definition currently in use in the state, what is the state's graduation rate for the class of 2004-05, overall and disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, limited English proficiency, gender, and migrant status?

What additional, complementary attainment-related indicators is the state calculating and reporting? (Such indicators may include five- and six-year graduation rates, college-ready graduation rates, completion rates, and drop-out rates, rates of improvement in graduation, and dropout rates.)

How many student enrollment, attainment, status, and withdrawal codes exist in the state data system? (Such codes may include: graduate, drop-out, location unknown, continuing enrollment, completer, GED recipient.) What are the codes? How is each defined? Does the state collect and report data with respect to how many students are identified with each code? How are students who are incarcerated or in residential treatment facilities accounted for in the data system? Are these the standard codes used across the state?

### **3. Identify and take short-term action steps to implement the compact.**

What mandatory training is provided to local officials and staff involved in collecting, entering, and reporting data required for the graduation-rate calculation? Who is responsible for designing and evaluating the training?

What state policies and procedures are in place to audit and verify data provided by school districts? Who is responsible for performing audits/verification? What policies and procedures are in place to address errors or anomalies identified through the audit/verification process? Who is responsible for addressing errors/anomalies?

What state policies and procedures are in place regarding the formal verification of all student transfers? When a student is classified as a transfer, is there a system in place that tracks whether a

transcript was requested from the receiving school or program? Who is responsible for this verification? How are these policies and procedures enforced at the local level? Who is responsible for enforcement?

**4. Identify longer-term action steps to implement the compact and develop a timeline and plan for accomplishing them.**

What are the barriers in current state data capacity and in state policy that could hinder full implementation? What changes need to be made to address these barriers? Who has the authority to make the requisite changes? Can the policy changes be made through regulation, or is new legislation required? What can the state accomplish and what actions will local districts and schools have to take? How can the state coordinate those efforts?

**5. Start a public information campaign to develop educator and public understanding about the need for good graduation and dropout data.**

What kind of outreach will the state need to do with various audiences, including parents, teachers, school leaders, students, business people, and taxpayers? What kind of public relations strategies will the state employ?

By assessing status and identifying necessary action steps, states will chart a course toward full compact implementation. The NGA Center for Best Practices stands ready to assist states as they undertake this crucial work.