Building a Grad Nation

Executive Brief: Overview of 2012-13 High School Graduation Rates
Civic Enterprises

Civic Enterprises is a public policy firm that works with corporations, nonprofits, foundations, universities, and governments to develop innovative initiatives and public policies in the fields of education, national service, civic engagement, conservation, global health and more. In 2006, Civic Enterprises released The Silent Epidemic, a seminal report that drew domestic and international attention to the nation’s dropout crisis and gave voice to our disconnected youth. Since that time, it has also released more than a dozen reports on the high school dropout challenge, including the annual Building a Grad Nation report. Civic Enterprises led the first National Summit on America’s Silent Epidemic, co-led the development of a Civic Marshall Plan to establish and meet a national goal for high school graduation rates, and co-convenes the annual GradNation summit with America’s Promise Alliance, Alliance for Excellent Education and The Everyone Graduates Center.

The Everyone Graduates Center

The Everyone Graduates Center, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University is a research and action center that focuses on understanding who graduates high school in America, and the characteristics of students, schools, communities and states that are making progress and those that are not. Seminal work includes Locating the Dropout Crisis, a 2004 report pinpointing the number and locations of the nation’s “dropout factories” and bringing the dropout challenge to the nation’s attention. The research and its dissemination underpin the second half of the Everyone Graduates Center’s work – development and advancement of models and tools, including Early Warning Systems to identify off-track students as early as the sixth grade accompanied by interventions to get students back on track. Research and work are accomplished in concert with states, districts, schools, universities and “think tank” partners.

Our sponsor:

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Over the past dozen years, schools, districts, and states have begun to focus increased attention on boosting high school graduation rates. During this period, the nation has seen more evidence-based educational reforms in low-performing schools, more support for struggling students, and better data and stronger accountability to chart progress and challenge. In 2006, an emerging group of leaders and institutions that would become the “GradNation” campaign set an ambitious goal: to raise the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the Class of 2020 and to take that goal seriously by fostering the reforms, supports, and accountability that could ensure more students stay on track to graduate.

In 2012, the nation took a giant step toward achieving this goal by reaching the 80 percent threshold for the first time in history, up about 10 percentage points from the beginning of the decade. The upward trajectory of high school graduation rates over the past decade continued in 2013, as the national graduation rate hit a record high of 81.4 percent. For the third year in a row, the nation remained on pace to meet the 90 percent goal.

This Executive Brief highlights high school graduation rates across the nation, and notes the progress being made by states and the subgroups of students represented within them. It also provides statistics on the benefits of earning a high school diploma to underscore the importance of getting students through this critical juncture. While the nation celebrates this achievement, it must also maintain a commitment to keeping standards high to ensure students are prepared to meet the challenges ahead. This Executive Brief keeps pace with the release of data on graduation rates and lays a foundation for the more comprehensive annual Building a Grad Nation report that will be issued in May 2015.

### ACGR Ranges by State, 2012-13 map

The latest state level 2012-13 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) data revealed that more states than ever were primed to reach a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020.

- Twenty-nine of the 50 states equaled or exceeded the national average of 81.4 percent, and six of those states were within two percentage points of reaching the 90 percent goal.

- Five states almost reached the national average of 81.4 percent.

This good news is tempered by the fact that 14 states, with graduation rates between 70 and 78 percent, still have much further to go, while one state remains more than 10 percentage points behind the national average.
Evidence reported in the 2014 *Building a Grad Nation* Annual Report showed that Hispanic/Latino and African-American students were the subgroups making the greatest gains in graduation rates – 15 and 9 percentage points, respectively, over the six years from 2006-2012. The latest national Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate data shows similar trends over the last three years.

- Hispanic/Latino students – the fastest growing student population – have made the greatest gains in the ACGR reporting era, improving 4.2 percentage points from 2011 to 2013.
- African-American students, one of the student subgroups with historically low graduation rates, also continue to show improvement, rising 3.7 percentage points from 67 percent in 2011 to 70.7 percent in 2013.
- White students have an 86.6 graduation rate for 2013. Though having traditionally high graduation rates, white students have recorded sluggish gains in recent years, increasing only 2.6 percentage points since 2011.

Despite the promising gains of Hispanic/Latino and African-American students, these subgroups still fall well below the national average of 81.4 percent. Many schools, districts and states will need to redouble their efforts to bring these students up to the current pace for Hispanic/Latino and African-American students to reach the 90 percent goal by 2020.
Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Change from 2010-11 to 2012-13, by State

The rates of improvement vary among states. Thirty-nine of the 47 states reporting ACGR from 2011 to 2013 increased their graduation rates by 1 percentage point or more during that period – an improvement across 80 percent of the nation. With seven more years until 2020, that is enough gain for some to reach 90 percent (on-pace states), but not enough for others to do so unless they accelerate their work.

- Ten states – Nevada, Alabama, New Mexico, Utah, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, North Carolina, New Jersey, and California – increased their graduation rates by four percentage points or more from 2011-2013. Five of these states are among the top 10 enrollment states in the country, meaning that they play a significant role in the nation’s gain.

- More than half of the 22 states making gains of 2 to 3.9 percentage points outpaced the national average, including Texas, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, also high enrollment states that significantly drive the national average.

- Within the group of 10 states registering the greatest gains, four (Nevada, New Mexico, Georgia, and Florida) still have relatively low graduation rates (70 to 78 percent), and have a long road ahead to achieve 90 percent.

Unfortunately, 10 states gained less than one percentage point or lost ground over the past three years. And many of the states that are closest to reaching the 90 percent goal have recently made little progress, suggesting that as states approach the 90 percent threshold, the challenge becomes that much greater.
## Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Change from 2010-11 to 2012-13, by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>ACGR 2013 (%)</th>
<th>ACGR Percentage Point Change from 2011-2013</th>
<th>Percent of High School Students in the Nation (%)</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>ACGR 2013 (%)</th>
<th>ACGR Percentage Point Change from 2011-2013</th>
<th>Percent of High School Students in the Nation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
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<td>New Mexico</td>
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<td>1.7%</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
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<td>North Carolina</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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<td>New Jersey</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<td>California</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
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<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<td>Alaska</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>New York</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
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<td>5.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
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<td>-0.3</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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<td>79.8%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
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<td>-0.4</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
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<td>4.1%</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
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<td>-3.0</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Virginia</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
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<td>0.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ACGR Change in Percentage Points Categories from 2011-2013

- **4+ Percentage Points**
- **2-3.9 Percentage Points**
- **1-1.9 Percentage Points**
- **0 Percentage Point or Less**
- **Non-Reporting or No Comparison**

Note. Washington, DC is not included in this table. ACGR Percentage Point Change from 2011-2013 = the 2012-13 ACGR minus the 2010-11 ACGR; therefore, positive values indicate an increase in graduation rate. Percent of High School Students in the Nation (%) = the total number of high school students in each state, divided by the total number of high school students in the U.S. (Not including Washington, DC). As long as the high schools had students enrolled in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12 grade [or 10th, 11th, and 12 grade for high schools that begin in 10th grade], they were included to calculate the percent of high school students in this table; however, some schools may have had students enrolled in grades below 9th grade (e.g., 8th grade) as well.

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Percentage Point Change Groups from 2010-11 to 2012-13 and Percent of National High School Students, Minority Students, and Low-Income Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACGR Percentage Point Change Group from 2011-13</th>
<th>Number of States Within ACGR Change Group (N)</th>
<th>Percent of National High School Students (%)</th>
<th>Percent of National Minority Students (%)</th>
<th>Percent of National Low-Income Students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>States with 4 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States with 2-3.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States with 1-1.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States with 0 or less</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Reporting States or No Comparison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of percentage point gains with the percent of minority and low-income students attending high school in each state tells an even more significant story.

- Historically, African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American students have had the lowest graduation rates. It is encouraging that the 10 states with high percentages of these students are among the top gainers (4 percentage points and more) followed by the 22 states in the next tier (gaining 2 to 3.9 percentage points), which also educate higher percentages of minority and low-income students.

- Combined, these two groups of states and their significant gains demonstrate that it is indeed possible to improve educational outcomes for youth in some of our country’s most-challenged schools and that their success not only contributes to – but in many cases will be the significant driver of – national success.

Summing It Up

The nation is making exciting progress in raising graduation rates, and much of that progress is occurring in states that educate high percentages of students who have had historically low graduation rates. At the same time, there is one subset of states where progress has slowed or that have even lost ground, and another subset in which progress has not been sufficient to off-set initial low rates.

With seven years remaining (school years 2013-14 to 2019-20), there is indeed time for each and every state to “make it to the finish line” although some states will have to exert much more effort than others. For a deeper analysis than this brief permits, please see the 2015 Building a Grad Nation Annual Report, to be released in May 2015.

Note. See Table “Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Change from 2010-11 to 2012-13, by State” for the list of states within each percentage point change group. As long as the high schools had students enrolled in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12 grade [or 10th, 11th, and 12 grade for high schools that begin in 10th grade], they were included to calculate the percent high school students, minority, and low-income high school students; however, some schools may have had students enrolled in grades below 9th grade (e.g., 8th grade) as well. Percent of National High School Students (%) = the total number of high school students within each ACGR percentage point change group divided by the total number of high school students in the U.S. Percent of National Minority Students (%) = the total number of non-white high school students within each ACGR percentage point change group divided by the total number of non-white high school students in the U.S. Percent of National Low-Income Students (%) = the total number of high school students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch within each ACGR percentage point change group divided by the total number of high school students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch in the U.S.

Why a High School Diploma Matters

A high school diploma is a significant milestone in the life of a young person, with a far-reaching impact on his or her future, in school, work, and life. Without this credential, young people struggle to live lives that are healthy and secure. They have fewer opportunities to contribute positively to their communities, or to raise their children in environments that are conducive to future success and well-being. The benefits of high school graduation have been well researched:

Economic Benefits

Students who graduate from high school can expect to see a lifetime of increased earnings.

- In 2012, the average annual salary for a high school graduate was $30,627 – fully $10,386 more than for an individual without a high school diploma.
- In addition, higher levels of education enable young people to build resilience to dips in the global economy. In 2012, the employment rate for young adults who completed high school was 64 percent, compared to 48 percent for those without a high school diploma.
- And while unemployment rates for high school dropouts have varied over time – from a low of 23 percent in 2006 to a high of 55 percent in 2009 – they have consistently remained higher than unemployment rates for students with a high school diploma.
- Given these statistics, it is not surprising that poverty rates for 18- to 24-year olds are significantly lower for individuals with a high school diploma (24 percent) than for those who failed to complete high school (31 percent).

Health Benefits

Positive outcomes in terms of physical well-being are also correlated with high school graduation.

- The more education a person has, the less likely he or she is to engage in risky behaviors such as smoking, being overweight, or not exercising.
- The CDC reported in 2011 that individuals with high school diplomas are less likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than those with less than a high school education.
- High school and college graduates also have increased longevity as compared to their peers with less education. On average, college graduates can expect to live at least five years longer than those without a high school diploma.

Social Benefits

A high school diploma is also a predictor of decreased reliance on government assistance and interactions with law enforcement.

- High school graduates are less likely to rely on government health care or use other public services, such as housing assistance or food stamps.
- A study from Columbia University shows that if you cut the high school dropout rate in half, you would save U.S. taxpayers $84 million a year in lower social services and increased revenues from more productive graduates.
- Individuals who drop out of high school are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested and 8 times more likely to be incarcerated.
- A 2009 study from Northeastern University found that on any given day from 2006-2007, nearly 1 of every 10 young male high school dropouts was institutionalized versus less than 1 of 33 high school graduates, and nearly 1 in 4 young black male dropouts was incarcerated or institutionalized.
- A 2013 report by the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that raising the national high school graduation rate for male students by only 5 percentage points could save the nation as much as $19.7 billion in annual crime costs.

Civic Engagement Benefits

Individuals with a high school diploma are also more likely to have greater levels of civic and community engagement.

- High school graduates are more than twice as likely to vote as those who drop out. During the 2012 presidential election, those levels increased to six times as likely – 24 percent of high school graduates voted, 37 percent of college graduates voted, and only 4 percent of youth who dropped out of high school voted.
- High school graduates are also three times more likely to volunteer or work with their neighbors to solve problems than those who failed to earn a high school diploma.
Conclusion

While celebrating progress toward the Grad-Nation goal, the nation cannot afford to slow efforts or become complacent in the face of success. Predictions of what the job market will look like in the decades to come show that jobs for those without high school diplomas will continue to dwindle, as more and more occupations require higher levels of education. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce estimated that by 2018, only 30 percent of jobs in the United States will employ workers with either a high school diploma or an incomplete high school education – down from 72 percent in 1973, 44 percent in 1992, and 41 percent in 2007.\textsuperscript{xvi} The study defined the future American economy as one that “puts a premium on education, training, and flexibility.”\textsuperscript{xvii} For students who do not complete the first step of obtaining a high school diploma, the options will be increasingly scarce. As the focus on preparing students for college and career grows, the nation must not lose sight of the critical first step of high school graduation in preparing young people to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

The full 2015 \textit{Building a Grad Nation} Annual Update will focus on what it will take to reach the 90 percent high school graduation rate goal by 2020. The wealth of data available over the past decade through enhanced graduation rate definitions and data collection promoted by the governors and the federal government will be used to further examine the state, district, and student subgroup trends underlying the national picture. The report will illuminate the areas of greatest challenge, and consider where efforts must be focused to make the most progress for students, our communities, states, and the nation. America is rising to meet its dropout challenge and renewed efforts must be made to ensure more students graduate ready for the challenges of college, career, and civic life.

To learn more about the GradNation campaign and read the 2014 \textit{Building a Grad Nation} report, please visit gradnation.org.
Endnotes


xvii Ibid.