

# AMERICAN GRADUATE INITIATIVE ACTION EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

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**Prepared by:** The Johns Hopkins University  
School of Education  
Everyone Graduates Center



EVERYONE  
GRADUATES  
CENTER



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# Executive Summary

*Created by Civic Enterprises for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in partnership with the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education*

Communities across America face unprecedented challenges, yet America cannot solve problems it does not understand. Today, more than one million children do not graduate high school with their peers. The consequences of this dropout rate to individual students, society, and our economy are far-reaching. As a result of this trend, more than six million youth (ages 16 – 24) are disconnected from school or work, leaving many of them unable to support themselves, raise families, and give back to their communities.

This disconnection from the two institutions that offer young people hope for the future – schools and workplaces – costs taxpayers \$93 billion per year, which amounts to \$1.6 trillion over the lifetimes of these vulnerable young people. It further widens America’s skills gap, leaving unfilled 3.7 million jobs available at a time of high unemployment. Even though America has always been a land of opportunity, our rates of economic mobility for those in poverty are now lower than many of our European counterparts.

This does not have to be America’s story. The knowledge, resources and tools that children, families, and communities need for economic mobility are available but untapped. Schools and community organizations too often work in isolation, shouldering the burden of educating children and addressing societal problems. Communities require a deeper understanding of the complex factors contributing to the dropout crisis, new ways of thinking about the issue, and an innovative and collaborative approach to addressing the crisis. Public media is uniquely situated to help communities do exactly that. The evaluation of American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen! by the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) at Johns Hopkins University School of Education shows that public media and local stations serve as trusted communicators, conveners, and capacity builders.

The evaluation examines the work of 25 public media stations in high-need communities and the services of local stations that helped that helped communities better address the issue. The initiative aligned itself to the research-based strategy of the Civic Marshall Plan (CMP)<sup>1</sup> designed to reach the nationwide Grad Nation goal of increasing the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the

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<sup>1</sup> The Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation (CMP) is a plan of action designed by a broad leadership council of national stakeholders that takes the national goal seriously. The Civic Marshall Plan identified research-based interventions, such as the creation of early warning systems that identified the attendance, behavior and course performance in reading and math that indicated whether a student was on-track or off-track to graduate. The CMP leadership council is now a working group of the America’s Promise Trustees and includes over 30 national organizations from across the sectors. For additional information on the CMP, please see Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Bruce, M., & Fox, J. H. (2013). Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic, Annual Report, February 2013. Civic Enterprises, Every Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, America’s Promise Alliance, and Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved August 26, 2012 from <http://www.civicerprises.net/Education>

Class of 2020 (from 78.2 percent in 2010<sup>2</sup>, the most recent data available)—a goal first articulated by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 and supported by every president since.

Public media brings key assets to addressing the dropout crisis including advancing knowledge about key challenges confronting schools, communities and individuals along with solutions to those challenges; providing opportunities for stakeholders (especially youth and educators) to have a voice in solving these problems; ensuring a multi-sector response, and driving collaborative action toward a common goal. The initiative also focuses on key content areas highlighted in the CMP, such as a focus on the middle grades and connecting education to college/career goals.

## Key Outcomes Achieved

American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen! conclusively demonstrates that local public media stations have a vital and unique role in helping communities end America's high school dropout crisis. The evidence from the EGC evaluation shows that the initiative succeeded, in public media stations' ability to (1) harness station assets and mobilize a community to solve a pressing local issue; (2) build informed, solution-oriented coalitions; and (3) give teachers and youth a voice.

- ☐ **Public media served as a trusted communicator, convener, and capacity builder -- all of which are essential elements for a community to address its high school dropout challenge.** For example, the community partners agreed that public media added value to stem the dropout crisis in the following ways:
  - Telling the story of the dropout crisis in a way that enabled more people to become involved (80 percent);
  - Directly reaching out to the community to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement (78 percent); and
  - Facilitating greater collaboration among community organizations working to combat the dropout crisis and improve graduation outcomes (77 percent).
  
- ☐ **American Graduate laid a strong foundation for ongoing action and long term impact.** The vast majority of community partners surveyed felt that this initiative would have an ongoing and lasting effect. For example, the majority of community partners reported that:

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<sup>2</sup> Stillwell, R., & Sable, J. (2013). Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10: First Look (Provisional Data) (NCES 2013- 309). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309.pdf>.

- Public media provided opportunities that will have a lasting effect on youth (74 percent) and that the media opportunities provided through American Graduate will have an impact on youth at risk of dropping out of school (64 percent); and
- Public media added significant value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis by directly reaching out to the community to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement (68 percent) and [will] add value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis in the next three years by directly reaching out to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement (85 percent, including 46 percent who say "to a very large extent/quite a bit").

Additionally, public media served as a catalyst for community-led discussions on education policies, which point toward longer-term impact through policy shifts. These include the consideration of improved statewide policies related to chronic absenteeism as well as programming that influenced community partners' reflection on school district strategies and the role of future superintendents.

## Strategies that Produced Success

American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen! achieved the initial successes outlined above through four key strategies defined in the American Graduate Logic Model (see Appendix A). It is important to note that the implementation of these strategies is, in part, a critical outcome in and of itself. In a complicated and ever-shifting education landscape, stakeholders and intervention strategists are increasingly equipped with the knowledge of "what works," yet accessing and then translating knowledge of powerful interventions into action is often much more difficult.

The four strategies below were identified in support of short-, mid-, and long-term goals related to engaging the community and sustaining the influence to achieve graduation rate improvement. They took into consideration the target audiences of at-risk youth, their families and communities, educators, partners, community members and policy makers, and caring adults. They also sought to leverage the role and value of community-based public radio and television broadcasting stations (e.g. staff, collaborating TV and radio stations, existing and new media); national and public media organizations (e.g. PBS, NPR, national producers including PBS NewsHour; digital media platforms; development and engagement service organizations); and partners (e.g. local corporations, nonprofits and agencies; education institutions).

- ☐ **Multi-platform Content:** The creation and distribution of media content was a key means of broadening public understanding of the complexities of the dropout crisis and the most promising ways to address it.
  - More than 1,700 news segments, public affairs programs, documentaries, PSAs and other content were produced, including web, short story/show segments, interstitial,

student production, long form, and promo reaching approximately 10 million broadcast viewers annually; and

- Nearly all (96 percent) of the content was made available online. Two-thirds (63 percent) was specifically aligned with national American Graduate goals and one-third (37 percent) focused specifically on solutions.

The partners felt that the content strategy played a key role in the American Graduate initiative:

- Three-quarters of community partners (75 percent) perceived that American Graduate had “resulted in the creation of media content around the dropout crisis that will be of continued usefulness” and 66 percent reported that public media had added substantial value to their community’s graduation rate improvement efforts by: “creating lasting materials and content (website, toolkits, video content) that could be used in efforts to combat the dropout crisis and improve graduation outcomes.”; and
- 75 percent reported that American Graduate “resulted in the creation of media content around the dropout crisis that will be of continued usefulness.”

- **Communication:** American Graduate brought together community organizations to strategize, plan, and organize dropout prevention/graduation improvement efforts for the long term. These efforts included regular meetings of established partners as well as meetings of organizations to discuss forming a coalition or other ways to collaborate on an ongoing basis or to plan a particular activity or program. In many communities, smaller work and discussion groups convened to air ideas, shape the work of larger groups, and inform development of media products related to graduation improvement.

- American Graduate’s solutions-orientation overcame previous negative perceptions of the media, which were rooted in past news stories shining a spotlight on problems, not solutions. American Graduate approached the community with the productive mindsets of “Let us learn what you need,” “Let us tell the story of your students,” and “Let us tell your story to the public,” setting the initiative up for greater success by building community trust. For example, WNET in New York produced American Graduate Day a unique live day-long national broadcast and online event that increased community engagement and volunteering by featuring stories of local work, local partnerships and promising solutions;
- A majority (56 percent) of partner survey respondents asserted that American Graduate had added substantial value to the community’s efforts to address the dropout crisis by “directly reaching out to teachers to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement.” Teachers who participated in the American Graduate Teacher Town Halls reported that they were equipped with a greater range of strategies for improving graduation outcomes in their schools and changed their beliefs about



education reporting, gaining a new perspective about public media's role in building forums and including the teacher's perspective in this important discussion; and

- American Graduate engaged and supported student voice. For example, APTV in Alabama, working with Birmingham Public Schools on the Student Retention Survey Project, surveyed nearly 8,000 adults and 6,000 students in the Birmingham City Schools on their top priorities, which impacted APTV's partner strategies and actions going forward.

□ **Training and Resources:** The national American Graduate education resources and curricula were major entry points into districts and schools for many stations.

- More than 20,000 teachers accessed professional development opportunities and conference experiences offered by the stations. For example, WHRO in Norfolk, VA, hosted Tech Trek a weeklong technology training camp for educators to utilize technology to better engage their students. WJCT in Jacksonville, FL, hosted its first annual TEACH Conference, a one-day conference for more than 1,000 educators representing all grades (PreK-12th) and disciplines;
- American Graduate enabled important data collection and data sharing. For example, New Mexico's KNME and the University of New Mexico's Center for Education Policy Research mapped the location of dropout crisis in the Albuquerque metropolitan area using geographical information system tools, color-coding risk factors, and early warning indicators, a powerful way to mobilize partners and begin strategic planning; and
- American Graduate education resources and curriculum were major entry points into districts and schools for many stations, including science- and STEM-related professional development, literacy and early learning. CPB-funded education programs and tools include StoryCorpsU (a standards-based college readiness program), Design Squad Nation (an online hands-on engineering program), PBS NewsHour Student Reporting labs (including a news literacy/digital media curriculum), and RoadTrip Nation (digital resources to help students' map career pathways).

□ **Partnership Formation:** Station partnership with community organizations, leaders and educators, and the youth of their communities laid a foundation for sustained effort. Local stations increased and strengthened community partnerships dedicated to ending the dropout crisis.

- Stations directly engaged tens of thousands of civic leaders, educators, parents, youth, and other community members in dynamic public dialogues, educational

opportunities and knowledge-building activities. By April of 2013, the 25 American Graduate public media stations reported partnerships with over 900 different community organizations. Two-thirds of the partner organizations were either local (35 percent) or regional (29 percent). Non-profit organizations represented the largest group of partners at 38 percent followed by schools at 17 percent;

- Approximately 40 percent of survey respondents indicated their partnership with the local station had not existed prior to American Graduate, highlighting station success at new partner formation during the American Graduate grant period;
- More than two-thirds of partners reported that American Graduate facilitated greater collaboration among community organizations (67 percent) and that American Graduate created a local collaboration of multiple organizations focused on graduation improvement (66 percent);
- Over 10,000 parents were engaged through activities sponsored by the station and/or by more than 100 community partners focused on parent engagement; and
- Over 2000 teachers were engaged through widely broadcast educator forums. These included the 12 Teach Town Halls conducted between November 2011 and June 2012 documented in Teacher Town Halls: A Summary of Findings and Impact.

## Conclusion

Ending the dropout crisis will require sustained and coordinated community efforts driven by an understanding of the reasons students drop out and the proven solutions that exist. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting's initiative, American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen, has demonstrated that by combining personal communication with high-quality media products, public media have a critical, unique and valuable role in meeting this national priority. The first phase of American Graduate achieved success by raising awareness of the high school dropout challenge, highlighting research-based solutions, and fostering community collaborations and community action to boost graduation rates. Some stations and markets have laid the groundwork for how public media can be an engine of positive change and productive partnerships in communities across the public media system. The evidence from the first 18 months of American Graduate shows the value of public media's role in helping communities understand and address pressing national challenges. The initial successes set the stage for sustainable on-going work and show that American Graduate has the potential for long-term impact through its public media stations, in partnership with each community they serve. Public media has a vital role to play in helping the nation achieve its high school graduation rate goal.

## Paths Forward

American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen! exemplifies the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's vision for public media as a powerful catalyst for the intelligent changes needed to solve complex social problems. Trends from the evaluation, reinforced by powerful examples from specific stations and communities, demonstrated local public media station's critical and unique valuable role in ending America's high school dropout crisis. These findings also set the stage for increased impact for American Graduate as it begins its third year, as well as laid the foundation for opportunities for public media to embed the thinking, strategies, and actions underlying American Graduate into all future public media work and expanding community efforts to include older youth and their parents. More detailed recommendations to strengthen and grow this collaborative, multi-platform approach are detailed in the full report.

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### About Civic Enterprises

Civic Enterprises is a public policy firm that helps corporations, nonprofits, foundations, universities, and governments develop and spearhead innovative public policies to strengthen our communities and country. Created to enlist the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to help address our nation's toughest problems, Civic Enterprises fashions new initiatives and strategies that achieve measurable results in the fields of education, civic engagement, economic mobility, and many other domestic policy issues. For information about Civic Enterprises, please visit [www.civicerprises.net](http://www.civicerprises.net)



# I. Introduction

## Overview

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) launched *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* in spring 2011 to help communities across the United States address a critical challenge—ensuring that all young people graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary or career success. The challenge is great. Despite recent advances:

- At least one in five young adults is not earning a high school diploma, with the numbers closer to one in three for African-American and Hispanic students, particularly young males.
- In an era when there is little work for high school dropouts, the negative impact of dropping out on the lives of these young people and on the economic and social well-being of the nation as a whole is substantial and well-documented.

The highest dropout rates are concentrated in low-income neighborhoods and communities. Entire locales are unable to provide their children with a pathway to adult success. When students drop out of school, most remain in the community, leaving that community to bear the related social and economic costs. Communities struggle to retain vitality. After decades of work, it is evident that schools and districts cannot solve the dropout challenge alone. Building awareness, engagement, capacity, and social support services in these communities is essential to ending the dropout crisis. Cities and towns that have improved high school graduation rates are, by and large, communities that have come together to help drive and support the work with a multi-sector, multi-partner, multi-year effort that builds will, takes action, and measures progress against benchmarks.

Over the past decade, innovative and targeted efforts by states, districts, schools and their communities have produced encouraging news—a nearly 10 percent (or six percentage-point) increase in the national graduation rate, to 78.2 percent<sup>3</sup>—after 30 years of stagnation at around 70 percent. Hispanic graduation rates increased by more than 10 percentage points in the last decade and African American graduation rates by more than six percentage points. Still, averages are deceiving and vast disparities remain: several states have 60 percent graduation rates, several have 90 percent graduation rates, and within states, urban and rural school

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<sup>3</sup> Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate, from Laird, J., DeBell, M., Kienzl, G., & Chapman, C. (2007). *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005* (NCES 2007-059). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007059.pdf>; Stillwell, R., & Sable, J. (2013). *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10: First Look (Provisional Data)* (NCES 2013-309). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309.pdf>.

districts post high school graduation rates far lower than their suburban counterparts, sometimes by 30 or more percentage points.<sup>4</sup> Efforts to improve graduation rates in these communities must be targeted to local needs and sustained over time.

The dropout challenge is a complex and entrenched social problem, hiding in the shadows of poverty and in chronically low-performing schools. These communities and schools typically lie outside the coverage of mainstream media, making it difficult for the wider public to fully comprehend the issue and what it takes to activate positive change.

## Theory of Action

In response, CPB's *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* initiative was designed to connect the mission, depth, commitment and capacities of public media—its local stations and national organizations—to nationwide community efforts to end the dropout challenge and to increase graduation rates. With a mandate to provide content and resources that educate and inform, public television and radio stations have a 40-year history of improving educational outcomes for all children, especially high-needs students and families.

American Graduate's goals and strategies were built on public media's decades-long work advancing best practices in education and community engagement, as well as on national calls to action included in the Civic Marshall Plan to Build a Grad Nation.<sup>5</sup> According to the Civic Marshall Plan, effective solutions to complex social problems demand bringing together a broad cross-section of organizations and individuals, including elected officials, private and public institutions, non-profit groups, and businesses, to commit to a common agenda.

CPB recognized that achieving large-scale public impact requires coordinated and articulated efforts rather than isolated investments and actions. CPB's theory of success for the project emphasized a thorough understanding of local needs and resources and developing solutions through collaboration and long-term commitment (Figure 1.1).

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<sup>4</sup> Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Bruce, M., & Fox, J. H. (2013). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic, Annual Report, February 2013*. Civic Enterprises, Every Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, America's Promise Alliance, and Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved August 26, 2012 from <http://new.every1graduates.org/building-a-grad-nation-state-profiles-and-annual-updates/>

<sup>5</sup> Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Moore, L. A., & Fox, J. H. (2010). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic, November 2010*; and subsequent annual updates through 2013. Retrieved August 26, 2012 from <http://new.every1graduates.org/building-a-grad-nation-state-profiles-and-annual-updates/>

**Figure 1.1. Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s Theory of Success**



CPB also developed an American Graduate initiative logic model, which mapped the pathways the project would take to achieve graduation improvement goals (see Appendix A for the full logic model). The logic model took into account that public media stations would need to work on multiple fronts to collaborate and jointly spearhead a coordinated approach linking multiple organizations and individuals in concerted action.

Based on current research on educational improvement, CPB and public media stations understood from the outset that the grant period would not be long enough to achieve measurable change in educational outcomes for large numbers of youth. The aim instead was that *American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen* would serve as a catalyst for developing and strengthening local efforts, coordinated among a diverse cross-section of community partners, which will be sustained over the long term.

The goals of *American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen* were:

- Raising awareness of the dropout issue in communities;
- Creating lasting partnerships and engaging stakeholders in public dialogue and collaborative solutions;
- Building the capacity of local educators and families to support at-risk youth; and
- Engaging youth themselves in activities designed to build their commitment and capacity to graduate and be prepared to succeed in college and in their careers.

With a combination of two-year planning and implementation grants for 25 stations, shorter planning grants for 50 stations, and resources for non-grantee stations, CPB’s American Graduate initiative linked national media organizations (PBS, NPR, PRX, WNET, WGBH, etc.) with the distinct assets of local, independently owned and operated, stations that are deeply embedded in and trusted by their communities. Public media stations were called upon to harness their assets – thoughtful and thought-provoking news and documentary content, universal reach into every home in America, community-based facilities, a reservoir of trust,

and digital curriculum development expertise – to become deeply involved and integrated as a community partner to scale knowledge and solutions that would accelerate the pace of graduation rate improvement. American Graduate would engage community partners across the country in building knowledge about the issues, creating a community dialogue, and facilitating collective action around the causes, consequences, and solutions to the dropout crisis.

These strategies were expected to produce short-term results, including increasing partnerships focused on reducing dropouts, raising awareness of the issue nationally and locally, and increasing the use of content and services available from public media and its partners. These short-term outcomes would lay the groundwork for longer-term goals, including building a more formalized infrastructure for cross-sector community partnerships focused on the dropout challenge, and developing concrete solutions for boosting youth engagement and increasing graduation rates.

## A Framework for Progress

Beginning in 2011, CPB engaged 75 stations in a nationwide public media campaign to raise awareness and help communities generate solutions to end the dropout crisis. Of these, 25 were identified as serving “high-need” areas that included many disadvantaged youth.<sup>6</sup> The 25 stations committed to taking on broader and deeper work over a minimum of two years (see Station Map, Figure 1.2).

The 25 stations were expected to:

- Develop strategic partnerships with community organizations;
- Develop strategic partnerships with educational institutions and organizations; including at least one high-need middle school and a youth-serving agency;
- Integrate teachers and students into their target populations for American Graduate activities;
- Pursue one or more public media curriculum Spotlight Projects, developed by national organizations, to provide interactive learning experiences. These could be professional development programs for educators and/or direct media training for at-risk youth;
- Develop and maintain an American Graduate website;

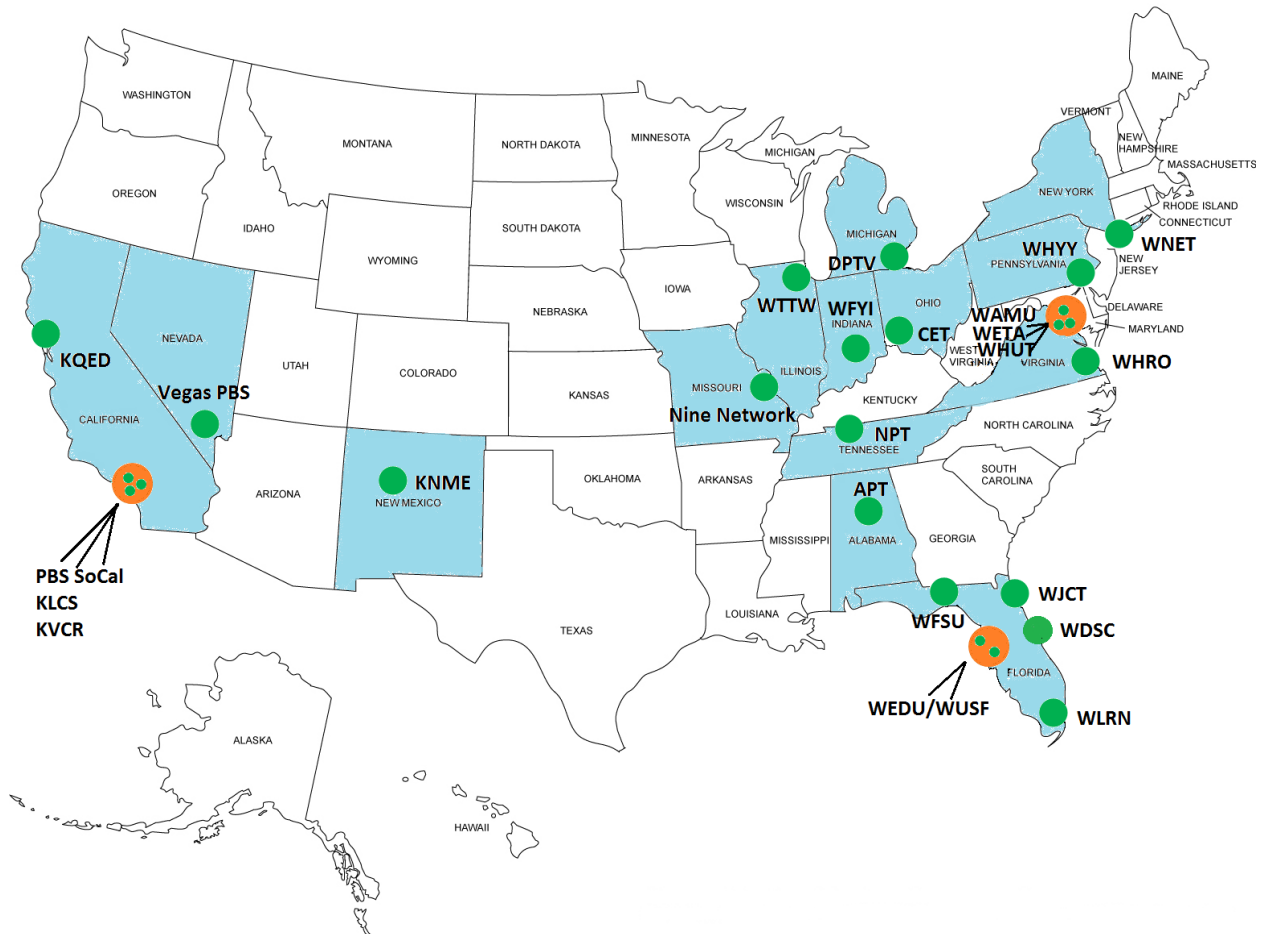
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<sup>6</sup> “High-need” stations served metropolitan, suburban, or rural area within the top 25 epicenters of the dropout crisis, with the lowest high school graduation rates (schools that consistently graduate fewer than 60% of their students) or in one of the 200 communities with two or more chronically low-performing high schools.



- Share their models and resources with other stations through regular reporting and participation in a cross-station learning network moderated by Nine Network of Public Media in St. Louis.

**Figure 1.2. Station Map**



Stations include: APT/Alabama Public Television (Birmingham, Alabama); CET (Cincinnati, Ohio); DPT (Detroit, Michigan); KLCS/KVCR/PBS SoCal (Los Angeles, San Bernardino/Riverside Counties, and Orange County, Southern California); KETC (Nine Network of Public Media/St. Louis, Missouri); KQED (San Francisco/Oakland, California); KNME/ New Mexico PBS (Albuquerque, New Mexico); Vegas PBS (Las Vegas, Nevada); WAMU/WETA/WHUT (Washington, D.C.); WDSC (Daytona Beach, Florida); WFTW (Indianapolis, Indiana); WFSU (Tallahassee, Florida); WHRO (Norfolk, Virginia); WHYY (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); WJCT (Jacksonville, Florida); WLRN (Miami, Florida); WNET (New York City, New York); WNPT (Nashville, Tennessee); WTTW (Chicago, Illinois); WUSF/WEDU (Tampa, Florida).

In addition, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CPB further engaged 12 of these stations to host American Graduate Teacher Town Hall meetings in their communities.

## The Action Evaluation

In spring 2012, CPB retained an independent research team from the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education to conduct an action evaluation of the American Graduate work in the 25 stations representing the highest-need communities. The evaluation activities were designed to support CPB and the participating stations in advancing stations' strategies to implement their local action plans, and to assess the initiative's progress against intended goals and next steps. Reflections on stations' progress and lessons learned were documented in an interim report completed in winter 2013. This final report focuses on the overall impact of the initiative.

The EGC team studied the extent to which stations effectively:

- Increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of the dropout crisis, its complexities, solutions, and the importance of high school graduation;
- Engaged more community organizations in addressing the dropout problem and helped produce more focused and coordinated collaboration across multiple organizations;
- Enabled teachers' views on solving the dropout crisis to be heard;
- Provided educators with professional development on the use of learning media resources to help them develop and enact strategies for increasing student motivation and engagement, and decreasing dropout rates;
- Enhanced the capacity of schools and/or districts to engage in activities focused on preventing students from dropping out or re-engaging those who had dropped out;
- Involved parents in developing awareness and supporting their children in short- and long-term dropout prevention and graduation improvement efforts, particularly in populations that are under-represented in student success;
- Engaged more youth in activities that increased their commitment to learning, to graduating, and to preparing for their future in college and careers; provided youth with opportunities to voice their experiences and perspectives; and
- Acted as a catalyst for community efforts to establish education policies or other community features that will support sustained focus on the dropout challenge.

This report draws from three data sources:

- *Descriptive reports* of station activities, products, and outcomes collected by CPB and Nine Network of Public Media. These include mid-year and final reports from each station, station documents and websites, station responses to Questions of the Week posed by Nine Network, a summary evaluation report of the Teacher Town Halls, numerical station-by-station tallies of American Graduate initiative output

(content and activities) and local impact (participants) and evaluations conducted by or for local stations;

- *EGC station reports*, based on multiple phone interviews with each station's American Graduate initiative program director and in-person site visits to stations, involving in-depth interviews with station leaders and staff and the station's community partners, many of whom are also leaders in local efforts to confront the dropout crisis;
- *An extensive Community Partner Survey* developed and administered electronically by EGC in spring 2013. The survey included 40 multiple-choice questions plus several open-response questions inviting station partners to report on the extent to which American Graduate provided value in their community and on the work of their organization. EGC received a 37 percent response rate from about 400 partners surveyed. Close to half of the respondents were from community-based non-profits; one-third hailed from education institutions; and the remainder from government agencies, coalitions, and other organizations. The survey included a sub-scale for organizations specifically involved in youth digital media training. There were 47 respondents in that category.

## In This Report

The EGC research team synthesized analyses of multiple data sources from the 25 stations to assess the overall progress of *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* to date. The following report presents findings related to the initiative's short-term outcomes and predictions for long-term impact in three major categories:

- Building public awareness, understanding, dialogue, and knowledge, with public media serving as key communicators;
- Increasing partnerships and community-wide engagement with stations as conveners and connectors;
- Empowering teachers and youth with direct services as educators.

Within the context of building public awareness and knowledge, the authors explore and report on the role of stations as communicators through the types of national and local content produced, disseminated and in some cases expanded, as well as the role of content in provoking and galvanizing local discussion through public screenings of media products.

The report next explores the role of stations as community collaborators, the diversity and growth of partnerships through *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen*, the increase in collaboration among the partners, and partners' overall perception of the impact of stations' efforts.

Last, the authors look at the role of *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* public media stations in connecting and empowering youth through amplifying their voice, teacher professional development, and direct services in classrooms or after-school. For older students, this primarily meant opportunities through digital media production to share their stories of disengagement and re-engagement. For younger students, this meant helping them develop better reading, mathematics and science inquiry skills.

## II. Building Public Awareness, Knowledge and Dialogue through Content

### Telling the Story

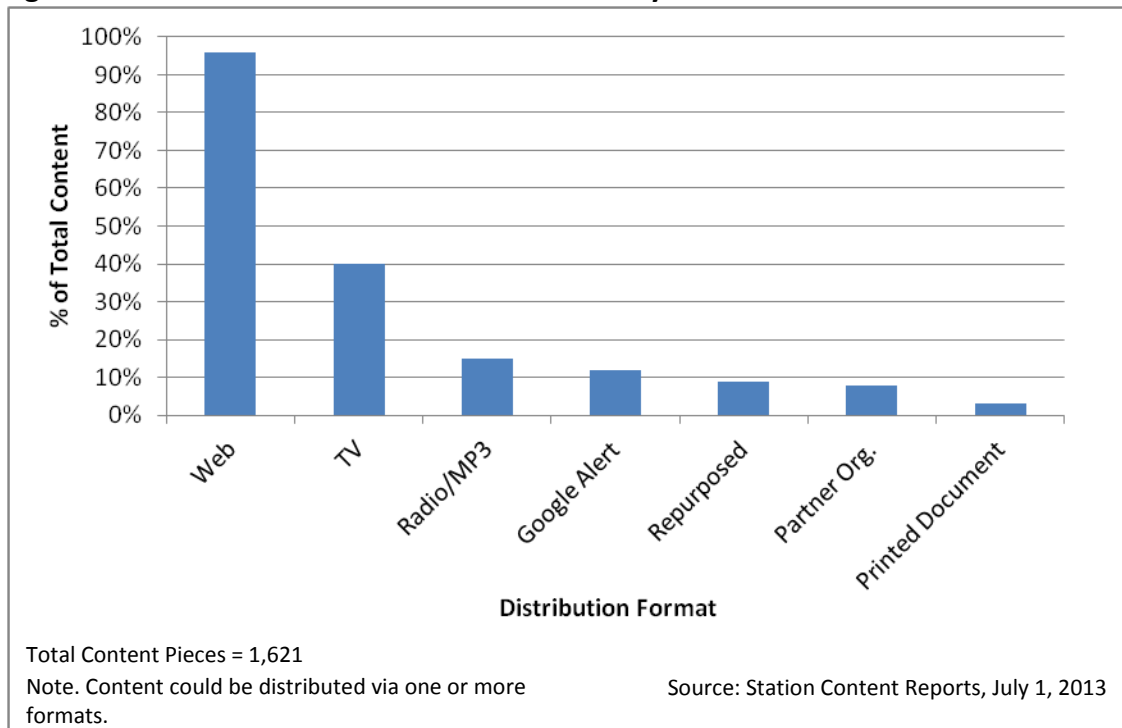
*American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* used public media broadcasting's strength in creating and distributing media content as a key means to broaden public understanding of the complexities of the dropout crisis and the most promising ways to address it. Through national reporting and documentaries on PBS and NPR available across the country and significant local productions related to regional issues, public television and radio stations addressed many sides of the problem, illustrating diverse perspectives from all those affected, and showcased solutions to help effect change more quickly.

Since fall 2011, nearly 1,700 hours of national and local content have been produced — from *Tavis Smiley Reports: Too Important to Fail* and PBS NewHour to the StoryCorps National Teachers Initiative — and have reached more than 10 million viewers and listeners each year, achieving the series' average, and over-indexing among minority populations disproportionately affected by the crisis.

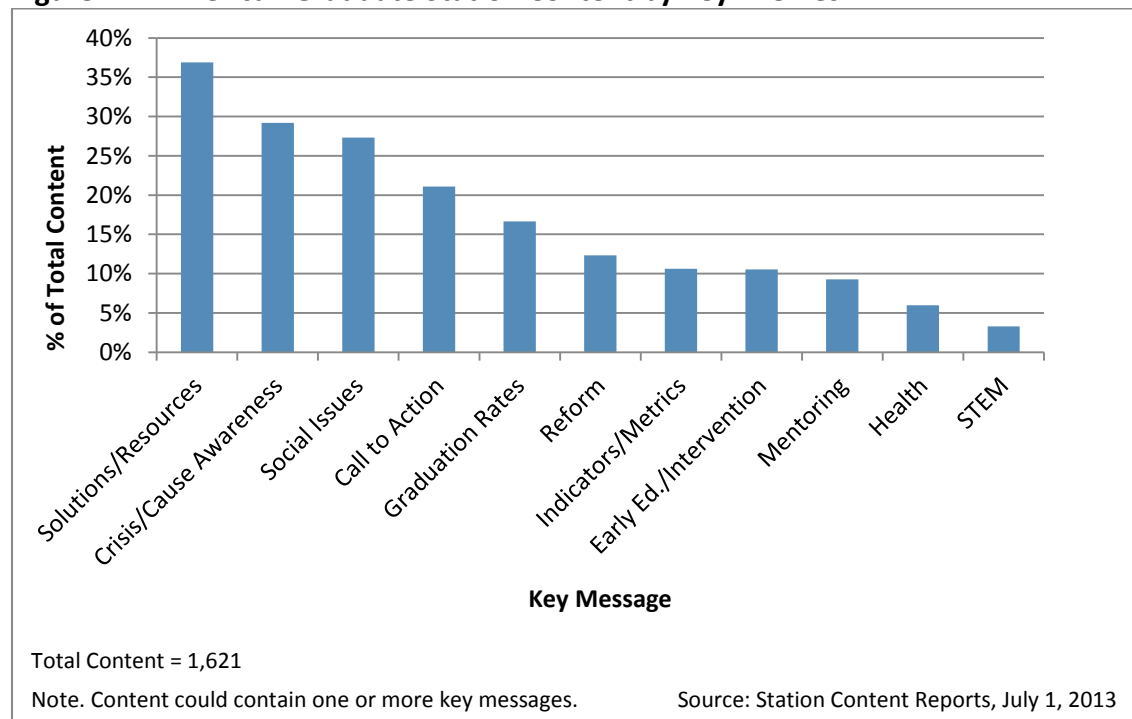
Coverage included long documentaries, town halls and other forums, episodes or segments as part of on-going series, short-form content and interstitials, and web-only (see Figure 2.1 for a breakdown of distribution formats). In keeping with American Graduate's priority of multi-platform programming and distribution, 96 percent of the content produced through the initiative was made available online. Every station developed a website where television and radio programs were either simulcast live or available for streaming anytime, and print products were archived.

Segments frequently examined root causes of dropping out, delved into social issues underlying students' disengagement, and focused on specific interventions such as mentoring and alternative education pathways. More than one-third of the content pieces focused specifically on solutions and resources (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.1. American Graduate Station Content by Distribution Format**



**Figure 2.2. American Graduate Station Content by Key Themes**



Combining national journalism and local issue assessment, the public media content produced through American Graduate is building an important national information resource that links dropout and graduation coverage to critical solution contexts, including: school policy and curriculum; community infrastructure, economic indicators, and workforce development; teacher requirements and assessments; youth development; and programs focused on mentoring and college readiness.

Joined nationally with the authors of *Building A Grad Nation: Progress and Challenges* annual report series and other leading organizations, American Graduate producers are building a shared narrative framework to guide the public discussion necessary for collective action.

### Spurring Dialogue through National and Local Productions

Nationally and locally produced content spurred local dialogue in various ways. Screenings and community discussions of films such as *180 Days: Inside an American High School*, Frontline's "Middle School Moment" and "Dropout Nation," and Teacher Town Halls fostered new discussions in many communities. *American Graduate Day* placed the national media spotlight on the dropout crisis (see box). In interviews, community partners reported that the intensity and consistency characterizing these events enabled citizens to understand both the critical importance and complexity of the issue.

#### ***A Unique Galvanizing Multi-Platform Programming Event***

"American Graduate Day" aired on September 22, 2012, a unique live day-long multi-platform effort – radio, TV, web and mobile — to increase community engagement and volunteerism by presenting stories of local work and promising solutions. Many community organizations participated in the broadcast, for which national content was produced by WNET in New York City and local segments were produced by participating stations and local partners. WNET estimates that the Twitter feed (#amgrad hashtag) about the broadcast "reached over 3 million people"<sup>7</sup> on just one day and provided opportunities for numerous online discussions about the dropout issue. A second annual *American Graduate Day* is scheduled to air in September 2013.

At many stations, public affairs reporting became more focused on education as the American Graduate initiative grew. Some stations hired education reporters, including Nashville Public Television and WHYY in Philadelphia. In the South, reporters' work was often showcased on the Southern Education Desk, composed of stations in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee (four of these states have been profiled over the last several years in the *Building a*

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<sup>7</sup> Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (2013). American Graduate Let's Make it Happen. Retrieved August 26, 2012 from <http://americangraduate.org/grad-day>

*Grad Nation: Progress and Challenges Annual Reports* for their progress in raising graduation rates from low baselines).

Examples of local productions across the country include:

- Washington, DC's WAMU presented a compelling nine-part radio series that provided a comprehensive perspective on the causes and effects of the dropout crisis in the District of Columbia, where more than 40 percent of all students fail to graduate on-time. Topics ranged from "Breaking the Cycle When Dropping out Runs in the Family" and "Battling Homelessness" to "Graduation Rates Increase Around The Globe As U.S. Plateaus" and "In Experimental School, Tight-Knit Community Helps Students Succeed."
- In Norfolk, VA, WHRO developed Dropout "Challenge Crisis: The Dropout Experience," and later worked with Norfolk Public Schools to screen a documentary about dropping out and the importance of graduating, and start a dialogue about dropping out/graduating with 600 ninth-graders in five high schools.
- Nashville Public Television created and broadcast two 30-minute specials, "NPT Reports: Translating the Dream" and "Graduation by the Numbers," that have been frequently rebroadcast as springboards for small-group workshops and community discussions. The first examined the challenges Nashville's immigrant and non-English speaking students face, and how schools and teachers are trying to address this increasing need in a city that is shifting from black and white to increasingly multi-cultural. The second took an in-depth look at Nashville's efforts to keep students in school and the use of "early warning systems," and explained the complex way graduation rates are calculated.
- CET in Cincinnati created and aired a one-hour documentary, "Cradle to Career: Moving the Needle on Education," in collaboration with the local ABC affiliate, Channel 9, WCPO. The film documented the three-county region's "Cradle to Career" initiative, which brings together leaders in business, education, community service and philanthropy to work toward common goals in education.
- Chicago's WTTW created a 90-minute live broadcast, "American Graduate Special," with panels of experts, dropouts, and youth who have successfully reengaged after dropping out, and adults who have contributed to students staying in school. In addition, WTTW dedicated segments of the station's flagship public affairs program, *Chicago Tonight*, to raising awareness of the dropout crisis, bringing attention to potential local solutions, and facilitating insightful and productive community conversations.
- KVCR in San Bernardino, CA produced 20 segments for the live broadcast *Plugged Inland*, many of which were later rebroadcast by the commercial station ION TV or transformed into interstitials.



- New Mexico PBS’s “Public Square” community dialogue program featured an episode on bullying with R.J. Mitte, an actor from the hit commercial television show *Breaking Bad*, who was bullied as a child; State Representative Rick Miera; Kristine Meurer, Director of the Public Education Departments School and Family Support Bureau; Tonna Burgos, Executive Director of Student Services at Rio Rancho Public Schools; and Detective Brian Schamber of the Los Alamos County Police Department.
- Las Vegas PBS examined the role of teachers, administrators, and families in three special programs that spurred conversation and dialogue in the community leading up to the Teacher Town Hall. “Teachers Making a Difference,” hosted by PBS NewsHour correspondent Ray Suarez, featured a panel of teachers, a middle school principal and the county superintendent of schools, recognizing the role of teachers in the educational process. “Helping Families Graduate” featured a panel of family members discussing their personal experiences with public education, and “Road to Reform” addressed the administration’s perspective on the issue. The live broadcast of the Teacher Town Hall, also hosted by Ray Suarez, followed the three broadcasts.

According to the Community Partner Survey, American Graduate events played a significant role in building public awareness of the dropout crisis and involvement in efforts to end it. **The vast majority of respondents (80 percent) reported that public media had added substantial value to the community’s efforts to address the dropout crisis “by telling the story of the dropout crisis in a way that enabled more people to become involved.” Almost three-quarters of responding partners reported that American Graduate had substantially increased public awareness of the *magnitude and complexities* of the dropout crisis. Almost half of the partners felt that American Graduate had also substantially increased public awareness of *solutions* to the dropout crisis.**

Community organizations confirmed that public radio and television content is a critical resource for increasing graduation rates moving forward. **Three-quarters of respondents perceived that the American Graduate initiative had “resulted in the creation of media content around the dropout crisis *that will be of continued usefulness*” and 66 percent reported that public media had added substantial value to their community’s graduation rate improvement efforts by: “*creating lasting materials and content* (website, toolkits, video content) that could be used in efforts to combat the dropout crisis and improve graduation outcomes.”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added.



### III. Tearing Apart Silos and Spreading Solutions through Partnerships and Community Engagement

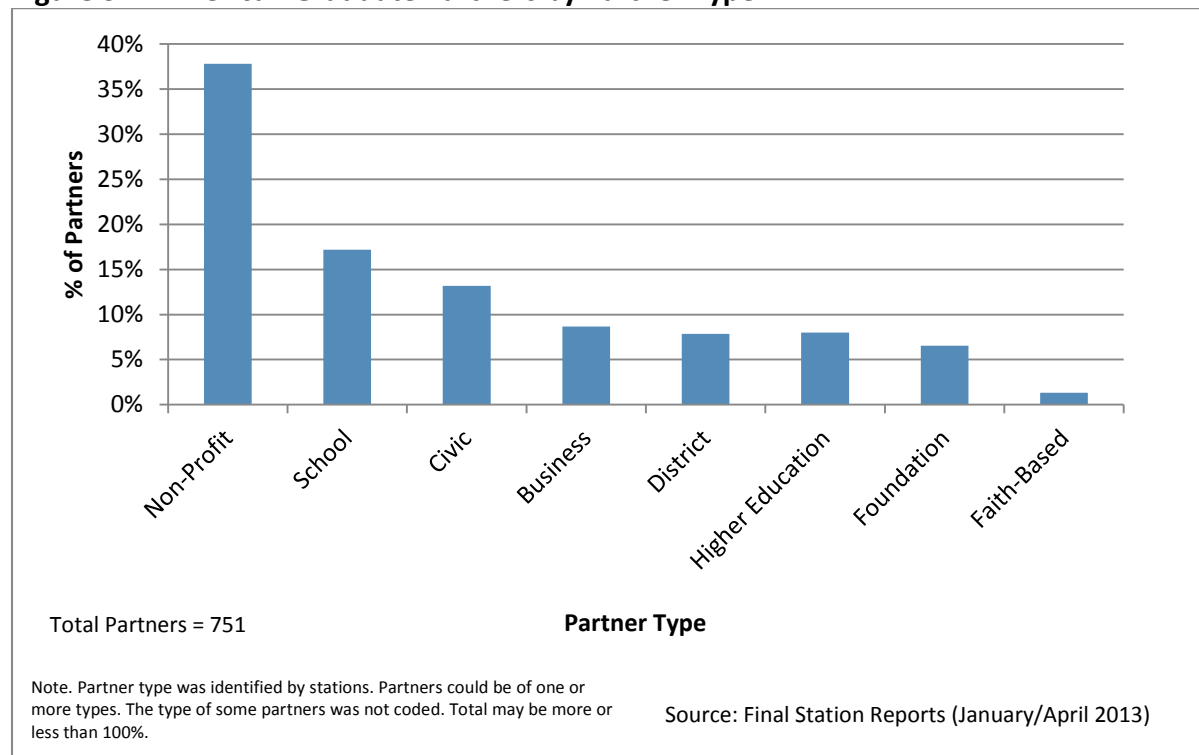
Through *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen*, stations increased the number and broadened the type of community partners with whom they collaborated. Stations also brought community partners together, increasing collaboration among partners in their communities for greater goal alignment and effectiveness.

#### Diversity of Community Partners

**By April 2013, the 25 American Graduate public media stations reported partnerships with more than 750 community organizations.**

- Nearly two-thirds of the partner organizations were either local (35 percent) or regional (29 percent); most stations also partnered with a smaller number of state and national organizations.
- Many stations had or created partnerships with local affiliates of youth-centered national organizations. At least 11 stations partnered with their local United Way affiliate, and at least nine with Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys and Girls Clubs. These partners already had developed local graduation improvement efforts of their own. Working with a combination of local and national organizations magnified the public media stations' efforts.
- Non-profit organizations represented the largest group of partners (38 percent), followed by schools (17 percent) and civic organizations (13 percent).
- Businesses, school districts, colleges and universities, and foundations each represented fewer than 10 percent of the total. About 1 percent of the organizations identified themselves as faith-based (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1. American Graduate Partners by Partner Type**



## Increasing Numbers of Station Partners

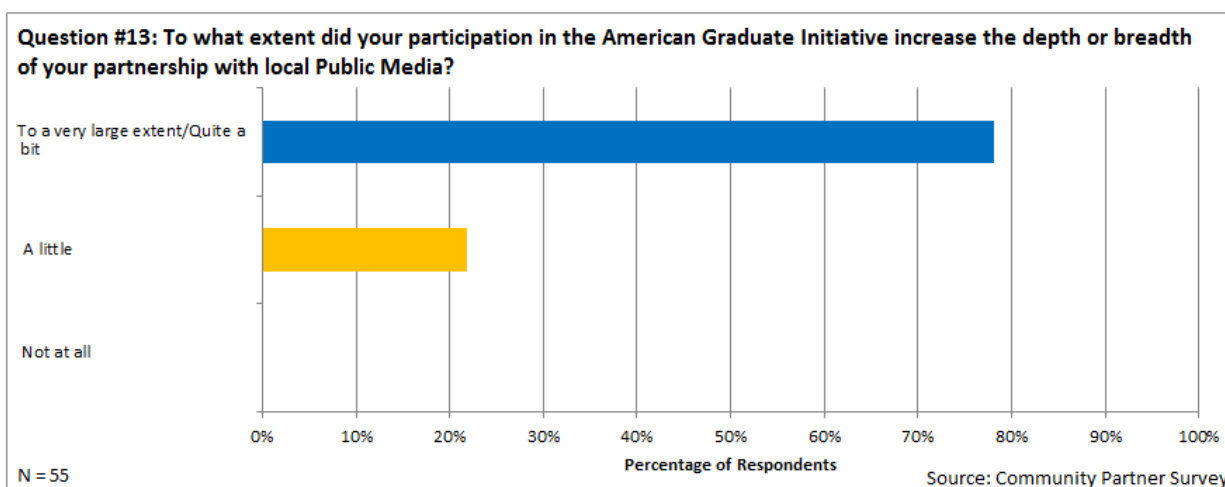
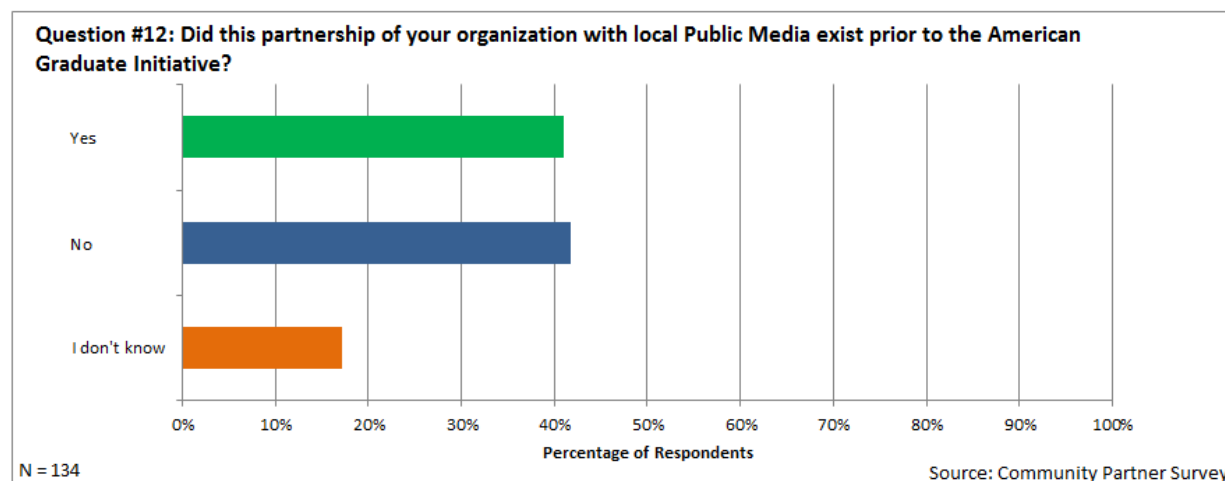
Results from the Community Partner Survey indicate that stations met the strategic objectives for increasing community partnerships. This work broke down existing barriers and facilitated a multi-sector response, which sustained the momentum of stations efforts and allowed them to broaden their goals for solving the dropout crisis.

- Approximately 40 percent of survey respondents indicated their partnership with the local station had not existed prior to American Graduate, meaning the partnerships were created in the American Graduate grant period;
- Nearly 80 percent of those with pre-existing partnerships with local public media reported the initiative increased the depth and breadth of their partnership.

Survey responses are illustrated in Figure 3.2.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> All percentages reported from the survey represent the combined total of two out of four response categories—“To a very large extent” and “Quite a bit.”

**Figure 3.2. American Graduate Forges New Partnerships, Deepens Relationships with Existing Partners<sup>10</sup>**



## Increasing Effective Collaboration among Community Partners

***American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen*** not only forged and strengthened partnerships between organizations and local public media stations, but also strengthened working relationships among the community organizations. These included regular meetings of established partnerships as well as meetings of organizations to discuss forming collaboration, planning a particular activity, or developing a strategy for long-term educational improvements. In many communities, smaller work and discussion groups convened to share ideas, shape the work of larger groups, and help develop media products related to graduation improvement.

<sup>10</sup> For Question 13, the number of respondents is reduced because the respondents were the approximately 40 percent of the 134 who responded “yes” to Question 12, just above. It is anticipated that those who responded “Don’t Know” to Question 12 were those who were new to their organizations.

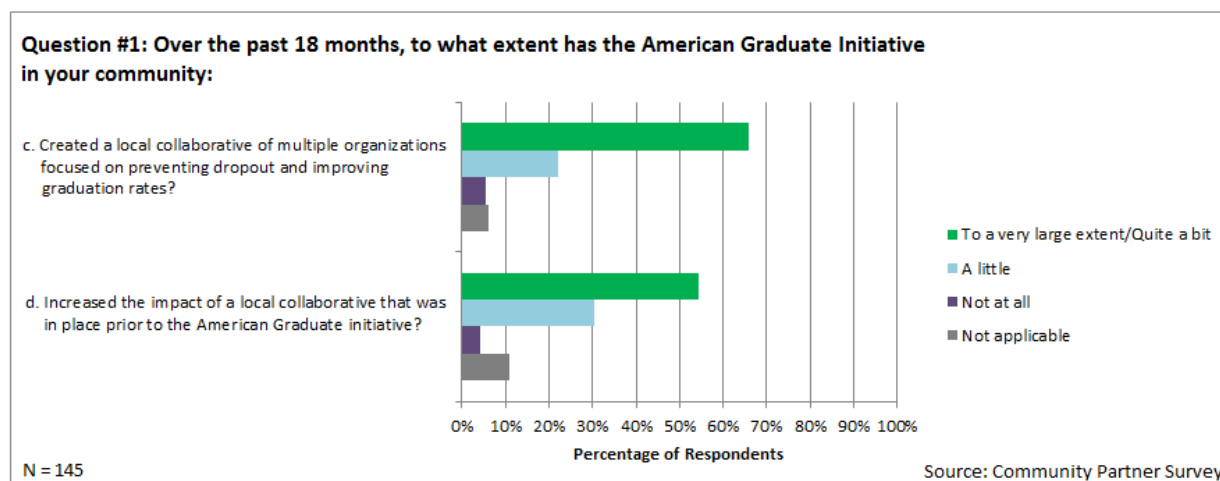
American Graduate local public media stations joined with existing community-based collaboration in five cities: Cincinnati, the District of Columbia, Detroit, Nashville, and San Francisco. New collaborative initiatives emerged in four additional cities—Albuquerque, Jacksonville, Las Vegas, and St. Louis — with groundwork laid in several others. These included a Tallahassee collaboration focused on mentoring, and one in Indianapolis on defeating chronic absenteeism. Stations in Alabama and Southern California gathered partners without a formal framework but with emerging common interests.

- **Two thirds of the Community Partner Survey respondents indicated American Graduate facilitated greater collaboration among community organizations working to combat the dropout crisis and improve graduation outcomes.**
- **Two thirds reported American Graduate created a local collaboration of multiple organizations focused on graduation improvement, and at least half said it increased the impact of an existing local collaboration (Figure 3.3).**

#### ***Communicating and Collaborating for Change in St. Louis***

In St. Louis, Nine Network of Public Media assembled 50 leading youth-focused community improvement organizations, both long-established ones and emerging organizations. Well-attended monthly and bi-monthly meetings led to the formation of a steering committee, an outline of what the partnership sought to change and how this would be achieved, and a logic model that determined the responsibilities of the various partners. In April 2013, the United Way of St. Louis emerged from the group of partners to lead the effort as the “backbone organization.” Nine Network was given the major role of bringing public awareness to the efforts through its broadcast, online content and membership base.

**Figure 3.3. American Graduate Creates New Collaborations and Strengthens Existing Collaborations**



## Building Knowledge and Engagement via In-Person, On-Air and Digital Forums

Public media stations worked with their partners to engage civic leaders, educators and members of the general public in hundreds of events designed to encourage dialogue around the dropout crisis and inspire cooperative action to end it. **Tens of thousands of community members, including teachers, students, parents, civic leaders, and representatives of local and national organizations, participated in on-air broadcasts as well as in-person events** (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5 for detail on events and participants). The discussions took place in large and small groups, both in-person and on-air. Types of events and activities included:

- Widely broadcast educator forums, including 12 Teacher Town Halls that engaged more than 2,000 teachers in in-person discussions.
- Detroit Public Television worked with the Center for Michigan to publish *The Public's Agenda for Public Education*, a report on more than 250 community conversations that engaged thousands of citizens across the state on education topics. DPTV and the Center for Michigan collaborated on two broadcasts to discuss the findings in detail as well as the response they have received from educators, lawmakers, and others. The first of the two broadcasts included an interview with Governor Rick Snyder.
- KQED held a major back-to-school rally on the steps of Oakland City Hall in partnership with the mayor and the Oakland affiliate of America's Promise Alliance. Approximately 4,500 students and 500 parents attended this masterful kick-off to the school year, and received backpacks and other materials as incentives to go to school and stay in school.
- In Alabama and Norfolk, VA, more than 30 individuals in each location were trained by the Centers of Civic Engagement to lead local conversations about the dropout

challenge and actions that could be undertaken by communities. WHY and the Penn Project for Civic Engagement in Philadelphia later convened diverse stakeholders in six Civic Dialogues, each framed as an opportunity to provide input to the city's School Reform Commission on how to ensure that more Philadelphia youth graduate from high school, and to influence the commission's development of community engagement criteria for a new superintendent.

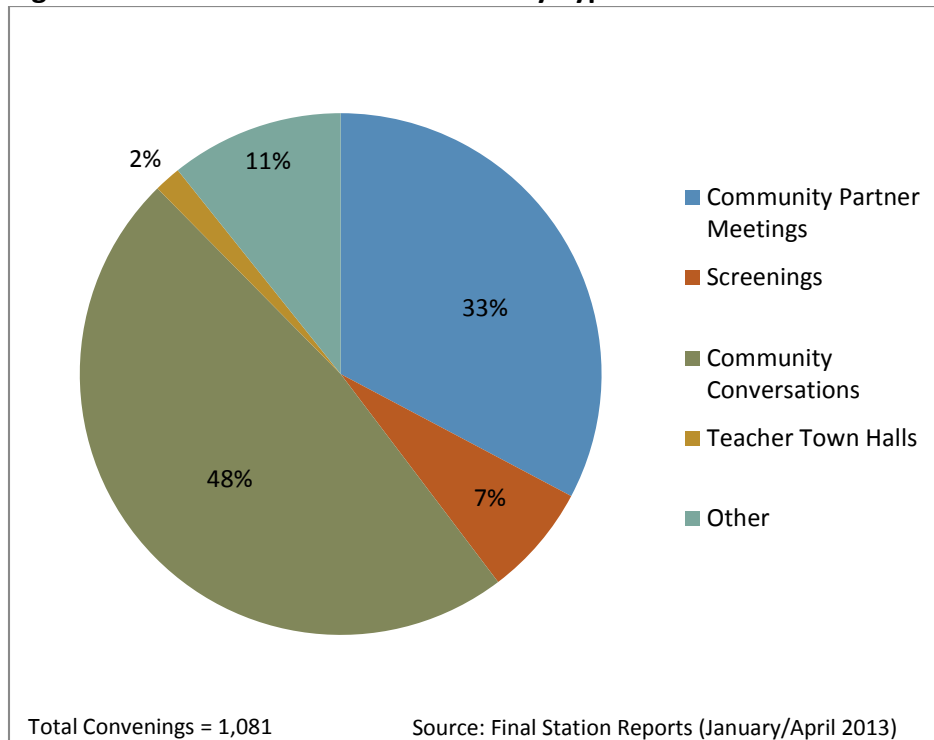
- WFYI in Indianapolis held nine Conversations about Education in 2012, often in concert with the Indianapolis Central Library; some had as many as 250 attendees to hear from national and local education experts. One dynamic discussion included the Indianapolis superintendent as well as a lead charter organization's proposals for the future of Indianapolis schools.
- Nashville Public Television fostered small group civic discussions around keeping students in school, promoting and graduating more children of recent immigrants, both as a forerunner and as a follow-up to the documentary it produced on the same subject.
- In Indiana, efforts of the Indiana Partnership Center, a youth media organization called MCCOY, the Center for Education Policy and Evaluation, and the national group Attendance Works! are culminating in statewide consideration of policies related to chronic absenteeism. WFYI hosted a day-long summit to kick off the work in late 2011 and a second summit, an education meeting and a large press conference in 2012, sponsored a billboard campaign throughout Indianapolis highlighting the importance of school attendance, and developed a communications toolkit for youth agencies, parent groups and schools.
- In Jacksonville, FL, WJCT joined the local Public Education Fund to engage more than 1,600 community members in nearly 170 structured small group conversations about engaging youth and improving education. WJCT also helped produce and moderate nearly a dozen community and regional forums aimed at connecting and informing voters (and candidates) about youth development and education issues in preparation for the 2012 Duval County school board and mayoral elections. These conversations formed the foundation for a recently ratified community agreement to guide the new superintendent in a strategic education plan for the district.

Stations also reported in-person contact with more than 10,000 parents through activities sponsored by the station and/or by more than 100 community partners focused on parent engagement. Station staff members attended events and distributed information and resources about American Graduate parent nights and parenting workshops, and posted resources on school bulletin boards, recognizing that many families have limited Internet access.

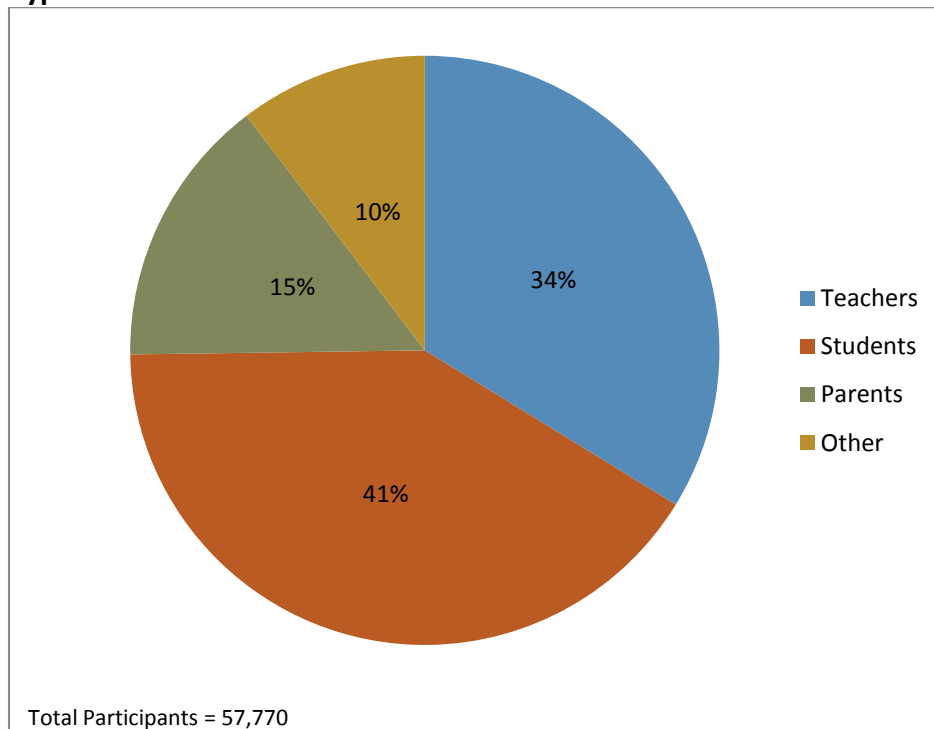
In Norfolk, VA, WHRO station staff used literacy vans to visit neighborhoods and provide information to parents about literacy skills. KLCS, a station licensed to the Los Angeles Unified School District, developed a Grad Van program in which district student support staff took graduation and career information to parents and students at community centers and schools.



**Figure 3.4. American Graduate Events by Type**

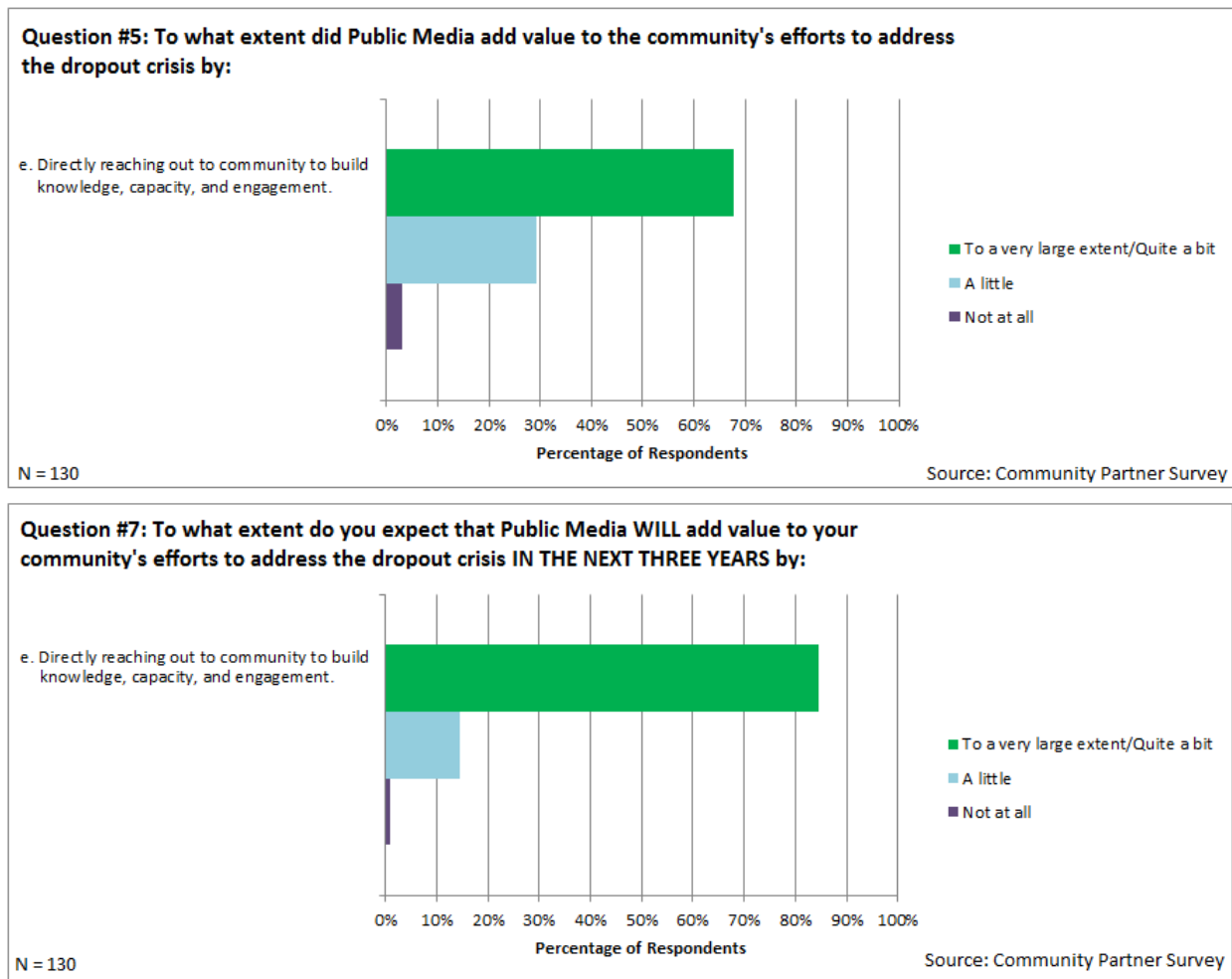


**Figure 3.5. Direct and Indirect Participation in American Graduate Events by Participant Type**



More than two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that public media, through American Graduate, added significant value to their community's efforts to address the dropout crisis by directly reaching out to the community to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement. Notably, 85 percent expected public media to add value through direct community outreach in the next three years (Figure 3.6), a magnification of American Graduate's impact over time that reflects the enduring foundation built through stations' American Graduate efforts.

**Figure 3.6. American Graduate Adds Significant Value that is Expected to Grow**



## Creating Partnerships and Leveraging Data to Guide Action

School improvement efforts depend on data – for illuminating challenges, for developing solutions, for monitoring outcomes, and for modifying, enhancing and reinvigorating plans for improvement. **Several public media stations worked with their partners in innovative and strategic ways to collect data that would guide local planning and implementation efforts.**

- New Mexico PBS and the University of New Mexico’s Center for Education Policy Research mapped the location of the dropout crisis in the Albuquerque metropolitan area using geographic data, color coded risk factors and early warning indicators. The map served as a powerful way to mobilize partners and begin strategic planning. New Mexico PBS also regularly surveyed its American Graduate partners using Survey Monkey to gather partners’ thoughts to guide content development.
- WETA in Washington, DC, collaborated with the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation and the College Success Foundation to conduct a gap analysis of dropout prevention organizations and youth services in the District of Columbia. The report published in 2012 identifies the kinds of services available, where they are provided, and what is still needed. Based on information from 85 organizations working to address the dropout problem, the analysis led WETA to develop an interactive map and an extensive, searchable database of mentoring and other volunteer opportunities to support youth in the metropolitan area.
- St. Louis’s Nine Network of Public Media organized 21 area school districts to participate in a free Gallup Student Poll. Nearly 16,000 high school students responded: 46 percent felt “discouraged or stuck,” 43 percent felt “disengaged or not engaged” and 33 percent felt they were “suffering or struggling.” The responses will be used by Nine Network and the emerging St. Louis Collective Impact group to guide content creation and mobilize ongoing efforts to improve graduation rates.
- Alabama Public Television, working with Birmingham Public Schools on the Student Retention Survey Project, surveyed nearly 8,000 adults and 6,000 students in the Birmingham City Schools, as part of its work on a school district committee. The responses convinced the two partners that goals for an on-line Parent University should be shelved, with an emphasis instead on person-to-person professional development. Students responded that safe schools and encouraging teachers to show more interest in their students should be priorities for increasing student engagement.



## IV. Empowering Teachers and Students

### Opening New Doors in Schools and School Districts

Through formal workshops, professional development opportunities, events, surveys, and messaging campaigns, *American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen* enabled stations to step up their work substantially with local schools and districts. Some stations deployed nationally produced curriculum resources, such as Mission US, PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs, StoryCorpsU and Roadtrip Nation. **During site visits, and in their final reports, a number of stations indicated improved communications with districts and schools because of the shared goals to improve outcomes for students through American Graduate.**

Some districts, expecting to be publicly pilloried for their failure to educate a substantial group of students, were surprised by the inclusive approach adopted by American Graduate stations: “let us learn what you need,” “let us tell the story of your students” and sometimes “let us tell your story to the public.” Districts and schools began to see new opportunities for collaboration with public media stations; in several cases, station leaders and education directors were asked to sit on district or school advisory councils, and to help districts and schools explain education reforms to parents.

Enhanced communication also proved beneficial for a number of stations, as superintendents and deputy district leaders joined station advisory boards. In several communities, stations reported that they learned productive new approaches to engaging districts and schools; for some, the best approach was to find a receptive leader in the school to help shepherd the relationship. In others, media products and solutions were door-openers. A third of responding partners reported that American Graduate significantly enhanced or influenced the capacity of schools and/or school systems to engage in activities focused on preventing and re-engaging dropouts.

Many American Graduate stations held forums and developed on-line content and tools specifically geared toward adults who play important roles in students’ lives. Many developed and implemented face-to-face professional development and training opportunities, and worked directly in schools to implement intervention and support programs. A few are planning similar activities for the post-grant period as a result of maturing partnerships with school districts, school and community organizations.

For example:

- *Sid the Science Kid* garnered such positive response from teachers in WEDU/WUSF’s audience in Tampa that the program was widely used in Hillsborough County’s six-week pre-K summer program, reaching 1,000 children and laying a foundation for school

readiness, and STEM learning for students – and for future collaboration between the station and the district.

- *Martha Speaks Reading Buddies*, a program in which fourth- or fifth-graders mentor kindergarten or first-grade students, is widely popular in CET's, and WJCT's partner schools, as well as across Florida. The Association of Public Media in Florida evaluated the impact of the *Martha Speaks Reading Buddies* program in 16 Florida school districts and found positive results in improving young children's reading vocabulary. "This study suggests that school day interactions with PBS programming can have a positive educational impact on children's vocabulary when combined with appropriate, research-based instructional practices."<sup>11</sup>

## Amplifying Teacher Voice and Building Capacity

**Tens of thousands of teachers in many markets participated in Teacher Town Halls, forums, and professional development opportunities. These core activities increased their access to information, tools, and learning networks aimed at building their capacity to engage at-risk youth, and ensured that educators' experiences became a central part of the American Graduate narrative.**

A majority (56 percent) of survey respondents asserted that American Graduate had added substantial value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis by "directly reaching out to teachers to build knowledge, capacity, and engagement." Nearly half (46 percent) believed that the initiative "enabled teachers' views on solving the dropout crisis to be heard."

## Educator Forums

As documented in *Teacher Town Halls: A Summary of Findings and Impact*, 12 town halls were conducted between November 2011 and June 2012, in a dozen communities under the auspices of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.<sup>12</sup> These events amplified the voices of more than 2,000 teachers and reached more than 2 million people who heard or viewed the broadcasts and webcasts. Town Hall discussions were taped and posted on station websites for widespread dissemination and continuous reference. In many communities, excerpts from the Town Halls were re-broadcast over the web and used as prompts for ensuing community conversations.

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<sup>11</sup> The Association of Public Media in Florida. (2013). Study Finds PBS Educational Outreach Program Positively Impacts Student's Vocabulary in Florida Elementary Schools.

<sup>12</sup> Corporation for Public Broadcasting. (2012). American Graduate Teacher Town Halls: A Summary of Findings and Impact. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://www.americangraduate.org/images/stories/video/TownHalls/teacher-town-hall-report-vfinal.pdf> Stations in the Washington, DC hub produced a joint Town Hall, as did stations in the Florida and California hubs.

These town halls had a significant impact on participants. Close to 90 percent of involved teachers sought additional town halls, reporting that they increased their knowledge of strategies to approach the dropout challenge:

- 93 percent noted that the Teacher Town Halls provided an opportunity for them to voice ideas about solving the dropout crisis;
- 85 percent perceived that the Teacher Town Halls were an effective means to share teachers' concerns with people in their communities;
- 83 percent believed that the Teacher Town Halls were successful in describing the factors that contribute to the dropout crisis.

Pre- and post-surveys of participating teachers found statistically significant increases in teachers' perceptions of opportunities to contribute to conversations about education, being informed about a range of ideas that could improve the graduation rate at their school, and having reporters consider the teacher's perspective when reporting on education issues.

#### ***Convening and Educating for Change in Jacksonville, FL***

The Teacher Town Hall sponsored by WJCT in Florida solidified the station's focus on teachers and laid the groundwork for the hugely successful TEACH conference in September 2012. Over 1,000 teachers, principals, and other education professionals participated. The conference featured nationally known keynote speakers, a wide variety of breakout sessions, and even a video booth where teachers recorded their experiences, some of which were later posted on WJCT's American Graduate/Teacher Wall website. Breakout sessions included a workshop called "Beyond Cool Tools: PBS Learning Media" and several sessions that focused on specific curriculum such as Mission US. The latter was highly rated on participant evaluations, just as the conference was overall -- receiving an average quality rating of 9.4 out of 10 points. The conference also had a substantial impact on participants' intentions to use WJCT and PBS as educational resources. More than half of respondents (244) said they used WJCT and PBS as resources before the conference; after the conference nearly double this number (407) reported they would do so. More than 300 participants also signed up to receive WJCT's education newsletter.

As a supplement to the Teacher Town Halls, the Gates Foundation invited CPB to participate in the Teacher Wall project, an existing online "town square" hosted by Scholastic in partnership with Donors Choose. CPB partnered with the National Center for Media Engagement (NCME, [www.mediaengage.org](http://www.mediaengage.org)), the leading public organization for providing stations with support and assistance in engaging their communities, to provide \$2,200 grants to 50 public media stations across the country. Fifteen of these stations are American Graduate hubs for their communities. Each station was asked to interview at least five local teachers, resulting in the production of about 1,200 short videos with 285 teachers. Stations distributed these videos on air, online, at events, and via social media, and a subset are available at

[www.americangraduate.org](http://www.americangraduate.org). These videos build on public media's current work, including the Teacher Town Halls and overall American Graduate initiative to advance the conversation around the dropout crisis and foster a deeper understanding of education issues.

## Professional Development

**American Graduate education resources and curricula were major entry points into districts and schools for many stations. Professional development opportunities and conference experiences offered by the stations reached more than 20,000 teachers, directly and indirectly. These included sessions on digital storytelling, science- and STEM-related professional development, literacy and early learning.**

The public media curriculum Spotlight Projects were a major focus. More than 1,500 teachers were trained in Mission US, an online history game that immerses students in U.S. history content through free, interactive games aligned with national history education standards. Other teachers were trained via workshops or worked alongside station and partner staff to train for projects that engaged their students in reporting and media production. These projects involved national CPB education programs and tools including:

- StoryCorpsU, an interactive, standards-based, college-readiness program that uses StoryCorps content and interviewing techniques to enhance students' skills in speaking, listening, writing, and critical thinking, while also fostering their self-awareness, social awareness and school connectedness;<sup>13</sup>
- Design Squad Nation, an interactive online resource for engaging students in hands-on engineering;<sup>14</sup>
- PBS NewsHour Student Reporting labs, which "includes a news literacy/digital media curriculum and online collaborative space designed to transform their [students'] understanding of news, build a foundation of civic engagement and spark a life-long interest in current events;"<sup>15</sup>
- Roadtrip Nation, which includes "an interactive, multi-lesson curriculum designed to facilitate self-discovery and give students direction in exploring different passions in their lives."

Other stations developed their own content for professional development. Alabama Public Television, for example, developed training in classroom management and offered

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<sup>13</sup> StoryCorps. (2013). StoryCorpsU. (2013). Retrieved August 26, 2012 from <http://storycorps.org/education/storycorpsu/>

<sup>14</sup> PBS KIDS. (2012). Design Squad Nation. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://pbskids.org/designsquad/parentseducators/>

<sup>15</sup> PBS NewsHour, Extra. Student Reporting Labs: Think. Create. Inform. Retrieved August 26, 2013 from <http://www.studentreportinglabs.com/about-student-reporting-labs>



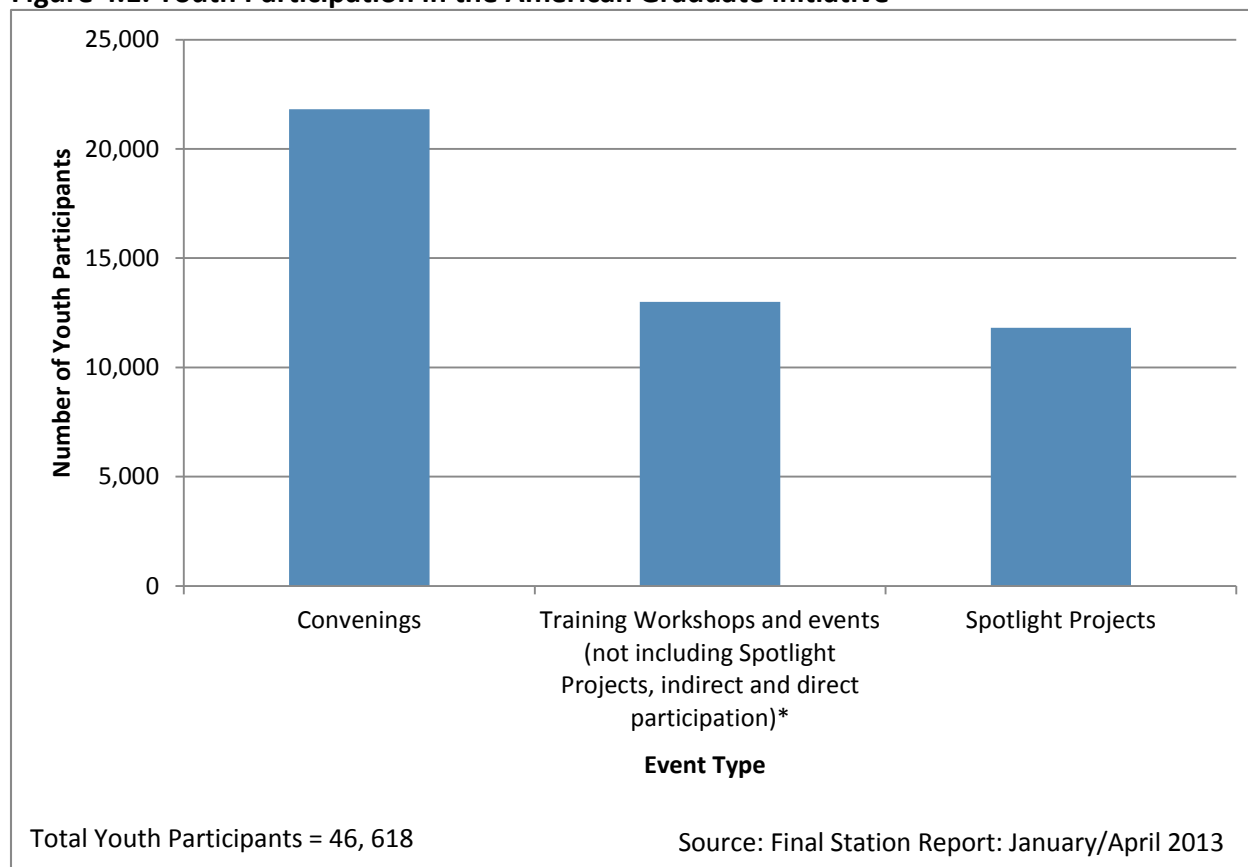
administrator or professional learning credits in partnership with the Alabama State Department of Education.

## Empowering Youth

### Reaching and Expanding the Youth Audience

**According to station reports, more than 30,000 young people were indirectly and directly affected by American Graduate.** Stations reported that teachers who were exposed to public media curriculum Spotlight Projects at conferences or, in smaller numbers, through direct training—PBS NewsHour Reporting Labs, Roadtrip Nation, Mission US, Design Squad Nation, and StoryCorpsU—influenced more than 15,000 young people. Mission US represented the largest touch point, as teachers who learned about the curriculum and ways to use it were responsible for nearly 12,000 students (Figure 4.1). Other teachers were engaged through rallies, assemblies, contests, clubs, and camps sponsored, and typically produced and staffed, by public media stations and their partners.

**Figure 4.1. Youth Participation in the American Graduate initiative**



*\* Direct participation includes students who attended training workshops and events (n = 172). Indirect participation includes students who did not attend training workshops and events, but were enrolled in classes with teachers who attended training workshops and events (n = 12,822). These students were, thus, indirectly impacted by their teachers who attended these training workshops and events and*

*incorporated what they had learned into their classroom instruction. Each station estimated youth indirect participation based on the number of teachers who attended their workshops and events and the number of students taught by the teachers.*

**Targeting messages, tools, and training to educators and parents of teenagers and working in schools with older youth, broke new ground for many stations, especially those that had worked primarily with young children and their parents through PBS KIDS and Ready To Learn.** American Graduate propelled an expansion of public media's efforts into the secondary level, most notably with the online interactive history game Mission US, and other curricular tools including PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs, and StoryCorpsU. These resources guided youth through reporting, media production, and workforce, college and career preparation.

According to participant reports, these activities resulted in a powerful connection between students' and partners' interests, and represented another byproduct of public media's collaboration with new partner organizations. The focus on college and career access, and students' and families' evident needs for more information in this area, motivated a focus on life's possibilities, generated goal-setting, and served as a powerful antidote to dropping out.

### **Amplifying Youth Voice and Capacity for Self Expression**

*American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* sought to increase the effectiveness of interventions and solutions to the dropout crisis by amplifying and integrating the shared experiences of at-risk youth. **Through American Graduate, every station worked with partners to incorporate youth voice and perspectives into media content, activities and events. These activities reached tens of thousands of young people directly.**

Through a subset of these efforts, the initiative put a priority on increasing students' skills and knowledge, as young people are more likely to stay engaged and graduate if they are learning skills they feel they need to succeed in an increasingly interconnected, technology-driven society. Most stations directly engaged youth in one-time events and contests. A few stations established ongoing programs with partners to develop students' academic, social, and media skills and to convey the value of staying in school and graduating. Some stations formed exciting projects with local schools.

**Forty-two percent of the content generated or shown by the stations under American Graduate were videos or radio shows where at least one student was interviewed or featured.** In many cases, efforts begun as part of a PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Lab led to a larger emphasis on youth voices in local American Graduate initiative efforts. PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs connect high school students to local PBS stations and community media production organizations to produce student videos with an emphasis on social issues, including the dropout crisis. The youth participants in the project learn how to investigate relevant topics, think critically, and report.

*PBS Frontline* was cited by a number of stations and community partners for the impact it had on the sustained coverage of the dropout crisis. Local stations were encouraged to produce supplemental content to broadcast in conjunction with *Frontline's* "Dropout Nation," a documentary that followed students in Houston on the verge of dropping out of high school. Respondents noted that this local/national coverage helped keep the issue on the front burner and that the commitment to ongoing reporting signaled the importance of the topic, and the fact that sustained efforts would be needed to solve it. "Kids as Caregivers" was a segment produced by WUSF in Tampa as part of its American Graduate work to accompany the national Frontline content. The WUSF segment examined the finding that 22 percent of high school dropouts say they left school to take care of a family member.

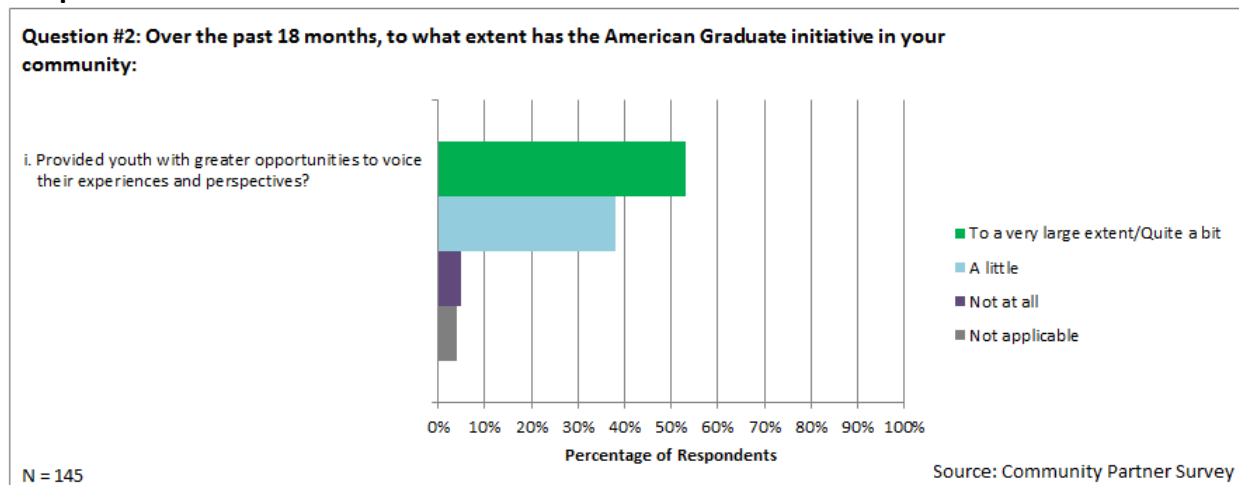
In addition, in December 2012, WFYI partnered with the Peace Learning Center and the Indianapolis Museum of Art to present a day-long conversation about graduation rates for high school students. Using a screening of the *Frontline* documentary, "Dropout Nation," the event featured former dropouts' testimonials and discussion groups around dropout issues in Indianapolis. Approximately 200 students participated.

A number of stations were able to develop and/or expand digital media arts training programs for youth in their areas:

- WNET in New York City identified 12 student filmmakers through the Reel Works project in Brooklyn. The students developed a 30-minute film focused on the dropout crisis in New York City as seen through the eyes of struggling teenagers. The film debuted during the station's American Graduate Day on Sept. 22, 2012;
- WHYY in Philadelphia expanded the number of youth receiving digital media training through summer camps and after-school programs;
- WTTW in Chicago is working with Free Spirit Media in providing direct training to students in documentary media production;
- WFSU in Tallahassee integrated media training into the curriculum of a leadership course through its partnership with the Success Academy at the Ghazvini Learning Center, a second-chance program for students at high risk of dropping out;
- WHUT in Washington, DC, expanded its after-school Digital Media Arts Clubs into four additional middle/high schools as well as local libraries;
- KVCR in San Bernardino County, CA supported students in a computer class at a local high school in scripting and developing a video explaining the school's recent improvement that was shown at a school board meeting, and later broadcast.

**According to the partner survey, more than half of respondents felt public media through American Graduate provided youth with greater opportunities to voice their experiences and perspectives (Figure 4.2).**

**Figure 4.2 American Graduate Increases Youth’s Opportunities to Voice their Experiences and Perspectives**



## Expanding Intervention Campaigns to Inform Choices

Numerous stations collaborated with community partners and schools to create and implement on-the-ground campaigns to enhance students’ and parents’ awareness of and decision-making about issues related to staying in school and graduating.

### ***Campaigning and Educating for Change in Alabama***

Alabama Public Television, the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, the Alabama Department of Education and the Alabama Department of Corrections collaborated in a statewide “Stay in School” Campaign. Participants in this collaboration created 1,800 toolkits and distributed two toolkits to each of the state’s middle and high schools via their superintendents. Toolkits consisted of backpacks, posters, American Graduate inserts and a curriculum for guiding student discussion of the issues surrounding dropping out of school and the repercussions from it. This effort complemented long-standing work by the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation to emphasize to high school and middle school students the economic and personal advantages of graduating from high school. Alabama Public Television additionally partnered with Birmingham libraries and Birmingham pediatricians in an innovative “Prescription for Reading” strategy. Participating physicians wrote out a “prescription” for young children that entitled them to library membership, a package of books at the library and workshop opportunities for their parents.

Alabama Public Television also launched the Birmingham GED Network with its American Graduate partners, the Literacy Council and the Economic Security work group of the Children’s Policy Council, and Birmingham City Schools. A powerful new effort, the Birmingham GED Network focuses on several distinct groups of people: older youth who have already dropped out, for whom a GED may open some pathways to the future; parents of at-risk youth who themselves have not completed high school, pushing them to access GED training and resources and create a better, more educationally oriented home environment for their children; and youth still in school, who are strongly encouraged to stay in school and earn a high school diploma.

Stations produced events or series of events to showcase youth media skills and develop their commitment to graduating. Examples include:

- The Community TechFest & STEM Video Game Challenge at Norfolk State University (NSU). WHRO hosted the event with support from the Broad Creek Digital Inclusion Advisory Board and NSU, both American Graduate community partners. Attended by more than 200 students and at least 100 parents, educators, and representatives of community organizations, including the YMCA and Norfolk Public Library, the event drew youth from the communities that feed WHRO’s American Graduate partner schools. The event was designed to motivate interest in STEM learning; a participant in the Norfolk event went on to win one of the national prizes. WHRO produced a Best Practice segment highlighting the event.
- WFSU in Tallahassee, FL, has been instrumental in helping to decrease the dropout rate at its partner school, the Ghazvini Success Academy, an alternative school. The partnership produced several programs: Operation American Graduate to Economic Security (AGES), parent nights for Title I parents, monthly iNetwork Professional Lunches linking students with community mentors, an annual career fair, and donations to support a school-wide behavior program. Administrators attribute decreases in student behavior referrals and significant increases in student academic assessment scores to the programs. According to Ghazvini administrator Sue Rishell, “The academic and behavioral success of our students can be directly linked to our valuable partnership with WFSU!”

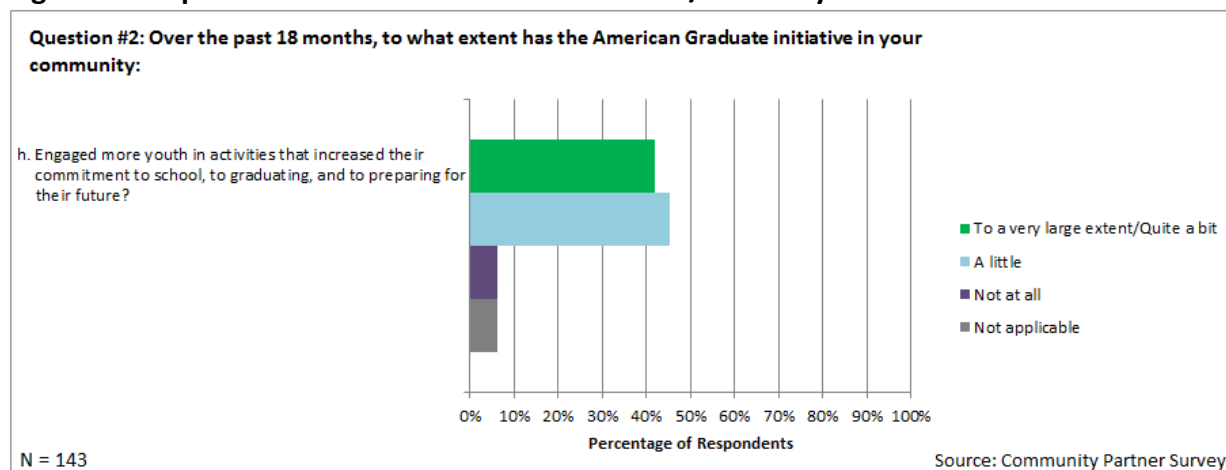
- In Miami, WLRN committed American Graduate initiative resources to the goal of engaging youth in school-based activities designed to increase their awareness and commitment to graduation. WLRN is licensed by the school system, so the station had ready access to schools interested in participating. Station staff worked directly with four middle schools to coordinate quarterly assemblies and provide materials that enabled school staff to make high school graduation and college a visible and concrete goal. School staff made it clear that they didn't have the capacity, expertise, or contacts to produce the dynamic, multi-media events and relevant, engaging content that was provided by WLRN. This endeavor reached 1,320 students. Of more than 750 students who completed a survey in spring 2013, more than half agreed that WLRN's American Graduate initiative helped them do better in school, and two-thirds said that WLRN's partners motivated and inspired them to stay in school. The school district also invited WLRN's project director to present its American Graduate initiative work and toolkits to more than 100 counselors to reach more students.

According to EGC's Community Partner Survey, more than one third of respondents indicated that American Graduate:

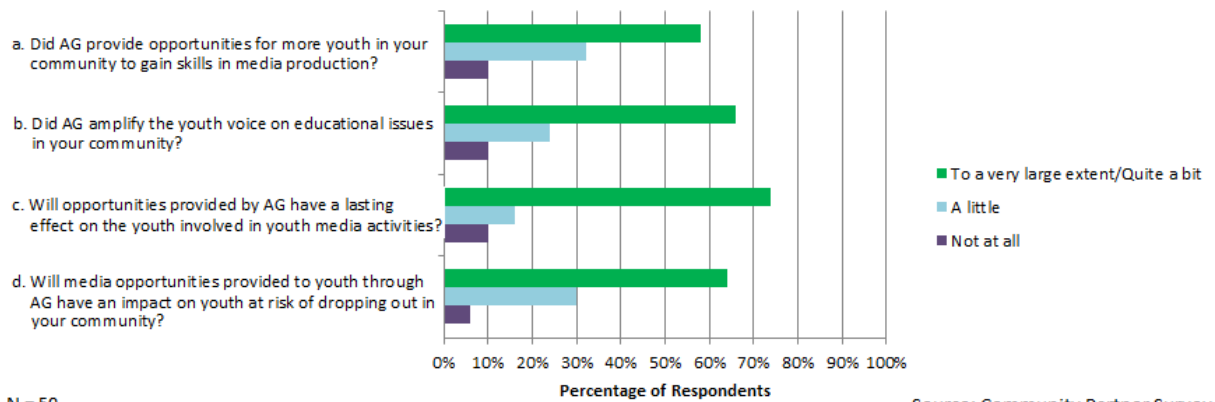
- engaged more youth in activities that increased their commitment to learning, to graduating, and to preparing for their future (42 percent);
- provided opportunities for significantly more youth to gain skills in media production (58 percent); and
- provided opportunities that will have a lasting effect on youth (74 percent).

Almost two thirds of respondents said that the media opportunities provided through American Graduate will have an impact on youth at risk of dropping out of school (Figure 4.3, Question 4.d).

**Figure 4.3 Impact of American Graduate on Schools/School Systems and Youth**



**Question #4: To what extent...**



N = 50

## V. Station Challenges

American Graduate stations set out to inform communities, leaders, schools, parents and caring adults about the dropout crisis and the solutions. National and local programming along with forums, partnerships and direct resources were designed to inspire action and keep youth on the path to graduation and adult success. The initiative was ambitious, calling on stations to move beyond traditional broadcasting and reporting to embrace a more active role as partners in their communities and sustain focus on a complex social challenge.

CPB and the station staffs anticipated and prepared for challenges inherent in American Graduate from the outset. They understood, for example, that plans would need to be flexible and customized because their eventual impact was highly dependent on the extent to which local community partners and school districts came together around the issue. Tackling the dropout issue also required public media to more strongly align its educational services from preschool through high school and workforce development to build a path of continuity. Further, rapidly changing communications methods within a digital society required full development of multi-media platforms incorporating web-based and social media in community engagement.

**As the initiative developed, stations also encountered unexpected challenges related to developing partnerships, especially with schools and school systems, and in reaching parents and families.** The majority of stations selected for *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* are in metropolitan areas with high levels of poverty, and low to extremely low graduation rates. Districts and schools in such communities often shy away from media, having too often experienced news stories that turned a spotlight on trouble. Some stations benefited from existing relationships or fully developed collaborative structures that brought all parties to the table. Others, however, did not have strong relationships with districts or schools:

*"Because of funding cuts, our station had eliminated the education position in 2008 and had little outreach into the education community since that time. This lack of exposure in the education world created a challenge when attempting to cultivate relationships. It has taken time to make the educators aware of our outreach efforts and we are continuing to work on establishing our education program as a serious player in the education community."*

One station indicated that their Teacher Town Hall was the first time the local school district participated in an event with the station or its partners. The small number of stations that are nationally licensed to school districts presented a mixed picture; though they benefitted from direct access to schools, the need to fulfill expectations from the district for continued delivery of non-American Graduate services (particularly to younger students), coupled with increasing financial pressures, created tensions that limited their efforts.



Reaching parents and families also was challenging for stations. Some stations partnered with commercial broadcast entities to reach parents and families of at-risk youth, but most struggled to connect directly. Of the 1,621 pieces of content generated or shown by the stations under American Graduate, just a small percentage (105 pieces, or 6 percent) included parents, that is, a video or radio show where at least one parent is interviewed or otherwise shares his or her perspective. According to the Community Partner Survey, less than a third of respondents indicated that American Graduate helped parents/caregivers in their community support their children to stay on-track to high school graduation. Though many parents were touched by American Graduate activities, overall impact on families can be identified as an area for further development. Several stations are planning parent workshops, tool kits, and encounters focused on linking parents with community liaisons and partners around issues related to youth disengagement.

**The challenge most frequently cited by stations was time.** Participants in American Graduate quickly realized that their goals would take more than 18 months to achieve. The time it takes to turn awareness and knowledge into action – an adult deciding to become a mentor, a business executive launching a new internship program, a school deciding to bring in a new resource or enforce change in attendance policies, or a local government implementing a new law on legal age for dropping out – is better measured in years than in months. Stations with strong existing partnerships or collaborative structures that brought all parties to the table were able to get to work more quickly. Most stations, however, were able to lay important groundwork for securing a position in their communities as a key partner in collaborative work to end the dropout crisis.

## VI. Conclusion

The evidence shows that American Graduate is succeeding – in mobilizing local stations to bring their assets to bear on a pressing community issue; building informed, solution-oriented coalitions; giving teachers and youth a voice; and energizing communities to confront the high school dropout crisis. The initiative directly engaged tens of thousands of civic leaders, educators, parents, youth, and others in communities across the country through public forums, conferences, trainings, workshops, and media production and dissemination. It also laid important groundwork for sustaining these outcomes by creating partnerships, materials, and tools for community members to use in their present and future work to address the graduation challenge. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s initiative, *American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen*, has demonstrated that public media have a critical, unique, and valuable role in meeting an urgent national priority — ending the high school dropout crisis.

In *American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen*, a powerful synergy emerged between unconventional personal communications approaches and high-quality media products. Through organized small group conversations, one-on-one graduation vans, middle school gatherings, public library projects, collaboration with pediatricians, and structured dialogues with local groups working on topics from civic engagement to school attendance, American Graduate stations applied a lesson that has been learned in successful school improvement: Relationships matter. Improving social outcomes involves more than identifying a problem, finding the right technical solution, and spreading the word. It also involves changing behavior. Behavior, in turn, is more likely to change when the individuals involved have positive inter-personnel relationships grounded in shared understanding of the task at hand. By combining the knowledge and emotional connection high-quality media products can provide with forums that fostered personal relationships and face-to-face dialogue, *American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen* helped coalesce individual and group goals, narratives, and lessons around a community endeavor. This approach combined the convening power of public media with its skill in storytelling and strength in producing state-of-the-art programming and educational events.

Equally important, the local stations participating in American Graduate provided their communities with a set of tools and skills that are often missing but essential to successful intervention efforts. First and foremost, each local station became a partner that could objectively, and with depth, tell the story of local dropouts and their challenges, and potential solutions to this community challenge. Also important to the success of the initiative was the stations’ role as a trusted convener bringing together key stakeholders — ranging from established community leaders to students who know the pull of dropping out — for informed dialogue aimed at finding solutions and building local efforts to solve the dropout crisis. Collectively, the public media stations in the American Graduate initiative strengthened their role as communicators, conveners, educators, and capacity builders, and thus substantially advanced local efforts to end the dropout crisis.

The power and potential of public media to play a crucial role in ending the nation's dropout crisis goes beyond these specific outcomes. Ending the dropout crisis will require sustained and coordinated community efforts driven by an understanding of the reasons students drop out and the proven solutions that exist. The evidence is clear that those communities that have made the greatest progress in raising high school graduation and college and career readiness rates have been able to launch and sustain multi-sector efforts involving the school system, elected officials, key civic institutions, non-profits, the business community and faith-based organizations, along with students, teachers, and parents.

Collaboration and coordination of this magnitude, however, are difficult and as likely to fail as succeed. This largely explains why progress to improve high school graduation rates has been uneven across communities and states. *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* demonstrated that public media have a crucial role to play in building the community know-how, collaboration, and coordination needed to move graduation rates in many locales. While not every station participating in *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* fully realized this potential, in total, stations in more than 20 major urban areas made significant contributions toward ending the high school dropout crisis during the grant period. Even more importantly, stations set the stage for long-term commitments to improving the educational and life outcomes for youth at risk of dropping out. **Thus, the true power of public media to improve civic life lies in their unique assets combined with their national reach and community relationships.** As such, it is hard to see the nation achieving its goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020 without the continuation and expansion of public media's efforts launched with *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen*.

## VII. Recommendations

*American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* is a strong expression of public media's emblematic creativity, innovation and commitment to solid reporting that makes issues come alive in the hearts and minds of the American public. It also is something more. American Graduate represents the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's vision for public media as a powerful catalyst for the intelligent changes needed to solve complex and deeply rooted social problems. It also demonstrates the willingness and unique capacity of public media stations to activate this expanded role in their communities. The positive experience and impact generated through the initiative laid important groundwork for sustained effort. The study findings point to the following recommendations for both CPB and the stations as they consider next steps for all community engagement initiatives.

### Recommendations for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting

- ***Formally expand CPB work to include an enduring thread focused on youth.*** Develop a strong, coherent emphasis on issues affecting youth aged 12-25, and on support for education and workforce development necessary for their social and economic advancement.
- ***Embed the thinking, strategies and actions underlying American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen into all future public media work.*** This includes continuing the “parameters but not prescriptions” approach that characterized this initiative, while also promoting the expanded, collaborative, multi-platform approach as the new operating standard for public media.
- ***Continue to expand public media's collaboration with national organizations and alliances*** that endeavor to improve educational attainment and reach national goals for 90 percent high school graduation rates by 2020. Public media have a critical role to play in bringing eyes, ears, voices, concerns and ideas from local communities and states to the national table.
- ***Broaden public media's strategy for continuing and expanding community impact.*** A collaboration of public media stations can develop and lead a long-range public media strategy related to ending the dropout crisis and engaging older youth in school, work, and civic life. The strategy would emphasize stations' communicator, convener, and educator roles, map promising pathways to change, and work with researchers to develop reasonable metrics and benchmarks.
- ***Fund future initiatives for a minimum of three years.*** A longer period of support would enable local stations to plan, implement, and evaluate their initiatives, and demonstrate the impact that is necessary for further investment and sustainability.

- **Convene participating stations annually to share best practices.** Stations participating in American Graduate highly valued opportunities to network with peers. The continued implementation and impact of this new way of operating in their communities will require sustaining communication and peer support among the stations.

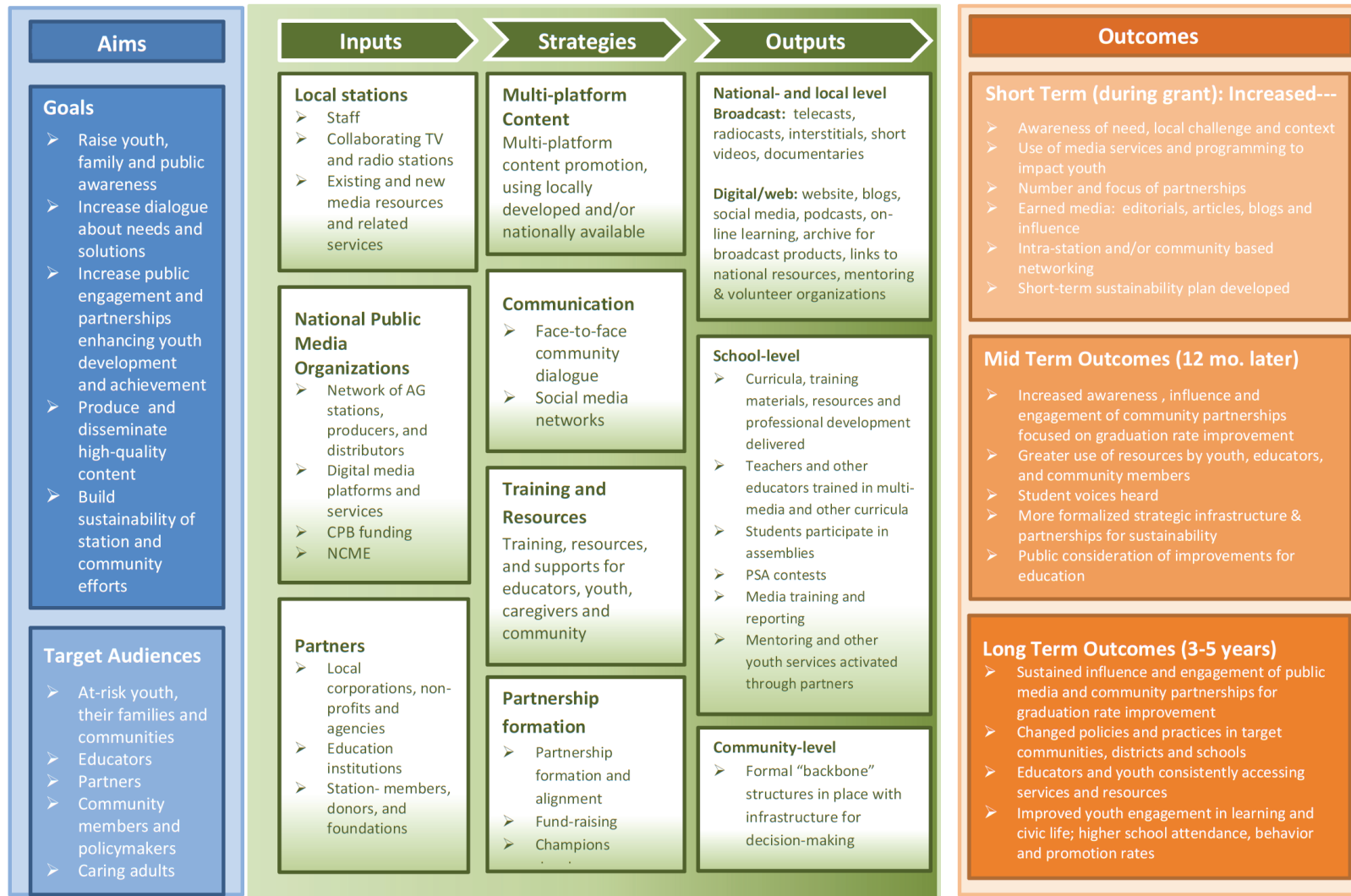
### Recommendations for Local Stations

- **Institutionalize station organization to maximize cross-departmental work.** Stations reporting high levels of activity and outcomes and the strongest plans for sustaining American Graduate consistently attributed their success to integrating talent from their leadership, and programming, education, production, marketing and development departments.
- **Be at the community table.** Successful American Graduate stations also had leaders and key staff who were visible in their communities, serving on committees and boards, and supporting local events. This enabled station personnel to understand the established and emerging power centers in their communities and to enjoy more access to partners when they launched American Graduate.
- **Engage a broader range of partners for all efforts.** Partnerships with community non-profit organizations were well-developed through American Graduate. Moving forward in all community engagement activities, stations might increase their impact by cultivating relationships with other partners who have access, through their traditional constituencies, to new and important audiences and participants. These new markets especially include local businesses, faith-based organizations, school districts and low-income families and youth.
- **Involve parents of older youth.** Almost all stations are successful in engaging young children and their parents. A number found creative and innovative ways to reach and engage parents of older youth. These included discussion groups held in connection with immigrant services, information-filled vans staffed by specialists traveling into neighborhoods, and highly engaging hands-on events that focused attention on the specifics of careers within STEM fields. We urge all stations to think creatively to further develop outreach efforts for hard-to-reach parents of older youth, taking the message directly into the community.
- **Plan local formative and summative evaluations from the outset.** Only a few stations attempted to collect data on the impact of their activities, and none had the capacity to rigorously evaluate its efforts. We recommend earlier and stronger emphasis on impact evaluation, perhaps through partnerships with local universities or research organizations.

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## APPENDIX A Logic Model for American Graduate Impact





## APPENDIX B Design and Methodology

The work of the *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen* stations began in November 2011, with a mid-term meeting on March 15, 2012, and a contractual ending on April 30, 2013. Dialogue with the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) began in February 2012, and a contract was initiated June 2012, for work extending through October 31, 2013. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided the EGC team with source material related to the RFP, stations' applications and action plans. At the same time, EGC led a webinar on July 24, 2012, for station project managers introducing the elements of the formative action evaluation that would follow, and team members set up conference calls to get to know the stations better and to begin planning for the site visits to follow. In late summer 2012, the EGC team designed a national logic model for the initiative, followed in early fall by customized logic models for each station that closely followed the national logic model, with local adjustments tailored to each station. A rubric for assessing station activity was also developed.

Site visits to the stations and in most cases to a selected set of their partners began in October 2013. These visits were carried out by one- and two-person EGC teams and lasted one to one-and-a-half days, sometimes with participation in events away from the station related to American Graduate. The station visits were 90 percent complete by January 2013, with the last one completed in March. The resulting site visit reports were analyzed by the EGC team, in tandem with the interim station reports filed by the stations with Nine Network of Public Media, and stations' responses to Questions of the Week which were posed electronically. EGC submitted an interim report to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting on April 12, 2013.

Following the interim report, the EGC project leader and director met with the CPB team and discussed the implications of the report for the remaining four months of the project. It was determined at this meeting to discontinue a second round of site visits that had been proposed for spring 2013, as well as a proposed policy study. The visits would have examined more closely best practices and lessons learned at stand-out sites and areas of weakness needing attention at less successful ones. Replacing this, there was interest in developing a Community Partner Survey, as it was perceived that the voices of partners would contribute greatly to the suite of data used in the final report. At this same meeting, the general focus of the final report was reviewed. Work from March through July emphasized the Community Partner Survey (discussed below in detail) and generation of a draft and then final project report.



## Survey Methodology

The Community Partner Survey was developed in late spring 2013 by the Everyone Graduates Center team after consultations with CPB and Nine Network of Public Media. An online prototype of the survey was tested by several station partners who provided formal feedback on its content and functionality.

The final survey is organized around six primary multiple-choice questions on a four-point scale, some with comment sections; two free-response questions; and questions concerning type of organization, audience served and focus of organizational work. The complete survey is available in Appendix C of this report. The main questions included:

- Question 1: Over the past 18 months, to what extent has the American Graduate initiative impacted your community? (with 9 sub-questions);
- Question 2: Over the past 18 months, to what extent has the American Graduate initiative in your community increased capacity and influenced policy? (16 sub-questions);
- Question 3: Does your organization provide media training for youth? (Yes/no);
- Question 4: To what extent and what is the impact of opportunities provided to youth? (4 sub-questions);
- Question 5: To what extent did Public Media add value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis? (6 sub-questions);
- Question 6: (Free-response). Is there anything else we should know about how Public Media has helped contribute to your community's effort to combat the dropout crisis through the American Graduate initiative?
- Question 7: To what extent do you expect that Public Media will add value to your community's efforts to address the dropout crisis in the next three years? (6 sub-questions);
- Question 8: (Free-response). In your view, what would be the most effective role public media could play in combatting the dropout crisis in your community?

In late spring 2013, the link to the survey was distributed to station partners after 21 stations recommended partners and provided contact information. A 22<sup>nd</sup> station provided this information in late July. A total of 461 contacts were provided, an average of 22 per station, with a range of 2 to 87 per station. The recommended contacts were dominated by six stations (three fourths of the potential responders): WETA/WHUT/WAMU (85); DPTV (63); New Mexico PBS (54); Nine Network (41); KVCR (32); and WNET (28). In most cases the recommended contact list of partners was relatively small, ranging between two and 20 partners.

The survey closed in early August 2013. EGC received responses from a total of 145 community organizations. Of the 145 responses received, New Mexico PBS produced the largest number of respondents (20), followed closely by Nine Network (18) and WETA/WHUT/WAMU at a combined 16 responses, DPTV at 11, and Alabama Public Television at 10 (out of 14, the highest response rate by any station’s recommended contacts). The remaining stations each produced between one and eight responses. Six responses were received from “others” – four of them likely to be media partners of WNET.

The recommended contacts were widely distributed across multiple sectors, as were those who responded.

Sector	Recommended Contacts	Responders
Non-profit	45.4%	45.9%
Education total (all levels)	24.9%	37%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School</li> <li>Higher education</li> <li>District</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14.2</li> <li>7.3</li> <li>3.4</li> </ul>	
Government	8.9 percent	3.0 percent
Faith-based	1.4 percent	0
Business	5.5 percent	0
Other*	12.6 percent	13.3 percent

\* “Other” includes media organizations, funders, unions, and libraries.

Educators responded at higher rates than were present in the general population of contacts. Business, funder and faith-based organizations were largely absent, suggesting a reason for the challenges some stations had in raising funds for sustainability that goes beyond the explanation given by stations, i.e., that they were in competition with direct service providers. It also raises the question, especially given the highly positive ratings given the American Graduate initiative by many partners, of what results could be obtained if the dual linchpins of many communities — business and faith-based organizations – were to be included as partners in future initiatives.

When asked about the focus of their organization’s work (respondents could check multiple boxes), graduation improvement topped the list, at 62.7 percent. The majority of respondents – nearly 60 percent – worked at the middle or high school level. Among all respondents, there was an emphasis on dropout prevention and college and career readiness

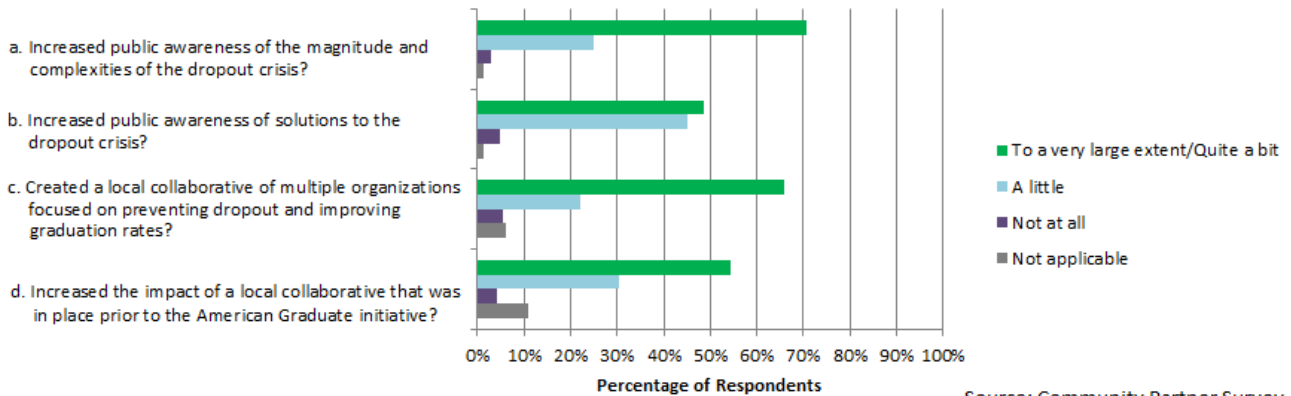
Focus of Respondents' Organization's Work	
<b>Graduation Improvement</b>	62.7%
<b>Middle and high school grades</b>	57.5%
<b>Dropout prevention</b>	56.0%
<b>College and career readiness</b>	48.5%
<b>Literacy</b>	45.5%
<b>Education practice (school, district, etc.)</b>	38.8%
<b>Education policy</b>	36.6%
<b>Workforce development</b>	35.1%
<b>Early grades</b>	34.3%
<b>Parents</b>	32.8%
<b>Alternative pathways for dropout recovery</b>	34.3%
<b>Early childhood health and wellbeing</b>	29.1%
<b>Adult education</b>	19.4%
<b>Higher education (community college, technical institute, 4-year college, university)</b>	17.9%
<b>Health, all ages</b>	15.7%

The survey method was designed to elicit responses from partners representing a range of sectors that were most knowledgeable about American Graduate station activities in their communities, i.e. the most active or key organizations among the stations' partners. The overall response pattern suggested that the method succeeded in this regard. Stations that submitted shorter recommended contact lists posted relatively high response rates (for instance, APTV with 10/14, and CET with 5/8 and NPT with 4/7). The few stations that provided large lists ultimately had far lower response rates, suggesting that the responding organizations selected themselves into the respondent group based on a higher level of engagement with the initiative.

Nevertheless, survey findings reported here should be interpreted with caution since stations pre-identified the initial pool of contacts (potentially leaving out organizations that may have had a negative experience with the initiative). Study conclusions are based on analyses of multiple data sources, however, and the substantive pattern of responses throughout the survey is consistent with information drawn from content analyses as well as interview and observation data.

## APPENDIX C Community Partner Survey Results

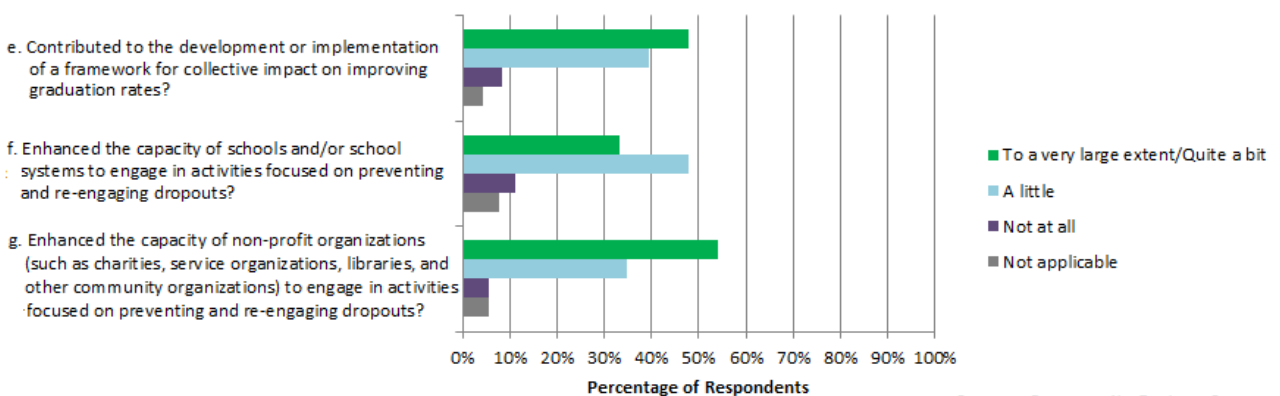
**Question #1: Over the past 18 months, to what extent has the American Graduate Initiative in your community:**



N = 145

Source: Community Partner Survey

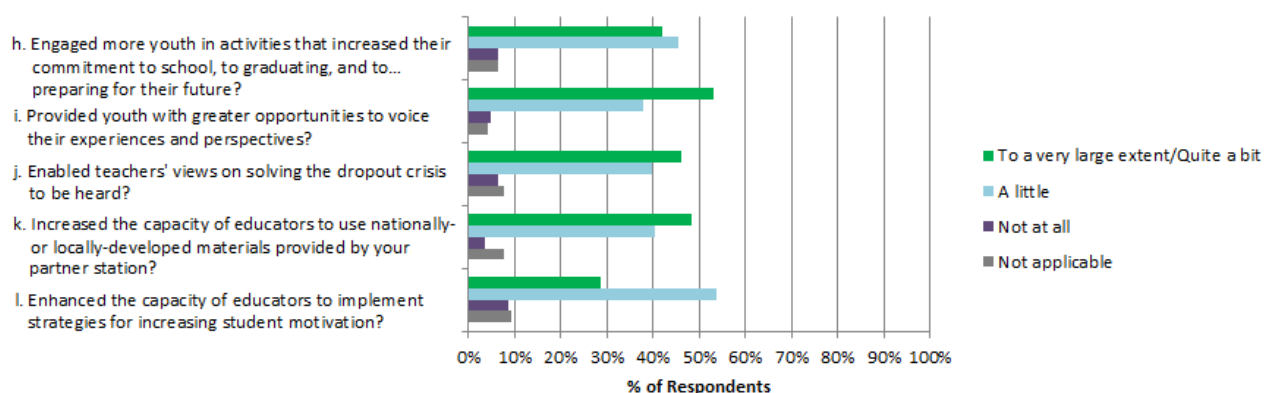
**Question #1: Over the past 18 months, to what extent has the American Graduate Initiative in your community (continued):**



N = 145

Source: Community Partner Survey

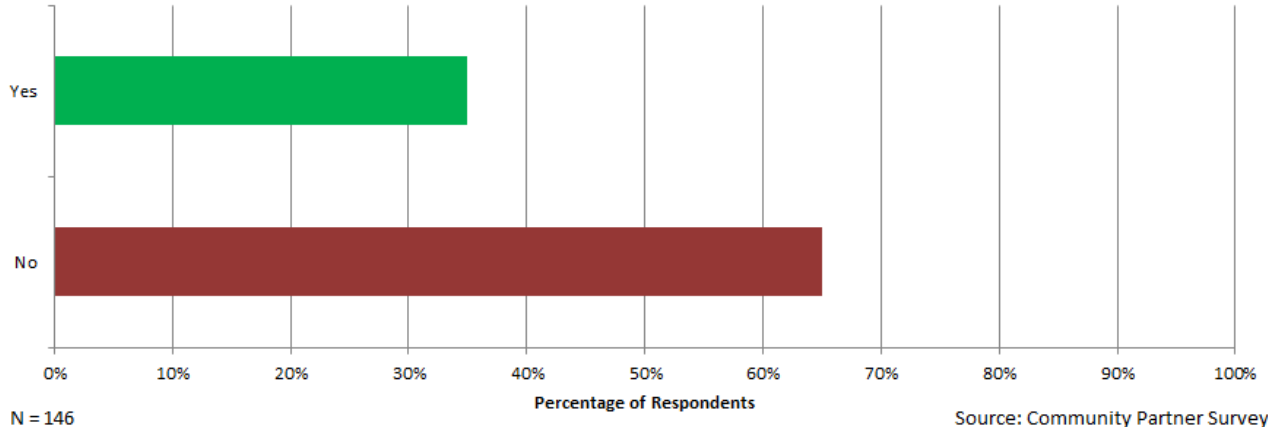
**Question #2: Over the past 18 months, to what extent has the American Graduate Initiative in your community:**



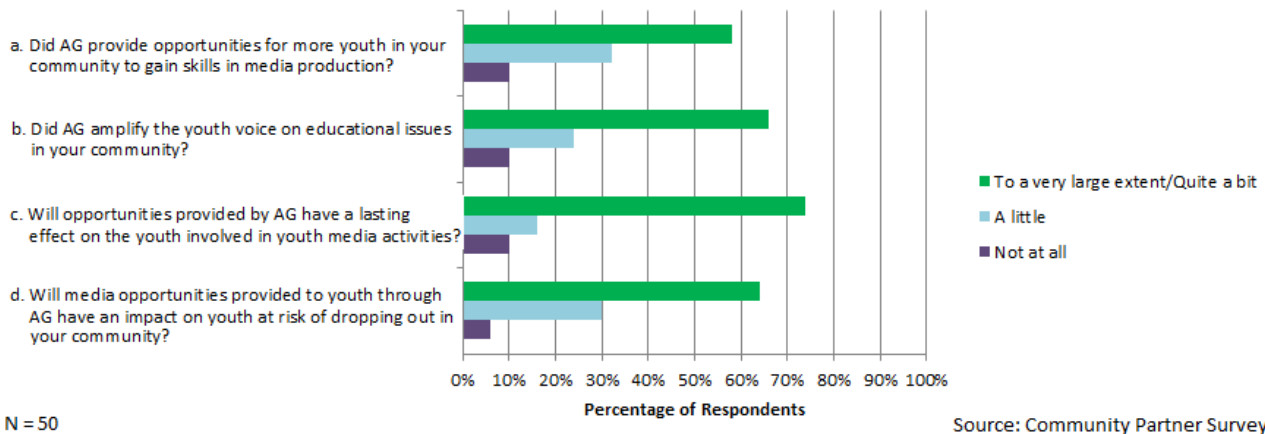
N = 145

Source: Community Partner Survey

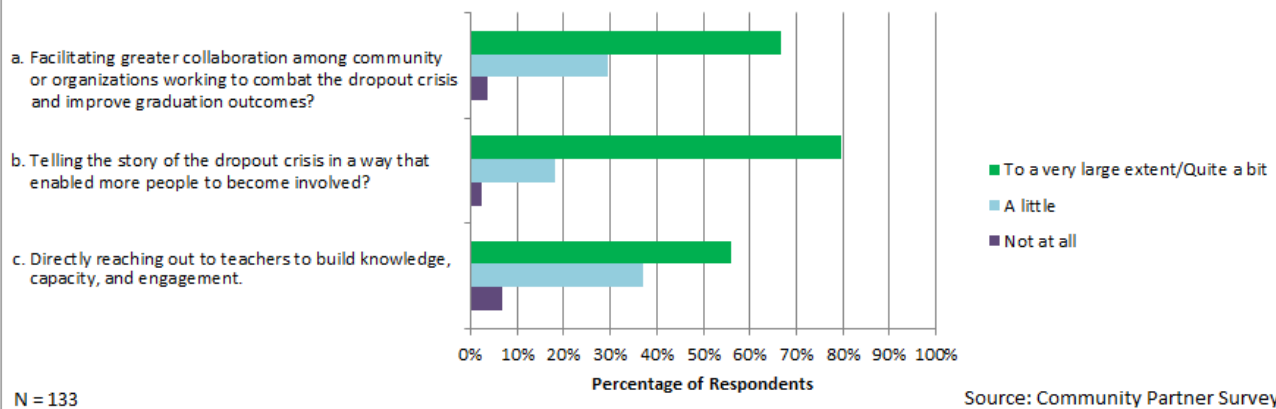
**Question #3: Does your organization provide training for youth?**



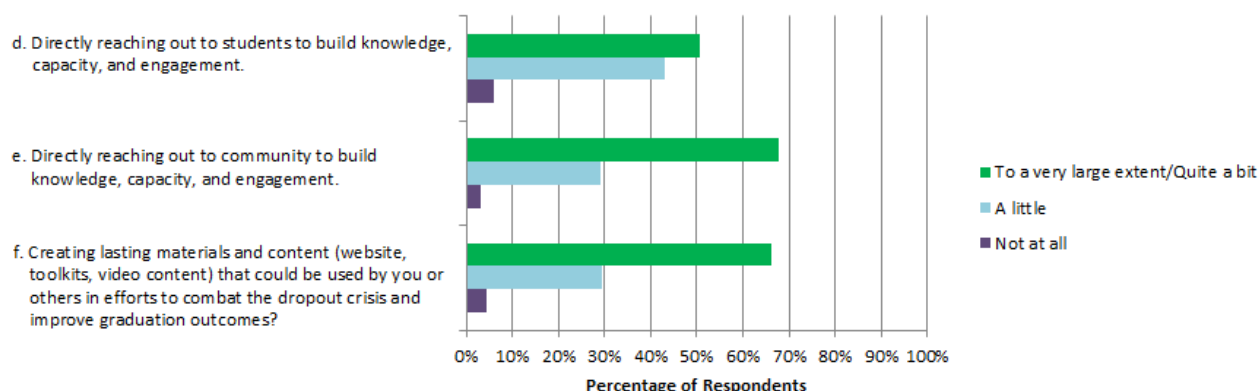
**Question #4: To what extent...**



**Question #5: To what extent did Public Media add value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis by:**



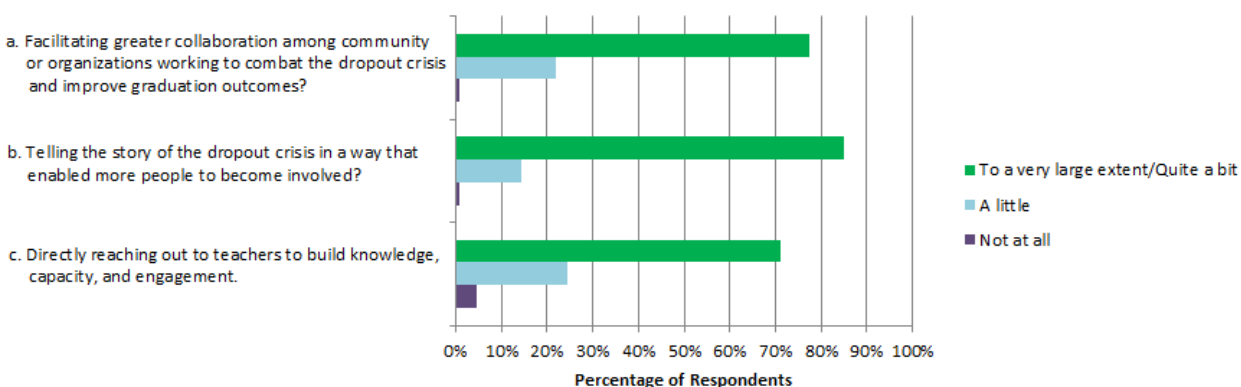
**Question #5: To what extent did Public Media add value to the community's efforts to address the dropout crisis by (continued):**



N = 133

Source: Community Partner Survey

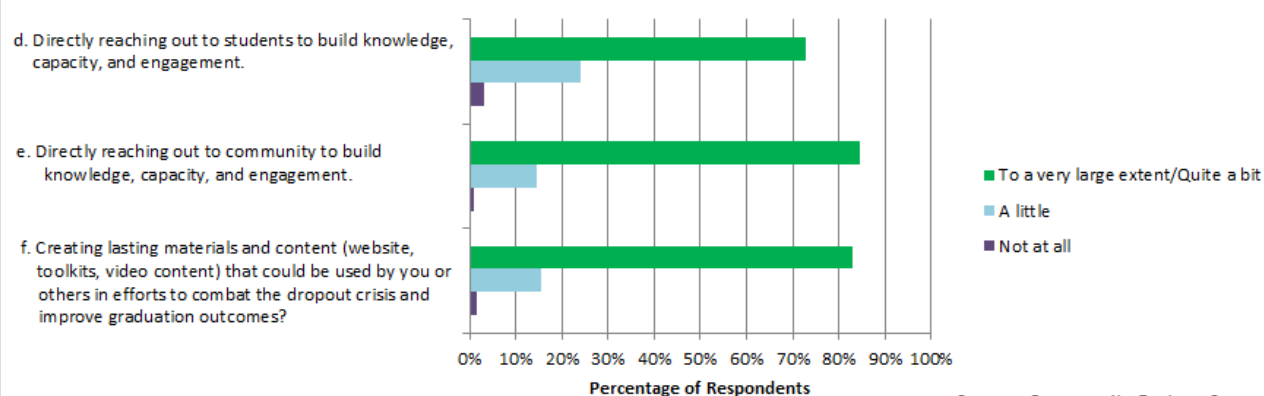
**Question #7: To what extent do you expect that Public Media WILL add value to your community's efforts to address the dropout crisis IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS by:**



N = 132

Source: Community Partner Survey

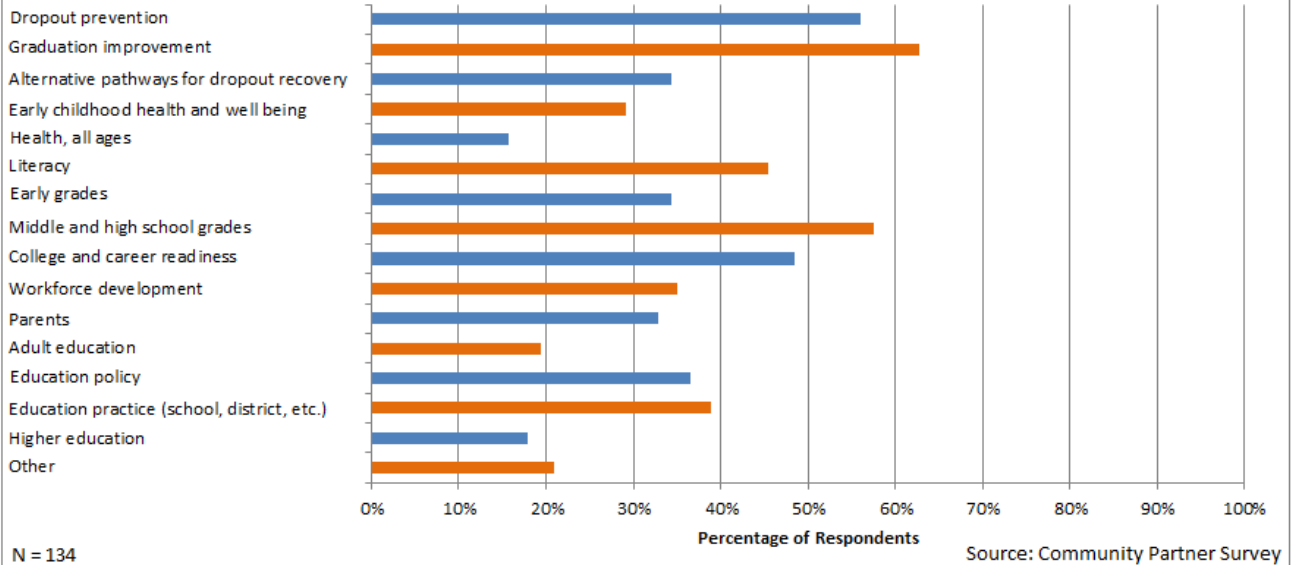
**Question #7: To what extent do you expect that Public Media WILL add value to your community's efforts to address the dropout crisis IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS (continued):**



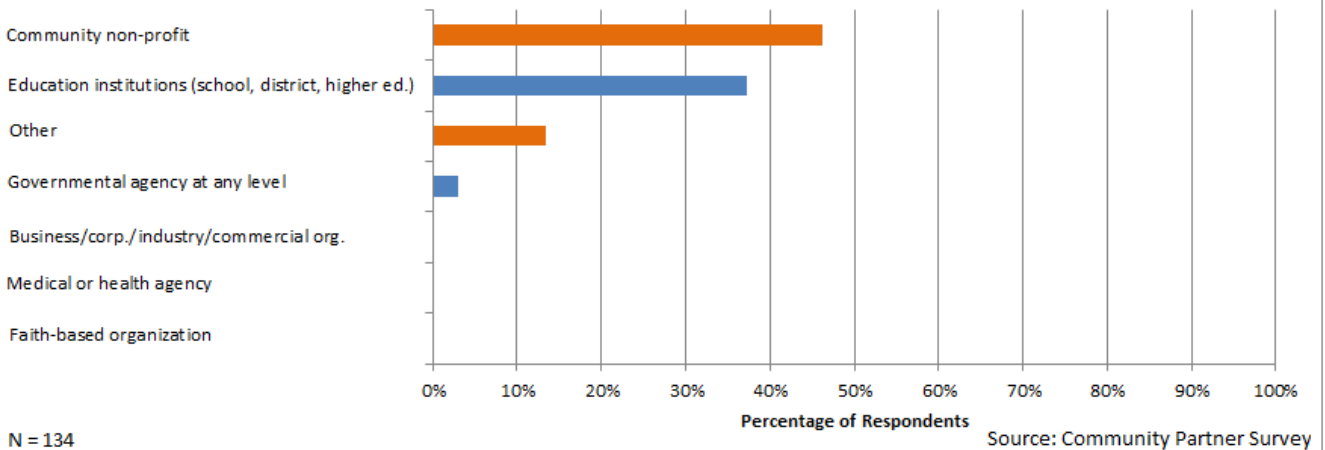
N = 132

Source: Community Partner Survey

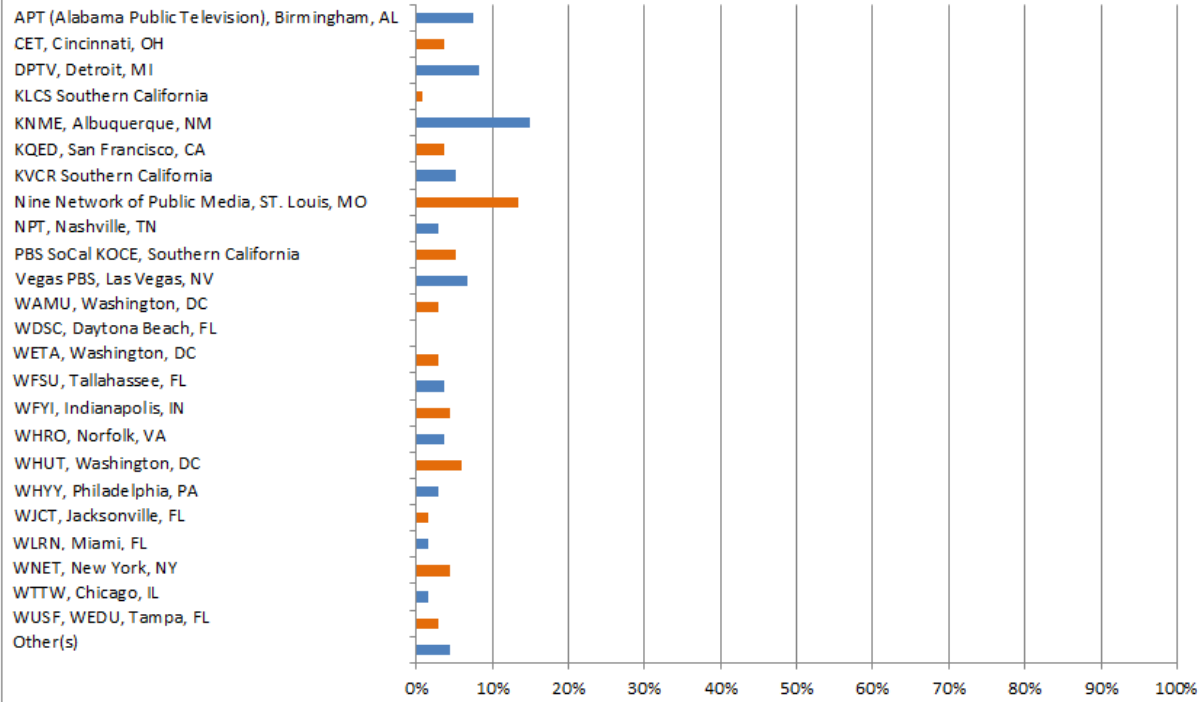
**Question #9: What is the focus of your organization's work? (Check all that apply)**



**Question #10: What is your organization's primary classification?**



**Question #11: With which Public Media stations(s) are you a partner? (Check all that apply)**



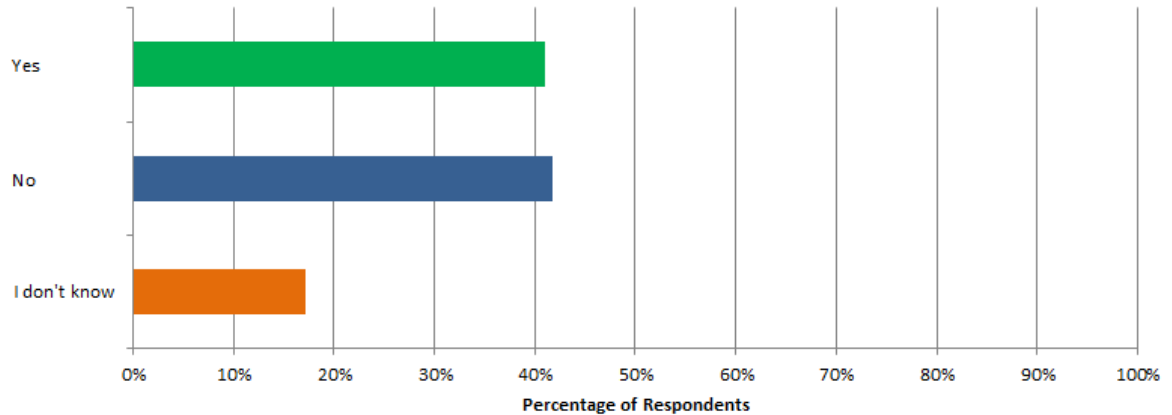
N = 134

Percentage of Respondents

Source: Community Partner Survey



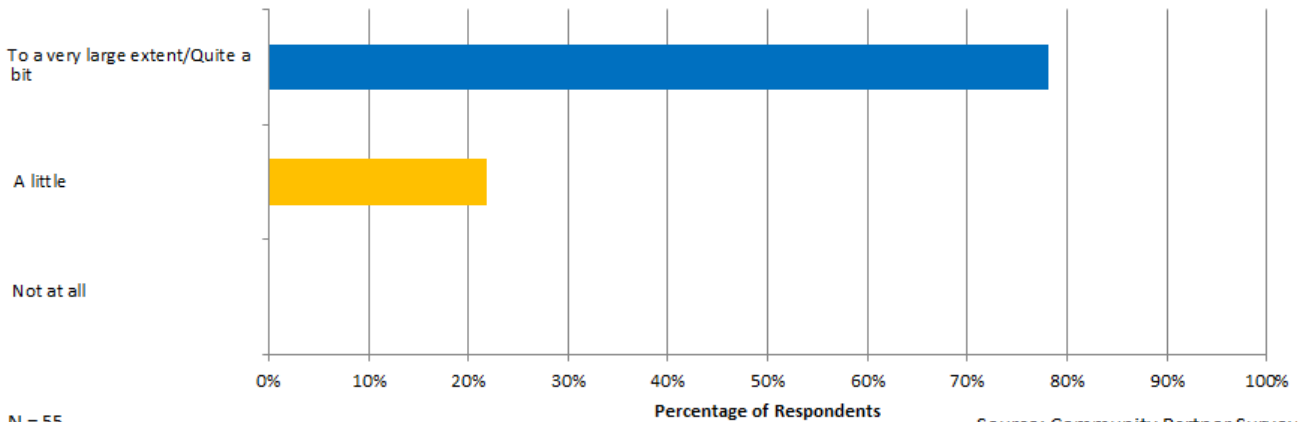
**Question #12: Did this partnership of your organization with local Public Media exist prior to the American Graduate Initiative?**



N = 134

Source: Community Partner Survey

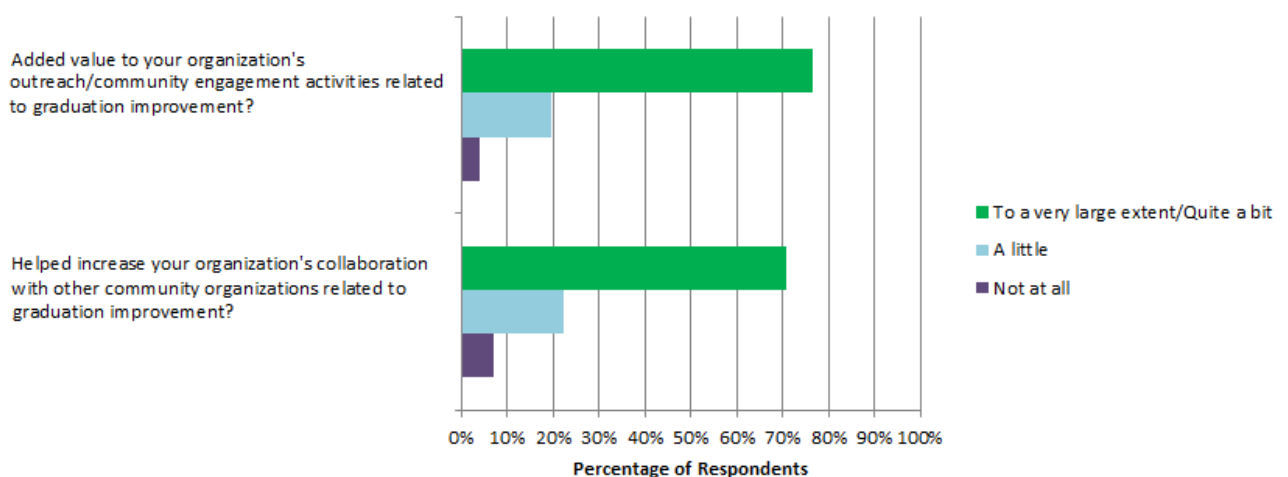
**Question #13: To what extent did your participation in the American Graduate Initiative increase the depth or breadth of your partnership with local Public Media?**



N = 55

Source: Community Partner Survey

**Question #14: To what extent has partnership with local Public Media...**



N = 127

Source: Community Partner Survey

## APPENDIX D Acknowledgements

The authors – Robert Balfanz, Joanna Hornig Fox, and Nettie Legters – thank the Everyone Graduates Center Team for their effort, thought and support during this initiative. Marcia Davis, Douglas MacIver, Martha MacIver, and Charlene Pryseski were indefatigable travelers, station visitors, data analysts and writers. Charlene Pryseski, joined by S. Leo Jones and Sarah Bowles, were keen analysts during the actual report writing. Ann Maouyo, Diana Marsteller and Mary Maushard were important contributors to the final report. To all, we offer many thanks.