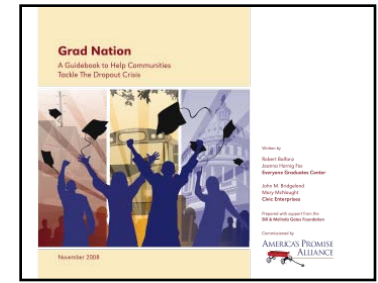


# How Your Community Can Meet Its Graduation Challenge

Robert Balfanz  
Everyone Graduates Center  
Johns Hopkins University

# Graduation Nation:

## A GUIDEBOOK TO HELP COMMUNITIES TACKLE THE DROPOUT CRISIS



- ***Graduation Nation*** contains research-based guidance for addressing the dropout crisis in your community, with ready-to-print tools and links to additional online resources.
- One size does not fit all, so you will not find step-by-step instructions, rather you will find tools to create a **customized solution** that's right for your community.
- This is an active process- use the **Grad Nation Action Tool** to begin assessing your community's next steps.
- The goal is to give **your community** the tools it needs to:
  - Rally your community to end the dropout crisis
  - Understand the dropout challenge
  - Comprehensively address your dropout crisis
  - Move forward to create lasting change



# It Will Take a Community Effort

- Understand Your Graduation Challenge
- Develop and Implement Comprehensive Solutions Tailored to Your Community
- Organize Yourself to Succeed



# Step 1

## Understand Your Graduation Challenge



# To Understand Your Graduation Challenge- Answer 5 Essential Questions

1. How many students are not graduating (each year and from each entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade class)?
2. How close to meeting graduation requirements do your students dropout?
3. Which of your high schools face the biggest Graduation Challenge?
4. Why do your students dropout?
5. Are your high school graduates prepared for success in college and/or career and technical training?



# How Many of Your Students are *Not* Graduating?

- Last year, how many students in grades 7 - 12 left your school district with no evidence of transfer to another diploma-granting school?
- For the Class of 2007, how many students who were first time 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2003-04 earned a high school diploma on-time? How many graduated with one or two extra years? Of those that did not earn a diploma, how many transferred to another diploma granting high school?



## *Grad Nation Tip*

Use Enrollment & Diploma Numbers  
To Make a Quick Estimate

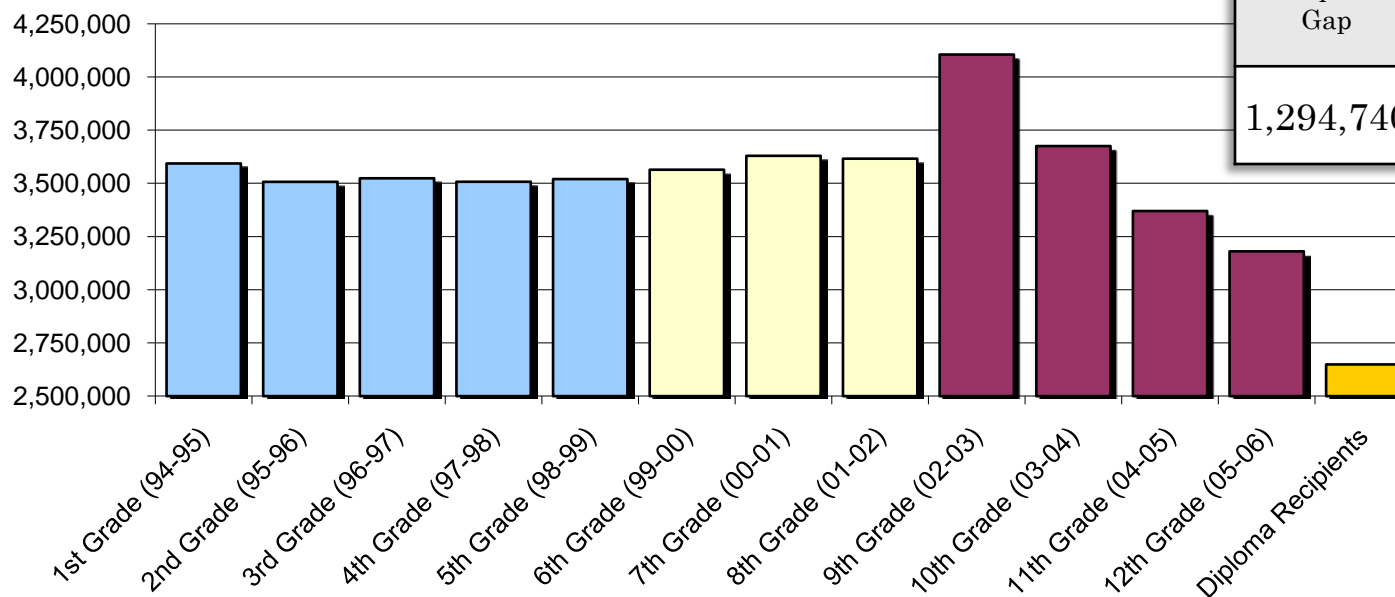


# CLASS OF 2006

## GRADE ENROLLMENTS & GRADUATES

### FOR THE NATION'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Total Number of Students and Graduates



#### Current Graduation Gap

9th Graders  
to Diploma  
Gap

1,294,740

12th Graders  
to Diploma  
Gap

370,269



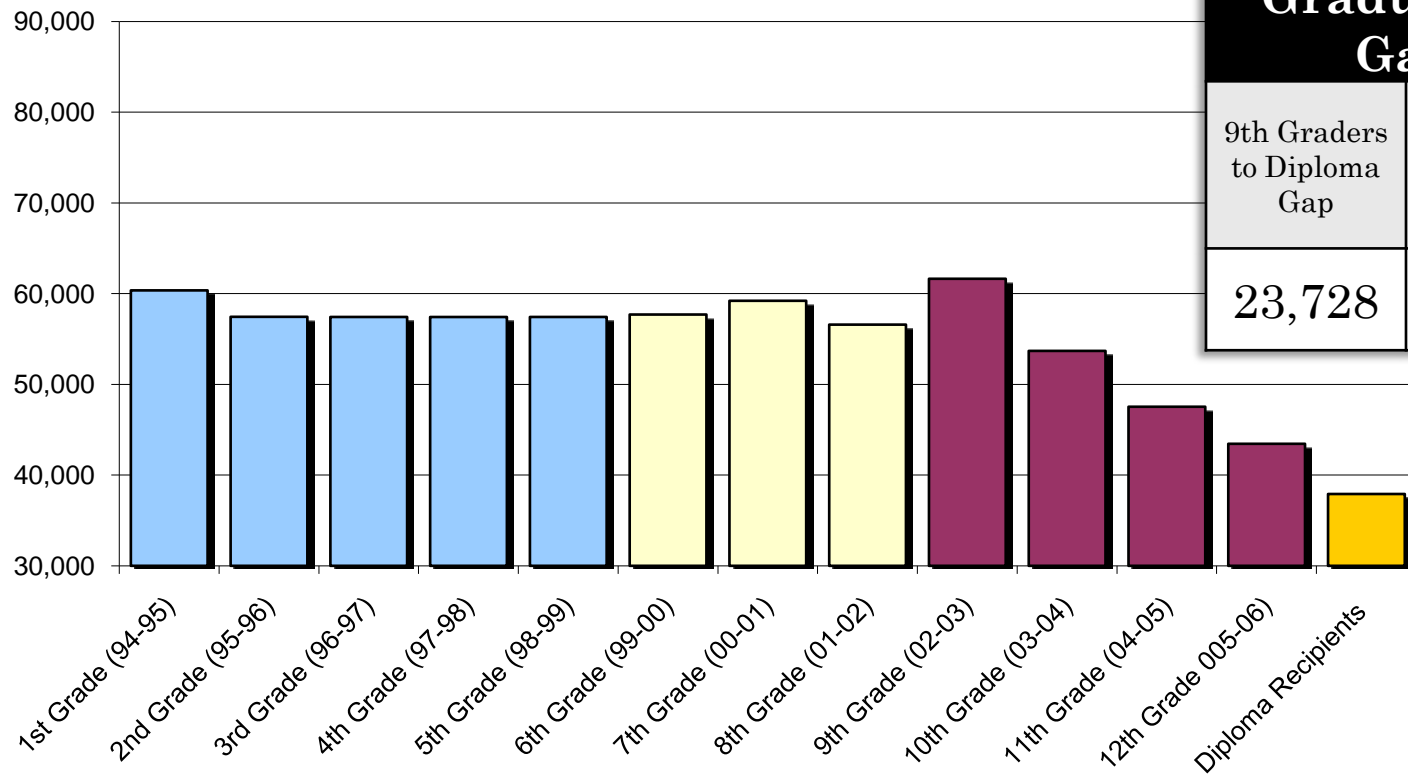


# CLASS OF 2006

## GRADE ENROLLMENTS & GRADUATES

### FOR THE ALABAMA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Total Number of Students and Graduates



#### Current Graduation Gap

9th Graders to Diploma Gap

23,728

12th Graders to Diploma Gap

5,534



# How Close to Meeting Graduation Requirements Do Your Students Dropout?

- How many students make it to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and do not graduate?
- How many dropouts are 1-3 credits shy of graduating?
- How many dropouts have enough total credits but do not meet other graduation requirements?
- How many dropouts are over-age and significantly under-credited? For example, 17 years old with 10 or fewer credits?
- How many students dropout after failing to earn promotion to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade?
- How many students dropout before entering HS?



# Grad Nation Tools You Can Use: Tool 7- Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analysis

## 7 | Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analysis: Attendance, Behavior, Age, Course-Passing and Credit Accumulation, Mobility

This sample form is suggested for the cases where it is not possible to carry out a computerized analysis as described in the Excel spreadsheets in the tool Dropout Profiles Related to Attendance, Credits, Credit Accumulation, Age, Withdrawal.

### Individual High School Student Dropout Profile — Analyzing previous year (200Y-OZ)

Student ID number (confidential—for school use only): \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Male ☐ Female

High school(s) attended (with names):

Grade 9 _____	OR	HS Year 1 _____
Grade 9R1 _____	OR	HS Year 2 _____
Grade 9R2 _____	OR	HS Year 3 _____
Grade 9R3 _____	OR	HS Year 4 _____
Grade 10 _____	OR	HS Year 5 _____
Grade 10R _____	OR	HS Year 6 _____
Grade 11 _____	OR	HS Year 7 _____
Grade 12 _____	OR	HS Year 8 _____

Age at high school entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Age at entering *this* high school: \_\_\_\_\_

Age at time of dropping out: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years attended any HS,  
at time of dropping out: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of credits completed,  
at time of dropping out: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest grade level attained

Number of high schools attended



# Which of Your High Schools Face the Biggest Graduation Challenge?

- Which high schools have the lowest graduation rates?
- Are there any high schools with mid-range graduation rates but high enrollments? (If so, they may still account for lots of dropouts.)
- Do the high schools with the lowest graduation rates face a greater educational challenge? Does a higher percentage of students enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade with middle grade course failures, declining attendance, and/or behavior issues?
- Make a quick estimate by comparing 9<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment to the number of diplomas awarded four years later.



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use-Tool 5

## Estimating the Magnitude of the Dropout Crisis in Your

### 5 | Estimating the Magnitude of the Dropout Crisis In Your Community

**Estimated Graduation Rates:** Estimate district and state graduation rates for your district and state compared to national rates using the Pew Partnership for Civic Change's Learning to Finish Calculator (<http://www.learningtofinish.org/calculator/>) for the years 2003-05.

Estimated Graduation Rates	2003	2004	2005
OUR DISTRICT (S)			
OUR STATE			
THE UNITED STATES			

**Promoting Power:** Estimate high school graduation rates by using the Promoting Power database provided by the Alliance for Excellent Education. The database organizes high schools by name, ZIP code, county, school districts, Congressional districts, and states ([http://www.all4ed.org/about\\_the\\_crisis/schools/state\\_and\\_local\\_info/promotingpower/](http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_and_local_info/promotingpower/)).

Promoting Power in Our School District	2004 Promoting Power	2005 Promoting Power	2006 Promoting Power
WEAK promoting power (less than 60%)			
High School A			
High School B			
High School C			
High School D			
High School E			

MODERATE promoting power (61 to 85%)



# Why Do Your Students Dropout?

## How Many Can be Classified as-

- **Life Events** - need to work, get married, become incarcerated, have a child, need to take care of an ill family member, etc.
- **Fade Outs** - Do ok in school, do not get in trouble, but at some point stop seeing the point of staying in school, believe they can succeed better without it
- **Push Outs** - Seen as detrimental to success of school or other students. Administrative rules used to remove from school or send to alternative school
- **Fail to Succeed** - Do not pass courses and earn enough credits to be promoted to next grade or graduate



# To Understand Why Students Drop Out, It's Important to Talk to Them

- Survey current students with poor attendance-most dropouts see their attendance drop in the year prior to dropping out
- Conduct exit interviews with students who leave school without a diploma but stay in the community



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 12-NELS Dropout Survey and Findings

## 12 | National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) Dropout Survey and Findings

A follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS:88), “Two Years Later: Cognitive Gains and School Transitions of NELS Eighth Graders” (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=95436>), explored the reasons students dropped out of school early. The study disaggregated reasons for leaving school by gender. Apparently, young men often leave school for reasons related to lack of engagement, foreshadowing *The Silent Epidemic* survey of a decade later.

Consider using the NELS:88 questions, and discuss them with last year’s dropouts and the students you consider to be potential future dropouts. With this new learning, you will be better able to design a support system to keep students in school. (Note: categorizations were added by authors of *Grad Nation*.)

### Students’ Reported Reasons for Dropping Out of High School Early

SCHOOL REASONS	Boys	Girls	Categorization
Didn’t like school	58%	44%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with teachers	52%	17%	Fade-out
Felt didn’t belong at school	31%	14%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with peers	18%	22%	Fade-out
Suspended too often	19%	13%	Push-out
Expelled from school	18%	9%	Push-out
Changed schools and didn’t like new one	11%	16%	Fade-out
Failing school	46%	33%	Failing
Couldn’t keep up with work	38%	25%	Failing

### ECONOMIC REASONS





# Are Your High School Graduates Prepared for Success in College and/or Career and Technical Training?

- Talk with the nearest Community College and Public University - what percent of your district's graduates who attend go on to earn diplomas?
- Talk with local employers who have training programs for high school graduates - what skills and knowledge do these entry workers need to succeed?



## Step 2

**Develop and Implement  
Comprehensive Solutions  
Tailored to Your Community**



# Four Core Components of a Comprehensive Effort to Meet the Graduation Challenge

1. Community-wide, multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention and recovery system and a college and career ready curriculum
2. Targeted school transformation of the high schools with the greatest graduation challenge and their feeder middle grade schools
3. A student support system sufficient to meet the community's graduation challenge
4. Policy audit



# Grad Nation Tool that You Can Use: Tool 16

## Comprehensive Community Solutions Diagram

### 16 | Comprehensive Community Solutions Diagram

IA, IB. Ensure that Policies and Resources Enable Accomplishing Goals		
2. Enact Across-The-Board Strategies for Accomplishing Goals		
<b>2A. Offer a College- and Career-Ready Curriculum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for all secondary school students</li> <li>• College-level learning opportunities</li> <li>• Strong teacher and student supports for achieving high expectations, including service learning</li> </ul>	<b>2B. Support a Multi-Tiered Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery System</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early warning/On-track indicator system</li> <li>• Positive support and recognition systems</li> <li>• Transitional support systems that help students cross from middle grades into high school and from high school into college and careers</li> </ul>	<b>2C. Develop Human Capital</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective and informed leadership</li> <li>• Highly trained and supported teachers working collaboratively</li> <li>• Good ratio of skilled adults to struggling students</li> </ul>
3. Create Effective Student Support Systems		
<b>3A. Organize Student Support Systems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiate by students' needs</li> </ul>	<b>3B. Supplement School and District Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have community adults serve as advocates, mentors, and tutors</li> </ul>	<b>3C. Complement the Work of the Community Adults</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand or add governmental- and external organization-based wraparound supports</li> </ul>
4. Revitalize and Reconfigure Schooling in High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Grades Schools		



## Component 1a

# Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Recovery

- Most dropouts are predictable and identifiable
- Students are knocked off the graduation path by the A, B, C's - Attendance, Behavior/Effort, and Course Performance
- In the districts we have studied, students who make it on-time and on-track from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade have 75% chance or higher of graduating; while students who do not have only a 25% or less chance of graduating
- Poor attendance, behavior or lack of effort, and in particular course failure as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> must be effectively responded to. Students will not grow out of it.



# Early Warning and Intervention Systems

- To be effective, focus needs to be on intervention, not on identification
- Need to identify and build on student strengths
- Can be done at the school level, with data routinely collected by schools - attendance, behavior, and course performance measures
- Teachers are the most effective intervention agents but need support, time, and professional development
- Need to record what interventions are attempted and evaluate their effectiveness on a regular basis



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 20

## Key Data for an “Early Warning System”

### 20 | Key Data for an “Early Warning System” with On- And Off-Track Indicators

The goal for an early warning system composed of on- and off-track indicators is ultimately to create inventories that can be used to guide interventions. There are two groups who need to be inventoried: students who are in danger of falling off-track and students who have reached the “off-track zone” already. Both groups will require serious yet somewhat different interventions. Knowing who these students are, how many there are, and in which grade level they are is the first step to changing outcomes and getting better results for the students in your community.

Your ability to produce such inventories easily depends on the type of software used by your community’s schools and districts, and in some cases by the state department of education.

We have provided two examples of summary inventories that we believe will be most useful to communities and six examples of the preliminary tables that might lead to the summary inventories. We recognize, though, that these examples can at best only provide guidelines, and that you will adapt them depending on how your data is collected and kept.

Inventory One: In Danger of Falling Off-Track In the Past Semester				
	Missed 5-9 days of school	Had 2 or more in-school suspensions	Had C or D average	Received one F in a core academic subject
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years overage for grade				



*Public Health-Response to Intervention Model*  
Provides a Useful Framework to build a  
Dropout Prevention, Intervention and  
Recovery System Around





# Three Tiers of Intervention are Needed

1. **Whole School/Preventative** - School-wide attendance and positive behavior programs, engaging instruction, safe and welcoming learning environment
2. **Targeted** - for students needing moderate intensity interventions, usually in small group settings or short but continual one-on-one interactions *e.g. extra help programs in math and reading, mentoring, homework support, attendance monitoring*
3. **Intensive** - for students needing case-managed professional supports *e.g. social work, intense tutoring from reading specialist*



# School Level Strategy

- Create a 3-by-3 grid - put Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance across the top. Put whole school, targeted, intensive down the side.
- Establish what is already in place at the school and effective. Place it in the appropriate place on the grid
- Find effective research based interventions for any grid box that is empty - Use Grad Nation to locate or see the Philadelphia Education Fund's site: <http://www.philaedfund.org/>
- Establish decision rules for when students move from one level to the next
- Important to practice *Intervention Discipline*- Save most intensive and costliest interventions only for students for whom no other intervention is sufficient



# Keeping on the Graduation Path-School Level Intervention System

	Attendance	Behavior	Course Performance
Whole School Preventative			
Targeted Moderate Intensity			
Intensive Case Managed			



# Dropout Recovery

- Even the best prevention and intervention system will miss some students
- Need to provide multiple pathways to graduation - but need to be data-based
- Need rapid credit recovery options
- Need to be able to provide students with ability to graduate and meet their life responsibilities - earn income, raise children, take care of ill family members
- But do not want to make alternative schools and GED first option for students who are struggling to fit in at school



## Component 1b

# College and Career Ready Curriculum

- Students need to leave high school prepared for further schooling or training
- Little work is left that requires just high school diploma and no further training



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 15

## College and Career Ready Curriculum ...

### 15 | A College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation

Knowing whether a college- and career-ready curriculum is in place is measured not by course titles but by student outcomes. David T. Conley, in his book *College Knowledge*, and in the paper, *Toward a More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness*, prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, March 2007 (<http://www.gatesfoundation.org>), makes a distinction between two types of college readiness — comprehensive and traditional.

The comprehensive approach to college readiness envisioned by Conley focuses on evaluating:

- students' cognitive development and growth in high school
- students' subject-specific content knowledge
- students' attitudes and behavioral attributes (study skills, time management, awareness of one's performance, persistence, and the ability to utilize study groups)
- students' contextual knowledge (how to apply to college, pay for college, and adjust to college once there)

The traditional approach, by contrast, focuses on:

- course-taking and completion relevant to college and university admission
- remedial course needs of students once in college or the workforce

**College- and Career-Ready Checklists** (adapted from Conley, *Toward a More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness*). What percentage of the secondary students in your community is on-track to exhibit college-ready characteristics? What is your goal? Put your estimate of present status in column 1 and your goal in column 2.

**The percentage of our students who demonstrate the following college-ready characteristics is:**

PRESENT	GOAL	CHARACTERISTIC:
		Consistent intellectual growth over four years of high school
		Deep understanding and facility applying key foundational ideas and



## Component 2

# Targeted School Transformation

- If you have a high school in your district that has a graduation rate of 65% or below, you will need to transform it and its feeder middle grade schools in order to meet your community's Graduation Challenge
- Small changes will not solve major challenges
- Comprehensive Reforms that Enable All Students to Stay on the Graduation Path will be required
- Focusing on one or two elements alone will not be sufficient



# School Transformation Will Involve:

- **Organizational and structural reforms** that make middle and high schools more personalized-teams of teachers (3-6) who share a common set of students, with time and an expectation for collaborative work are the key element
- **Instructional, curricular, and assessment reforms** need high standards for all, effective extra help, and formative assessments that enable better instruction
- **Leadership Reforms**-need to create and support distributed leadership. A principal alone can not transform a high needs middle or high school.
- **Professional Development Reforms**-content and grade specific, aligned to actual instructional needs, peer component.
- **Use of Data**
- **Parent and Community Involvement**





# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 17

## Comprehensive Solutions Taking Inventory

### 17 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Taking Inventory of “What Is”

Comprehensive Community Solutions to the Dropout Crisis			
In High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Schools	IN PLACE	NOT IN PLACE	IN PLACE & NEEDS WORK
<b>1. Ensure that policies and resources enable accomplishing goals</b>			
1A. Enabling policies support accomplishing goals			
1B. Aligned resources support accomplishing goals			
<b>2. Enact across-the-board strategies for accomplishing goals</b>			
2A. Offer a college- and career-ready curriculum			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous curriculum requirements and expectations for quality of student work are adopted</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College-level learning opportunities are provided</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong teacher and student supports are provided for achieving high academic expectations</li> </ul>			
2B. Support a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early warning system</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-track indicators</li> </ul>			



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 13

## Policy Audit

### 13 | Policy Audit and Next Policy Steps

Policies provide a foundation for much, but not all of what occurs within a school system and schools. With this table, we propose that your community determine at which political or organizational level some of the policies related to staying in school, dropping out, and graduating are made. You may also wish to determine whether in some cases long-term practices should be reconsidered.

Policy Audit					
POLICY	Policy determined by:				
	State legislature	District school board	District Superintendent	School-Based Decision Makers	Other (including practices)
Sets legal school-leaving age					
Sets other conditions for leaving school legally					
Defines "dropout"					
Defines the codes and practices that are used in the data system to track students who exit high school with or without graduating					
Defines the pupil progression policy (promotion/retention) grades K to grade 8					
Defines the pupil progression policy (promotion/retention) grades 9 to 12*					
Defines grading policies K to grade 8					



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Tool 27

## Sample Working Session for Increasing Grad Rates

### 27 | **Sample Working Session** for Increasing the Graduation Rate and Reducing the Dropout Rate in Our Community

This is a sample template for organizing a community workshop on the Dropout Crisis.

#### Overarching and Prompting Questions

Prompting Questions help answer the Overarching Questions

##### OVERARCHING QUESTION #1:

Why do we care about the dropout challenge and increasing the graduation rate in our community?

Prompting Questions:

1. What impact do dropouts have on the quality of life overall in our community?
2. What is the economic impact of dropouts in our community?
3. What are the personal impacts for high school dropouts in our community?

##### OVERARCHING QUESTION #2:

How many young people drop out in our community? Who drops out, and why? What are the main indicators putting students at risk of dropping out in our community?

Prompting Questions:

1. What do we “know” about the dropout issue in our community?
2. Are our responses to this question based on perception or reality?
3. Where can we obtain the information and data needed to create an accurate picture of the dropout challenge within our community? What specific communities and agencies might have this information?

##### OVERARCHING QUESTION #3:



# Grad Nation Tool You Can Use: Grad Nation Action Tool

## Congratulations on recognizing the need for action in your community, and on moving forward with action plans tailored to your community.

To help you in your planning efforts, we have developed a **quick assessment tool**<sup>1</sup> that takes inventory of what you already have in place and what gaps still need to be addressed. Please feel free to use this as a way of informing and driving your action planning process.

### Grad Nation Action Tool

<i>Please use this as a helpful way to drive your action planning and address your community's drop-out challenge</i>	Answer (Yes/No)	To Do List
<b>1. Rallying Your Community to End the Dropout Crisis</b>		
a. Do you have accurate data concerning your drop-out challenge? (p. 8, p. 17)		
b. Have you compared this data to other districts; to your state; to other states; and to the national rate? (p. 9)		
c. Have you assessed the costs of your dropouts to the local economy and community? (p. 10)		
<b>2. Understanding Your Dropout Rate</b>		
a. Do you know where the problem is the worst in your community/state? (pp. 21-22)		
b. Do you know which students are dropping out; for what reason; and at what rate? (pp. 23-25)		
c. Have you surveyed low-attendance students as to why they don't attend school regularly? (p. 26)		
d. Have you surveyed students as to how they view their classroom and school experience? (p. 27)		
e. Have you asked dropouts and those who appear close to dropping out why they are doing so? (pp. 27-28)		
f. Have you catalogued all student supports/wraparound services across the four key transitions? (p. 31)		



# STATE PROGRESS TOWARD RAISING GRADUATION RATES (FROM 2002 TO 2006): TOP 25%

State	Graduation Rate Gain (Percentage Points)	Graduation Rate 2002**	Graduation Rate 2006**	Change in Number of Weak Promoting Power High Schools
Tennessee	11.2	61%	72%	-22
Delaware	6.8	70%	76%	2
Kentucky	6.8	71%	78%	-26
South Dakota	5.3	79%	85%	4
Arkansas	5.2	75%	80%	0
Alabama	4.1	62%	66%	-30
North Carolina	3.6	68%	72%	-26
New York	3.5	64%	67%	-37
Hawaii	3.4	72%	76%	2
Missouri	3.4	78%	81%	7
Nebraska	3.1	84%	87%	1
New Hampshire	3.0	78%	81%	-1
United States	0.4	74%	74%	-184

\* Net gain in graduates was calculated by applying the Graduation Rate for 2002 to the estimated number of first-time ninth-graders in 2002-2003, and then subtracting the result from the total number of graduates in 2005-2006.

\*\* Rates for 2002 and 2006 are rounded for ease of comparison; source: Common Core of Data



# FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email: [rbalfanz@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:rbalfanz@csos.jhu.edu)

Visit: <http://www.every1graduates.org>

