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National Graduation Rate Keeps Climbing; 1.1 Million Students Still Fail to Earn Diplomas

*Report Examines Challenges Facing Latino Students;
Identifies Promising Strategies and Districts Beating the Odds*

Individualized Graduation Reports Issued for All 50 States and D.C.

WASHINGTON—June 7, 2012—A new national report from *Education Week* and the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center finds that the nation's graduation rate has posted a solid gain for the second straight year, following a period of declines and stagnation. Amid this continuing turnaround, the nation's graduation rate has risen to 73 percent, the highest level of high school completion since the late 1970s. The report shows that the nation's public schools will generate about 90,000 fewer dropouts than the previous year. Nationwide improvements were driven, in large part, by impressive gains among Latino students.

"It's no exaggeration to say that the educational and economic future of the nation will hinge on our ability to better serve the nation's large and growing Latino population, which faces unique challenges when it comes to success in high school and the transition to college and career," said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. "Given what's at stake, it is heartening to see that graduation rates for Latinos are improving faster than for any other group of students."

The nation's 12.1 million Latino schoolchildren encounter significant barriers on the road to educational success: language challenges, poverty, lagging achievement, low rates of high school and college completion, and, more recently, a wave of state laws targeting illegal immigrants that have put additional strain on Hispanic students, families, and communities. The 2012 edition of *Diplomas Count—Trailing Behind, Moving Forward: Latino Students in U.S. Schools*—takes a closer look at the state of schooling for this population of students, the challenges they face, and the lessons learned from some of the schools, districts, organizations, and communities that work closely with Latino students.

The report—part of an ongoing project conducted by the Bethesda, Md.-based Editorial Projects in Education—also tracks graduation policies for all 50 states and the District of Columbia and presents an updated analysis of graduation patterns for the nation, states, and the country's 50 largest school systems. The new analysis focuses on the class of 2009, the most recent year for which data are available.

GRADUATION RATE TRENDING UPWARD

The national public school graduation rate for the class of 2009 reached 73.4 percent, an increase of 1.7 points from the previous year. Much of this improvement can be attributed to a rapid 5.5 point rise in graduation rates among Latinos and a 1.7 point gain for African-Americans. These increases more than offset modest drops in graduation rates for Asian-American and Native American students. Rates for white students remained largely unchanged.

The class of 2009 marked the end of a decade—punctuated by periods of sluggish growth and some troubling reversals—during which the nation’s graduation rate rose by more than 7 percentage points. These improvements have been widespread. Forty-four states have posted gains ranging from a fraction of a point to more than 20 points. All major demographic groups have also improved, with the drive toward higher graduation rates led by African-Americans and Latinos, both of which have posted improvements of 10 percentage points over the last 10 years.

While such signs of progress are reason for encouragement, that optimism is tempered by the reality that far too many young people are still failing to complete a high school education. *Diplomas Count* projects that 1.1 million students from this year’s high school class will not graduate with a diploma. That amounts to 6,000 students lost each school day, or one student every 29 seconds.

LATINOS IN FOCUS

Because the Latino graduation rate, at 63 percent, lags substantially behind the U.S. average, this group makes up a disproportionate number of the students who do not finish high school. Of the 1.1 million members of the class of 2012 that we project will fail to graduate with a diploma, about 310,000 (or 27 percent) will be Latinos. Two states—California and Texas—will produce half the nation’s Hispanic dropouts.

The educational experiences of Latino students are largely reflected in—if not directly driven by—the characteristics of the communities in which they live and the school systems by which they are served. Latinos are much more likely than whites to attend districts that are large and highly urbanized, that serve high proportions of English-language learners, and that struggle with high levels of poverty and racial and socioeconomic segregation. Yet some schools, districts, and communities—including those profiled in the report—have demonstrated records of success serving diverse Latino populations.

In a special analysis conducted for *Diplomas Count 2012*, the EPE Research Center identified a nationwide group of large, majority-Hispanic districts that are beating odds when it comes to graduation rates. Topping the list is California’s Lompoc Unified School District, which graduated 89 percent of its Latino students, compared with an expected rate of 67 percent. Three other districts "overachieved" by at least 15 percentage points: the Ceres Unified and Merced Union districts in California and Arizona’s Yuma Union High School District. High-performing systems outside the West and Southwest included those serving Providence, R.I., and Yonkers, N.Y.

SPECIAL WEB-ONLY FEATURES AVAILABLE AT EDWEEK.ORG

- The full *Diplomas Count 2012* report and interactive tools: www.edweek.org/go/dc12.
- State Graduation Briefs for the 50 states and the District of Columbia featuring detailed data on current graduation rates and trends over time, definitions of college and work readiness, and state requirements for earning a high school diploma: www.edweek.org/go/dc12/sgb.
- The public release event for *Diplomas Count 2012* will be streamed live in a simulcast from Washington, D.C. The webcast will be available at 10 a.m., EDT, on June 8 on [edweek.org: www.edweek.org/ew/dc/2012/dc-livestream.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/dc/2012/dc-livestream.html).
- EdWeek Maps, a powerful online database, lets users access graduation rates and other information for every school system in the nation and easily compare district, state, and national figures at maps.edweek.org.

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The EPE Research Center is the research division of the Bethesda, Md.-based nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education. It conducts policy surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in the annual Quality Counts, Technology Counts, and Diplomas Count reports. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts and EdWeek Maps online data resources. The EPE Research Center is on the Web at www.edweek.org/rc.

NEW FINDINGS

DIPLOMAS COUNT 2012: Trailing Behind, Moving Forward

About *Diplomas Count 2012*

The 2012 edition of *Diplomas Count*, titled *Trailing Behind, Moving Forward: Latino Students in U.S. Schools*, examines the nation's growing Latino student population and investigates the cultural, financial, language, and legal challenges Latino youths face in pursuing academic success. The report also features the EPE Research Center's original, comprehensive analysis of high school graduation rates, completely updated for this year's report, and includes a special focus on the Latino population.

To help guide your reporting, we have highlighted some of the key findings below. For the purposes of the national totals presented below, the District of Columbia is counted as a state.

GRADUATION RATES KEEP CLIMBING

A new analysis of high school completion from the EPE Research Center, using its Cumulative Promotion Index method and data from the U.S. Department of Education, finds that the national **graduation rate for public schools stands at 73.4 percent** for the class of 2009, the most recent year for which data are available.

- The new findings point to **continued improvements** for the nation. The graduation rate rose 1.7 percentage points from 2008 to 2009, marking the second straight year of increases following a period of stagnation and decline.
- At 73.4 percent, the nation's graduation rate has reached its **highest point since the late 1970s**.
- **Latino success drives national improvement.** Graduation rates for Latino students increased by an impressive 5.5 percentage points from 2008 to 2009, with African-Americans posting a more modest rise of 1.7 points. Rates were steady for white students, but dropped for Native American and Asian-American students (by 1 and 2 points, respectively).
- Graduation rates also increased in three-quarters of the states from 2008 to 2009.

A DECADE OF IMPROVEMENT

From 1999 to 2009, the **nation's graduation rate increased by 7.3 percentage points** on average.

- **Forty-four states posted gains** over the past decade, including double-digit increases in 10 states: Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.
- Graduation rates have increased for all major **racial and ethnic groups**, with African-Americans and Latinos showing the most rapid improvements. Both groups have posted increases of 10 percentage points in their graduation rates since 1999. As a result, the black-white and Latino-white graduation gaps have narrowed substantially over this period.
- The gap between Native Americans and whites has widened somewhat.

HISTORICAL DISPARITIES PERSIST

While all demographic groups and most states have made progress, large graduation gaps persist, both among racial and ethnic groups and across the states. These disparities remain a cause for concern.

- Asian-Americans and whites remain the nation's highest-performing groups, posting graduation rates of 81 percent and 79 percent, respectively, for the class of 2009. Sixty-three percent of Latinos finished high school with a diploma, while 59 percent of African-Americans and 53 percent of Native Americans graduated.
- High school graduation rates for **minority males** consistently fall between 50 and 60 percent.
- On average, 70 percent of male students earn a diploma compared with 76 percent of female students, a **gender gap of nearly 7 percentage points** that has remained virtually unchanged for years.

STATE AND DISTRICT PERSPECTIVES

Graduation rates vary dramatically across states and districts. Some systems thrive, while others struggle to make earning a diploma a reality for most students. An alarming 35 percentage-point chasm separates the highest- and lowest-performing states.

- The **leading states**—Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—each graduate more than 80 percent of their high school students. At **the other extreme**, fewer than 6 in 10 students graduate in the District of Columbia, Nevada, and New Mexico.
- Wide variations are also found among the **nation's 50 largest districts**. Within that group, Detroit has the lowest graduation rate, at 42.4 percent, while Montgomery County, Md., tops the nation at 87.6 percent.
- The report also identifies the **epicenters of the Hispanic graduation crisis**, 25 individual school systems that collectively produce 37 percent of the nation's Latino dropouts. Los Angeles is the leading producer of Latino dropouts, with nearly 30,000 Hispanic students failing to earn diplomas. New York City ranks second, with about 16,000 Latino nongraduates.

UPDATED ROAD MAP TO STATE GRADUATION POLICIES

To provide context for high school completion rates and reform efforts, *Diplomas Count* tracks key state policies related to graduation.

- **College and work readiness:** Thirty-seven states define what students should know and be able to do to be prepared for credit-bearing courses in college. Definitions of work readiness have likewise been established in 37 states.
- **Advanced diplomas:** Twenty-three states award advanced diplomas or some type of formal recognition to students who exceed standard graduation requirements.
- **Exit exams:** Twenty-four states require exit exams for the class of 2012, with 23 of those states basing exit exams on standards at the 10th grade level or higher.
- **Completing coursework:** In the typical state, earning a diploma requires that students obtain four course credits in English, three credits each in math and social studies, and two or three credits in science.

Diplomas Count 2012

online at www.edweek.org/go/dc12



Graduation in the United States

Nationwide, 73.4 percent of all public school students graduated from high school with a regular diploma in the class of 2009, marking the second straight year of gains following a period of modest declines. A gap of 35 percentage points separates the best-performing and worst-performing states. The national leaders—Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—each graduate at least 80 percent of their students. By contrast, the graduation rate falls below 60 percent in the District of Columbia, Nevada, and New Mexico.

	TEN-YEAR GRADUATION TREND (ALL STUDENTS)			GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENT SUBGROUPS, CLASS OF 2009						
	Class of 2009	Class of 1999	Change 1999 to 2009 (percentage point)	Male	Female	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White
Alabama	69.2	56.7	+12.5	64.6	73.8	77.0	76.1	56.8	59.8	74.7
Alaska	69.3	63.7	+5.6	67.7	72.8	53.0	‡	63.9	64.0	73.7
Arizona	72.3	48.2	+24.1	68.8	75.5	59.9	84.1	64.0	70.6	78.3
Arkansas	70.6	70.5	+0.1	67.8	73.7	36.0	‡	65.4	59.7	72.7
California	71.3	68.7	+2.5	67.2	75.0	40.3	77.4	63.0	50.8	75.4
Colorado	76.4	67.5	+8.9	72.3	79.6	52.1	87.1	58.7	62.5	82.0
Connecticut	76.0	75.1	+0.9	70.4	75.6	55.7	78.8	54.3	61.5	78.8
Delaware	67.9	57.7	+10.2	61.6	74.5	44.4	76.4	59.3	58.7	73.9
District of Columbia	52.4	65.7	-13.3	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Florida	70.4	52.5	+17.9	66.8	75.9	‡	86.6	72.6	62.0	73.1
Georgia	62.7	51.5	+11.2	61.2	72.2	‡	86.6	57.1	55.3	72.6
Hawaii	69.2	59.5	+9.6	66.6	72.0	55.5	70.5	61.5	62.8	66.7
Idaho	72.1	76.5	-4.4	73.0	75.6	44.3	73.7	63.5	44.2	75.7
Illinois	71.2	72.4	-1.2	64.1	63.1	62.0	84.2	61.5	51.3	78.7
Indiana	75.8	71.1	+4.7	71.7	78.8	32.3	79.1	62.0	59.5	77.9
Iowa	80.5	78.9	+1.7	77.8	81.2	22.6	62.2	53.4	45.9	81.8
Kansas	78.4	73.5	+5.0	76.1	81.8	‡	69.8	60.3	60.1	80.5
Kentucky	70.5	62.3	+8.2	66.3	74.0	21.9	75.5	58.5	53.6	72.5
Louisiana	64.0	59.1	+4.9	57.9	70.2	56.9	85.5	68.0	56.0	69.7
Maine	72.3	68.9	+3.4	68.5	74.8	‡	‡	‡	‡	72.3
Maryland	77.9	71.8	+6.1	73.6	82.5	‡	95.0	70.3	67.0	85.5
Massachusetts	79.1	73.9	+5.3	75.3	82.2	‡	86.3	55.5	64.0	84.9
Michigan	74.1	68.7	+5.4	70.4	79.4	48.1	75.7	43.6	‡	79.8
Minnesota	82.6	79.4	+3.1	80.1	82.4	‡	75.5	‡	‡	85.4
Mississippi	62.2	58.4	+3.8	57.1	68.3	35.8	73.6	51.6	58.1	67.1
Missouri	79.3	72.1	+7.3	76.5	81.4	67.5	84.4	68.7	61.0	82.6
Montana	77.4	75.7	+1.7	74.2	78.6	53.0	56.9	49.2	57.3	79.8
Nebraska	76.6	77.6	-1.0	72.3	79.1	31.4	‡	57.4	42.3	81.7
Nevada	59.2	69.0	-9.8	55.7	62.2	44.6	74.9	53.3	48.9	60.4
New Hampshire	79.1	72.7	+6.5	75.7	81.2	‡	‡	‡	‡	79.2
New Jersey	87.4	76.3	+11.0	85.3	87.2	33.2	88.3	74.1	74.4	90.1
New Mexico	59.4	58.1	+1.3	55.3	64.2	48.0	72.2	62.3	35.8	55.9
New York	78.4	58.5	+19.9	71.9	82.8	52.5	82.0	57.9	57.6	84.7
North Carolina	68.0	58.7	+9.3	61.9	72.0	56.8	79.5	54.1	56.0	74.9
North Dakota	85.9	82.9	+3.1	82.3	87.7	57.5	‡	‡	‡	87.9
Ohio	76.4	69.0	+7.4	76.1	80.6	‡	‡	50.5	51.3	83.2
Oklahoma	73.6	70.4	+3.2	71.4	76.5	65.8	85.1	67.8	62.4	75.7
Oregon	73.1	64.0	+9.1	69.9	76.0	‡	72.0	‡	54.4	73.7
Pennsylvania	80.5	75.3	+5.1	78.2	82.5	43.8	88.1	58.7	59.0	85.2
Rhode Island	75.3	70.8	+4.5	70.8	78.6	‡	69.1	59.4	61.9	79.6
South Carolina	61.7	47.1	+14.6	55.9	67.9	33.3	77.0	53.8	53.6	67.3
South Dakota	69.5	74.6	-5.0	65.5	70.9	26.6	66.8	43.8	65.9	75.6
Tennessee	75.8	62.1	+13.7	71.7	79.6	53.3	85.9	64.3	68.0	78.6
Texas	71.5	60.2	+11.3	68.9	74.3	‡	90.1	64.4	64.4	79.6
Utah	78.4	75.7	+2.7	64.3	70.2	59.0	65.4	51.7	54.2	69.2
Vermont	77.4	76.9	+0.5	78.2	82.3	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Virginia	76.0	73.9	+2.1	71.9	80.5	‡	89.0	65.5	64.8	81.5
Washington	68.1	68.6	-0.5	65.2	72.4	39.7	78.4	56.0	49.4	71.4
West Virginia	71.5	71.2	+0.4	67.8	75.1	50.7	72.3	47.3	65.2	71.4
Wisconsin	83.8	76.4	+7.4	80.8	85.2	54.2	82.3	64.2	50.4	88.3
Wyoming	73.9	73.4	+0.5	69.9	76.5	30.9	50.2	‡	33.2	75.1
U.S.	73.4	66.0	+7.3	69.6	76.4	53.1	80.5	63.0	58.7	78.8

† Value not calculated because necessary data field(s) not reported in the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data and not provided by state education agency.

‡ Value not reported because of insufficient data for reliable estimate.

How Does the EPE Research Center Calculate Graduation Rates?

The Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI)

The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center uses the **Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI)** method to calculate graduation rates. The CPI represents the high school experience as a process rather than a single event, capturing the four key steps a student must take in order to graduate: three grade-to-grade promotions (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and ultimately earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation). Each of these individual components corresponds to a grade-promotion ratio.

The equation below illustrates the CPI formula for calculating graduation rates. The class of 2008-09, the most recent year of data available, is used as an example.

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{10\text{th graders, fall 2009}}{9\text{th graders, fall 2008}} \times \frac{11\text{th graders, fall 2009}}{10\text{th graders, fall 2008}} \times \frac{12\text{th graders, fall 2009}}{11\text{th graders, fall 2008}} \times \frac{\text{Diploma recipients, spring 2009}}{12\text{th graders, fall 2008}}$$

Multiplying the four grade-specific promotion ratios together produces the graduation rate, the percent of public school 9th graders who will complete high school on time with a regular diploma. The CPI counts only students receiving standard high school diplomas as graduates, following the definition of a graduate established by the No Child Left Behind Act.

We can use a simplified example to further demonstrate how the center calculates the CPI. Let us suppose that a particular school district currently has 100 students enrolled in each grade from 9 through 12. We will also assume that 5 percent of students currently in grades 9, 10, and 11 will drop out of school this year and that 5 percent of seniors will fail to earn a diploma at the end of the year. So, for example, we would count 100 9th graders at our starting point but only 95 10th graders the following fall.

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} = .815$$

Carrying out the calculation (shown above), we arrive at a graduation rate of 81.5 percent for this district. Given conditions in this hypothetical district (an effective 5 percent annual attrition rate for students at each grade level), only about 82 out of every 100 9th graders would be expected to finish high school with a diploma.

The CPI can be calculated for public school districts that have students enrolled in the secondary grades (9 through 12). State and national statistics are generated by aggregating the district-level data upward.

Notes on the Methodology

The EPE Research Center calculates graduation rates using data from the Common Core of Data (CCD), an annual census of public schools and school districts in the United States conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. Detailed methodological descriptions of the CCD can be found in technical documentation published by the National Center for Education Statistics (available online at nces.ed.gov/ccd). For the 2008-09 school year, diploma counts for all students or student subgroups were not available from the CCD for California, Nevada, and Vermont. In these instances, the EPE Research Center obtained those data directly from the respective state education agencies where available. The center also used agency-reported enrollment data from the District of Columbia and Ohio.

The center's goal is to provide a direct measure of the graduation rate for each of the roughly 11,000 school districts in the nation that enroll high school students. It was possible to do this for districts serving the vast majority (96 percent) of all public school students nationwide. But in a small number of cases—for example, if a particular piece of information needed to calculate the CPI indicator was missing—the center could not directly compute the graduation rate.

To avoid the unintentional disclosure of information about individual students, the EPE Research Center does not report results for very small demographic subgroups, those with fewer than five students in a given category. Additional procedures are employed to ensure that results are only reported in situations where sufficient data are available for a reliable calculation.