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High School Graduation Rate Approaching Milestone, Reaches Highest Point in 40 Years

*Report Examines State and Local Performance;
Identifies Promising Dropout Recovery Strategies*

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

WASHINGTON—June 6, 2013—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 third straight year, following a period of declines and stagnation. Amid this continuing turnaround, the nation's graduation rate has risen to almost 75 percent, the highest level of high school completion since 1973. Although 1 million students will fail to graduate with the class of 2013, the report shows that the nation's public schools will generate 96,000 fewer dropouts than the previous year. Nationwide improvements were driven, in large part, by strong gains among Latino and black students.

"A decade ago, as concerns about the nation's graduation rate were just starting to gain public attention, only two-thirds of U.S. students were finishing high school with a diploma," said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. "Now, the graduation rate for America's public schools stands just shy of 75 percent. At the current pace of improvement, the graduation rate could reach an all-time high within the next few years."

But there is a flip side to these gains: Far too many young people are still failing to complete a meaningful high school education, and most of these nongraduates come from educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and communities. The 2013 edition of *Diplomas Count—Second Chances: Turning Dropouts into Graduates*—investigates "recovery" interventions that target these out-of-school youths—a group whose prospects for landing a stable job or a postsecondary credential may depend on finishing high school.

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 original analysis of graduation patterns for the nation, states, and the country's 50 largest school systems. The new findings focus on the class of 2010, the most recent year for which data are available.

GRADUATION RATES ENTERING HISTORIC TERRITORY

The national public school graduation rate for the class of 2010 reached 74.7 percent, rising nearly 2 full percentage points from the previous year and 8 points in the past decade. Much of the nation's improvement since 2000 has been driven by strong gains for historically underserved groups. Graduation rates for Latino students have skyrocketed 16 percentage points over this period, reaching 68 percent for the class of 2010. Rates for black students, now at 62 percent, have risen 13 points.

Graduation rates for white and Asian students—now at 80 percent and 81 percent, respectively—have increased at a slower pace. In a partial exception to the general upward trend, Native American students have experienced only modest improvements since 2000 and have seen their rates decline since 2008.

A 30-point graduation gap separates Asians and Native Americans, the nation's highest- and lowest-performing groups.

One implication of these distinctive improvement patterns is a narrowing of the graduation gap between whites and their Latino and black peers. The white-Latino gap has been cut in half in the past decade, while the black-white gap shrank by almost 30 percent.

STATE AND LOCAL VIEWS

The EPE Research Center also finds significant divides across the states and from district to district. A 28-percentage-point gap separates the highest-performing state (Vermont at 85 percent) from the lowest performer (the District of Columbia at 57 percent). All told, 13 states are now graduating at least 80 percent of their students; in six states, fewer than two-thirds of students finish high school with a diploma.

Graduation rates have also been on the rise in a majority of states during the past decade. Forty-six states have posted gains ranging from a fraction of a percentage point to nearly 32 points. The states losing ground typically saw declines of 2 points or less.

A similar degree of variation exists among the nation's largest school systems. With a graduation rate of 85 percent, Fairfax County, Va., ranks first among the 50 largest districts in the country; Maryland's Baltimore and Montgomery counties follow closely, at 84 percent each. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Detroit graduates fewer than half of its students. Graduation rates surpass the national average in 18 of the 50 largest districts.

FOCUS ON "RECOVERABLE" YOUTHS

This year's report includes a special original analysis that examines the nation's population of "recoverable" youths—young adults between the ages of 16 and 21 who are not in school and who have not completed a high school education. These individuals comprise nearly 7 percent of this age group and are prime targets for recovery interventions aimed at returning former students to a pathway leading to either a diploma or other high school credential.

The report estimates that there are 1.8 million recoverable youths nationwide, with largest numbers tending to be found in more populous states: California, Florida, Georgia, New York, and Texas. Native American, Latino, and black youths are disproportionately represented among young adults who are out of school without a high school credential. Within the out-of-school population, employment rates are 75 percent higher for those who have finished high school, compared with dropouts.

SPECIAL WEB-ONLY FEATURES AVAILABLE AT EDWEEK.ORG

- The full *Diplomas Count 2013* report and interactive tools: www.edweek.org/go/dc13.
- 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/dc13/sgb.
- 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.

DIPLOMAS COUNT 2013: SECOND CHANCES

Highlights and Key Findings

About the Report

The 2013 edition of *Diplomas Count*, entitled *Second Chances: Turning Dropouts into Graduates*, examines dropout recovery and innovative strategies for returning to the educational fold the 1 million students who leave school without a diploma each year. *Education Week's* journalists investigate interventions that provide second chances to those youths—a group whose prospects for landing a stable job or a postsecondary credential may depend on finishing high school.

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 state and local patterns.

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 STILL RISING

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 74.7 percent** for the class of 2010, the most recent year for which data are available.

- The new findings point to **continued improvements** for the nation. The graduation rate rose 1.9 percentage points from 2009 to 2010, marking the third straight year of increases following a period of stagnation and decline.
- At 74.7 percent, the nation's graduation rate has reached its **highest point since 1973**.
- **Success among historically underserved groups drives national improvement.** Graduation rates for Latino students increased by an impressive 5.4 percentage points from 2009 to 2010, with African-Americans posting a rise of 3.3 points. Rates were largely steady for white students, but dropped by 2 points for Native American students.
- Graduation **rates also increased in seven out of 10 states** from 2009 to 2010.

A DECADE OF IMPROVEMENT

From 2000 to 2010, the **nation's graduation rate increased by 7.9 percentage points** on average.

- **Forty-six states posted gains** over the past decade, including double-digit increases in 10 states: Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.
- **Graduation rates have increased for all major racial and ethnic groups**, with Latinos and African-Americans showing the most rapid improvements—gains of 16.3 and 13.2 percentage points, respectively, since 2000.

- The Latino-white and black-white graduation **gaps have narrowed substantially** over this period. However, 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 80 percent, respectively, for the class of 2010. Sixty-eight percent of Latinos finished high school with a diploma, while 62 percent of African-Americans and 51 percent of Native Americans graduated.
- High school graduation rates for **minority males** fall between 46 percent (Native Americans) and 63 percent (Latinos).
- On average, 72 percent of male students earn a diploma compared with 78 percent of female students, a **gender gap of 6.5 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. A 28-percentage-point divide separates the highest- and lowest-performing states.

- The **13 leading states**— Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wisconsin—each graduate at least 80 percent of their high school students. **At the other extreme**, fewer than two-thirds of students graduate in the District of Columbia, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, and South Carolina.
- Wide variations are also found among the **nation's 50 largest districts**. Within that group, Detroit has the lowest graduation rate, at 46 percent, while Fairfax County, VA., tops the nation at 85 percent.
- The report also identifies the **epicenters of the graduation crisis**: twenty-five individual school systems that collectively produce 18 percent of the nation's dropouts. New York City is the leading producer of dropouts, with nearly 36,500 students failing to earn diplomas. Los Angeles ranks second, with about 32,000 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-eight 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 38 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 2013, with all but one of those states basing the 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, science, and social studies.

Diplomas Count 2013

online at www.edweek.org/go/dc13/sqb



Graduation in the United States

Nationwide, 74.7 percent of all public school students graduated from high school with a regular diploma in the class of 2010, marking the third straight year of gains following a period of modest declines. A gap of 28 percentage points separates the best-performing and worst-performing states. The national leaders, Vermont and North Dakota, graduate at least 85 and 84 percent of their students, respectively. By contrast, in six states, fewer than two-thirds of students finish high school with a diploma.

	TEN-YEAR GRADUATION TREND (ALL STUDENTS)			GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENT SUBGROUPS, CLASS OF 2010						
	Class of 2010	Class of 2000	Change 2000 to 2010 (percentage point)	Male	Female	Native American	Asian	Latino	Black	White
Alabama	69.4%	61.4%	+8.0%	66.3%	73.7%	67.2%	73.3%	57.6%	61.7%	75.6%
Alaska	68.7	59.3	+9.4	63.0	70.6	42.5	72.0	65.8	61.2	73.6
Arizona	67.2	62.2	+5.1	64.0	69.3	52.6	76.2	64.6	58.9	67.7
Arkansas	72.3	69.6	+2.8	69.5	75.6	56.6	65.4	68.9	63.0	75.9
California	73.7	68.5	+5.2	70.3	77.1	51.0	83.6	66.0	56.8	80.2
Colorado	75.6	70.2	+5.5	72.3	78.1	38.2	69.8	61.2	50.8	77.1
Connecticut	82.2	76.3	+5.9	78.2	83.6	†	80.6	73.2	61.0	85.4
Delaware	73.9	67.0	+6.8	69.5	76.1	†	72.1	69.1	67.8	76.5
District of Columbia	57.0	53.5	+3.5	51.1	65.4	†	64.7	63.2	61.9	99.3
Florida	72.9	49.9	+23.0	72.9	81.9	68.7	85.3	77.1	70.1	76.4
Georgia	64.0	53.4	+10.5	59.2	69.0	38.0	78.5	55.8	56.5	71.1
Hawaii	67.2	62.3	+4.9	63.7	70.3	63.6	69.6	31.5	97.7	59.4
Idaho	80.0	74.6	+5.4	76.7	82.2	29.3	54.0	69.2	61.3	80.1
Illinois	77.8	73.6	+4.2	77.4	82.6	†	83.5	75.4	67.6	82.0
Indiana	78.0	70.8	+7.2	77.7	83.9	†	69.5	67.7	68.9	80.9
Iowa	83.2	78.3	+5.0	82.3	84.6	28.9	78.0	66.9	59.4	84.9
Kansas	80.0	73.5	+6.6	77.5	82.3	64.0	84.0	65.3	62.7	84.6
Kentucky	77.2	63.7	+13.5	76.6	82.9	†	89.3	76.4	73.7	79.3
Louisiana	67.0	59.5	+7.4	60.3	72.9	54.2	85.4	40.4	59.8	71.8
Maine	80.5	71.9	+8.6	76.1	81.6	†	47.2	†	26.4	80.9
Maryland	78.6	72.7	+5.9	74.4	82.5	56.4	90.9	76.7	66.9	82.9
Massachusetts	79.9	75.2	+4.7	76.4	82.6	64.9	88.6	56.4	68.9	85.0
Michigan	70.9	72.9	-2.0	68.1	74.6	50.5	77.2	59.1	50.1	76.2
Minnesota	80.4	78.6	+1.7	77.8	82.1	36.1	72.8	49.2	53.9	84.5
Mississippi	64.4	59.2	+5.3	58.4	70.7	30.2	73.5	59.2	59.7	69.5
Missouri	80.7	71.3	+9.5	78.0	82.3	†	77.9	68.5	64.9	83.2
Montana	79.1	76.6	+2.5	76.4	78.0	45.7	72.8	63.7	41.6	80.9
Nebraska	78.8	78.2	+0.6	74.7	81.0	37.0	59.8	72.9	43.5	81.1
Nevada	62.7	55.3	+7.4	59.4	65.8	37.9	76.0	54.9	45.0	69.1
New Hampshire	78.3	73.5	+4.7	74.5	81.3	†	82.6	37.6	62.5	78.3
New Jersey	83.1	82.2	+0.9	80.8	83.5	†	89.1	69.4	66.0	87.3
New Mexico	59.4	60.7	-1.3	56.8	63.3	53.3	71.4	54.6	55.8	62.2
New York	73.3	60.5	+12.8	69.8	76.1	52.6	81.8	74.8	72.7	83.8
North Carolina	71.7	60.3	+11.3	65.9	74.4	53.4	87.9	63.5	48.4	81.2
North Dakota	84.0	79.8	+4.2	79.6	86.2	49.4	81.5	73.7	81.0	88.5
Ohio	74.1	70.7	+3.4	74.7	78.3	†	86.9	54.1	54.3	80.4
Oklahoma	73.9	67.6	+6.3	69.8	76.3	63.0	81.3	67.3	53.6	75.5
Oregon	75.6	63.0	+12.6	74.3	81.4	41.4	75.5	67.1	69.8	78.0
Pennsylvania	83.0	75.3	+7.7	81.3	85.2	†	87.7	65.5	68.1	86.4
Rhode Island	71.9	72.6	-0.7	67.3	75.3	29.8	56.6	58.2	55.0	74.7
South Carolina	61.5	48.5	+13.1	56.6	67.6	24.4	58.4	58.7	54.3	67.4
South Dakota	76.3	78.2	-1.8	72.4	76.5	32.3	64.8	65.3	57.3	81.3
Tennessee	80.3	48.8	+31.5	76.8	83.1	76.7	75.5	67.4	74.6	81.6
Texas	74.8	62.9	+11.9	71.5	77.4	44.8	80.9	73.3	61.1	74.0
Utah	71.3	79.4	-8.0	73.7	80.8	45.0	66.1	56.7	60.0	80.2
Vermont	85.0	73.7	+11.3	82.3	84.9	†	84.9	†	85.2	84.2
Virginia	77.5	77.4	+0.1	76.4	84.5	42.2	89.9	77.0	65.4	82.4
Washington	72.1	62.2	+9.9	66.9	75.3	30.9	69.4	55.1	50.8	72.9
West Virginia	74.7	70.2	+4.5	71.4	77.5	†	65.9	61.5	69.2	74.6
Wisconsin	83.7	76.6	+7.1	80.9	84.5	53.0	78.9	63.0	52.3	87.4
Wyoming	77.6	74.8	+2.8	76.8	80.3	39.0	77.6	64.9	55.7	80.6
U.S.	74.7%	66.8%	+7.9%	71.9%	78.4%	51.1%	81.1%	68.1%	61.7%	79.6%

† 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 2009-10, the most recent year of data available, is used as an example.

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{10\text{th graders, fall 2010}}{9\text{th graders, fall 2009}} \times \frac{11\text{th graders, fall 2010}}{10\text{th graders, fall 2009}} \times \frac{12\text{th graders, fall 2010}}{11\text{th graders, fall 2009}} \times \frac{\text{Diploma recipients, spring 2010}}{12\text{th graders, fall 2009}}$$

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 2009-10 school year, diploma counts were not available from the CCD for Connecticut. The EPE Research Center obtained those data directly from the state education agency where available.

The center's goal is to provide a measure of the graduation rate for each of the roughly 11,000 school districts in the nation that enroll high school students. To provide fuller and more representative coverage of the student population, the center used a multivariate statistical model to impute graduation rates for certain districts where a directly calculated rate was not available.

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.