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Most K-12 Students Are Not Highly Engaged, Educators Report; Survey Finds High Schoolers Fare Even Worse

*Despite Historically High Graduation Rate,
Three-Quarters of a Million Fail to Earn a Diploma*

WASHINGTON—June 5, 2014—Recently released federal data for the high school class of 2012 find that the share of students earning a diploma has exceeded 80 percent for the first time in the nation's history. However, an original analysis by the Education Week Research Center reveals that, of an estimated 3.8 million students who entered the 9th grade in fall 2008, more than 760,000 failed to successfully finish high school by 2012. Youth from historically underserved groups remain disproportionately overrepresented among U.S. nongraduates. African-American and Latino students constitute the majority of those failing to graduate.

Despite continuing challenges in closing the graduation gap and eliminating historical disparities, high school completion rates have improved consistently in recent years. During the past five years, the U.S. graduation rate has risen by 7 percentage points, with improvements seen in all but three states—Michigan and South Dakota held steady, while Rhode Island lost two points. Another bright note: national gains have been driven largely by groups that have historically lagged behind. The rate of improvement for Latinos is twice the national pace; gains for African-American students also exceed the U.S. average.

Against this backdrop, educators and experts alike have come to a growing realization that academic factors alone do not tell the whole story of what it means to successfully navigate the educational system through high school and into higher education or the workplace. A new national report from *Education Week* investigates the role that student engagement and motivation play in academic success, in general and for high school completion specifically. The 2014 edition of *Diplomas Count—Motivation Matters: Engaging Students, Creating Learners*—explores the challenge of engaging and motivating students, with a focus on innovative strategies to promote the traits and beliefs that will help students achieve their goals in school and beyond.

A National Perspective on the Engagement Challenge

To complement the report's in-depth journalism on the importance of cultivating such attributes as persistence, grit, and self-control among students, the Education Week Research Center conducted a national survey that takes the pulse of educators on crucial issues related to engagement and motivation. More than 500 teachers and school administrators from around the country participated in the study. This companion report, *Engaging Students for Success*, also released today, was produced

with support from the Atlantic Philanthropies, the California Endowment, the NoVo Foundation, and the Raikes Foundation.

“The views of the nation’s educators should serve as both a reality check and a wake-up call,” said Christopher B. Swanson, Vice President of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit organization that publishes *Education Week*. “Despite the fact that teachers and administrators believe that engagement in schooling is the most important contributor to student success, most of those educators say that less than half their student are highly engaged and motivated.”

Among the study’s key findings:

- The teachers and school-level administrators surveyed identified student engagement and motivation as the most important driver of student achievement, ranking higher than teacher quality and a range of other influences examined.
- Only four in ten educators say the majority of students at their schools are highly engaged and motivated. Engagement levels for specific groups of students vary considerably around the national average.
- Almost all respondents report that a lack of student engagement and motivation is a concern at their schools. Most also feel too little attention is given to promoting engagement among their students.
- Most respondents believe that they are themselves good at motivating students, but they give more measured endorsements to the abilities of their fellow teachers and administrators.
- Less than half of respondents believe their pre-service training adequately prepared them to engage and motivate students. Views of in-service training are slightly more positive.
- Teachers and administrators report facing a broad array of challenges in engaging students, with a lack of parental support and inadequate time and resources among the leading barriers.
- Educators find a variety of strategies effective for motivating students, including using interactive and hands-on activities and building relationships with students.

Special Online-Only Resources at edweek.org

- The full *Diplomas Count 2014* report and interactive tools: www.edweek.org/go/dc14.
- The Education Week Research Center’s full report, *Engaging Students for Success*: www.edweek.org/media/EWRC_EngagingStudents_2014.pdf.

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The Education Week 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.