Preventing Future High School Dropouts

An Advocacy and Action Guide for NEA State and Local Affiliates
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By Marcella R. Dianda, Ed.D.
National Education Association

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Let us be absolutely clear about the dropout problem.

Year in and year out, it takes a terrible toll on our young people, especially in poor and minority communities. For America, the costs of doing nothing about dropouts are enormous and far outweigh the costs of action.

Second, the dropout problem will not be solved in a month or a year. It has been with us for as long as there have been schools. At education conferences in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, how to keep students in school often topped the agendas. Back then, getting just half the general student population to graduate high school was considered a worthwhile but lofty goal. Today, of course, such a graduation rate, even for a single group of students or district, is unacceptable.

Third, and most importantly, measures can be taken to prevent students from dropping out. Yes, the problem is chronic and deep-rooted, and yes, it has bedeviled us for years, but that is no excuse for inaction. The dropout problem is not intractable.

Again, let us be absolutely clear. There are solutions, and educators are a part of those solutions, but we are not the solution. This has to be a collaborative effort. This is why NEA has joined with organizations such as America’s Promise Alliance and Jobs for America’s Graduates to prevent students from dropping out.

I know some of NEA’s local and state affiliates are already engaged in serious dropout prevention work. I hope this advocacy and action guide enriches your ongoing efforts. What’s more, I hope the guide will encourage those of you who have not yet engaged in this important work to begin.

The guide presents concrete practices and policies that will enable you to make a difference. And please note that many of the same measures we have been advocating to close the achievement gaps also help solve the dropout problem: preschool that is free and available to all; full-year public kindergarten; smaller class sizes, especially in the early grades; timely and targeted interventions for students with attendance, behavioral, or academic problems; and improved professional development for educators.

Likewise, as educators, we know we have to do a better job in the curriculum and in our classrooms of engaging minority students, be they American Indians or Native Hawaiians, Blacks or Latinos. The renowned African American author, Ralph Ellison, had some excel-
lent advice for us: “If you can show me how I can cling to that which is real to me, while teaching me a way into the larger society, then I will not only drop my defenses and my hostility, but I will sing your praises and help you to make the desert bear fruit.”

I am under no illusions, however, that dropout prevention will be easy. If it were, the dropout problem would have been solved by now, and we could focus our energies elsewhere.

It has been 10 years since the U.S. Department of Education published a dropout report entitled No More Excuses. In the preface to that report, the authors wrote this: “What troubles us and adds to our collective impatience in submitting this report is precisely that so much of this has appeared so often in the research literature…. Yet the nation has failed to put this knowledge to work…”

That is sobering. But NEA is determined to put its knowledge to work to solve the dropout problem, as part of our commitment to transform public education by 2020. We and our partners see this as a marathon, not a sprint, and we plan to cross the finish line together.

Dennis Van Roekel
NEA President
About the Author

Marcella Dianda is a Senior Policy Analyst in the NEA Human and Civil Rights Department. In education for 30 years, she worked in educational research and development prior to joining the NEA. While at NEA she has written numerous policy papers for NEA and other audiences. In her present position, she focuses on closing student achievement gaps and high school dropout prevention. Her doctorate is from UCLA.
NEA state and local affiliates have an important role to play in preventing students from dropping out of high school. Although the issue is complex, it is possible to prevent future dropouts, and this Guide can help affiliates meet this important goal.

Why Affiliates Should Read This Guide

Each chapter of the Guide is written for NEA state and local affiliates. Recognizing that leaders and staff are busy, the Guide:

1. Identifies areas and school districts with the highest dropout rates and discusses what affiliates can do about it;
2. Supports affiliates’ advocacy efforts in addressing out-of-school factors that increase dropout rates;
3. Shares school practices and policies that increase high school graduation rates;
4. Identifies effective dropout prevention programs;
5. Documents the negative effects dropouts have on the nation’s economy;
6. Demystifies graduation and dropout statistics.

Chapter 1: What NEA Has To Say About Dropout Prevention

Over the past few years, NEA has released its dropout prevention and intervention plan; published criteria that characterize a great public school; and proposed a new balance in the federal, state, and local education partnership to make every public school great by 2020.

Dropouts Can Be Prevented through Focused Action. In its dropout prevention and intervention plan, NEA advances strategies from preschool through age 21:

1. Intervene prior to kindergarten;
2. Involve families in students’ learning;
3. Provide students with individual attention;
4. Monitor students to track their academic progress;
5. Involve the community in dropout prevention;
6. Provide educators with the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out;
7. Implement career and workforce readiness programs in schools;
8. Provide graduation options for students;
9. Raise the compulsory school attendance age;
10. Open graduation centers for students who are 19–21 years of age;
11. Gather and report accurate dropout rates;
12. Increase federal funding to support dropout prevention.
These 12 action steps are supported by NEA’s vision of great public schools. These are schools with quality programs and services that meet the full range of children’s needs; high expectations and standards; a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum; and a qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce.

**A New Federal Role Would Address Factors Contributing to Dropping Out.** NEA proposes a new balance in the federal, state, and local education partnership to make every public school great by 2020. The new balance requires federal leaders to more fully support states and districts and to assist them in addressing some of the key factors that contribute to high dropout rates. NEA recommends that the federal government:

1. Require states to develop “Adequacy and Equity” plans describing how they will remedy disparities in educational tools, services, opportunities, and resources among districts and schools as part of their applications for funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

2. Guarantee full funding for Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Pair full funding with additional federal resources to meet the needs of special populations of students (e.g., English Language Learners, low-income students).

3. Address social and economic factors that affect students’ learning, such as poverty, lack of stable housing, and limited or no access to healthcare.

4. Support teachers at each stage of their career by promoting high entry standards, supporting beginning teachers, and providing ongoing professional development.

5. Work with states to attract, support, and retain a diverse and qualified teaching staff in high-poverty schools, including high schools.

6. Increase federally funded education research and dissemination.

**Make Every Public School a Great School by 2020.** The central feature of a new balance among federal, state, and local education roles is the partners’ commitment to make every public school great by 2020. NEA has advanced seven criteria for a great public school:

1. Quality programs and services that meet children’s education, health, and nutritional needs so they come to school every day ready and able to learn;

2. High expectations and standards, with curriculum that focuses on critical thinking, communication and literacy skills, and a deep understanding of content;
3. Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning, including smaller class sizes; safe, healthy, modern, and orderly schools; and up-to-date technology and materials;

4. Using student assessment results to identify policies and programs that will improve learning;

5. Parent, family, and community involvement in students’ learning and in the life of schools;

6. A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce to provide an excellent education for all students;

7. Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding to make every public school a great school.

Chapter 2: Why High School Dropouts Are Everyone’s Concern

Dropping out of high school has significant negative consequences for the individual and society. The cost of doing little or nothing about high school dropouts is enormous, while investments in dropout prevention promise significant benefits.

Dropouts Hurt the Nation’s Competitive Edge. The U.S. ranks 18th in high school graduation rates among developed countries, and workers with more than a high school diploma are predicted to increase by only 4 percent through 2020. At the same time, the nation’s senior population will balloon over the next two decades, especially when compared to the number of working-age Americans.

Dropouts Are Prevalent in Some Rapidly Growing Racial/Ethnic Groups. The greatest population growth in the U.S. is among racial and ethnic groups that have traditionally had lower levels of educational attainment (i.e., high school diplomas and college degrees). By 2020, the country’s working-age population (ages 25–64) will be 30 percent Latino and Black—groups whose high school graduation rates have been below 60 percent.

Dropouts Earn Less and Contribute Fewer Tax Dollars to the Economy. The lifetime income difference between high school graduates and dropouts is estimated to be $260,000; the difference in lifetime income tax payments is $60,000. The combined lifetime earning losses of one group of 18-year-olds that never completes high school (about 600,000 students) is $156 billion or 1.3 percent of Gross Domestic Product. If the U.S. could cut the number of high school dropouts in a single cohort of 20-year-olds (approximately 700,000 individuals) in half, the country would gain $45 billion through extra tax revenue and reduced public health, crime and justice, and welfare payment costs—and the $45 billion would accrue for each successive cohort of 20-year-olds.
Dropouts Have Increased Health Costs. Conservatively, each and every cohort of high school dropouts (based on 600,000 students) represents $23 billion in public health costs and $110 billion in forfeited health and longevity. Compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to suffer from illness or disability and to die prematurely from cardiovascular disease, cancer, infection, injury, and diabetes. If half of the 600,000 students who drop out each year graduated from high school, the lifetime savings in health costs would be $11,700,000.

Dropouts Drive Up Criminal Justice Costs. About 41 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons have less than a high school education. Schooling significantly reduces criminal activity—self-reported crime, arrests, and incarceration. Increasing the high school completion rate of men ages 20–60 by one percent would save the U.S. as much as $1.4 billion per year in criminal justice costs.

Dropouts Draw Heavily on Welfare and Public Assistance. High school dropouts are more likely to be on some form of public assistance. For example, single mothers who lack a high school diploma are very likely to access housing assistance, food stamps, and/or federal assistance to needy families. If all single mothers obtained at least a high school education, the annual cost savings would be $3.8 billion.

Dropouts Are Less Likely To Vote or Engage in Civic Activities. In 2004, college graduates were nearly three times more likely to vote than Americans without a high school degree, replicating a longstanding pattern of political participation directly proportional to educational attainment. Americans with the least education are the least likely to be engaged in civic participation—voting, community involvement, volunteering, charitable work, etc.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?

1. It is possible, even advisable, to advance an economic as well as educational argument when advocating for dropout prevention.

2. A second argument can be advanced for dropout prevention in states and communities with large or growing concentrations of racial-ethnic minority student groups who have traditionally had lower graduation rates.

3. If high school dropouts are everyone’s concern, enlist allies outside the education community in reducing dropout rates. These include business and industry, governors, mayors, state legislators, public health and welfare agencies, the justice system, and community organizations.
Chapter 3: Unraveling Graduation and Dropout Statistics

Understanding how graduation/dropout rates are calculated and what they report better positions affiliates to respond to legislators, board members, and others who cite these rates.

National Graduation Rate Estimates Have Not Changed Very Much. For 35 years, the four-year, on-time public high school graduation rate has ranged between 70-75 percent, depending on how it is calculated. In 2006, it was 74.7 percent. However, graduation rates for most racial-ethnic minority students are lower than the national average. The 2006 graduation rates for students of color were as follows: American Indians/Alaska Natives: 61.8 percent; Latinos: 61.4 percent; Blacks: 59.1 percent; and Asian and Pacific Islanders: 89.6 percent.

Studies Tracking Individual Students Report High Graduation Rates. Three longitudinal studies have tracked individual students in a nationally representative sample through high school and into adulthood. All report graduation rates near or above 80 percent. Rates for Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native students are over 70 percent.

Dropout Rates Show a Mixed Pattern. The event dropout rate (the rate at which students drop out of high school each year) has not changed a great deal over the past 35 years. It was 4 percent in 2006, with considerable variation across states and racial-ethnic groups. Over the same period, the Status Dropout Rate has declined about six percentage points to a little over 9 percent. This Status Dropout Rate indicates the percentage of 16–24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school diploma or equivalent credential such as a GED. It includes individuals who may have attended high school outside the U.S.

State Graduation Rates Have Been a Patchwork. States have used a wide variety of methods to calculate graduation rates. They also vary in their definitions of a regular or standard diploma, in requirements for obtaining a diploma, and in the number and types of diplomas available to students. As a result, comparing states’ graduation rates is fraught with problems, and until each state uses the same calculation method, state-by-state comparisons make little sense.

U.S. Department of Education Moves Toward a Uniform State Graduation Rate. The Department will require states to use a “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” beginning in the 2011–12 school year to calculate disaggregated graduation rates for determining Adequate Yearly Progress under ESEA.

Graduation Rates in 40 States Are Projected To Rise Due to Enrollment Increases. Higher graduation rates are expected in 40 states through 2016 as a by-product of projected student enrollment increases. The increases, which are expected to raise the national graduation rate
by 6 percent, reflect internal migration of students, legal and illegal immigration, and high birth levels among Latinos and Asians.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?

1. Understand how your state calculates graduation rates so you are able to respond to media stories and inquiries.

2. Support a common method of calculating graduation rates and the development of the student data systems required for this calculation.

3. Help members understand available graduation and dropout rate statistics.

Chapter 4: Locating the Dropout “Crisis” in Your State and Community

A single factor characterizes the nation’s dropout crisis: It is located in specific areas, and those areas have been identified. The crisis is among poor, minority students in the largest cities and in specific high schools, many of which are located in urban school districts, on the urban fringe, and in rural county districts. This does not mean that other districts and locations can ignore their graduation and dropout rates, but it is in everyone’s interest to focus on the communities and schools in which there is a graduation/dropout crisis.

Many U.S. cities and urban districts have a dropout crisis. In 2003–04, only about half of the students in the nation’s 50 largest city school districts graduated from high school within four years. And there is an “urban-suburban divide” between dropout rates in these districts and surrounding metropolitan areas. About 58 percent of students in the urban districts graduated from high school compared to 75 percent in nearby suburban communities.

There Are about 2,000 “Weak Promoting Power” High Schools in the U.S. These are schools in which there are 60 percent or fewer seniors compared to the number of freshmen enrolled four years earlier. About half of these high schools are located in cities in the North, Midwest, and West. The other half are located in the Southwest and South, and most of these are in low-wealth rural counties or on the urban fringe. Twenty five percent of these are in single high school districts.

“Weak Promoting Power” High Schools Produce Half of U.S. Dropouts. These schools consistently produce 50 percent of the nation’s dropouts year after year. And they are primarily responsible for the majority-minority graduation gap. Eighty-one percent of Native American, 73 percent of Black, and 68 percent of Latino dropouts come from these schools.

These Are Under-Resourced, Over-Challenged Schools. Over half the schools have been
“weak promoting power” schools for a decade or more. They educate almost exclusively low income students, and less than half receive federal Title I funds. Many struggle with high student retention rates, student performance that is two or more years below grade level, high rates of special education placement, severe student attendance and behavior problems, and high teacher and administrator absenteeism and turnover.

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** Affiliates can do little on their own to address the dropout crisis in communities, school districts, and schools, but they can:

1. Build collective will to take action by working in coalitions, creating partnerships, hosting community conversations, and participating in state and local dropout prevention summits. NEA’s Public Engagement Program provides affiliates with resources to organize community dialogues and follow-up action. NEA is partnering with the America’s Promise Alliance on its Dropout Prevention Campaign, an effort to organize and fund summits in all 50 states and in 50 large cities through 2010.

2. Recognize that solving the dropout crisis may well involve nothing short of community and school transformation. With respect to school transformation, comprehensive school reform, which focuses on every aspect of the school, may be required.

3. Reach out to stakeholders who stand to benefit from school and community transformation, including groups interested in educational excellence, economic growth, social justice, youth development, crime reduction, rural prosperity, and urban renaissance.

4. Involve civic institutions that end up bearing the cost of the dropout crisis in developing and taking ownership in a local plan to address the dropout crisis, including businesses, civic groups, advocacy groups, law enforcement, health care, social service providers, and neighborhood organizations.

5. Encourage legislators to support legislation that creates a federal-state-local partnership to transform schools that produce most of the nation’s dropouts. Such a partnership would bring the technical assistance, capacity building, research, resources, and accountability needed for school transformation.

**Chapter 5: Advocating for Students Who Are at High Risk of Dropping Out**

Students who drop out of high school are distinguished by their home and community circumstances; the schools they attend; and their own attitudes, behaviors, and performance. There are several factors state and local affiliates can address through advocacy or direct action by members.
Low–Income Students. Poverty affects children’s well-being, school readiness, and performance in school. The effects of poverty are profound, from before birth through high school (and into adulthood). And poverty in America continues to grow. More students live in poverty and lack health care today than 35 years ago.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates? Affiliates can advocate for changes outside of school that would improve the lives of low-income students and their families.

1. Increases to the minimum wage;
2. Changes that enable workers to seek and obtain collective bargaining rights and thereby earn higher wages;
3. An expansion of the earned income tax credit, a subsidy for low-income working parents;
4. Access for low-income families to affordable and adequate housing;
5. Adequate health care for low-income children and their families;

Students in Racially Isolated Schools in Low-Income Communities. Almost 2.4 million students—about one in six Black and Latino students—attend “hyper-segregated” schools in which the student population is 100 percent of color. Overwhelmingly, these schools educate high percentages of students from low-income homes and produce low graduation rates and academic outcomes.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates? Affiliates can:

1. Advocate for affordable housing, living wages, and community development to bring jobs to low-income, isolated neighborhoods.

2. Promote social justice for students and their families:

• Speak out against housing segregation.
• Play a part in community campaigns that support options for minority families to move into areas with strong schools.
• Encourage school districts and schools to actively recruit students from White families who have moved into gentrified areas of urban communities.
• Argue against ending court-ordered desegregation in communities that are still under court order. Where desegregation plans are forbidden by the court, encourage school districts to pursue diversity using other measures.
• Argue that public school choice programs, charter and magnet schools, and student transfer programs operate in ways that support integration.
• Advocate for more racially, ethnically, and economically balanced schools.
Homeless Students. In any year, between 575,000 to 1.6 million children in the U.S. are homeless, including students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. Twenty percent of homeless children do not attend school. Over 40 percent of those who go to school attend two different schools during the school year. With each change in schools, a student is set back academically four to six months.

In any year, approximately 500,000 to 700,000 students are in foster care. About half of 15-year-olds in foster care drop out of high school.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates? To ensure that students who are homeless or who are in foster care attend, remain in school, and graduate, affiliates can:

1. Support policy changes and transportation options that enable homeless children and children in foster care to remain in their school of origin, when feasible.

2. Advocate for seamless transitions when children relocate to a new school so they are placed into the instructional program without delay.

3. Support federal and state policy changes that ensure students receive educational services while they are awaiting foster care placement so they do not miss school.

4. Encourage schools to assign an adult advocate for each student who is homeless or who is in foster care.

Dropping Out Is More Likely for English Language Learners. As of 2005, almost one third of Latino students (31%) and nearly one quarter of Asian American students (24%) were English Language Learners. Achievement gaps between English Language Learners and other students can be attributed in large part to a number of inequitable conditions that affect opportunities to learn.

What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates? To remedy inequities in the education of English Language Learners:

1. Secure policy incentives to recruit and retain teachers who are specifically trained and credentialed to teach this student population.

2. Make sure school districts provide schools with adequate instructional materials in English and in students’ primary languages.

3. Advocate for improved school facilities and schools that are safe for employees and students.
4. Make sure teachers receive the professional support from administrators they need to help English Language Learners be successful.

5. Ensure that all English Language Learner students receive the full range of services they need—both to bring them to English proficiency and to improve their performance in academic content areas.

6. Address segregation based on ethnicity, poverty, and language by advocating for dual immersion schools; that is, schools in which students are taught, learn, respond, and study in two languages.

7. Hold policymakers accountable for developing assessments that are appropriate for English Language Learners (including native language tests), and support efforts to use federal funds for this purpose.

**Minority Males Are More Likely To Drop Out.** For example, only 48 percent of Black males in the class of 2004 graduated compared to 59 percent of Black females. Similarly, 49 percent of Latino males, but 58 percent of Latino female students, graduated.

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** Many of the interventions that address poverty, special education placement, and the prevalence of racially isolated schools in low-income neighborhoods apply to minority males. In addition, affiliates can:

1. Work to recruit and retain minority male teachers at all levels of schooling, especially elementary school.

2. Encourage male members of color to serve as mentors for minority male students.

3. Examine minority male students’ representation among students whom schools have suspended, expelled, referred to special education, and enrolled in higher-level classes (e.g., gifted and talented classes; high-level mathematics).

4. Seek out partnerships with state and local organizations advocating for policy and program changes designed to improve the educational outcomes of minority males.

**Special Education Placement.** One in four students in special education dropped out of high school in 2007. They included a disproportionate number of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students who may have been misidentified as needing special education services. For more than 30 years, educators have been concerned that students’ race and ethnicity significantly influence the probability they will be misidentified for special education.
Executive Summary

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** In a 2007 report on disproportionate representation of racial-ethnic minority students in special education, NEA recommends the following:

1. Understand the extent to which the disproportionate placement of racial-ethnic minority, and low-income, students in special education exists in your state or community.

2. Find out more about the referral process. Request information about which students are placed in special education and the reasons for those placements.

3. Identify and change policies or procedures that contribute to disproportionate placement (e.g., eligibility criteria, screening assessments, and definitions of special education categories).

4. Urge states and districts to disaggregate outcome data for students who are in special education by racial/ethnic group, income level, and status as English Language Learners.


6. Argue for changes that can decrease disproportionate placement, including reducing class size so teachers can engage students in personalized learning.

7. Provide members with information on the negative effects of special education placement on students who do not have disabilities. Special education referral and placement should not be used to secure extra support for students with academic or behavior problems, or students who are English Language Learners.

**Poor School Attendance.** Frequent absenteeism is a significant predictor of dropping out. It also is the most common indicator of student engagement. Students who are chronically absent due to poor attendance, frequent suspensions, or long expulsions, are disengaged from the academic and social life of school.

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** Affiliates can help address high student absenteeism by doing the following:

1. Work with members and encourage district and school administrators to strive for 100 percent daily attendance at all schools.

2. Advocate for school policies that require phone calls the first day students are absent to parents or guardians and to the students themselves in the case of high school students.
3. Encourage schools, and members, to communicate regularly with students’ homes about the importance of daily school attendance.

4. Advise districts and schools of the need to identify the reasons students are absent. Are they ill? Do they need to take care of siblings? Are they underperforming at school and, as a result, are reluctant to attend? Are they bored at school? Do they feel isolated? Are they being bullied or harassed?

5. Advocate for more child care options in the community so middle and high school students are not enlisted to care for younger siblings while their parents are at work.

6. Encourage districts and schools to review their expulsion and suspension policies; determine if they disproportionately affect racial-ethnic minority students; move to in-school suspensions; and reserve out-of-school expulsions for students who are a threat to school safety.

**Student Retention.** Research has consistently showed that retaining students in a grade, even in lower elementary grades, provides them with little or no academic advantage and increases the likelihood they will drop out. Retention in ninth grade—the transition year to high school—dramatically increases the likelihood of dropping out.

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** To address student retention, affiliates can:

1. Convene a member task force to analyze district retention policies and determine how retention decisions are made, whether other interventions are tried prior to retention, and the reasons students are retained.

2. Inform members about the downside of retention.

3. Present evidence to the state and local board of education about the negative effects of retention and recommend alternatives.

4. Work to change retention policies so students are promoted to the next grade, and once promoted, receive extra support through highly focused summer school classes, one-on-one tutoring by a teacher or trained education support professional, and/or special courses during the school day that catch them up academically with their peers.

**Academic Failure.** Like grade retention and chronic absenteeism, failing in school is a major factor associated with dropping out. Many students fall behind academically in elementary and middle school, and by the time they reach high school, they are not able to catch up.
What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?

1. Advocate for increased instructional time in reading and mathematics in the daily school schedule.

2. Advocate for reduced class sizes in all grades, including middle school and ninth grade, so students receive more intense and personalized instruction.

3. Encourage schools to provide struggling students with one-on-one tutoring and intense support before school, after school, in summer school, and in the first quarter of each school year.

Chapter 6: Identifying Interventions that Have a Track Record of Success

For at least a decade, researchers have reported a dearth of rigorous evaluations that provide evidence of dropout prevention and intervention programs’ effectiveness. This means that few, if any, of the programs meet the screening criteria or standards for inclusion in reviews.

Five Interventions Demonstrably Raise Graduation Rates. Rigorous evaluations have demonstrated that five interventions increase high school graduation rates, especially for low-income students.

1. Perry Preschool Program: A high-quality program for 3 and 4 year olds consisting of a center-based preschool experience for 2.5 hours per weekday, a child-to-teacher ratio of less than 8:1; teachers trained in early child development and special education; weekly home visits; and group meetings of parents.

2. First Things First: A comprehensive high school reform program that includes small learning communities (no more than 350 students) with dedicated teachers; instructional improvement grounded in high expectations and a rigorous curriculum; and teachers who meet with individual students regularly, monitor student progress, and work with parents to support students.

3. Class size reduction: Four years of schooling (grades K–3) with class sizes reduced from 25 to 15. Thirty years of research has documented the positive effects of reducing class sizes to 18 or fewer students, particularly from kindergarten through grade 3. NEA supports a class size of 15 students in regular programs and a smaller class size in programs for students with exceptional needs.
4. **Chicago Child-Parent Center Program**: A high-quality center-based public school program that provides early childhood education and family support services; high staff-to-student ratios; parent involvement; and health and nutrition services.

5. **Teacher salary increase**: A 10 percent increase in teacher salaries for all years K–12. Using state data over a 10-year period, researchers estimate that, holding all else equal, raising teachers’ salaries by 10 percent would reduce dropout rates by three to six percent.

**Twelve Additional Programs Helped Students toward Graduation.** According to the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse, the following programs have provided evidence that they help students stay in, progress in (e.g., earn credits, grade promotion), or complete high school.

1. Accelerated Middle Schools
2. Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success
3. Career Academies
4. Check & Connect
5. Financial Incentives for Teen Parents
6. High School Redirection
7. Job Corps
8. JOBSTART
9. New Chance
10. Talent Development High School
11. Talent Search
12. Twelve Together

**Chapter 7: Implementing School Practices and Policies To Increase Graduation Rates**

When all is said and done, efforts to prevent students from dropping out will take place in communities, schools, and classrooms that take the following actions:

**Understand the local graduation/dropout challenge:** Any actions states or communities take should be grounded in answers to key questions: 1) Which students are at high risk of dropping out? 2) When are students dropping out? 3) Why do individual students drop out? 4) Which schools did students attend prior to dropping out?

**What Does This Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** To help local communities better understand their graduation/dropout challenge, affiliates can:
1. Encourage districts to use longitudinal, student-level data on attendance, behavior, and academic performance to gather accurate information on the number of students who drop out; identify students who are at high risk of dropping out before they reach key academic transitions (e.g., into middle school, into high school); and identify events in students’ lives outside of school that increase their risk of dropping out.

2. Urge schools to assess students’ sense of engagement and belonging in school. Gathering information about school climate or the nature of teacher-student interactions can help schools identify potential drop outs.

3. Argue for accurate information about why students dropped out. Often codes that districts and schools use to document students’ withdrawals provide little information about why students left school.

4. Make sure districts collect information about high schools with high dropout rates. These schools may inadvertently be organized in ways that contribute to, rather than reduce, dropout rates. Researchers have identified a number of questions that can guide this data gathering.

**Build an Early Warning System:** For most students, the decision to drop out of school is the final step in a process that began years earlier, so it is important for districts and schools to build an early warning system. The system focuses on key transition points in students’ school careers, beginning with the transition into kindergarten.

**What Does this Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?** Affiliates can work with districts, schools, and members to ensure students make successful transitions at key points in their academic career:

1. **Entry into kindergarten:** All children have access to high-quality pre-K education and are ready for kindergarten.

2. **Success in early reading and math:** All students can read on grade-level and do grade-level math by the end of second grade.

3. **Special education placement:** Identification and placement are used exclusively for students with disabilities; placements are not based on poor academic performance, student behavior, or English language proficiency.

4. **Transition to middle school:** Student attendance, behavior, and academic performance is addressed through interventions that are: 1) schoolwide, 2) targeted, and 3) intensive; students receive on-time promotion to the next grade with extra catch-up support.

5. **Transition to high school:** Students receive on-time promotion to 10th grade with extra catch-up support.
6. **Transition to adulthood**: Students have multiple pathways to graduation; school teaches adult behaviors.

**Use a Tiered Prevention and Intervention System**: A tiered intervention system enables schools to react effectively to the first signs of poor attendance, poor behavior, and course failure. Adopted from public health, it works at any level of schooling but is particularly useful in middle schools to ensure that students are on-track to graduation and in high schools to ensure they remain on track.

*What Does this Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?* Work with districts, schools, and members to establish tiered intervention systems that are organized around a set of specific rules that trigger movement between levels.

1. **Tier 1—Schoolwide Interventions**. Applied to all students to establish school norms and practices to prevent poor student attendance and behavior.

2. **Tier 2—Targeted Interventions**. Provided to the 15 to 20 percent of students who need additional support to be successful. Many of the interventions involve adult intervention teams or one-on-one interactions with students.

3. **Tier 3—Intensive Interventions**. Reserved for the 5-10 percent of students for whom targeted interventions are not sufficient. Intensive support can include one-on-one tutoring and counseling as well as family, social service, or community support to address each student’s particular needs.

**Offer Alternative Schedules and School Types**. Rethink schedules for students whose family or financial responsibilities make it impossible for them to attend school during regular school hours by offering instruction in the day, in the evening, and on weekends. Offer alternative school options to students who are over age for the grade they are in, have had interrupted schooling and are seriously behind age-level peers academically, who are teen parents, or who have to work. Alternatives include integrated services schools, targeted schools, transitional schools, and comprehensive alternative schools.

*What Does this Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?*

- Support districts’ efforts to offer students modified school schedules and alternatives to traditional high schools so all students can obtain their diploma.

**Monitor the Effects of High-Stakes Exit Exams**. Due to limited research, the verdict is still out on whether high-stakes tests, including high school exit exams, increase dropout rates. But racial-ethnic minority students are more likely to live in states that tie the exams to graduation.
Executive Summary

What Does this Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates?

• Urge states and communities to monitor the effects of high-stakes testing on dropout rates, including high school exit exams.

Implement School Features that Lead to Higher Graduation Rates: Researchers agree that a common set of school features lead to increased high school graduation rates and educational success:

What Does this Mean for NEA State and Local Affiliates? Work with districts, schools, and members to make sure that:

1. **Schools are personalized:** Small learning environments; caring, long-term relationships between students and adults; student advisory and counseling systems; and effective connections between the school and students’ families.

2. **Schools offer rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction:** High academic expectations; curriculum that connects to students’ lives, cultures, and communities; career and technical education; partnerships with higher education; interdisciplinary courses; and project- and community-based learning.

3. **Schools provide substantive assistance to students:** Teacher collaboration to address the needs of individual students and plan ways to support students; additional academic classes and/or extended learning time; and out-of-classroom assistance, such as one-on-one tutoring.

4. **Schools employ qualified instructional staff:** Skilled and knowledgeable teachers and education support professionals who are expert in their subject matter, the needs of diverse learners, and the learning process.

Design a Dropout Prevention Agenda

NEA state and local affiliates will likely be involved in setting state-specific or community-based agendas to prevent future dropouts. The action steps below summarize information contained in this Guide that supports affiliates’ involvement in agenda setting and implementation.

1. Organize and/or participate in state and local summits to develop action plans to prevent students from dropping out.

2. Participate in the implementation of state and local dropout prevention action plans.
3. Implement programs and interventions that provide convincing evidence they increase graduation rates or have a positive effect on key outcomes leading to graduation (e.g., promotion to the next grade, staying in school).

4. Advocate for longitudinal student-level databases that assign statewide identifiers for individual students, follow them over time, and identify those who are at risk of dropping out.

5. Encourage districts and schools to periodically survey or conduct focus groups with students to gather information on their sense of engagement and belonging in school.

6. Argue for districts and schools to collect accurate information about the reasons students drop out of school to guide future decision making.

7. Advocate for early warning systems that target attention and resources to students who are at risk of not making successful transitions at key points in their academic careers.

8. Advocate for schools to use tiered intervention systems that address students’ attendance, behavior, and academic performance through schoolwide, targeted, and intensive interventions.

9. Urge states and communities to monitor the effects of high-stakes testing on dropout rates, including high school exit exams.

10. Promote the features of schools that research has shown increase high school graduation rates and student success.
Introduction: Why Affiliates Should Read This Guide

This Guide was written for NEA state and local affiliates. Each chapter is tailored for you—busy Association leaders and staff who are dedicated to ensuring that every student in the U.S. attends and graduates from great public schools.

A comprehensive but user-friendly resource, the Guide:

1. Puts the dropout crisis into perspective by identifying where the crisis is located and what affiliates can do about it;
2. Supports your advocacy for improving out-of-school factors that increase dropout rates;
3. Identifies programs that have a track record for helping students stay in school, progress in school, and graduate;
4. Documents the negative effects dropouts have on the nation’s economy;
5. Provides information about school practices and policies that increase high school graduation rates;
6. Demystifies graduation and dropout statistics.

How To Use the Guide

Take advantage of three user-friendly features of the Guide:

1. The Executive Summary condenses much of the Guide’s content and presents recommended action steps;
2. “Highlights” at the beginning of each chapter showcase key content;
3. “Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates” sections in each chapter discuss what affiliates can do to help prevent future dropouts.
Preventing Future High School Dropouts
An Advocacy and Action Guide for NEA State and Local Affiliates
What NEA Has To Say About Dropout Prevention

“NEA’s dropout plan involves strategies that have already been tested and proven.”

Highlights

- Dropout prevention and intervention begins in preschool, extends beyond age 17, and involves families and communities.

- Effective prevention addresses students’ educational and social needs, furnishes them with graduation options, and ensures they have educational experiences that prepare them for additional education and jobs/careers.

- The federal government can help reduce dropout rates by supporting state and local efforts to address educational and economic inequities: One mechanism is “adequacy and equity” plans for states as part of ESEA.

- Every child deserves great public schools with quality programs, qualified staff, and conditions that support teaching and learning.

Over the past few years, NEA has generated the plans and recommendations presented in this chapter of the Guide, beginning with its vision of what constitutes a great public school. That vision is reflected in NEA’s dropout prevention and intervention action plan. Recent recommendations for a new federal, state, and local educational partnership support the dropout action plan and will help create great public schools for every student.

NEA’s Dropout Prevention and Intervention Plan

NEA published its dropout prevention and intervention plan in September 2006. The plan and additional information associated with its release—as well as activities related to the plan’s implementation—are available online at www.nea.org/dropout/index.html. The plan advances strategies from preschool through age 21. Some may require changes in state policy; others require community, school district, or school action. All require substantial investment of resources.

1. Early Intervention Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade 12: Act early so students do not drop out by providing high quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; strong elementary programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work when they enter middle school; and middle school programs that address causes of dropping
out in these grades and ensure that students have access to algebra, science, and other courses that serve as the foundation for success in high school and beyond.

2. **Family Involvement in Students’ Education:** Involve families in students’ learning at school and at home in new and creative ways so that all families—single-parent families, families in poverty, and families in minority communities—can support their children’s academic achievement, help their children engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved in their children’s education from preschool through high school graduation.

3. **Individual Attention for Each Student:** Make sure students receive individual attention in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (15 or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after-school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day.

4. **Monitoring of Academic Progress:** Monitor students’ academic progress during the school year through a variety of measures that provide a full picture of students’ learning and help teachers ensure students do not fall behind academically.

5. **Community Involvement in Dropout Prevention:** Involve the entire community in dropout prevention through family-friendly policies that provide release time for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules for high school students that enable them to attend classes on time and be ready to learn; “adopt-a-school” programs that encourage volunteerism and community-led projects in school; and community-based, real-world learning experiences for students.

6. **Educator Training and Resources To Prevent Dropping Out:** Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out, including professional development focused on the needs of diverse students and students who are at risk of dropping out; up-to-date textbooks, materials, computers, and information technology; and safe, modern schools.

7. **Career and Workforce Readiness Programs for Students:** Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools so that students see the connection between school and careers after graduation. To ensure that students have the skills they need for these careers, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

8. **Graduation Options for Students:** Expand students’ graduation options through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with
alternative schools so that students have other ways to earn high school diplomas. For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences.

9. **Higher Compulsory Attendance Age**: Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21. Just as the compulsory attendance age increased to 16 or 17 at the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical in the 21st century to eradicate the idea of “dropping out” before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education.

10. **Graduation Centers for Older Students**: Establish graduation centers for 19–21 year olds to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students.

11. **Accurate Data on Dropout Rates**: Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates by gathering accurate data for key student groups (e.g., racial, ethnic, and economic); establishing benchmarks in each state for eliminating dropouts; and adopting the standardized reporting method developed by the National Governors Association.

12. **Dropout Prevention as a Federal Priority**: Make high school graduation a federal priority by calling on Congress and the president to invest $10 billion over the next 10 years to support dropout prevention programs and states that make high school graduation compulsory.

Each of the action steps is cross-referenced in a 2007 directory of community-based dropout prevention and intervention efforts developed for NEA by the Youth Development and Research Fund (YDRF). The 22 programs highlighted in the directory met seven YDRF selection criteria: 1) encourages grassroots buy-in; 2) adheres to best practices; 3) demonstrates success; 4) follows a model that can be replicated; 5) collaborates with other programs; 6) forms partnerships among districts, schools, and families; and 7) does not oppose or conflict with locally bargained teachers’ agreements. You can request a copy of *Answering the Call: Addressing the Dropout Trend* at hcrinfo@nea.org.

“All of America’s students do not have access to high-quality public schools. Achievement gaps persist... High school dropout rates, especially among Black and Hispanic students, are disgraceful.”

2
NEA’s Recommendations for New Balance in Federal, State, and Local Education Roles

In July 2008, NEA proposed a new balance in the federal, state, and local education partnership. The new balance requires federal leaders to recognize that “schools, districts and states—not the federal government—are the primary engines of school transformation.” To support state and local education roles, NEA recommends a “Transforming America’s Public Schools Initiative” that addresses key issues related to preventing future dropouts. To “protect and achieve students’ equal access to educational services and support,” NEA proposes that the federal government require states to develop “Adequacy and Equity” plans to receive funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The plans are a practical mechanism to encourage state action. States would describe steps to remedy identified disparities in educational tools, services, opportunities, and resources among districts and schools. NEA recognizes that the remedies may require some states and localities to restructure their tax and finance systems.

In addition, NEA recommends that the federal government guarantee full funding for ESEA, Title I, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). None have ever been funded at authorized levels. Full-funding, NEA argues, should be paired with additional federal resources to meet the needs of special student populations (e.g., English Language Learners, low-income students) and to provide programs for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

NEA also recognizes the need to address powerful out-of-school factors that affect students’ success. It calls for addressing social and economic factors, such as poverty, lack of stable housing, and limited or no access to healthcare, as part of comprehensive strategies to improve students’ educational opportunity.

Acknowledging the central role of teachers, NEA recommends that the federal government support teachers at each stage of their career. This includes promoting high entry standards into the profession, supporting beginning teachers to increase retention, and providing effective ongoing professional development that enhances teachers’ knowledge and skills. The federal government’s role also extends to working with states to develop policies that will attract, support, and retain a diverse and qualified teaching staff in high-poverty schools, including high schools.

NEA’s Criteria for a Great Public School

The central feature of a new balance among federal, state, and local education roles is the partners’ commitment to make every public school great by 2020. NEA has advanced seven criteria for a great public school.

1. Quality programs and services that meet the full range of children’s needs so they come to school every day ready and able to learn: These programs and services include
access to public school pre-K and kindergarten programs; afterschool enrichment and intervention programs; nutrition, including school breakfast and lunch programs; school-based health care and related services; counseling and mentoring programs for students and families; safe and efficient transportation; and safe and drug-free school programs.

2. High expectations and standards, with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for all students: This curriculum focuses on critical thinking, problem solving, high-level communication and literacy skills, and a deep understanding of content. Aligned with standards and assessments, it includes more than what can be assessed on paper and pencil multiple choice tests; hence the need for performance assessments, project-based learning, and other strategies that involve students in their learning and in demonstrating what they have learned.

3. Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning: These conditions include smaller class sizes and smaller learning communities in large schools; safe, healthy, modern, and orderly schools; up-to-date textbooks, technology, media centers, and materials; policies that encourage collaboration and shared decision making among staff; and the providing of data in a timely manner with staff training in the use of data for decision making.

4. A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce in our schools: Beginning with a pool of well prepared, highly skilled candidates for all vacancies, creating this workforce requires quality induction for new teachers with mentoring services from trained veteran teachers; opportunities for continual improvement and growth for all employees; working conditions in which they can be successful; and professional compensation and benefits.

5. Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability by stakeholders: Appropriate accountability means using student assessment results to identify policies and programs that successfully improve student learning and to provide positive supports, including resources for improvement and technical assistance to schools needing help. Schools, districts, states, and the federal government should be financially accountable to the public, with policymakers accountable to provide the resources needed to produce positive results. Accountability systems should be transparent so that policies are determined and communicated in an open, consistent, and timely manner.

6. Parent, family, and community involvement and engagement: This includes policies that assist and encourage the active involvement and engagement of parents, families, and communities in their public schools; that require professional development programs to provide skills needed for effective parental communication and engagement; and that provide employers with incentives, or require them, to grant a reasonable amount of leave for parents to participate in their children’s school activities.
7. **Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding:** Essential prerequisites include a combination of a fair tax structure and the elimination of inefficient and ineffective business subsidies as well as fully funding key programs, such as those required by ESEA, at their authorized levels.

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

Readers will see NEA’s policy recommendations, the elements of its dropout prevention and intervention plan, and its criteria for a great public school throughout the Guide.

**Chapter 2.** NEA sees the urgent need to decrease dropout rates, and the reasons are made clear in this chapter’s discussion of the consequences of dropping out of high school for the individual and society.

**Chapter 3.** NEA’s recommendations to report more accurate and reliable dropout and graduation rates provide the backdrop for a review of the current state of calculating and reporting these rates. The enormous variety brings NEA’s call for a uniform method into sharp focus.

**Chapter 4.** The communities and schools discussed in this chapter all have high dropout rates and would benefit from many of NEA’s recommendations, including adequacy and equity plans connected to ESEA; Title I funding; adequate, equitable, and sustained funding of Title I and IDEA; and safe, modern schools.

**Chapter 5.** Readers will see many of NEA’s suggestions reflected in specific steps the Guide recommends state and local affiliates consider as advocates for students who are at high risk of dropping out of high school.

**Chapter 6.** In part, implementing NEA’s dropout prevention and intervention plan—or state and local plans affiliates help develop and implement—rests on effective programs and interventions. This chapter identifies programs that have track records of success in preventing students from dropping out of high school.

**Chapter 7.** This chapter focuses on three recurring themes in NEA’s advocacy for students who are at risk of dropping out: 1) act early in students’ academic careers; 2) address the factors—both inside and outside of school—that contribute to students dropping out; and 3) intervene immediately when students need extra support to stay on track to graduation.
Why High School Dropouts Are Everyone’s Concern

“When a student drops out of school, we all pay. The dropout rate has serious economic, societal, and political effects on our nation.”

Highlights

• As “Baby Boomers” retire, and the number of working-age Americans shrinks as a share of the population, the fastest growing segment of the workforce will be racial-ethnic groups that have had lower high school graduation rates.

• Each group of 18-year-olds who fail to graduate forfeits $156 billion in lifetime earning, and costs the nation $58 billion in lost income tax revenue.

• Conservatively, each and every cohort of dropouts costs $23 billion in public health care costs.

• Incarcerated at twice the rate of high school graduates, dropouts drive up criminal justice costs.

• Dropouts are less likely to vote or volunteer in their communities.

Dropping out of high school has significant negative consequences for the individual and for society. If the nation decides to do little or nothing about high school dropouts, it will pay dearly for years to come. But if it invests in dropout prevention and intervention, it will accrue enormous benefits. It is that simple. But the critical question remains: “Does the U.S. have the political will to invest the resources to substantially reduce dropout rates and eliminate disparities among racial and ethnic groups?” Evidence to date suggests the answer is no. This chapter of the Guide highlights reasons why the answer should be “yes.”

Dropouts Hurt the Nation’s Competitive Edge

America’s economic leadership has been closely related to its highly educated population. But most recently the U.S. ranked 18th in high school graduation rates among developed nations. It also ranked fifth in the percentage of young adults (aged 25–34) with college degrees. “As global competition heats up, the U.S. is falling behind with respect to educational attainment.”
At the same time, more current workers are nearing the end of their work careers. The leading edge of the “Baby Boomers” will reach age 65 in 2011. By 2030, the entire “Baby Boom” generation will be drawing Social Security. By 2050, retirees will be nearly 20 percent of the population. But the number of working-age Americans will grow more slowly than the retired population, and working-age adults will shrink as a share of the total population.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that growth in the labor force will fall to .5 percent by 2020. This means that the country will have to rely on fewer workers to sustain growth and support “Baby Boomer” retirees. The growth rate in the number of educated workers also is beginning to flatten. The number of workers with more than a high school diploma increased by 20 percent between 1980 and 2000, but is predicted to increase by only 4 percent through 2020.

**Dropouts Are Prevalent in Some Rapidly Growing Racial-Ethnic Groups**

The greatest population growth in the U.S. is among racial-ethnic groups, some of whom have lower levels of educational attainment, i.e., high school diplomas and college degrees. Latinos, for example, will increase from 14 percent of the population in 2005 to 29 percent in 2050. One in five Americans (19%) will be foreign born in 2050, which will surpass historic peaks for immigrants as a share of the country’s population.

In contrast, Whites, who were 67 percent of the population in 2005, will be 47 percent in 2050. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2020, the country’s working-age population (ages 25–64) will be 30 percent Latino and Black—groups whose high school graduation rates have been below 60 percent.

**Dropouts Earn Less and Contribute Fewer Tax Dollars to the Economy**

High school graduates earn 43 percent more than non-graduates, and college graduates earn more than 150 percent—one and a half times—more than high school dropouts. The lifetime income difference between high school graduates and dropouts is estimated to be $260,000, and the difference in income tax payments is $60,000. Female dropouts earn $120,000 to $244,000 less than female high school graduates; male non-graduates earn $117,000 to $322,000 less than male graduates. When these estimates are aggregated over one group of 18-year-olds who never complete high school after dropping out (about 600,000 students), their combined lifetime earning losses are $156 billion, or 1.3 percent, of Gross Domestic Product. These foregone wages result in $58 billion in lost income tax revenue and another $36 billion in other lost tax revenue.

Students who do not complete high school also have trouble finding jobs because they do not have required skills and they lack a diploma. They are more likely to be unemployed, out of the labor force, or “discouraged workers” (i.e., people who would like a job but have given
up looking for work). In 2003–04, for example, a little over half of high school dropouts (53%) were employed, nearly 40 percent were out of the labor force, and 7 percent were unemployed.21

Once high school dropouts get jobs, those jobs offer lower wages and benefits. Dropouts are half as likely to have jobs that provide pension plans or health insurance, for instance. They also work fewer weeks per year than high school graduates. Table 1 compares the differences in annual earnings among 18–24 year olds who were dropouts, high school graduates, and college graduates. Additional education results in salary increases, with males benefiting the most, followed by Blacks and Asians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Annual Earnings of Young Adults, Ages 18–24, by Educational Attainment, 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No high school diploma</td>
<td>Diploma or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>19,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>20,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Planty, et al., 2008, p. 128
Note: Information was not provided for other racial-ethnic groups.

If the U.S. could cut the number of high school dropouts in a single cohort of 20-year-olds (approximately 700,000 individuals) in half, the country would gain $45 billion through extra tax revenue and reduced public health, crime and justice, and welfare payment costs—and the $45 billion would accrue for each successive cohort of 20-year-olds.22

Dropouts Have Increased Health Costs

Conservatively, each and every cohort of high school dropouts (based on 600,000 students) represents $23 billion in public health costs and $110 billion in forfeited health and longevity.23 Compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to suffer from illness or disability and to die prematurely from cardiovascular disease, cancer, infection, injury, and diabetes.
Dropouts also are disproportionately represented among Medicaid recipients. More than one quarter of uninsured Americans are high school dropouts. Only eight percent of high school graduates (and only 1% of college graduates) enroll in Medicaid; 25 percent of dropouts do so. Dropouts also enroll in Medicare (due to disability) at twice the rate of high school graduates.

On average, the public health costs for each high school dropout are $2,700 annually, and the average high school dropout consumes $59,000 in discounted public health insurance by age 65 compared to $23,000 for high school graduates. If half of the 600,000 students who drop out each year graduated from high school, the lifetime savings in health costs would be $11,700,000.

**Dropouts Drive Up Criminal Justice Costs**

The most recent survey of prisoners’ characteristics (conducted in 1997) found that about 41 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons had less than a high school education. In comparison, only 18 percent of the general population age 18 or older had not finished high school in 1997. Other data from the survey indicated that inmates who were dropouts were more likely to have served a prior prison sentence and were more likely to have been sentenced as juveniles.

Researchers have concluded that schooling significantly reduces criminal activity—self-reported crime, arrests, and incarceration. More specifically, a one-year increase in average years of schooling reduces murder and assault arrests by 30 percent, motor vehicle theft by 20 percent, arson by 13 percent, and burglary and larceny by 6 percent. Similarly, a 10 percent increase in high school graduation rates reduces arrest rates by 5-10 percent through the increased wages graduates earn.

If high school graduation rates in 1990 had been one percent higher, nearly 100,000 fewer crimes would have been committed. The direct costs of one year of high school were about $6,000 per student in 1990. Society has since lost as much as $2,100 per year in costs of crime for each male non-graduate from that year. And in terms of cost savings, “a one percent increase in the high school completion rate of men ages 20–60 would save the U.S. as much as $1.4 billion per year in criminal justice costs.”

**Dropouts Draw Heavily on Welfare and Public Assistance**

High school dropouts are more likely to be on some form of public assistance. As was noted previously, dropouts are less likely to be employed, earn lower wages when they are employed, and are unemployed for longer periods of time than high school graduates. Single mothers who lack high school diplomas are very likely to access housing assistance, food stamps, and/or federal assistance to needy families. In fact, of the 1.2 million single mothers who received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) in 2002, nearly half were dropouts.
Researchers estimate there would be a total annual cost savings of $3.8 billion in three programs (TANF, housing assistance, and food stamps), if all single mothers obtained at least a high school education. If they obtained more than a high school education, cost savings would be $5 billion per year, and if they all went on to post-secondary education, savings could approach $11 billion annually.\textsuperscript{32}

**Dropouts Are Less Likely To Vote or Engage in Civic Activities**

Dropping out of high school not only costs individuals and society in terms of income and productivity, it can also be a “grave loss to democracy.”\textsuperscript{33} For example, in 2004, college graduates were nearly three times more likely to vote than dropouts, replicating a longstanding pattern between political participation and educational attainment.\textsuperscript{34} Americans with the least education are the least likely to be engaged in civic participation—voting, community involvement, volunteering, charitable work, etc. College graduates are four times as likely to volunteer as dropouts, and twice as likely to engage in public work in their communities.\textsuperscript{35}

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

Students who drop out of high school greatly diminish their future prospects and, as a result, contribute less to economic competitiveness and the common good in terms of taxes and civic participation. Dropouts also disproportionately contribute to increased health, criminal justice, and welfare and public assistance costs. Conversely, taxpayers can enjoy sizeable savings if high school graduation rates increase, even by as little as 1 percent. This means that it is possible, even advisable, to advance an economic as well as educational argument when advocating for dropout prevention and intervention programs.

In addition, through mid-century, dramatic demographic growth is predicted among students who have not traditionally had high graduation rates, especially Latinos. This suggests a second argument that can be advanced, especially in states and communities with large Latino communities. But projections that 30 percent of the future workforce will be Latino and Black also argue for increasing graduation rates in majority Black communities.

Finally, the data presented in this chapter argue that high school dropouts should be everyone’s concern. This suggests the wisdom in enlisting allies outside of the education community to help reduce dropout rates. Logical allies include business and industry, governors, mayors, state legislators, state and local boards of education, public health and welfare agencies, the justice system, and community organizations.
Unraveling Graduation and Dropout Statistics

“Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates by gathering accurate data for key student groups.”

Highlights

• The U.S. on-time graduation rate has remained remarkably stable over the past 35 years: 70 to 75 percent of U.S. public school students graduate from high school within four years.

• Many high school dropouts do not remain dropouts. They either re-enroll in high school and earn their diploma, or they earn a GED. Nearly 90 percent of 18–24-year-olds have a high school diploma, GED, or other equivalency credential.

• Currently, states’ NCLB-reported high school graduation rates are higher—some say unrealistically higher—than those reported by the U.S. Department of Education or Education Week.

There is no lack of graduation and dropout statistics. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics recently reported on nine high school graduation rates that have been calculated by states, federal agencies, and researchers. To simplify matters, the U.S. Department of Education has proposed that states calculate graduation rates using the same method, beginning in 2008-09. This chapter of the Guide provides an overview of the dizzying array of high school graduation/dropout rate statistics. Understanding how they are calculated and what they report better positions affiliates to respond to news stories, state reports, legislators, and others who cite these rates.

National Graduation Rates

The Current National Rate

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the nation’s official graduation rate in 2006 was 73.4 percent. But as Table 2 illustrates, in any given year, there are usually two, and sometimes three, studies that report a national graduation rate. This will be the case for reports from other sources issued later this year. There are many reasons for the different graduation rates. Statisticians use different calculations, include (or exclude) students who earn degrees other than regular diplomas, calculate four- and five-year graduation rates, and rely on different databases for their calculations.
Methodological differences notwithstanding, researchers have concluded there is reasonable agreement across reports and across years to identify a range within which the national graduation rate falls. The public high school graduation rate ranges between 70 and 75 percent, figures that some observers find disappointing given the nation’s substantial investment in educational reform over the past 30 years.

Graduation rates for students of color are lower than the national average (see Table 3). Education Week, for instance, reported only modest increases from 2003–2005. Graduation rates among American Indian/Alaska Native students have generally been the lowest, but the U.S. Department of Education reported a considerable increase in 2006 to nearly 62 percent. Graduation rates for Black and Latino students were in the 50-60 percent range between 2003 and 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Graduation Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stillwell and Hoffman (U.S. Department of Education, 2008)</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sable et al. (U.S. Department of Education, 2007)</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Week (2008)</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Week (2007)</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seastrom et al. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006)</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Week (2006)</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene and Winters (2006)</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren (2005)</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laird et al. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006)</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swanson (2004)</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene and Foster (2003)</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Graduation Rate Estimates by Student Racial/Ethnic Groups, 2003–06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Class</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Stillwell and Hoffman, 2008; 2 Education Week, 2008; 3 Education Week, 2007; 4 Education Week, 2006

And while current graduation rates are highest among Asian/Pacific Islander students (89.6% in 2006), this designation includes over 50 ethnic groups and 100 language groups from East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. In a recent report, the College Board observed “there are significant number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander students who struggle with poverty, who are English-language learners increasingly likely to leave school with rudimentary language skills, and who are at risk of dropping out, joining gangs, and remaining on the margins of society. . .” Among the most economically disadvantaged are Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian students whose families are from rural Southeast Asia. Failure to report achievement data for these and other individual groups masks their performance; consequently, NEA has recommended disaggregating data within the Asian/Pacific Islander category by ethnicity.

By comparison, the graduation/dropout rates of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) students are not even available. A 1989 study, for example, reported that 28 percent of gay and lesbian students drop out of school due to peer harassment. More recent surveys indicate that GLBT youth ages 13–20 were more than twice as likely as the general secondary school population to say they were not planning on completing high school or going on to college.

One more piece of information about the graduation rates in Table 3: They are from the two major sources that educators, policymakers, and the media cite—the U.S. Department of Education and Education Week. The graduation rates that each have reported in any given year have been different, with the Education Week rate being lower than the rate calculated by the Department.
For example, in 2004–05, the most recent year in which rates from both sources are available, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that the national graduation rate was 74.7 percent. *Education Week* calculated a 70.6 percent national graduation rate for that year. One of the major differences is how retained ninth graders are accounted for in the calculations.\textsuperscript{47}

*Education Week* includes all ninth graders (entering students and students who have been retained) in its calculations. Retained ninth graders are far more likely to drop out of school compared to students who have not been retained in ninth grade; in fact, it is a key predictor of dropping out in nearly every study.\textsuperscript{48}

In contrast, the U.S. Department of Education excludes students who are retained in ninth grade by using the average enrollments in eighth, ninth, and tenth grades as a proxy for the size of the entering ninth grade class (i.e., first-time ninth graders). The result: Graduation rate estimates from the U.S. Department of Education are higher than those reported by *Education Week*.

Over the past 10–20 years, the number of ninth graders has grown substantially, which is primarily the result of increased retentions. Nationally, there are 12-13 percent more public school ninth graders than eighth graders in the previous school year; for Blacks and Latinos there are 25 percent more.\textsuperscript{49}

**The National Graduation Rate over Time**

Deciding whether the national graduation rate has increased or decreased depends on at least two factors: the time span and the specific dropout rate under consideration. Take the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate reported by the U.S. Department of Education as an example. It is the percentage of public high school students who received their diploma four years after beginning their freshman year. Over the past 10 years, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate has ranged between 70-75 percent (see Table 4). In fact, it has been within this range for many years. In 1977, for example, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate was 74.7.\textsuperscript{50}
### Table 4
**Averaged Freshman Graduation and Status Completion Rates, 1995–2005**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (Percent)</th>
<th>Status Completion Rate (High School Completion Rate)&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, March 2008  
<sup>2</sup> Laird et al., 2006

A second rate that is often cited—the Status Completion Rate (also called the High School Completion Rate)—has increased over time, rising steadily since 1980. It was approximately 88 percent in 2005, the most recent year for which data are available (see Table 4). This matches Canada’s high school completion rate and is higher than rates in three other English-speaking industrialized countries (the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand).<sup>51</sup>

The Status Completion Rate reports the percentage of 18–24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school but have a high school diploma or an equivalent credential such as a GED certificate. It also includes individuals who may have completed high school outside the U.S.<sup>52</sup>

In 2005, Asian/Pacific Islanders had the highest Status Completion Rate (approximately 96%) followed by Whites (92%), Blacks (86%), and Latinos (70%) (Because of small sample sizes, American Indians/Alaska Natives and Asian/Pacific Islanders are only included in the totals). More than half of the completers (55%) were 18–21 years of age.<sup>53</sup>
Another View of National Graduation Rates

Substantially higher graduation rates have been reported for participants in three national longitudinal studies: the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS 88), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY 79 and NLSY 97), and the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS 2002). All track individual students in a nationally representative sample through high school and into adulthood; some verify high school graduation by reviewing students’ transcripts.

All the national longitudinal studies report graduation rates near or above 80 percent (see Table 5). These are four-year, on-time graduation rates, with the exception of the ELS 2002 study that reports rates for 2006, two years after students’ expected graduation. On-time graduation rates are not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Longitudinal Study</th>
<th>NELS 88</th>
<th>NLSY 79</th>
<th>NLSY 97</th>
<th>ELS 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one race</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Mishel and Roy, 2006; Bozick, Lauff and Wirt, 2007
NA=Not Available.

Among NELS 88 participants, 78 percent graduated in 1992 on time and with a regular high school diploma. Eight percent more went on to obtain a GED certificate.54 Similarly, 84 percent of participants in NLSY 79, and 82 percent of NLSY 97 participants, graduated within four years with regular high school diplomas.55 And by 2006, two years after their expected high school graduation date, 88 percent of ELS 2002 sophomores had graduated from high school.56

Longitudinal data provide another perspective on graduation rates of students of color. Most are over 70 percent, and in some studies exceed 80 percent. Almost two-thirds of Black students (63.2) graduated on time in 1992 with a regular diploma. By 2000, nearly three
quarters (74.4%) had earned their diplomas, and another 13.6 percent had earned their GEDs. Only 12 percent remained dropouts eight years later. Patterns for Latino, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and White students are the same. In each case, individuals who did not graduate within four years either went back to high school or earned a GED so that by the time they were 26 years old, very high percentages had completed high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Regular diploma in 1992</th>
<th>Regular diploma in 2000</th>
<th>GED in 2000</th>
<th>Dropouts as of 2000</th>
<th>Regular diploma or GED by 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All 1988 8th Graders</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mishel and Roy, 2006

Some researchers maintain that the considerably higher graduation rates longitudinal studies report reflect the nation’s “real” graduation rates. Because they track individual students over time, they are able to calculate exact measures of high school completion. In contrast, studies that rely on enrollment and diploma data to estimate graduation rates, such as those reported in Table 2, produce inaccurately low graduation rates say these researchers.

**National Dropout Rates**

The National Center for Education Statistics reports two dropout rates each year: the Status Dropout Rate and the Event Dropout Rate. The Status Dropout Rate has declined over the past 35 years from 14.6 percent in 1972 to 9.4 percent in 2005. It reports the percentage of
16–24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school diploma or equivalent credential, such as a GED. The Status Dropout Rate includes all young people in this age range regardless of when or where they attended high school, which may have been outside the U.S.\(^5^9\)

Relative to other groups, in 2005, Latinos had the highest Status Dropout rate (22%). The Latino rate may reflect immigrants, ages 16–24, who did not complete high school in their home countries prior to coming to the U.S. The 2005 Status Dropout Rates for other racial-ethnic groups were: Blacks (10.4%), Whites (6%), American Indian/Alaska Native (14%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (3%).\(^6^0\)

The Event Dropout Rate is the rate at which students drop out each year. More specifically, it captures the percentage of young adults, ages 15–24, that dropped out of grades 10–12 in both public and private high schools in the 12 months between one October and the next. The national Event Dropout Rate ranged between 3.6 and 6.7 percent from 1972–2004.\(^6^1\)

In 2006, it was four percent, with considerable variation across states. Nationally, the rates were highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (7.4%) and lowest for Asian/Pacific Islander students (2.4%). Event Dropout Rates for other student groups were 2.7 percent (White), 6 percent (Latino), and 6.1 percent (Black).\(^6^2\)

**The General Education Development (GED) Certificate**

Dropping out of high school is not an irreversible decision. Some students drop out but later either re-enroll or go on to earn a GED certificate or other credential (see Table 6). The GED is accessible to any adult in the U.S. 16 years or older who does not have a high school diploma or credential and who is not enrolled in an educational program.

According to the American Council on Education, which administers the GED testing program, slightly less than two percent of eligible adults (676,000 individuals) took the GED Tests in 2006. More than two-thirds (68.7%) passed. Thirty percent were 16–18 year olds who had been out of school a year or less.\(^6^3\)

The GED certificate is not equivalent to, nor does it have the market value of, a regular high school diploma. Nevertheless, studies show that the GED allows recipients, especially male recipients and those who get their GED within a few years of dropping out of high school, to earn more than high school dropouts and to go on to higher education and training programs.\(^6^4\) For example, follow-up with students who dropped out in 1988 showed that individuals who earned a GED (or other credential) within four years of dropping were more likely to be employed and to earn higher salaries than those who took four to six years, and as long as 12 years, to get a GED.
However, earning a GED certificate appears to be a better option for males than females. On average, males who had dropped out in 1988 and had received their GED (or another credential) by 1992 earned $32,800 in 2000. Females only earned $26,400. Among late completers—those who completed their high school education by spring 2000—the differences were dramatic. Males earned $26,800 while females only earned $15,100, which was about the same as young women who had never completed high school ($15,200).

States’ Graduation Rates

The state graduation rate landscape is no less confusing than the national landscape. States have used a wide variety of methods to calculate graduation rates. And states vary in their definitions of a “regular or standard” diploma, in requirements for obtaining a diploma, and in the number and types of diploma options available to students. As a consequence, comparing states’ graduation rates is fraught with problems, and until they use the same calculation method, state-by-state comparisons make little sense.

In 2005, in an effort to bring some uniformity to the way states calculate graduation rates, the National Governors Association (NGA) called for states to use a common method. Later that year, every governor signed the NGA Graduation Counts Compact and made a commitment to a common calculation method. According to NGA, 16 states currently calculate and report graduation rates that are consistent with the formula agreed to in the Compact. By 2012, NGA expects 45 states will use the Compact formula.

The Compact rate is a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate calculated by dividing the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier. Graduates are defined as those receiving any kind of high school diploma. Under this definition, states can make adjustments for students who transfer in and out of schools, and for students with disabilities. If needed, English Language Learners can be assigned to a later student cohort so they have more time to graduate. NEA has endorsed NGA’s Compact.

Influenced by the Compact, the U.S. Department of Education recently unveiled “a uniform and more accurate measure of calculating graduation rate that is comparable across states.” This a four-year adjusted cohort rate, which the Department defines as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier (adjusted for transfers in and out, émigrés, and deceased students). The adjusted-cohort rate includes students who
earn a regular high school diploma at the end of their fourth year of high school as well as those who graduate early, and if a state chooses, students who earn their diploma the summer immediately following their fourth year. To remove a student from a cohort, a school or district must confirm in writing that the student has transferred to another school or educational program leading to a regular high school diploma, has immigrated to another country, or is deceased. The Department argues that “requiring school officials to have written confirmation before removing a student from a cohort will improve the accuracy of graduation rate calculations.”

In recognition that some students may need longer than four years to graduate, states can apply to the Department to use an “extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.” Calculated in addition to the four-year rate—and reported separately—the extended rate is defined as the number of students who graduate in four years plus cohort members who earn a regular high school diploma on an extended timeline. This figure is divided by the adjusted four-year cohort rate that is adjusted further for students who entered or left the cohort by the end of the extended graduation year. States will be allowed to calculate an extended-year rate that combines a five-year and a six-year graduation rate or they can calculate more than one extended-year graduation rate (i.e., a five-year rate and a six-year rate).

With respect to the timeline for implementing these new graduation rates, the Department has established requirements related to reporting and Adequate Yearly Progress requirements under No Child Left Behind. In the 2008–09, 2009–10, and 2010–11 school years, states must use either a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate or an approved “transitional” graduation rate to determine Adequate Yearly Progress for students in the aggregate. For reporting purposes, states must disaggregate these rates for student subgroups at the school, district and state levels. (States also can report any extended-year rate separately).

The “transitional” graduation rate is available until 2010–11 to states that cannot yet calculate the required four-year adjusted cohort rate. But the transitional rate must still measure the percentage of students from the beginning of high school who graduate with a diploma in four years, or it must meet a Department-approved different definition the state provides that measures the rate at which students graduate with a regular diploma.

By 2011–12, all states must use the four-year adjusted cohort rate that is disaggregated for student subgroups for Adequate Yearly Progress determinations.

In addition, by the end of the 2009–10 school year, states must establish a single graduation rate goal (i.e., the rate they expect all high school students to meet) as well as annual graduation targets that “reflect continuous and substantial improvement from the prior year toward meeting or exceeding the goal.”
Finally, the Department is requiring each state to revise its Accountability Workbook to include: 1) its current definition of graduation rate; 2) its progress toward meeting the 2011–12 deadline for calculating and reporting the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate; 3) its graduation rate goal and targets; and 4) an explanation of how the graduation rate goal represents the rate it expects all high schools to meet and an explanation of how graduation targets demonstrate continuous and substantial improvement toward meeting or exceeding the goal. If a state decides to use an extended-year rate as part of its Adequate Yearly Progress definition, it must describe how it will use that rate along with its four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate to determine whether schools and districts have made Adequate Yearly Progress.

**Three Different State Graduation Rates**

Differences between the graduation rates states and independent researchers calculate average 11 percent but have been as high as 30 percent in specific instances. In most cases, states’ estimates are higher—unrealistically high say some observers. And, although more and more states have been adopting the NGA Compact formula, in 2006–07, states still used five different graduation rate calculations for NCLB accountability. And NGA reports that in 2006, 38 states reported a Leaver Rate instead of, or in addition to, the Compact Rate. The Leaver Rate is among those formulas criticized for inflating states’ graduation rates.

Table 7 reports three different public high school graduation rates for 2004–05, the latest year for which data are available for all three rates. The first is the graduation rate states reported for NCLB accountability purposes using calculation methods of their choosing; the second is the U.S. Department of Education’s Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate; and the third is the rate reported by *Education Week*. Three differences are worth noting. First, the rates tend to vary, sometimes substantially, in any given state. Second, the graduation rates that states report for NCLB accountability tend to be the highest. Third, for reasons discussed earlier, rates reported by *Education Week* tend to be the lowest.
## Table 7
State-by-State Public High School Graduation Rates, 2004–05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>State-Reported NCLB Rate¹</th>
<th>Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate²</th>
<th>Education Week Rate³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>87.4</td>
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<td>73.6</td>
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<td>74.7</td>
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<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>80.1</td>
<td>77.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>83.3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
State Enrollment Projections and Graduation Rates

Looking ahead, higher graduation rates are expected in 40 states through 2016 as a by-product of projected student enrollment increases (See Table 8). For the nation as a whole, student enrollment records will be set every year. The unprecedented number of high school students, which will swell to more than 15 million by 2016–17, is expected to increase the national graduation rate by six percent.
### Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Idaho</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<td>10.7</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
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<td>Alaska</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>–9.3</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>–2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>–7.0</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>–2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>–6.4</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>–2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>–3.6</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>–0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>–2.8</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>–0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>–2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Husar et al

Enrollment increases are expected to be more than 30 percent in Nevada and Utah; nearly 30 percent in Arizona and Texas; and about 25 percent in Idaho and Georgia. Overall, 16 states can expect enrollment increases of 10 to 36 percent. The enrollment increases reflect internal migration of students, legal and illegal immigration, and high birth levels among Latinos and
Asians. As a result, some of the projected increases in graduates in 2016–17—a reflection of the number of high school seniors expected that year—are substantial: Nevada (68%), Utah (45%), Arizona (43%), Florida (33%), and Georgia (28%).

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

Getting a handle on graduation and dropout statistics is grounded, in part, in understanding how various graduation/dropout rates are calculated. Equally important is knowing if a rate includes public and private school students, covers one year or several years, or counts graduates of schools in the U.S. as well individuals who live here but completed their high school degree in another country (see sidebar).

It also is worth considering long-term trends because they put annual graduation/dropout statistics into perspective. The nation’s graduation and dropout rates have remained remarkably consistent over the past 35 years. The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for the nation as a whole has ranged between 70–75 percent. Similarly, the national Event Dropout Rate has stayed within a 3 to 7 percent range. The Status Dropout Rate has declined about six points and the Status Completion Rate has increased about four points during the same time period.

What is on the horizon and what does it mean for affiliates? Projected school enrollment increases in 40 states are expected to raise graduation rates simply because of the larger number of high school students. As significant, the high school graduation rate landscape will likely change as the U.S. Department of Education’s uniform graduation rate takes effect in all states in 2011-12.

According to a 2007 survey, 43 states said they have student data systems in place that enable them to meet this requirement if it is enacted. States that implemented these data systems only recently may need time to accumulate four years of student data to calculate the required rate; others have reported they did not yet have the necessary data infrastructure.

Overall, the information in this chapter of the Guide suggests that affiliates are wise to:

1. Understand how your state calculates graduation rates so you are able to respond to media stories, inquiries from policymakers, and questions from members.

2. Help members understand available graduation/dropout rate statistics.

3. Support a common calculation of graduation rates and the development of the kinds of student data systems required for this calculation.
## Graduation/Dropout Statistics At-a-Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation/ Dropout Statistics</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics, U.S Department of Education</td>
<td>Estimates the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time by dividing the number of graduates with regular diplomas by the size of the incoming freshman class four years earlier. Estimates the size of the incoming freshman class by summing the enrollment in grade 8 in one year, grade 9 for the next year, and grade 10 for the year after, and then dividing by three. The averaging is intended to account for student retentions in grade 9.</td>
<td>Ranged between 70-75% since late 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Promotion Index</td>
<td><em>Education Week</em></td>
<td>Estimates the probability a public school student in grade 9 will complete high school on time with a regular diploma. Multiplies together three grade-to-grade promotion ratios (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation).</td>
<td>Negligible change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Completion Rate</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics, U.S Department of Education</td>
<td>Includes the percentage of 18–24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school, but have a high school diploma or an equivalent credential such as a GED certificate. Includes individuals who may have completed their high school education outside the U.S.</td>
<td>Increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Dropout Rate</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics, U.S Department of Education</td>
<td>Includes the percentage of 16–24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school diploma or equivalent credential such as a GED. Includes individuals in this age range, regardless of when or where they attended high school, which may have been outside the U.S.</td>
<td>Decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Dropout Rate</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics, U.S Department of Education</td>
<td>The rate at which students drop out each year. Captures the percentage of young adults, ages 15–24, that dropped out of grades 10–12 in both public and private high schools in the 12 months between one October and the next.</td>
<td>Fluctuates from state to state. Steady nationally since 1990.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Locating the Dropout “Crisis” in Your State and Community

“Many of our public schools are remarkable and offer their students an excellent education. But America’s students do not have equal access to high quality public schools.”

Highlights

• Dropout rates have reached crisis proportions in many large cities/urban districts and in a select number of high schools, many of which are located in urban areas and in rural county school districts.

• NEA local affiliates (or NEA/AFT combined affiliates) represent educators in 70 percent of the cities with graduation rates of 50 percent or less.

• Half the nation’s high school dropouts are consistently produced by approximately 2,000 high schools. These are under-resourced, large schools that educate high percentages of low-income, racial-ethnic minority students.

• NEA state and local affiliates cannot solve the dropout crisis alone. It will take collective action and will involve community and school transformation.

A single factor characterizes the nation’s dropout crisis: It is located in specific areas, and those areas have been identified. The crisis is among poor, minority students in the largest cities in the country, and in specific high schools, many of which are located in urban school districts, on the urban fringe, and in rural county districts. This does not mean that other districts and schools can ignore their own graduation and dropout rates. High school dropouts in any area are everyone’s concern because all of society is affected (see Chapter 2). It is in everyone’s interest to get to the heart of the problem. This chapter of the Guide shares studies that have identified those communities and schools where the problem is most acute.

Cities and Districts in Crisis

Many U.S. cities and urban districts have dropout crises. Graduation rates in the nation’s 50 largest cities are showcased in Table 9, which reports rates from Education Week’s EPE Research Center. According to the Center, in 2003–04 only about half (52%) the students in the nation’s 50 largest city school districts graduated high school within four years. This is well below the Center’s calculated national graduation rate of 70 percent and the U.S. Department of Education’s Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for urban districts, which was 60 percent in 2003–04.
Only six cities reached or exceeded the 70 percent national average (Mesa, San Jose, Nashville, Colorado, San Francisco, and Tucson). Thirteen additional cities had graduation rates in the 60 percent range. But in the remaining 33 cities, rates were below 60 percent; in 17 they were below 50 percent. The lowest graduation rates—35 percent or lower—were in Baltimore, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Detroit.

**Table 9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mesa</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>77.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado Springs</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Las Vegas</td>
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<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tulsa</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Beach</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jacksonville</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honolulu</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Oklahoma City</td>
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<td>46.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arlington, TX</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albuquerque</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>45.6</td>
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<td>El Paso</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>45.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>59.8</td>
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<td>Dallas</td>
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<td>43.7</td>
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<td>Columbus</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cleveland</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>50</td>
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</table>

Source: Swanson, April 1, 2008, p. 9
As disturbing, EPE Center researchers report an “urban-suburban divide” between dropout rates in these cities/urban districts and rates in their surrounding metropolitan areas. About 58 percent of students in the urban districts graduated from high school compared to 75 percent in nearby suburban communities. Table 10 shows the difference between suburban and urban graduation rates and the resulting rank in terms of the urban-suburban divide.

On average, there was a 15 to 17 point urban-suburban graduation gap in 2003–04, but the gap is much wider in many locations. The Baltimore metropolitan area had the largest urban-suburban graduation rate disparity (46.9%) followed by Columbus, Cleveland, New York, Denver, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis. In 10 additional cities, the disparity between urban and suburban graduation rates was 20-30 percent. Graduation rates in the urban districts exceeded rates in nearby suburbs in only four metropolitan areas (Phoenix, Mesa, Tucson, Albuquerque, and Memphis). The 50 cities in Table 10 are scattered across 29 states, so your state may not be represented on the list. If that is the case, 2004–05 graduation rates in 50 additional cities are reported by Gorofono and Sable, 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Suburban–Urban Gap</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
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<td>80.5</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
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<td>84.1</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Oklahoma City</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tulsa</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
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<td>83.0</td>
<td>24.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
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<td>87.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacksonville</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles/Long Beach</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A study of the nation’s 100 largest school districts reports they have the following common characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Completion Rate</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dallas/Fort Worth/Arlington</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Beach</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco/Oakland</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashville-Davidson Co.</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Paso</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix/Mesa</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucson</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albuquerque</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado Springs</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisville/ Jefferson Co. 1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas 2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami 3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honolulu 4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Metro Area</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Swanson, 2008

1 Served by combination of suburban and rural school districts.
2 Coincides with Clark County, NV, which is served by a single school district classified suburban.
3 Served by three county school districts classified suburban.
4 All of Hawaii is served by a single school district classified suburban.
1. Larger student enrollments, larger school sizes, and higher median pupil/teacher ratios than the average school district.

2. Higher percentages of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and who attend Title I eligible schools compared to all school districts.

3. Minority student enrollment comprises more than 50 percent of the student population in nearly all the districts and is 75 percent of students in more than one-third.

**High Schools in Crisis**

There are about 2,000 high schools across the U.S. that consistently produce 50 percent of the nation’s dropouts year after year, even though they only educate 18 percent of high school students. What is more, they are primarily responsible for the majority-minority graduation gap, say researchers. Eighty-one percent of American Indian/Alaska Native, 73 percent of African American, and 68 percent of Latino, but only 34 percent of White dropouts, come from these schools.

These are “weak promoting power” high schools in which there are 60 percent or fewer seniors enrolled compared to the number of freshmen four years earlier. To determine a school’s “promoting power,” researchers count the number of students who are on-time graduates as well as students who repeat a grade or enter high school between ninth and twelfth grade. While “promoting power” is not a direct measure of graduation rates, it is a strong indicator of high schools in which students are likely to graduate. The Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University maintains a roster detailing the “promoting power” of “weak promoting power” schools for the graduating classes of 2004–06 online at http://web.jhu/CSOS/images/AP.html.

Florida has the largest number of “weak promoting power” high schools followed by Texas, Georgia, New York, and California. The fewest are in Illinois (see Table 11). But the number of schools tells only part of the story. The concentration of “weak promoting power” high schools also is of interest. States in which high schools with “weak promoting power” comprise a high percentage of their high schools (e.g., Florida, Texas, South Carolina, and Nevada) face particular challenges in turning these schools around.

“The challenge is to develop the capacity, know-how, and will to implement what is known to work in all the high schools in need.”

---

55
Table 11
Ten States with the Largest Number and/or Concentration of “Weak Promoting Power” High Schools, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>“Weak Promoting Power” High Schools</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td></td>
<td>208</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
<td>190</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td>131</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td></td>
<td>124</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
<td>103</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Balfanz, March 27, 2008
Note: The table combines the 10 states with the largest number and the 10 states with the largest concentration of “weak promoting power” high schools.

In addition, about half of “weak promoting power” high schools are located in cities in the North, Midwest, and West (see Table 12). All are in the cities with low high school graduation rates that were discussed earlier: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami, Detroit, Dallas, Houston, Milwaukee, and Jacksonville. The other half are located in the Southwest and South, and most of these are in low-wealth rural counties or on the urban fringe. Overall, 25 percent are in single high school districts.
Table 12
Districts with the Largest Number and Percent of “Weak Promoting Power” High Schools, 2003, 2004, and 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of high schools</th>
<th>“Weak promoting power” high schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee School District</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Unified School District</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia School District</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duval County School District, Jacksonville, FL.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Independent School District</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston Independent School District</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit City School District</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City Public Schools</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>95 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Chicago District 299</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dade County School District, Miami</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22 54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Balfanz, March 27, 2008

Most “weak promoting power” high schools serve high-poverty students, and more than half (56%) serve high concentrations (90% or more) of minority students. Large-size schools and high student-teacher ratios also contribute to their status as “weak promoting power” schools. By and large, they have poor facilities, limited instructional resources, and few additional staff to support students (e.g., counselors, social workers, family outreach coordinators). Many struggle with a number of challenges, including low student retention rates, student performance two or more years below grade level, high rates of special education placement, severe student attendance and behavior problems, and high teacher and administrator absenteeism and turnover.

In addition to being over-challenged, most schools with “weak promoting power” are under-resourced in terms of funding and personnel, especially a highly qualified teaching staff. This means that critical grades, such as ninth grade, are often taught by new, inexperienced, emergency certified teachers or by long-term substitutes. In many places, weak promoting power high schools are in districts that have increased class sizes in high school so they can provide smaller class sizes in elementary schools. Latino students in particular often attend large “weak promoting power” high schools with high teacher-to-student ratios.
Two additional findings about these schools stand out. First, although they educate almost exclusively low income students, less than half of the nation’s “weak promoting power” high schools receive federal Title I funds. Second, over half had been “weak promoting power” schools for a decade or more.\(^9^4\)

But there is cause for optimism. Researchers who have studied high schools with “weak promoting power” argue that, due to their limited number, transformation is feasible. In fact, there were fewer such schools in 2006 than there were in 2001. And “enough is known about reforming low-performing, high-poverty, neighborhood high schools to transform them.”\(^9^5\) There are successful models and experiences that can be adopted and replicated. The challenge, researchers say, is developing the capacity and will to implement comprehensive reform (see sidebar).

### Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

NEA state and local affiliates can do little on their own to address the dropout crisis in the communities, school districts, and schools identified in this chapter of the Guide. But NEA local affiliates (or combined NEA and AFT locals) represent educators in most of the urban school districts highlighted in this chapter. NEA local affiliates also represent educators in most of the suburban school districts that ring these urban cores.

In many cases, solving the dropout crisis will involve nothing short of community and school transformation. Addressing the dropout crisis in urban districts

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**Comprehensive School Reform**

The Comprehensive School Reform Quality (CSRQ) Center defines comprehensive school reform as “a systemic approach to school improvement that addresses every aspect of a school, from curriculum, scheduling, and management to family and community involvement. Rather than use individual, piecemeal programs, effective comprehensive school reform integrates research-based practices into one unified program to raise student achievement.”\(^9^6\)

Some schools choose an external comprehensive school reform model that provides a research-based, replicable set of practices. Other schools choose to develop their own models.

The external models serve as blueprints to guide schools as they make changes in various areas. And while the models vary in focus, philosophy, and method, all are designed to raise student achievement. Typically, the models provide schools with professional development and technical assistance to help them with implementation.

Comprehensive school reform gained momentum with the creation of the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (www.ed.gov/programs/compreform). NCLB increased funding and permanently authorized the Comprehensive School Reform program.

To receive federal funding under NCLB, a school implementing an external comprehensive school reform model or a locally developed model must meet specific requirements specified by the U.S.
successively may require an examination of resources, student enrollment, housing patterns, and employment options in the school districts that comprise an entire metropolitan area. Efforts to transform schools and the community need to involve stakeholders who stand to benefit from the transformation. In addition to the usual partners with whom NEA affiliates work, consider groups interested in educational excellence, economic growth, social justice, youth development, crime reduction, rural prosperity, and urban renaissance.

Equally as important, the civic institutions that bear the costs of the dropout crisis need to be involved in developing a community plan that addresses the dropout crisis—and they, along with the education community, need to take ownership of the plan. These institutions include businesses, civic groups, advocacy groups, law enforcement, health care, social service providers, and neighborhood organizations.

From a broader perspective, NEA local and state affiliates can encourage their legislators to support legislation that creates federal-state-local partnerships to transform schools that produce most of the nation’s dropouts. Such partnerships would bring the technical assistance, capacity building, research, resources, and accountability needed for school transformation. NEA continues to stress the fact that schools, districts, and states are the primary engines of public school transformation. The federal role is to support and accelerate this transformation.

While there are a variety of mechanisms at NEA state and local affiliates’ disposal to build collective will to address dropout crises in local communities, school districts, and schools, two are summarized below. The first is from NEA; the second is from America’s Promise Alliance, an NEA partner in dropout prevention.

**Action Planning through Community Conversations**

Ten years ago, NEA launched its Public Engagement Program (PEP) to provide state and local NEA affiliates with resources to organize broad-based community dialogues focusing on improving public schools. Since that time, hundreds of conversations have taken place across the country, providing the opportunity for students, parents, educators, clergy, community, and business leaders to discuss issues that affect their public schools. Dialogues
have ranged from topics such as school safety, parent involvement, school choice, and teaching methods to neighborhood schools and diversity.

In 2007, NEA expanded the community conversation model to motivate communities to move from a single “conversational” event to follow-up action through a four-step process NEA state affiliates can implement by means of competitive state grants.

1. **The Community Conversation.** The Community Conversation is organized and conducted by a coalition committee consisting of a wide variety of community stakeholders representing grassroots, parent, business, faith-based, and ethnic minority organizations. The committee conducts the Community Conversation on a specific date and involves a broad range of participants from key stakeholder groups in the discussion.

2. **Analysis of the Community Conversation.** The coalition committee—and several Community Conversation participants—analyze the Community Conversation experience to 1) identify the most critical issues relating to addressing graduation/dropout rates that surfaced and (2) organize a follow-up collective community action planning session that will focus on the identified issues.

3. **Community Action Planning.** Participants from the original Community Conversation as well as any other interested community members focus on the analysis of the Community Conversation and develop an action plan to address graduation/dropout rates.

4. **Advocate Training and Community Mobilization.** As requested by the community, NEA staff will conduct this training session and provide skill-building tools and materials in the community-identified priority areas. NEA also continues to guide the community during their follow up actions to help ensure long-range success. For more information, contact Rhantgan@nea.org.

**Action Planning through State and Local Dropout Prevention Summits**

NEA is partnering with the America’s Promise Alliance on its Dropout Prevention Campaign, an effort through which America’s Promise Alliance will organize and fund summits in all 50 states and summits in 50 large cities through 2010. NEA has asked state and local affiliates to consider organizing, co-sponsoring, and/or attending these summits, as well as participating in the implementation of state- and community-specific dropout prevention plans resulting from the summits.

The summits bring together educators, mayors, governors, businesses leaders, child advocates, students, and parents to develop action plans for improving graduation rates and students’ college and work readiness. America’s Promise Alliance provides free summit tools and templates on its Web site (www.americaspromise.org). It also provides programs and support for post-summit work and offers summit planning advice.
“For too many poor and minority children, “at risk” describes their fate and not simply their circumstances. We are convinced that by improving both children’s circumstances and their schools, we can change their fate.”

Highlights

- Poverty is the single most powerful demographic factor that increases an individual student’s chances of dropping out of school.

- Attending racially isolated schools with high concentrations of low-income students is another key factor in dropping out.

- Students who drop out also are more likely to be minority males, English Language Learners, and students in special education, including racial-ethnic minority students who do not have disabilities but are over represented in special education.

- Chronic absences from school, retention, and academic failure are other key predictors of dropping out.

Students who drop out of high school differ from those who graduate as early as elementary school. They are distinguished by their home and community circumstances; the schools they attend; and their own attitudes, behaviors, and performance. This chapter of the Guide explores several factors that place students at high risk of dropping out. Some are directly related to schools; others are outside the confines of school but dramatically affect students’ academic success. The list is not exhaustive. It focuses on factors NEA considers key and that state and local affiliates can address through advocacy or direct action by members.

Students Who Live in Poverty

Poverty, and all the conditions it creates, is the single most powerful demographic factor that increases students’ chances of dropping out of high school. It affects children’s well-being, their school readiness, and their performance in school. In any given year, almost twice as many students from low-income homes (defined as the bottom 20% of all family incomes) drop out as do students from middle-class backgrounds.

The most recent data indicate that 38 percent of American school-age children live in families that are “poor” (below the poverty threshold) or “near poor” (at 100-199% of the poverty threshold).
threshold). This includes 60 percent of Black, 59 percent of Latino, and 25 percent of White children.\(^{10}\) In addition, approximately 25 percent of Pacific Islander and 18 percent of Asian children were living below the poverty level in 2004.\(^{10}\) And poverty in America continues to grow. More students live in poverty and lack health care today than 35 years ago.\(^{11}\)

The effects of poverty are profound, from before birth through high school (and into adulthood). Poor children are more likely to be low birth weight babies who are at higher risk of having learning disabilities. Poor children also have higher rates of lead poisoning, asthma, iron-deficiency anemia, and undetected vision and hearing problems that impair their learning. Tragically, they often have no access to health insurance, routine preventive medicine, or dental care. As a result, they are absent from school more often due to illness. In addition, few obstetricians, pediatricians, and other primary care doctors practice in their communities. Hunger, lack of adequate housing, and residential mobility also affect their performance in school.\(^{11}\)

In *Kids Count 2008*, the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported on key factors that shape children’s lives, affect their well-being, and put them at greater risk of academic failure, including dropping out of high school (see Table 13). Living in a single-parent household, for example, is associated with higher dropout rates. Sixty five percent of Black children (ages 1–14), and nearly half of American Indian/Alaska Native children, live in single-parent households, usually headed by a female.

Many children of color—including 50 percent of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native children—also live in homes where their parents are not employed full time. And when parents are employed, it is often in lower paying, low-skill jobs that do not have benefits such as health insurance.\(^{11}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13</th>
<th>Selected Indicators of Child Well-Being, Ages 1–14, by Race and Ethnicity, 2005 and 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>National average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low birth weight babies</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child death rate</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen death rate</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent household</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents not employed full-time</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from *Kids Count Data Book*, 2008, p. 33.

Child death rate = deaths per 100,000 children ages 1–14; Teen death rate = deaths per 100,000 children ages 15–19.

Poverty = income below $20,244 for a family of four in 2006.
According to the U.S. Department of Education, seven out of 10 of entering kindergarten students from Latino and Black families, and six out of 10 entering kindergarteners from Asian/Pacific Islander families, have one or more of the following family background risk factors: 1) a mother who has less than a high school education; 2) a family on welfare or receiving food stamps; 3) a single-parent family; and 4) parents whose primary language is a language other than English. A separate study reports that 39 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native children under five live in poverty, twice the rate for five-year olds.

To put these statistics into a broader perspective, the U.S. ranked 20th among 21 industrialized countries in a 2007 UNICEF study of child well-being. America’s dismal performance was largely accounted for by high percentages of children living in single-parent homes and in homes with equivalent incomes below 50 percent of the national median. The U.S. has had the highest rate of child poverty among rich nations for over a decade.

To make matters worse, progress in improving the quality of children’s lives in the U.S. has stalled, ending an eight-year upward trend from 1994 through 2002. Economic recession and slow growth in 2001–2002 negatively affected the poverty rate for families with children; the rate at which low-income, single-parents were able to get jobs; and median family income. At the same time, children’s health continued to decline, sinking to its lowest point since 1975. The downward trend was driven largely by a slowdown in the improvement of child mortality rates and a dramatic rise in childhood obesity.

Children’s well-being is expected to continue its decline through 2008 (and possibly beyond) because of the nation’s current financial crisis. “Rapidly increasing amounts of debt, high job losses, skyrocketing gas and food process, and a tidal wave of foreclosures are driving many American families to the edge of financial ruin.”

Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

The Association cannot eradicate poverty, but it can advocate for changes outside of school that would improve the lives of low-income students and their families. Even “modest social and economic reforms well within our political reach” could substantially ameliorate the effects of poverty on students’ learning and on their academic success." Affiliates can:

1. Advocate for increases to the minimum wage. While parents of school-age children may not work for the minimum wage, many work in industries with wage structures that are tied to the level of the minimum wage. “An increase in the minimum wage could well have an influence on student performance, comparable to the influence of within-school educational reforms.”

2. Advocate for changes in state laws that enable workers to seek and obtain collective bargaining rights and thereby earn higher wages.
3. Advocate for an expansion of the earned income tax credit, a subsidy for low-income working parents.

4. Advocate for low-income families’ access to affordable and adequate housing. High mobility rates contribute to low student attendance (and in some cases, to homelessness) and lower achievement. And while there are many reasons for low-income families’ high mobility, one reason is the lack of affordable housing.

5. Advocate for adequate health care for low-income children and their families. These could be school-based health clinics that serve children and their parents through high school, community-based clinics that serve children as well as adults, or cooperative arrangements between schools and health agencies.¹²²

6. Advocate for early childhood education for all low-income children. High-quality early childhood education has been shown to demonstrably increase graduation rates (see Chapter 6). In fact, there is strong evidence that high-quality pre-school and early childhood programs close gaps in school readiness between middle- and low-income children. Positive effects include significant reductions in special education placement and grade retention.¹²³ Former preschoolers also have lower teen parenting rates, fewer health problems and a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect, and they engage in less criminal activity.¹²⁴

NEA believes high quality early childhood programs are rooted in these characteristics:¹²⁵

- Well-rounded curriculum that enhances young children’s cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development;
- Small class sizes and low child-teacher ratios;
- Educators who are caring and well-trained in early childhood education and child development;
- Parents who work with educators as partners in their child’s development;
- Programs that address child health, nutrition, and other family needs as part of a comprehensive service network.

Students Who Attend Racially Isolated Schools in Low-Income Neighborhoods

Almost 2.4 million racial-ethnic students attend “hyper-segregated” schools in which the student population is 90-100 percent of color. Overwhelmingly, these schools educate high percentages of students from low-income homes and produce low graduation rates and academic outcomes.¹²⁶ For example, in almost half (42%) of “weak promoting power” high schools, more than 70 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.¹²⁷ Nearly 40 percent of both Black and Latino students attend intensely segregated schools in which students of color are 90-100 percent of the student body; approximately 75 percent
attend schools in which students of color are a majority. And while Asian Americans, as a whole, are the most integrated group in the country in terms of schooling and residential patterns, one-third (34%) of Asian/Pacific Islander students attend schools in which ethnic-minority enrollment is 75 percent or more. Many American Indians/Alaska Natives also attend racially isolated schools in urban areas and on reservations.

Racially segregated schools generally have fewer qualified and experienced teachers, higher rates of administrator and teacher turnover, lower per-pupil spending, limited academic offerings, larger class sizes, and fewer basic educational supplies. They generally are located in low-income, low-opportunity, racially and ethnically isolated neighborhoods characterized by shortages of jobs; street violence; drug and alcohol abuse; domestic violence; decaying, inadequate, and crowded housing; and a lack of positive role models. They also provide little or no access to “social networks that open doors to life opportunities in the form of college access and jobs.”

Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

Affiliates can help address the lack of educational opportunity in racially isolated, low-income schools if they:

1. Advocate for affordable housing and living wages so families can move up the economic ladder.

2. Advocate for community development to bring jobs to low-income, isolated neighborhoods.

3. Speak out against housing segregation, “a powerful root of many forms of racial inequality including segregated (i.e., racially isolated) schools.” While housing discrimination has been illegal since the late 1960s, there has been limited enforcement of fair housing laws. Moreover, “all recent studies have shown serious continuing discrimination in rentals, sales and housing financing.”

4. Work with community campaigns that enable minority families to move into areas with strong schools. Encourage school districts to actively recruit White families who have moved into gentrified areas of urban communities into the public schools.

5. Argue against ending court-ordered desegregation in communities that are still under court order. Ending the court order could strip local authorities of any right to take actions they believe are needed to address racial separation.

6. Where desegregation plans are forbidden by the court, encourage school districts to pursue diversity using other measures such as geographic diversity, linguistic diversity, and economic and test score diversity.
7. Promote public school choice programs, charter schools, and student transfer programs that support integration. Make sure magnet school desegregation policies are maintained wherever possible.

8. Advocate for more racially/ethnically and economically balanced schools. Research shows that low-income minority students who attend middle- and upper-middle class schools, and therefore have access to more and better educational resources, have more academic success and higher high school graduation and college attendance rates than their peers who remain in schools with concentrated poverty. Under the 2007 Supreme Court ruling on school desegregation, communities can adjust school attendance boundaries to ensure more integrated student populations; build new schools in locations that are likely to create a racially and economically diverse school; use schools and transfer options that allow students to attend public schools in racially and economically balanced neighborhoods; and attract diverse students by allocating resources to special programs (e.g., dual language programs, and International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs) and schools (e.g., magnet schools).

Students Who Are Homeless or Are in Foster Care

Homelessness. For most children, being homeless is temporary, but studies have documented similar negative outcomes for homeless and low-income housed children. Homelessness, researchers conclude, can function as a “marker of risk” for children; that is, children who are homeless are likely to have a higher prevalence of problems than other children, but not necessarily higher than a comparison group of similarly poor, but housed children. Overall, homelessness is one stressor that some children living in poverty encounter.

One of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children. Families comprise 34 percent of the homeless (23% children and 11% adults) on any given night. This translates to about 420,000 families, including 924,000 children, a year. Among low-income families, about eight percent of households and nine percent of children have been homeless during the past year. Many more children live in families who are precariously housed, in doubled-up situations with other families, or in substandard housing.

Lack of affordable housing, especially in urban areas, is the main cause of homelessness among children who live with their families. Low wages, unemployment, domestic violence, illness, and mental health issues dramatically increase the risk of experiencing homelessness.
According to the Urban Institute, “compared to poor children who are housed, homeless children have worse health (more asthma, upper respiratory infections, minor skin ailments, gastrointestinal ailments, parasites, and chronic physical disorders); more developmental delays; more anxiety; more depression and behavior problems; poorer school attendance and performance; and other negative conditions.”¹⁴⁴

The Congressional Research Service estimates that between 1 million and 1.7 million adolescents are homeless, runaways, or “throwaways,” (i.e., were asked to leave their homes, are current and former foster youth, and/or have mental health or other issues).¹⁴⁵ According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless, between 20 and 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered.¹⁴⁶ Homeless youth, in particular, are at risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, chemical or alcohol dependency, and death.¹⁴⁷

**Foster Care.** In any given year, approximately 500,000 to 700,000 students are in foster care.¹⁴⁸ Only 54 percent of young adults who age out of care at age 18 have completed high school. Similarly, 15-year-olds in foster care are about half as likely as other students to have graduated from high school by age 20. About half (55%) drop out of high school.

Over one third of young adults who had been in foster care reported they changed school five or more times while they were in elementary and secondary school, which increased their risk of failing a grade and of repeated behavior problems. On average, teens in foster care read only at the seventh grade level after completing 10th or 11th grade. And several studies show that anywhere between 23 and 47 percent of children and youth in foster care receive special education services at some point in their schooling.¹⁵⁰

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

To ensure that students who are homeless or in foster care attend school, remain in school, and graduate, affiliates can:

1. Support policy changes at state and local levels that would enable homeless children and children in foster care to remain in their school of origin, when feasible.

2. Help develop creative transportation options that allow children to stay in the same school, even if they change foster care families or move to different homeless shelters.

3. Work to promote seamless transitions when children relocate to a new school so they are placed into the regular instructional program without delay.

4. Support federal and state policy changes that will ensure students receive educational services while they are awaiting foster care placement so they do not miss school.
5. Encourage schools to assign an adult who is invested in the student’s education to each student who is homeless or in foster care.

**Students Who Are English Language Learners**

As of 2005, almost one third of Latino students (31%) and nearly one quarter of Asian American students (24%) were English Language Learners. Most of these students were born in the U.S. In fact, of the 15.7 million children who lived in “immigrant families,” only 3.1 million were born outside the U.S.\(^{151}\)

Approximately half of immigrant students enroll in middle or high school when they come to the U.S. They often encounter four challenges: 1) catching up academically, 2) acquiring academic proficiency in English, 3) earning credits to graduate, and 4) passing high-stakes tests, such as high school exit exams.\(^{152}\) In addition, some are over-aged for their grade levels because they were retained in school in their home countries or they experienced interrupted schooling. As a result, “students who arrive after age 13 are particularly at risk of being overlooked and underserved and, as a group, are more likely to drop out.”\(^{153}\) (Suarez-Orozco, 2008, p. 15). Studies show, for example, that while older immigrant students tend to display attitudes and behaviors related to school success, the longer they are in the U.S., the more negative they become toward school and the less hopeful they are about their future.\(^{154}\)

Like newcomer immigrants, students who are born in the U.S., but enter school with limited English proficiency, must master the English language skills that are necessary to compete successfully with native English speakers. Research has long documented that, on average and under optimal conditions, it takes five to seven years to acquire academic mastery of English.\(^{155}\) Policies that demand students demonstrate mastery on much shorter timelines (e.g., three years), coupled with requirements that they take standardized tests designed for native-born English speakers, contribute to dropout rates.\(^{156}\)

With respect to Latino students who are English Language Learners, Gándara (2008) notes that achievement gaps can be attributed to inequitable conditions that adversely affect their opportunities to learn and, that lead to an inferior education, even when compared to other poor and low-income students.

Chief among these is access to appropriately trained teachers who were fully certified to teach English Language Learners. Students also experience: 1) inequitable access to appropriate assessments to measure their achievement, gauge their learning needs, and hold the system accountable for their progress; 2) less time on academic tasks than other students; 3) limited access to appropriate materials in their native languages and to developmentally appropriate instructional materials and curriculum to learn English; 4) inequitable access to school facilities that are conducive to teaching and learning; and 5) “intense segregation” in schools and classrooms that compromise their opportunity to receive an education that is comparable in quality and scope to other students.\(^{157}\)
Many of these same problems are mirrored in the education of Asian/Pacific Islander students. In addition, they are less likely to find any significant representation of their own ethnicity among the staff or to hear their native languages used by other students or staff in the schools they attend. As a result, many Asian/Pacific Islander students, especially those who belong to post-Vietnam War era immigrant communities (but who were born in the U.S.) are at high-risk of being linguistically isolated.\textsuperscript{158}

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

To remedy inequities in the education of English Language Learners, affiliates can:

1. Help recruit teachers who are specifically trained and credentialed to teach this student population. Work for statewide and/or local incentives to encourage individuals from students’ racial-ethnic groups to become teachers. Incentives could include reduced tuition or tuition free college and teacher preparation, one-year tuition reimbursement for each year of successful teaching, and low-interest home ownership programs.\textsuperscript{159}

2. Work to ensure schools serving English Language Learners have adequate teaching and learning conditions so members want to work in these settings. Make sure school districts provide schools with adequate instructional materials in English and in students’ primary languages. Advocate for improved school facilities and schools that are safe for staff and students.

3. Make sure teachers receive the professional support they need to help English Language Learners be successful. To support affiliates that provide professional development for members, NEA has developed *English Language Learners: Culture, Equity & Language Training Module for Closing the Achievement Gaps*. The module provides research-based and classroom-focused strategies. For more, send an email to hcrinfo@nea.org.

4. Ensure that all English Language Learners receive the full range of services they need to bring them to English proficiency and to improve their performance in academic content areas.\textsuperscript{160}

5. Address segregation based on ethnicity, poverty, and language by advocating for dual immersion schools. According to the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, there is no legal bar to considering language in assigning students to school, but there is a “powerful educational justification for creating schools that are intentionally and positively integrated across lines of language.”\textsuperscript{161} Dual immersion has positive academic and linguistic effects.
6. Advocate for equitable and meaningful assessment of English Language Learners. “There is no research support for using English language tests to assess students who do not speak English.” Hold policymakers accountable for developing assessments that are appropriate for English Language Learners (including native language tests), and support efforts to use federal funds for this purpose.

Students Who Are Minority Males

The gender gap in graduation rates cuts across all racial and ethnic groups but is larger for Black and Latino male students. For example, for the class of 2003, graduation gaps between White and Asian male students and their respective female counterparts were small (5% and 3%). In contrast, only 48 percent of Black males graduated compared to 59 percent of Black females. Similarly, 49 percent of Latino males, but 58 percent of Latino females, graduated.

But researchers urge that “many of the areas in which we see boys struggling are connected to larger educational and social issues and are not just a function of gender but reflect racial and economic achievement gaps. In the aggregate, minority boys are not doing well, and the evidence suggests there also is good reason to be concerned about urban, rural, and low-income boys as well as boys with disabilities.”

In 2006, more than half of Black male students—the group for which there currently is the most information—did not graduate on time. And the 10 states with the nation’s lowest graduation rates enroll 40 percent of the nation’s Black male student population. Moreover, 75 percent of Black male dropouts attended “weak promoting power” high schools (see Chapter 3).

In addition, Black boys were disproportionately underrepresented in Gifted/Talented programs and in Advanced Placement courses. Black and Latino boys are much more likely to be retained than White boys or girls of any racial/ethnic group. And boys—especially minority boys—are more likely than girls to be suspended or expelled from school.

Across all racial/ethnic groups, twice as many males as females are identified for special education services in elementary schools. Males are 75 percent of students with specific disabilities, 76 percent of students receiving services under the “emotionally disturbed” category, and more than 50 percent of students receiving speech/language therapy services. Students in special education have higher dropout rates than other students (see discussion below).

Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

Many of the interventions discussed elsewhere in this chapter apply to minority males; that is, they address student poverty, practices for referring students for special education...
services, and strategies to decrease the prevalence of racially isolated schools in low-income neighborhoods. Minority male students also would benefit from the specific prevention strategies discussed in Chapter 7 that address student behavior, academic success, and attendance.

In addition, affiliates can:

1. Work to recruit and maintain minority male teachers at all levels of schooling, especially elementary school.

2. Encourage male members of color to serve as mentors for minority male students.

3. Work to change district or school policies that disproportionately affect minority males, e.g., discipline, special education referral, and access to gifted and talented programs and advanced level classes.

4. Seek out partnerships with state and local organizations that advocate for policy and program changes designed to improve the educational outcomes of minority males.

**Students in Special Education**

In 2006, one in four students who received special education services dropped out. Only 57 percent graduated with a regular high school diploma. In some states, 40 to 50 percent of students in special education graduated with modified diplomas, certificates of completion, or some similar document. Many employers and institutions of higher education question the value and rigor of these “lesser” graduation documents.

Some of the students in special education who drop out or graduate with less than a regular high school diploma have been misidentified as needing special education services. This is particularly true of racial-ethnic minority and low-income students. In fact, their disproportionate representation in special education has been a concern for more than 30 years. With respect to racial-ethnic minority students, Blacks and American Indians / Alaska Natives, particularly, have been disproportionately placed in special education. American Indian / Alaska Native children receive special education services at twice the rate of the general student population. Black students viewed as having “challenging behaviors” are referred to special education because of emotional disabilities more often than other students.

In a 2007 report, NEA noted that the inappropriate placement of a student in special education who does not have a disability has long-lasting harmful effects. Once students receive special education services, they tend to remain in special education classes. Disproportionate placement of minority students in special education also contributes
to significant racial segregation. And misidentified students experience a limited, less rigorous curriculum, are subject to diminished teacher expectations, and have less access to academically able peers.

As the number of students who are English Language Learners grows, there is increasing concern about their disproportionate placement in special education. Studies show that special education placement is prevalent among students who have limited proficiency in their primary language or in English and that the probability of placement increases as the primary language support they receive in school is reduced. Some researchers suggest that the size of the English Language Learner population influences special education placement. Students tend to be overrepresented in special education in districts with small numbers of English Language Learners and underrepresented in districts with larger enrollments where more services, support, and expertise to educate English Language Learners are available.

Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

In its 2007 report on the disproportionate representation of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in special education, NEA recommends the following:

1. Understand the extent to which the disproportionate placement of racial-ethnic minority and low-income students in special education exists in your state or community. Find out more about the referral process. Request information about which students are placed in special education and the reasons for those placements.

2. Identify and change policies or procedures that contribute to disproportionate placement. Special education eligibility criteria, screening assessments, and definitions of special education categories (e.g., learning disabilities and emotional disturbance) can all contribute.

3. Advocate for the disaggregation of outcome data for students who are in special education by income, racial-ethnic group, and English Language Learner status; for definitions of special education categories that are valid, non-discriminatory, and supported by research; and for screening assessments that are culturally appropriate, fair, and valid.


5. Advocate for changes in procedures and practices that can decrease the disproportionate placement of ethnic minority and low-income students in special education, including reducing class sizes so that teachers can engage students in personalized learning.
6. Provide members with information on the negative effects of inappropriate placement of students who do not have disabilities in special education. Special education referral and placement should not be used to secure extra support for students with behavior problems, students who are falling behind academically, or English Language Learners.

Students with Poor School Attendance

Frequent absenteeism is a significant predictor of dropping out. Students who are chronically absent are disengaged from the academic and social dimensions of school. As a result, they are more likely to drop out. 183

In his interviews with dropouts, the author of The Silent Epidemic reports that 55 to 65 percent missed class often the year before dropping out. Students described a pattern of refusing to wake up, missing school, skipping class, and taking three hour lunches. Each absence made them less willing to go back to school, so they were absent for longer and longer periods of time. 184

But for many students, chronic absences begin much earlier in their academic careers. In fact, some studies report first grade absenteeism was significantly higher for students who later dropped out of school. In high-poverty neighborhoods, the drop off in attendance between elementary and middle schools can be “staggering.” 185

For other students, absences are related to feeling unsafe at school. For example, the prevalence of various forms of anti-GLBT student behavior in schools often has a detrimental effect on GLBT students’ attendance. In 2005, over a quarter of GLBT students in a national survey reported they had skipped a day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe at school. 186

Schools’ suspension and expulsion policies also can contribute to student absenteeism. Ethnic minority students have especially high rates of office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. 187 For example, American Indian/Alaska Native students are more than twice as likely to be expelled as their White peers in states with high concentrations of American Indian/Alaska Native students. 188 Low-income Black males who are in special education have the highest suspension rate of any student group. And while suspensions tend to be for fewer than 10 days, studies have documented expulsions that have lasted a semester, a year, or longer. 189
Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

Affiliates can help address high student absenteeism by doing the following:

1. Work with members and encourage district and school administrators to strive for 100 percent daily attendance at all schools.

2. Advocate for school policies that require phone calls to students’ parents or guardians—and in the case of high school students, to the students themselves—the first day they are absent, preferably within 30 minutes of the start of school. The objective of the calls: Get students to school that day (or the next).

3. Encourage schools, and members, to communicate regularly with students’ families about the importance of daily attendance. Less than half (47%) of the dropouts who participated in The Silent Epidemic study, for example, said that the school had contacted their parents or the students themselves when they were absent.

4. Urge districts and schools to find out why students are absent. Are they ill? Do they need to take care of siblings? Are they underperforming at school and, as a result, are reluctant to go to school? Are they bored at school? Do they feel isolated? Are they being bullied?

5. Advocate for more child care options in the community so middle and high school students are not enlisted to stay home from school to care for younger siblings while their parents are at work.

6. Encourage districts and schools to review their expulsion and suspension policies; examine records to determine if the policies are disproportionately affecting ethnic-minority students, move toward in-school suspensions, and limit out-of-school expulsions for students who are a threat to other students’ safety.

Students Who Have Been Retained

Dropouts are significantly more likely to have been retained. Research has consistently showed that retaining students, even in lower elementary grades, provides them with little or no academic advantage and increases the likelihood they will drop out.

Retention in ninth grade—the transition year to high school—dramatically increases the likelihood of dropping out. In fact, a group of Chicago researchers can predict 85 percent of eventual dropouts based on just a few facts about ninth graders, including grade retention. On-time promotion to 10th grade has been compared to another critical juncture in students’ schooling: Being able to read on grade level by the end of second grade.
In some districts, ninth grade retention rates are extremely high. For example, a study of Philadelphia schools found that 40 percent of ninth graders had been retained, some more than once. Of the students who dropped out during their third year of high school, close to half had repeated ninth grade three times.\footnote{194}

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

To address student retention, affiliates can:

1. Convene a member task force to review district retention policies to identify how retention decisions are made, other interventions that are tried prior to recommending retention, and the reasons students are retained.

2. Present evidence to the state board of education and local school boards about the negative effects of grade retention.

3. Inform members about the downside of retention.

4. Work to change retention policies so students are promoted to the next grade and, once promoted, receive extra support through highly focused summer school classes, one-on-one tutoring by a teacher or trained education support professional, and/or special courses during the school day that catch them up academically with their peers.

**Students Who Have Experienced Academic Failure**

Like grade retention and chronic absenteeism, failing in school is a major factor associated with dropping out.\footnote{195} In national surveys and longitudinal studies of drop outs, more than one-third said they left high school because of poor grades.\footnote{196} Other indicators of academic failure were low test scores, failing English and mathematics, and falling behind in course credits.\footnote{197}

Many students fall behind academically in elementary and middle school, and they are not able to catch up by the time they reach high school. Almost half (45\%) of dropouts interviewed for a national study said their previous schooling had not prepared them for high school. The majority (57\%) said it was too difficult to pass from one grade to the next and that high school graduation requirements were too difficult.\footnote{198}

Most students who drop out because of academic failure can be identified years earlier. In fact, about 40 percent can be identified in the sixth grade; 75 percent by the ninth grade. Many students struggle in school or disengage from school three, four, or more years before they drop out.\footnote{199} Many later regret they dropped out of school.\footnote{200}
Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates. Researchers recommend a number of actions that affiliates can advance.

1. Advocate for increased instructional time in reading and mathematics in the daily school schedule and instruction that focuses on rapidly closing students’ knowledge and skill gaps.

2. Advocate for reduced class sizes in all grades, including middle school and ninth grade, so students receive more intense and personalized instruction.

3. Encourage schools to provide struggling students with one-on-one tutoring and intense support before school, after school, in summer school, and in the first-quarter of each school year to catch up.  

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Identifying Interventions that Have a Track Record of Success

“Disseminate best practice models and strategies designed to reach students at risk of falling behind and dropping out, as well as those with unique needs.”

Highlights

- Quality early childhood programs, small class sizes, comprehensive high school reform, and teacher salary increases are among the interventions that researchers say have a demonstrable effect on high school graduation rates.

- More than a dozen middle and high school dropout prevention programs have positive effects on staying in school, accumulating course credits, and/or graduating.

It is challenging to find interventions with credible evidence of their effectiveness in increasing high school graduation rates. For at least a decade, researchers have reported the dearth of rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of educational programs in general, and of dropout prevention and intervention programs in particular. This makes it difficult to identify high quality model programs or the components that make them effective. This lack of evidence also means that few, if any, of the programs meet the screening criteria or standards for inclusion in reviews such as those summarized in this chapter of the Guide.

Interventions that Demonstrably Raise Graduation Rates

A recent review of hundreds of studies of various interventions that promised to increase high school graduation rates identified only five that were able to demonstrate they did so “through a rigorous and systematic evaluation.” The five interventions are described in Table 14, which also shows the number of additional high school graduates each would yield if the intervention were provided to 100 students. The Perry Preschool Program is the most effective (19 extra graduates).

The researchers note that “these interventions have shown larger effects for minorities and low-income students, who are most at risk of dropping out, although they may not apply to all students equally.” They caution that other interventions might have even more powerful effects than these five but, absent well-conducted evaluations, they have not provided credible evidence about their effectiveness.
Table 14
Interventions That Demonstrably Raise the High School Graduation Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Additional graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perry Preschool Program</td>
<td>A high-quality program for three and four year olds consisting of a center-based program for 2.5 hours per weekday, a child-to-teacher ratio of less than 8:1, teachers trained in early child development and special education, weekly home visits, and group meetings of parents</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Things First</td>
<td>A comprehensive high school reform program that includes small learning communities (no more than 350 students) with dedicated teachers; instructional improvement grounded in high expectations and a rigorous curriculum; and teachers who meet with individual students regularly, monitor student progress, and work with parents to support the student’s success</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size reduction</td>
<td>Four years of schooling (grades K–3) with class size reduced from 25 to 15 students</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Child-Parent Center Program</td>
<td>A high-quality, center-based public school program that provides early childhood education, family support services, high staff-to-student ratios, parental involvement, and health/nutrition services</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher salary increase</td>
<td>A 10 percent salary increase for K–12 teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Levin et al., Jan. 2007, p. 4.
*For every 100 students involved in the intervention

The Perry Preschool Program is a high quality program that was the focus of the nation’s longest and most comprehensive study of the effects of early child care and education. Beginning in 1962, the High/Scope Perry Preschool study randomly assigned three- and four-year-old African-American children from one neighborhood in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to a group that received high quality early care and education or to a group that received no preschool. The two closely matched groups of children were living in poverty and were at high risk of failing in school. About 75 percent of the children participated for two school years (at ages 3 and 4); the remainder participated for one year (at age 4). Children attended the preschool each weekday morning for 2.5 hours. They were taught by certified public school teachers with at least a bachelor’s degree who worked with no more than eight children at a time. The curriculum emphasized active learning. The children engaged in activities that involved decision making and problem solving and were planned, carried
out, and reviewed by the children themselves, with support from adults. Teachers visited families each week for an hour and a half to discuss their children’s development with them and involve families in implementing the preschool curriculum at home.

In the study’s most recent phase, researchers interviewed 97 percent of study participants who were age 40 and still living. Those who had been in the preschool program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, and had committed fewer crimes. They also were more likely to have graduated from high school than those who did not have preschool (65% versus 45% overall).\(^{209}\)

**First Things First** is a comprehensive school reform designed to improve low-performing schools by strengthening relationships between teachers and students and by making classes more engaging and rigorous. It has three central components: 1) small learning communities of up to 350 students and key teachers who remain together for several years. The learning communities are organized around broad themes (for example, “Science and Technology” and “Performing Arts”) that inform instruction and provide the small learning communities with unique identities; 2) a family advocate system in which each student is paired with a staff member who meets regularly with the student, monitors his or her progress, and works with the student’s family to promote success; and 3) instructional improvement to make lessons more engaging and rigorous. Teachers work with their colleagues to align curricula with state and local standards, and they participate in professional development activities designed to help them learn, practice, and regularly use strategies that make classroom instruction rigorous and engaging.

First Things First was launched initially in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1998–1999, in low-performing schools, and subsequently tested in 12 middle schools and high schools in four additional districts through a five-year research and demonstration project. Researchers compared the change over time in student outcomes in schools that adopted First Things First with the corresponding change in similar schools that did not adopt the reform. The evaluation documented higher attendance and graduation rates as well as higher test scores in reading and mathematics in First Things First schools.\(^{210}\)

**Class Size Reduction** is a popular strategy that is widely used to improve educational outcomes.\(^ {211}\) Thirty years of research has documented the positive effects of reducing class sizes to 18 or fewer students, particularly when students are in small classes from kindergarten through grade 3.\(^ {212}\) NEA supports a class size of 15 students in regular programs and a smaller class size in programs for students with exceptional needs.\(^ {213}\)

Most researchers agree that small class sizes in the early grades are especially beneficial for at-risk students, especially low-income, ethnic-minority students attending inner-city schools.\(^ {214}\) Students who were in smaller classes from kindergarten through grade 3 performed better than
students in larger classes in reading and math.\textsuperscript{215} Reading and/or math gains continued years later,\textsuperscript{216} and achievement gaps between White and minority students narrowed.\textsuperscript{217}

In addition, researchers studied the effect of early class size reduction on high school graduation. Again, the effect was positive: Attending small classes for four years (K–3) increased the odds of graduating by about 80 percent for all students. The effect was even greater for low-income students (students receiving free or reduced-price lunches who more than doubled their odds of graduating).\textsuperscript{218}

Overall, researchers conclude that three or four years of small classes in the primary grades are needed to sustain long-term achievement gains and positively affect graduation rates; one or two years are insufficient.\textsuperscript{219} To maximize long-term benefits, they recommend beginning small classes in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten where students spend the entire school day in a small class and maintaining small classes for at least three consecutive years. They also recommend using a model in which the same group of students and teacher remain together over three or four years.\textsuperscript{220}

The Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program in Chicago is the second oldest (after Head Start) federally funded early childhood intervention program for children between the ages of three and four (and some five-year-olds). CPC funding is provided by Title I. Begun in 1967, the program operates in centers that are located in proximity to the elementary schools they serve. The elementary schools’ principals direct the centers, and each center’s program is tailored to neighborhood and family needs. CPC provides: 1) early intervention, 2) structured language and basic skills instruction in reading and mathematics, 3) health and social services, 4) a single, sustained educational program that spans preschool through grade 3, and 5) mandatory parent involvement.

Parents and guardians are expected to participate in parent-room or classroom activities for a minimum of 2 days a month or one-half day a week. While children are actively involved in classroom activity throughout the day, their parents are often engaged in school activities. These include participating in parenting classes, providing clerical assistance, developing resources for other participating parents, and coordinating school projects. Many of the parents are unemployed, work part-time, or participate in work programs through TANF.

CPC staff includes an elementary school principal, preschool classroom teachers, classroom assistants, a head teacher who handles day-to-day Center administration, a parent resource teacher who develops and maintains a positive relationship with all Center parents, and a school-community representative who creates a bridge between home and school and provides ongoing strategies to families with chronic attendance, behavior, and participation concerns.
The Chicago Longitudinal Study compared educational and other key outcomes of children in CPC with children from high-poverty neighborhoods who participated in preschool and/or kindergarten programs. Participants in CPC preschool had higher rates of high school completion, lower dropout rates, and lower rates of juvenile arrests. In addition, both preschool and school-age participation were associated with lower rates of grade retention and special education services.\textsuperscript{221}

**Teacher Salary Increases** lead to more competitive, fair salaries, which NEA has consistently argued help attract and retain talented, expert teachers. Salary increases also can help decrease dropout rates. Using state data over a 10-year period, researchers estimate that, holding all else equal, raising teachers’ salaries by 10 percent would reduce dropout rates by 3 to 6 percent. Raising salaries by 50 percent would reduce the high school dropout rate by more than 15 percent.\textsuperscript{222}

**“What Works Clearinghouse” Ratings of Dropout Prevention Programs**

For the past three years, the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) has compiled information on the effectiveness of middle and high school programs that are designed to increase high school completion rates. The evidence base for 16 programs met the WWC’s standards for inclusion in its most recent review. For example, at least one study of effectiveness was a randomized controlled trial or a quasi-experimental design. The WWC’s standards and review criteria are described in detail on its Web site (http://ies.ed.gov.ncee/wcc). Its methodology (and that used by others who compile syntheses of research evidence) is not without critics, however, and has recently been debated within the research community.\textsuperscript{223}

WWC reviews “are intended primarily to communicate evidence to educators making real-life choices among programs and practices. Studies are evaluated on the basis of their contribution to the knowledge that an enlightened educator would need to make sound, evidenced-based choices.”\textsuperscript{224} But the lack of evidence for some programs, and their exclusion from the WWC review, does not mean they are ineffective. The WWC stresses that “some programs have not yet been studied using a study design that permits the WWC to draw any conclusions about their effectiveness. And for some studies, not enough data were reported to enable us to confirm statistical findings.”\textsuperscript{225}

The WWC rates dropout prevention programs on three outcomes:

1. **Staying in school**: Whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate.

2. **Progressing in school**: Credits earned, grade promotion, and whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation.
3. Completing school: Whether the student earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate.

As Table 14 illustrates, few programs were highly rated on helping students earn a diploma. More received positive ratings for helping students stay in and/or progress in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Stay in School</th>
<th>Progress in School</th>
<th>Complete School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Middle Schools</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Academies</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check &amp; Connect</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Incentives for Teen Parents</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Things First</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Redirection</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Corps</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOBSTART</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle College High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Chance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Grad</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantum Opportunity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent Development HS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent Search</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve Together</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

++: Positive effects; strong evidence of positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence.
+: Potentially positive effects; evidence of positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence.
+-: Evidence of inconsistent effects.
0: No affirmative evidence of effects.
Blank: WWC did not provide information.

The WWC and the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy provide the following brief descriptions of each program. Findings from other studies that provide additional
evidence of program effectiveness are included for ALAS, Career Academies, Quantum Opportunity, and Talent Development High Schools.

**Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS)** is a middle school intervention designed to address student, school, family, and community factors that affect dropping out. Each student is assigned a counselor who monitors attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. The counselor provides feedback and coordinates communication among students, families, and teachers. Counselors also serve as advocates for students and intervene when problems are identified. Students are trained in problem-solving skills, and parents are trained in parent-child problem solving, how to participate in school activities, and how to contact teachers and school administrators when issues arise. Web site: [www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=158](http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=158).

A review of available studies by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition indicated that ALAS participants had lower absenteeism, lower percentages of failed classes, and a higher proportion of credits (on track to graduation) than non-participants. In addition, students who were in the program for three years had lower dropout rates than non-program participants.227

**Accelerated Middle Schools** are self-contained academic programs designed to help middle school students who are behind grade level catch up with their age peers. If these students begin high school with other students their age, they are more likely to stay in school and graduate. The programs serve students who are one to two years behind grade level and give them the opportunity to cover an additional year of curriculum during their one to two years in the program. Accelerated middle schools can be structured as separate schools or as schools within a traditional middle school. Web site: None

**Career Academies** are small learning communities (150 to 200 students), often located within large high schools in low-income, urban areas. The Academies combine a college preparatory curriculum with technical and occupational courses and team with local businesses to provide students with after-school, career-related learning opportunities. The goal is to keep students interested in school by demonstrating how their coursework will help them secure a job. Students are recruited, but must submit an application to attend a career academy. Approved applicants enter an academy in their first year of high school (i.e. ninth or 10th grade) and are taught by a single team of teachers through grade 12. Web site: [www.ncacinc.org](http://www.ncacinc.org)

“On the basis of our reading of the literature and on expert opinions, we believe that perhaps half the school dropout rate can be influenced by school interventions that have been proven to be effective”235
A study by Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation found that, for students who entered the programs at high risk of dropping out, career academies increased their likelihood of staying in school through the end of 12th-grade, improved their attendance, and increased the number of credits earned toward graduation. 

**Check and Connect** is a dropout prevention program for high school students with learning, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. Students typically enter the program in ninth grade and are assigned a “monitor” (e.g. a graduate student, special education teacher, or community member with experience in human services) who works with them year-round as a mentor, advisor, and service coordinator. Web site: http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect

**Financial Incentives for Teens to Stay in School** are components of state welfare programs intended to encourage enrollment, attendance, and high school completion as a means of increasing employment and earnings and reducing welfare dependence. The incentives take the form of bonuses and sanctions that are tied to school enrollment, performance, and completion. The programs typically provide case management and social services to supplement financial incentives. Web site: www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=190

**High School Redirection** is an alternative high school program that emphasizes basic skills development (with a particular focus on reading skills) and offers limited extracurricular activities. The program operates in economically disadvantaged areas and serves students who have dropped out in the past, are teen parents, have poor test scores, or who are over-age for their grade. To foster a sense of community, High School Redirection schools are small and teachers are encouraged to act as mentors as well as instructors. Web site: None

**Job Corps** is a federally funded education and job training program for economically disadvantaged youth that offers remedial education, GED preparation, vocational training, job placement assistance, and other support. Job Corps participants typically reside in a Job Corps center while enrolled in the program and can remain in the program for up to two years. Web site: http://jobcorps.dol.gov/.

**JOBSTART** is an alternative education and training program designed to improve the economic prospects of young, disadvantaged high school dropouts by increasing educational attainment and developing occupational skills. The program has four main components: 1) basic academic skills instruction with a focus on GED preparation, (2) occupational skills training, (3) training-related support services (such as transportation assistance and childcare), and (4) job placement assistance. Participants receive at least 200 hours of basic education and 500 hours of occupational training. Web site: www.jobstart-cawl.org/.

**Middle College High Schools** are alternative high schools located on college campuses that focus on helping at-risk students complete high school and encouraging them to attend college. The schools offer a project-centered, interdisciplinary curriculum, with an emphasis on team
teaching, individualized attention, and the development of critical thinking skills. Students also are offered support services, including specialized counseling, peer support, and career experience opportunities. Web site: www.mcnc.us.

**New Chance** is a program for young welfare mothers who have dropped out of school. Designed to improve both their employment potential and their parenting skills, participants take GED preparation classes and complete a parenting and life skills curriculum. They also can receive occupational training, job placement assistance, and child care from New Chance. Web site: www.newchance.org. 

**Project Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (GRAD)** is an initiative for students in economically disadvantaged communities. It seeks to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation and college enrollment rates by increasing reading and math skills, improving behavior in school, and providing a service safety net. At the high school level, Project GRAD provides four-year college scholarships and summer institutes to promote attending and completing high school. Project GRAD also provides services in elementary and middle schools that feed into the participating high schools. Web site: www.projectgrad.org.

**Quantum Opportunity Program** is an intensive, comprehensive program for high school-aged youth that offers case management, mentoring, tutoring, and other education and support services. The program also offers financial incentives for participation in program activities. Participants enter the program in the ninth grade and can receive services for four to five years, even if they drop out of school. Web site: www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=27.

The Promising Practices Network gave the Quantum Opportunity Program a “proven” rating on its “students graduating from high school” criterion based on a 1999 follow-up study of four original program sites several months after the participants should have graduated from high school. Compared to a control group, students in the program were significantly more likely to graduate from high school.

**Talent Development High Schools** is a school reform model for restructuring large high schools with persistent attendance and discipline problems, poor student achievement, and high dropout rates. The model includes both structural and curriculum reforms. It calls for schools to reorganize into small “learning communities”—including ninth-grade academies and career academies for students in upper grades—to reduce student isolation and anonymity. It also emphasizes high academic standards and provides all students with a college preparatory academic curriculum. Web site: www.csos.jhu/tdhs.

An independent, ongoing evaluation of the model by Manpower Research Demonstration Research Corporation reported that the program improved graduation rates for students in the earliest implementing schools.
**Talent Search** is a federally funded program designed to help low-income and first-generation college students (those whose parents do not have four-year college degrees) complete high school and enter college. It provides a combination of services designed to improve academic achievement and increase access to financial aid. Services include test taking and study skills assistance, academic advising, tutoring, career development, college campus visits, and financial aid application assistance. Web site: www.ed.gov/programs/tiotalent/index.html.

**Twelve Together** is a one-year peer support and mentoring program for middle and early high school students that offers weekly after-school discussion groups led by trained volunteer adult facilitators. Each peer discussion group consists of about 12 participants who are a mix of students at high, and lower risk, of academic failure. Group discussions are based on student interest, usually focusing on personal, family, and social issues. The program also offers homework assistance, trips to college campuses, and an annual weekend retreat. Web site: www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=263.

**Jobs for America’s Graduates: An NEA Partner**

NEA has established a partnership with Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG), a 28-year old non-profit school-based youth development program for students in grades 7–12. JAG reported the following outcomes for students it served in the class of 2007: Graduation rate (93%), full-time jobs rate (89.8 percent), and further education rate (45.6%).

In each school, a trained career specialist, who is often a teacher, works with 35-45 students who have been identified by a school-based committee as being at high risk of dropping out of school. The JAG program offers students a comprehensive set of services, including a curriculum that focuses on employability competencies, adult mentoring and advice, student-led leadership development through a National Career Association, linkages with community-based services, summer job placement, job and postsecondary education exploration, and 12-month follow up once students graduate from high school or complete a GED.

JAG offers:

1. The Middle School Program in grades 7 and 8 is designed to help students stay in school and transition into high school; improve their academic performance, school behavior, attendance, participation and self-esteem; and improve their skills in leading and being an effective member of a team.

2. The Multi-Year/Dropout Prevention Program begins as early as ninth grade and concludes with 12 months of follow up after graduation. Students are targeted for services based on the number of barriers they face to staying in school through graduation and/or transitioning from school to a career or to postsecondary education.
3. The Senior School-to-Career Program targets students in grade 12 to help them graduate from high school, secure an entry-level job leading to a career, or go on to postsecondary education.

4. The Dropout Recovery/Out-of-School Program helps dropouts, ages 15–21, complete requirements for a high school diploma or a GED certificate, find an entry level job, or go on to college. Students receive program services until they receive a diploma or GED, plus 12 months of follow-up services. Web site: www.jag.org.

**Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates**

Because so few programs can provide evidence of their effectiveness, affiliates face the challenge of identifying dropout prevention programs they can share with districts, schools, and members. The 21 programs highlighted in this chapter of the Guide are a place to begin.

The five programs that have been identified as demonstrably improving graduation rates include interventions NEA has long advocated: high quality early childhood programs; class size reduction, especially in the primary grades; and teacher salary increases. Teacher salary increases in all grade levels resulted in a more modest number of additional graduates than the other programs, but this finding is still noteworthy.

**Early Childhood Education.** NEA recommends that state and local affiliates take the following actions to increase students’ access to high quality early childhood education:

1. Develop and disseminate an early childhood policy agenda that reflects state and local contexts;

2. Serve on local boards that influence early childhood policy development and practices;

3. Work to improve the quality of all early childhood programs, regardless of the setting;

4. Bargain (or legislate) a class size level that is appropriate for effective early childhood education;

5. Bargain (or legislate) a level of preparation necessary for an early childhood education teacher to be effective in the classroom;

6. Work with candidates running for local and state offices to develop platforms that include early childhood education initiatives;

7. Support candidates who support funding for early childhood education initiatives.
Class Size Reduction. NEA recommends that state and local affiliates make small class sizes a reality by taking the following steps:

1. Advocate for class size reduction that starts in kindergarten; provides classrooms of 15 students in grades K–1 and no more than 18 in grades 2–5; and ensures that students are in small classes all day, every day for at least two years and up to four years for the longest-lasting benefits.

2. Support candidates for public office who will work for reduced class sizes, and identify state and local decision makers (e.g., state legislators, mayors) who support smaller class sizes.

3. Establish state and local coalitions that support programs that reduce class sizes and provide early intervention for students who are most at risk of failure in elementary school.

4. Help districts establish appropriate class size policies.

Teacher Salaries. Attracting and retaining qualified school staff requires salaries that are competitive with those offered in nearby school districts, in neighboring states, and in comparable professions. But teachers continue to be paid less than individuals in other professions requiring similar education and responsibilities. The average beginning salary, for example, only increased by a little over $11,000 between 1995 and 2005 (NEA, 2005). In 2005–06, the average public school teacher’s salary ranged from a high of $59,825 in California to a low of $34,709 in South Dakota.

NEA’s nationwide salary initiative calls for: 1) a $40,000 starting salary for all pre-K–12 teachers, 2) appropriate pay for all higher education faculty and staff, and 3) an appropriate living wage as starting pay for all education support professionals. More information on the salary initiative is available at www.nea.org/pay/about.html.

Dropout Prevention Programs. Each of the 16 programs reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse operates in middle and/or high schools. All met rigorous standards related to evidence about their effects on high school graduation rates and/or on behaviors likely to increase students’ chances of graduating (staying in school and progressing in school). They, and the program offered by Jobs for America’s Graduates, a partner in NEA’s dropout intervention and prevention efforts, are worth affiliates’ closer examination.
Implementing School Practices and Policies to Increase Graduation Rates

“While not taking away from the affects of effective state leadership, we want to be clear: the inspiration for public school improvement comes from the school level and the actual work of faculty and staff. Reform begins and ends in the school and classroom.”

Highlights

- Know who is dropping out, why they drop out, and which schools they attended before dropping out.

- Make sure students are successful at key transition points—entry into kindergarten; at-grade level performance in reading and math in the early grades; and the transitions to middle school, high school, and adulthood.

- Use a tiered prevention and intervention system that begins with schoolwide interventions for attendance, student behavior, and academic performance.

- Although the research evidence is mixed, monitor the effects of high-stakes tests on students who are at risk of dropping out.

- Implement key school features that lead to higher graduation rates, beginning with developing strong, caring relationships between adults and students.

When all is said and done, efforts to prevent students from dropping out will take place in communities, schools, and classrooms. So this final chapter of the Guide focuses on local policies and practices. These policies apply to all schools, even those that have a dropout crisis (see Chapter 4). Schools with a dropout crisis also are likely to need interventions for local economic and social needs that can best be addressed through a community wide plan developed and supported by a broad cross section of stakeholders.

This chapter focuses on how you can help prevent high school dropouts by:

1. Understanding the local dropout challenge in your community;
2. Building an early warning system;
3. Using a tiered prevention and intervention system;
4. Monitoring the effects of high-stakes testing;
5. Offering students alternative types of schools;
6. Implementing key school features that increase graduation rates.
Preventing Future High School Dropouts

An Advocacy and Action Guide for NEA State and Local Affiliates

Understand the local graduation/dropout challenge

Researchers argue that it is critical to accurately identify specific students who need extra support and assistance, determine the kind of extra support they need, and choose interventions that address those needs. Responding to symptoms, they warn, may be ineffective if the source of the problem is not understood. “For example, schools with chronic attendance problems may be tempted to implement stronger attendance monitoring. Attendance monitoring may be necessary, but the schools also need to collect information on why students are not attending if they are to effectively address the problem.”

Successful local prevention efforts are grounded in answers to some basic questions:
1) Which students are at high risk of dropping out? (2) Why do individual students drop out? (3) When are students dropping out? (4) Which schools did they attend when they dropped out?

To answer these questions, researchers recommend that communities:

1. Use longitudinal, student-level data to: a) get an accurate reading on the number of students who drop out and b) identify students who are at high risk of dropping out. Ideally, this requires longitudinal student databases with unique statewide identifiers for individual students that follow students over time and account for school or district transfers. As was discussed in Chapter 3, these are the databases needed to comply with the U.S. Department of Education’s uniform graduation rate requirements.

Source: Balfanz, 2007, p. 5.
2. **Use student-level data from #1 to identify students who are at risk of dropping out before they reach key academic transitions.** As was discussed in Chapter 5, students are more likely to drop out of school if they do not transition successfully to high school. The freshman year is critical, so it is important to identify high school freshmen who have histories of academic problems, truancy, behavioral problems, and retentions. But many students who are at greater risk of dropping out can be identified years earlier (see Chapter 4). Paying attention to key transition points during students’ entire academic career is addressed next in this chapter.

3. **Monitor students’ academic and social performance.** Regularly review students’ grades, test scores, discipline referrals, and attendance. This information can help identify potential dropouts (i.e., students who are facing academic, social, and behavioral challenges or who are dealing with events in their lives outside of school that increase their risk of dropping out).

4. **Monitor students’ sense of engagement and belonging in school.** Gathering information about school climate and the nature of teacher-student interactions can help identify students who are disengaged from school and, as a result, are at higher risk of dropping out. Student surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations with students “can cover topics such as the supportiveness of the school environment, perceptions of safety, academic rigor, and interactions with adults and other students.”

5. **Collect accurate information about why students dropped out.** This is especially important for identifying school-based or community-based causes that can be addressed to prevent future dropouts. But, the codes that districts and schools use to document student withdrawals often either disguise or fail to fully explain the reasons students dropped out. Codes such as “left school” are of little use. As important, who school districts count as dropouts may not help prevention efforts. For example, in some districts, students who transfer out of the school are considered to have dropped out, even though they might have re-enrolled in another school in the district or in the state.

6. **Gather information about schools with high dropout rates.** High schools with high dropout rates, and the middle schools from which their students matriculate, may inadvertently be organized in ways that contribute to, rather than reduce, dropout rates. In Chapter 4, the Guide addressed this issue in relation to communities and schools with dropout crises. A quick summary of some of the points addressed in that chapter are included here because they also apply to schools and communities that have the opportunity to address their dropout rates before they reach crisis levels.
Researchers have identified a number of questions that can guide this data gathering:

1. Which schools have higher dropout rates than the average school in your community? Where in the community are the schools located?
2. How would you describe the neighborhoods in terms of housing, jobs, income levels, economic opportunities, and access to health and social services?
3. How many students are retained at these schools?
4. How many have been retained more than once?
5. What percentage of students receive special education services?
6. Who is identified for special education and why?
7. How many students are reading below grade level and by how much?
8. What is the daily attendance rate?
9. How many students are chronically absent (i.e., for more than one month)?
10. How many students are expelled or suspended each month?
11. What is the staff turnover rate?
12. What is the school climate?
13. How do students feel about the school?  

**Build an Early Warning System**

For most students, the decision to drop out of school is the final step in a process that began years earlier. They often struggle academically or disengage from school long before actually dropping out, so it is important for districts and schools to build an early warning system to identify students who are at risk.  

Because potential dropouts can be identified using data schools routinely collect, an early warning system is possible and cost-effective—and it can never begin too early.  

For example, four factors in sixth grade have been shown to be powerful predictors of whether students fall off the track to graduation: low attendance, a failing mark in classroom behavior, a failing grade in math, and a failing grade in English. Sixth graders with any one of these had only a 10 percent chance of graduating on time and only a 20 percent chance of graduating a year late. And the earlier students fall off track, the more likely they are to become involved with the juvenile justice system.  

An early warning system focuses on key transition points in students’ school careers. The one depicted in Table 15 begins with the transition into kindergarten. If students transition successfully into school, from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school into adulthood, they are much more likely to graduate. In fact, effective programs and interventions at all of these transition points can increase graduation rates by as much as 10 percent.
Table 15
Effective Policies and Practices at Key Transition Points in Students’ School Careers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Point</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry into kindergarten</td>
<td>All children have access to high-quality pre-K education and are ready for kindergarten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success in early reading/math</td>
<td>All students can read on grade level and do grade-level math by the end of second grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education placement</td>
<td>Identification and placement are used exclusively for students with disabilities. Placements are not based on poor academic performance, student behavior, or English language proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to middle school</td>
<td>Poor attendance, behavior problems, and academic failure are addressed through interventions that are: a) schoolwide, b) targeted, and c) intensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-time promotion to the next grade with extra support to catch up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to high school</td>
<td>On-time promotion to 10th grade with extra support to catch up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to adulthood</td>
<td>Multiple pathways to graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools help students transition to adulthood and adult behaviors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Balfanz, May 9, 2007.

Ensure a successful start and early academic proficiency. Interventions at the elementary level to prevent future dropouts are not new; in fact, they constitute the “basics of good schooling.” The list is a familiar one:

- Provide high-quality pre-K education to all young children who need or want it.
- Reduce class sizes in kindergarten through grade 2 or 3, so that teachers can give students the individual attention they need to perform on grade-level in reading and mathematics.
- Establish a series of performance benchmarks, and intervene if students do not meet them. For example, decrease the student-teacher ratio, increase the time spent on reading instruction, and/or use different instructional techniques.
• Provide one-on-one tutoring for students who need extra support to become proficient readers.

• Enlist family or community members as reading partners for struggling readers and as math partners for students who are struggling with math. Prevent gaps in mathematical understanding and skills that emerge in the early elementary grades, grow over time, and can become a major factor in students being off-track to high school graduation.248

Use special education services appropriately. Labeling students as disabled when they are not can have a negative effect on their academic success and their chances of graduating (see Chapter 5). Yet teachers often request a referral to special education under the misconception that special education will provide more effective support for struggling students.249 Affiliates can provide members with information on appropriate and inappropriate use of special education placement and discourage them from using special education as an intervention for students who are struggling academically or behaviorally.

Help students transition successfully to middle school. The transition to middle school is critically important. Many future dropouts show warning signs at this stage in their schooling as their attendance, behavior, and achievement begin to slip.250 Dropout prevention in middle school focuses on keeping students interested and engaged so they attend school daily and, as a consequence, master the intermediate academic skills needed for high school. More specifically, “the middle grades curriculum needs to build year after year to measurable and intellectually meaningful outcomes in the eighth grade—the ability to write a persuasive essay and research paper, to read and interpret original documents from history, to conduct a science experiment and analyze its results, to use data analysis to uncover or solve a problem. These are the tasks that both engage middle grades students and demonstrate they are ready for success in high school.”251

A successful transition to middle school is more likely when students develop and maintain bonds with their teachers through looping, inter-disciplinary teacher teams, and small learning communities. Evidence suggests that, when combined with strong instructional programs and effective extra help in the middle grades, schools that are organized along a “communal” pattern can increase graduation by 10 percent.252

Promote a successful transition to high school. There is overwhelming consensus that schools and districts must pay special attention to the transition to high school.253 Ninth grade course failure and retention are strong predictors of dropping out of high school (see Chapter 5). So the best dropout prevention programs may well be those that help students make a successful transition to high school.
For example, the Talent Development Model works in large comprehensive high schools to restructure the ninth grade. Teacher teams staff ninth grade academies that occupy a different space in the building so teachers can get to know students and support their transition to high school. The ninth grade academies provide “a core academic curriculum, complete with materials and coaching, that helps students adjust to high school academic content and expectations, and abundant opportunities are available for students who fall behind to catch up on credits.”

Opportunities to catch up are particularly effective at helping students get back on track academically, and along with other student support, can increase credit accumulation, 10th grade promotion, and graduation rates. The Talent Development Model enrolls ninth graders who have weak literacy or math skills in intensive “catch up” classes, a special curriculum, classes to help them learn appropriate study and/or social skills, extra subject periods or a double dose of a core academic class, and summer enrichment programs.

Communities can develop their own criteria to adequate student performance in the freshman year to ensure on-time promotion to 10th grade, or they can use existing criteria such as those for the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which focus on credit accumulations and course failures. Students who are on track to graduation have completed enough credits by the end of the school year to be promoted to 10th grade and have failed no more than one semester of a core subject area (English, math, social studies, and science). These criteria have been better predictors of high school graduation than eighth grade test scores or students’ background characteristics.

Support the transition to adulthood. In this final transition, high schools prepare students for their lives after graduation in three ways. First, students learn “adult outlooks and behaviors, such as working for future goals and knowing what needs to be done to realize them.” Second, students have access to a rich, deep curriculum that stresses the relevance of what they are learning to adult success, and teaches them the skills and knowledge needed for success in college and in the workplace. Third, students have multiple paths to post-secondary education and training. These include high quality career and technical education programs, dual enrollment programs with community colleges, and “intensive and compressed schooling” for students who are over age and lack the number of required credits to earn a regular diploma. Other options include rethinking school schedules for students whose family or financial responsibilities make it impossible for them to attend school during regular school hours by offering classes in the evening and on the weekends.

Use a Tiered Prevention and Intervention System

Powerful risk factors, such as low attendance and behavior problems, can be observed even during the first month of school. The seeds for course failure, another early and potent risk factor, also are sown early in the school year and years before entering high school.
who fail math, English, or any two courses in sixth grade reduce their chances of graduating, and while few students fail both math and English, those who do almost never graduate. Course failure, in fact, is a better predictor of graduation outcomes than test scores. And while out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are highly predictive of dropping out, so is mild misbehavior. Receiving poor final behavior grades in two or more courses is highly predictive of dropping out.

A tiered intervention system like the one depicted in Table 16 enables schools to react effectively to the first signs of poor attendance, poor behavior, and course failure. Adopted from public health models, it works at any level of schooling but is particularly useful in middle and high school as a way to ensure students are on track to high school graduation. The intervention system is designed around a set of district- or school-specific rules that determine what triggers movement between the levels.

Table 16
Tiered Intervention System To Keep Students on Track to Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Intervention</th>
<th>Focus of the Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 1: Schoolwide</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(all students)</td>
<td>Every absence brings a response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School culture says attending every day matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive social incentives for good attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data tracking at teacher team level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 2: Targeted</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15-20% of students)</td>
<td>Two or more unexcused absences in a month brings a daily check by an adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance team investigates and problem solves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tier 3—Intensive Interventions. These interventions are reserved for the 5-10 percent of students for whom schoolwide and targeted interventions are not sufficient. Intensive support can include one-on-one tutoring and counseling as well as family, social service, or community support to address each student’s particular needs. It also is likely to include intense communication among schools, parents, and students, perhaps resulting in the use of student behavior contracts.  

Offer Students Alternative School Types

The Alternative Pathways Project, launched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to increase graduation rates among low-income and minority students, urges school districts and local
agencies with which they partner to “develop a portfolio of choice-based, high-quality schools and alternatives to meet the needs of their most vulnerable youth.” Instead of choosing to drop out, students are able to choose one of the alternatives and obtain their diploma. The alternatives are designed to meet the challenges of students who may be over age for the grade they are in because they were retained two or more times, who may have had interrupted schooling and are seriously behind age-level peers academically, who may be teen parents, or who have to work.

Some of the more common alternatives are:

- **Comprehensive Alternative Schools**: A small environment, set up as a four-year program that culminates in a diploma. These schools often provide courses and programs that mirror some of what might be found in a traditional high school, but they also tend to focus closely on the interests and needs of the students they serve.

- **Targeted Schools**: These programs are designed to meet the needs of special populations of students, such as students with alternative learning styles or court-involved youth. They may have enrollment requirements and they tend to be small. Generally, students complete their diploma in two years.

- **Integrated Services Schools**: These schools provide substantial social and health services or partner closely with public services such as child care, housing, and mental health to support and retain special populations of youth.

- **Transitional Schools**: Usually set up to last one year or less, these programs can help students who have had severe behavior problems in school earn their diploma and transition to post-secondary education or jobs.

**Monitor the Effects of High-Stakes Testing**

While the verdict is still out on whether high-stakes tests, such as high school exit exams, increase dropout rates due, in part, to limited research, it is a good idea to determine if these tests contribute to dropout rates in local communities. Some studies report that high-stakes tests increase the likelihood of students dropping out; some report little or no effect. Others find differentiated effects, including increasing the dropout rates among the lowest-ability students. For example, high-stakes tests inadvertently create incentives for low-scoring students to drop out or for schools to encourage students who would not do well on the tests to leave in subtle (and not so subtle) ways.

Other researchers note that the transition from ninth to 10th grade is becoming more difficult for students in states with high-stakes tests. A 2004 study reported that nearly three quarters of states with the highest student attrition rates between ninth and 10th grade used tests to make decisions about student promotion and graduation.
Studies have documented the fact that minority students are more likely to be required to take an exit exam to receive a diploma. And all states with exit exams show gaps in passing rates between various groups of students. States identify gaps between students with and without disabilities as the most challenging gap. Others identify low passage rates among English Language Learners, Black, and Latino students.270

Currently, students in 23 states must pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma. These include states with high minority student enrollment such as California, Texas, and New Mexico. In 2006, more than three-quarters of the nation’s racial-ethnic minority high school students were enrolled in public schools in these 23 states. By 2012, when additional states implement this requirement, 84 percent of minority students will have to pass an exit exam to graduate (see Table 17).271

Table 17
Percentage of Public High School Students Enrolled in States with High-Stakes Exit Exams, by Race-Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>2006 (23 states)</th>
<th>2012 Projected (25 states)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All minority students</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, 2008.

However, the information in Table 17 may soon be changed by states’ move to end-of-course exams. By 2015, 14 of the states that currently have high-stakes exit exams are expected to use end-of-course tests instead of, or in combination with, exit exams.272

Implement School Features that Lead to Higher Graduation Rates

In their review of programs that have demonstrated positive effects on high school graduation (see Chapter 6), Levin and his colleagues note that other interventions could potentially have even more powerful effects than the ones they identified. These other interventions “reflect convergence on a common set of features that lead to increased high school graduation and educational success.”273 Those features are:

1. High levels of personalization
2. Small school size
3. High academic expectations
How Well Does Your School Serve Each Student?

1. How many of the students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in four years?

2. What percentage of your graduates must take remedial courses in college or a community college? What percentage of those finish college?

3. Does your leadership team successfully interact with “hard-to-reach” parents with activities such as home visits, Saturday meetings, and meetings outside of regular business hours?

4. How many low-income and/or minority students are enrolled in advanced courses?

5. How many teachers from different disciplines work together on a regular basis?

6. Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?

7. What percentage of the classes per week at your school are primarily lecture driven?

8. Aside from student government, do students have a voice at your school?

9. Were you able to answer these questions and support the responses with data?

Table 18
High School Features that Lead to Higher Graduation Rates

| Personalization                                      | • Small learning environments  
|                                                    | • Caring, long-term relationships between students and adults  
|                                                    | • Advisory and counseling systems  
|                                                    | • Effective family connections  
|                                                    | • Alternative attendance options  
| Rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction    | • High academic expectations  
|                                                    | • Career and technical education  
|                                                    | • Partnerships with higher education  
|                                                    | • Interdisciplinary courses  
|                                                    | • Project and community-based learning  
|                                                    | • Curriculum that connects to students’ lives, cultures, and communities  
| Substantive assistance to students                  | • Teacher collaboration to address individual students’ needs and plan ways to support students.  
|                                                    | • Additional academic classes and/or extended learning time  
|                                                    | • Out of classroom assistance, such as one-on-one tutoring  
| Qualified instructional staff                       | Skilled and knowledgeable teachers and education support professionals who are expert in their subject matter, the needs of diverse learners, and the learning process  

**Personalization.** Personalized programs offer “a caring environment in which every student is perceived as an important member of the community by both staff and other students and in which an individual’s personal and academic needs are addressed.” Having a strong relationship with at least one adult at school is an important deterrent to dropping out. For example, only about half of the high school dropouts who participated in *The Silent Epidemic* study said they could go to a staff person for school problems, and considerably fewer (41%) indicated there was an adult at the school they could talk to about personal problems.

Personalized high schools support the development of meaningful, sustained relationships among school staff and students by creating smaller more responsive learning communities. Successful small schools, and small learning communities within larger schools, typically have smaller classes (20-25 students per class); at the high school level, they significantly reduce pupil loads for teachers (40-80).

Larger schools often reorganize into smaller learning communities through such mechanisms as grade-level or self-contained learning communities of 100-350 students that occupy their
own spaces in the school. They also reduce student loads for teachers by having teachers teach fewer groups of students for longer blocks of time by creating interdisciplinary courses. And they allow relationships between students and teachers to develop over time by keeping students with the same teacher(s) for multiple years (i.e., looping).

Personalized high schools also “focus intensively on why students are having difficulty and actively work to address the sources of the difficulties.” Some schools have strong counseling programs. Others use student advisory or advocacy structures that support students through strong personal relationships with a caring adult. Advisors identify academic and personal needs or problems that can be addressed earlier rather than later when they might lead to dropping out of school.

In addition, these high schools also make strong connections with students’ families. Although there are many studies of school, family, and community partnerships in the elementary and middle grades, less is known about partnerships with families of high school students. But an extensive study that examined longitudinal data from more than 11,000 students, their parents, and 1,000 high school principals showed positive effects of parental involvement. Students completed more course credits, had better report card grades, improved attendance and behavior, and came to school better prepared. The study also showed that high schools could reach out to parents and families in simple but effective ways. For example, when schools contacted parents about their teenagers’ plans after high school, parents were more likely to attend post-graduation planning workshops and talk more frequently with their teens about future plans.

Studies of effective alternative programs within schools and alternative schools that serve students at risk of dropping out share several of these same features: 1) a non-threatening learning environment in which students felt comfortable; 2) a caring and committed staff who accept personal responsibility for students’ success; and 3) a school structure that provides a low student-to-teacher ratio, and small class sizes to promote student engagement.

**Rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction.** Schools that have high graduation rates demand intellectually challenging work, and they focus on preparing students “to work independently and to meet the skills and content demands of college and challenging jobs.” Teachers make strong efforts to link the curriculum to students’ lives and interests through such mechanisms as project-based learning, community service, internships, career and technical education, and experiences outside of school that make the curriculum more authentic for students. Many high schools establish relationships with community and four-year colleges, offer dual-enrollment programs, and provide the opportunity for students to work at real jobs where they can apply the skills they are learning in high school.
Extra assistance to students. Working to promote every student’s success, these schools use time before and after school, on Saturday, and during the summer to provide extra support outside of regular class time. They often collaborate with community organizations and businesses to secure tutors for students who would benefit from one-on-one help in reading or math. Even more significant, they provide special catch-up courses for students so they can earn the credits they need to graduate. So schools can best structure the extra assistance, they provide time weekly for teachers to collaborate in grade-level, department-level, or learning community-level teams. These meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss individual students’ needs and discuss how best to meet them.

Qualified instructional staff. An extensive body of research indicates that one of the most important determinants of student learning is the quality of teachers. Qualified teachers know the subject matter in their content area, are able to access curriculum resources, and teach the ideas in their content in ways students can access and understand. They also understand how students’ cultures, languages, and experiences shape the way they approach school and learning. And they know what motivates students to learn and how students learn in different ways and for different purposes.

One of the challenges NEA state and local affiliates have addressed effectively is recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in high-needs schools, including schools with low graduation rates. For example, affiliates have secured incentives to teach in low-performing schools that include additional compensation, signing bonuses, or other benefits to teachers who are assigned to low-performing schools.

Implications for NEA State and Local Affiliates

The messages for affiliates are clear. Advocate for: 1) interventions at key transition points in students’ schooling, beginning in preschool and ending with preparation for adulthood; 2) school-based early warning systems that enable NEA members and others to respond efficiently and effectively to attendance, behavior, and academic concerns as they arise; and

“Increased personalization and student outreach, high standards, intensive instructional programs to close achievement gaps, improved teacher quality, professional development, and teacher supports, engaging school programs, and strengthened connections between high schools and colleges and employers are all needed in large, sustained, and coordinated measures.”

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Chapter 7: Implementing School Practices and Policies to Increase Graduation Rates
3) key features of middle and high schools that are associated with greater student success and higher graduation rates.

Preventing students from dropping out of high school is difficult, challenging work. It requires dedication, the belief that schools are responsible for, and capable of, preparing all students for a productive life after high school, and the willingness to become advocates for students who are most at risk academically.

Steps to Designing a Dropout Prevention Agenda

While NEA state and local affiliates that decide to meet the challenge of preventing high school dropouts will likely be involved in state-specific or community-based agendas, the following checklist summarizes what the Guide has offered to support affiliates’ involvement in agenda setting and implementation.
Chapter 7: Implementing School Practices and Policies to Increase Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda Design Steps</th>
<th>Guide References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Determine the extent of the high school dropout/graduation challenge:</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Collect and analyze available data on the number/percent of graduates and dropouts for the current year and for previous years to determine if rates are increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same. If available, examine data that are disaggregated by student race/ethnicity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. State and local graduation rates reported for NCLB accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (for state)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Graduation rates reported in <em>Education Week</em> (for state)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Any available longitudinal data on graduation/dropouts that have tracked individual students over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Rates reported by researchers who have studied graduation/dropout rates in the state or community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a picture of how many students in your state or community are in key categories that place them at higher risk of dropping out:</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Low-income families living at or below the poverty level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Racially isolated schools in low-income neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Homeless or in foster care</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. English Language Learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Minority males, especially from low-income homes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Enrolled in special education</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Poor school attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Retention in same grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Academic failure</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Advocate for changes in policy and practice to address the educational, economic, health, and social needs of students in your state/community who fall into the categories identified in #2, and any other high-risk categories that are appropriate to your state/community.</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Identify districts and schools that have a dropout crisis; i.e., annual graduation rates of 60% or less.</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Determine whether there are any dropout prevention programs/supports already in place in these districts and schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Gather information about funding, staff turnover, school climate, class size, student attendance and retention, special education referrals and placement, number of homeless/foster care students. When possible, gather these data for various student racial/ethnic groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Talk to members in these districts/schools to identify their concerns, priorities, suggestions for improvement, and interest in working to increase graduation rates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Determine what state or local associations can do to prevent students from dropping out in these districts/schools in light of your resources, capacity, policies, programs, interests, and priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda Design Steps</td>
<td>Guide References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identify existing coalitions, or stakeholders, in the state or community with an interest in working on dropout prevention. Partners might include:</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Education organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Businesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Institutions of higher education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Social services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Community organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Health care organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Social services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Law enforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Juvenile justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. State/local groups concerned about educational excellence, economic growth, social justice, youth development, crime reduction, urban renaissance, or rural prosperity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To make the case for immediate action, gather data relating to the effect of a low high school graduation rate on state or community resources, such as:</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Labor market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Tax revenues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Health care costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Spending on police, the courts, and incarceration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Welfare and public assistance costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Voter registration and voter turnout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Organize and/or participate in state/local summits or meetings focused on addressing dropout prevention.</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Engage in community conversations to plan a course of action to prevent students from dropping out.</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Implement interventions that have a track record for increasing graduation rates:</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. High-quality early childhood education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Class size reduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Teacher salary increases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Comprehensive high school reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Identify other programs/interventions that provide convincing evidence they increase graduation rates or have a positive effect on key outcomes leading to graduation (e.g., promotion to the next grade, staying in school).</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Agenda Design Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 11.  | Advocate for the state/school districts to develop and use longitudinal student-level databases that assign individual statewide identifiers for individual students, follow them over time to track, and help identify students at risk of dropping out based on such indicators as:  
   - Academic problems (e.g., low course grades, course failure)  
   - Absenteeism  
   - Behavior problems that lead to suspensions or expulsions  
   - Retentions  
   - Test performance |
| 12.  | Encourage districts and schools to periodically conduct, or survey data from, focus groups with students to monitor their sense of engagement and belonging in school. |
| 13.  | Argue for districts and schools to collect accurate information about the reasons students drop out of school to guide future decision making. |
| 14.  | Advocate for early warning systems that target attention and resources to students who are at risk of not making successful transitions at key points in their academic careers:  
   - Entry into kindergarten  
   - Early success in reading and math  
   - Special education placement  
   - Transitions to middle school, high school, and adulthood |
| 15.  | Advocate for schools to use tiered intervention systems that address students’ attendance, behavior, and academic performance through schoolwide, targeted, and intensive interventions. |
| 16.  | Urge states and communities to monitor the effects of high-stakes testing, including high school exit exams, on dropout rates. |
| 17.  | Share with communities school features shown by research to increase high school graduation rates and student success:  
   - High levels of personalization  
   - High academic expectations  
   - Small schools or small learning communities in large schools  
   - Strong counseling services  
   - Parental or family engagement  
   - Extended-time school sessions  
   - Competent and appropriate personnel, especially knowledgeable and skilled teachers  
   - Focused, rigorous, and relevant curriculum and instruction  
   - Substantive assistance for struggling students |

**Guide References**

- Chapter 7
1 *NEA Today*, Jan. 2007, 18


3 National Education Association, July 2008, iii.


5 National Education Association, July 2008, i.


7 Rumberger, 2004a, 252.


11 NCHEMS, 2005, 11.


17 Bailey, 2007; Stillwell and Hoffman, 2008.

18 Bridgeland et al., 2006.


Researchers rely on the Current Population Survey (CPS) from the U.S. Bureau of the Census or the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data (CCD). The CPS is a monthly survey of about 50,000 households. It collects self-reported educational attainment data along with a wide variety of other information. It produces population estimates for the number and percentage of people holding high school diplomas and GEDs. The CCD is a program of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics. Each year it collects fiscal and non-fiscal data about all U.S. public schools, public school districts and state education agencies. The data are supplied by state education agency officials.

41 Darling-Hammond and Woods, 2008; Dynarski et al., 2008.


43 College Board, 2008, 3.


45 NEA, 2002.


47 *Education Week* uses the Cumulative Promotion Index to calculate graduation rates. The CPT estimates the probability that a student in the 9th grade will complete high school on time with a regular diploma. It multiplies together three grade-to-grade promotions (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation) (*Education Week*, 2006, p. 12). The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate estimates the percentage of high school students who graduate on time by dividing the number of graduates with regular diplomas by the size of the incoming freshman class 4 years earlier. The size of the incoming freshman class is estimated by summing the enrollment in eighth grade in one year, ninth grade for the next year, and tenth grade for the year after and then dividing by three. Including eighth-graders is designed to remove the effect of freshmen who were retained and thus are not first-time freshmen (Seastrom et al., 2007).


52 Laird et al., 2006.

53 Laird et al., 2007.

54 Mishel and Roy, 2006.


58 Kaufman, 2001; Mishel and Roy, 2006; Roy and Mishel, 2008.

59 Laird et al., 2006.

60 KewalRamani et al., 2007.

61 Laird et al., 2007.


64 Mishel and Roy, 2006.


66 Hall, 2005; Swanson, 2003; Swanson, 2004; Seastrom et al., 2006.


68 NGA, 2005b.

69 NGA, 2008.

70 NGA, 2005a.

71 National Education Association, 2006.


73 Alliance for Excellent Education, April 23, 2008.

74 Hall, 2007; Swanson, 2004.

75 Alliance for Excellent Education, April 23, 2008.

76 NGA, 2008. As explained by the National Center for Education Statistics, the Leaver Rate is not an estimate of on-time graduation; it is a measure of departures. That is, it reports the percent of students from a specific freshmen class who left a state’s public high schools over a four-year period and did so with a regular high school diploma. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate with a regular diploma in a particular year (regardless of how long it took the student) plus the number of students
who received alternate degrees or certificates in the same year (regardless of how long it took the student) by the number of current year graduates and completers, plus the sum of all of the students who dropped out over the 4-year period (i.e., all of the students who left). The denominator in the calculation excludes students who started high school 4 years earlier, or who enrolled during the intervening years, but did not leave. This exclusion decreases the denominator and increases the leaver rate relative to an on-time graduation measure such as the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate or the uniform graduation rate the U.S. Department of Education will now require states to use. (Seastrom et al., 2006).

77 Husar and Bailey, 2007; Passal and Cohn, 2008.
78 Ewell and Boeke, 2008.
79 Stillwell and Hoffman, 2008.
80 Education Week, June 22, 2006, 12.
81 Laird et al., 2006.
82 Laird et al., 2006.
83 Laird et al., 2006.
85 NEA, 2008, i.
86 Gorofono and Sable, 2008.
87 Balfanz, March 27, 2008.
92 Balfanz, May 9, 2007.
93 Balfanz, March 27, 2008.
94 Balfanz, March 27, 2008.
Other factors associated with dropping out of high school include poor classroom behavior, student disengagement from school, and poor relationships with teachers (Jerald, 2006); student mobility, working more than 20 hours a week during the school year, and having siblings or friends who dropped out; living in a single-parent or step-families, low parent education levels or parents who are themselves dropouts; student discipline problems; student suspensions and expulsions; criminal behavior; students’ low educational and occupational aspirations; teenage pregnancy (Rumberger, 2004).
114 Llagos and Snyder, 2003.


120 Rothstein, 2008, 12.

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211 “Class size is the number of students who are regularly in a classroom with a teacher and for whom that teacher is responsible” (Finn et al., 2005, 214).

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213 NEA has adopted the following resolution on class size reduction: The National Education Association believes that excellence in the classroom can best be attained by small class size. The Association also believes in an optimum class size of fifteen students in regular programs and a proportionately lower number in programs for students with exceptional needs. Class size maximums must be based on the type of students, subject area content, physical facilities, and other criteria. Weighted class size formulas should be implemented to reflect the inclusion of exceptional students. State departments of education should collect and report class size data that reflect the class size experienced by most students (1982, 1997). (NEA, 2008b).

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