Educational Leadership:
An Agenda for Economic Prosperity

A report from the *State Legislative Leaders Education Symposium*

JAMES B HUNT, JR INSTITUTE
for EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP *and* POLICY

INTRODUCTION

In today's global economy, it is imperative that education in the United States prepare all students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in work and life. Yet, national data indicate that one-third of all public school students and nearly half of low-income and minority students fail to graduate from high school. At a time when a globally competitive workforce requires at least two years of postsecondary education, high school dropouts are at a distinct disadvantage.

The costs to students and state economies are substantial. High school dropouts earn considerably less than graduates and are much more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, and unhealthy. Due to the higher costs of public services to support this segment of the population and a limited supply of capable workers, low-income communities are particularly affected by the dropout crisis. Dropouts are also a burden to state economies, costing states millions each year in lost revenue and increased spending on crime and other public services. It has been estimated that the 1.2 million students who should have graduated with the Class of 2007 will cost the nation $349 billion in lost income over the course of their lifetimes.

This complex problem requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach. A "one size fits all" solution does not exist. Struggling students and schools have specific needs, and support should be applied based on sound data and research and with interventions that are targeted at specific problems.

State policymakers play a pivotal role in developing this comprehensive approach. To explore possible strategies for state-level improvement in education, the James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, along with the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, co-sponsored the 2008 Leaders Emerging Issues Program. The event, **Educational Leadership: An Agenda for Economic Prosperity,** brought together a bipartisan group of state legislative leaders with some of the foremost experts in education and public policy to explore potential solutions to the nation's dropout crisis.

During the three-day meeting, state legislative leaders explored the basic elements of a comprehensive education system that meets the needs of all students, especially those at risk of dropping out. With nationally known experts, legislators discussed the importance of:
• high, rigorous standards and quality assessments;
• the use of longitudinal data to identify early warning indicators among at-risk students and to track student progress throughout K-12 and across other state agencies;
• the need to provide comprehensive support for students as they move throughout the education system; and
• alternative education options needed for students who have already dropped out.

This report summarizes information shared during the meeting and focuses on key issues and successful strategies for making improvements at the state level.

# Improving Achievement and Closing Gaps Between Groups

Presenter:

**Kati Haycock,** The Education Trust

As the leader of a respected policy organization that has studied educational equity issues for more than 15 years, Kati Haycock offered a revealing presentation that shaped this premise: All students can succeed at a high level, but significant change is needed to help make it happen.

Haycock first shared some good news. During the last 10 years, the United States has made notable improvements in reading and math at the elementary school level, with all groups of students showing academic gains. According to results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), achievement gaps among elementary school students of different races and ethnicities have narrowed to their smallest size in history.
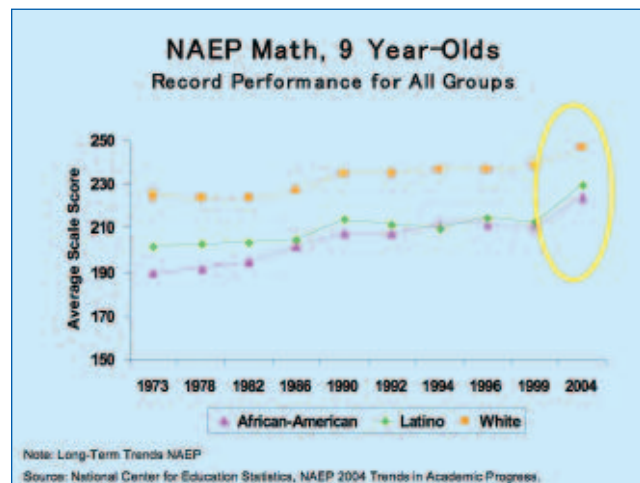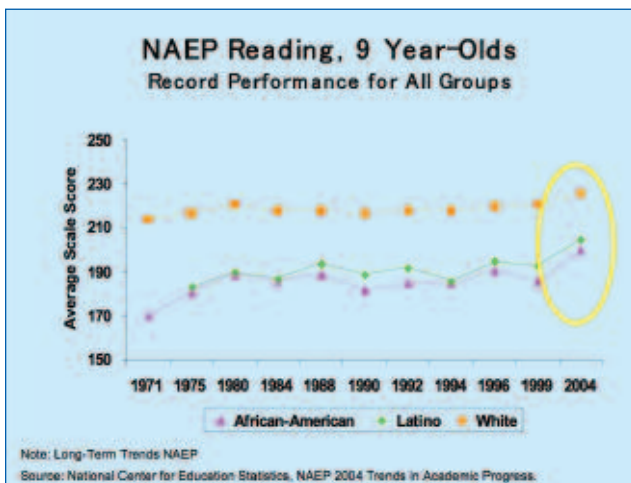
However, research has shown that the academic gains made early on are not sustained as students progress through high school. Despite significant growth in the early grades, high school graduates have weaker skills than their counterparts of 20 years ago. Furthermore, achievement gaps between White, African-American, and Latino high school students are greater than they were in 1990. Students who attend school in high-poverty or high-minority communities are often provided with less experienced teachers and less demanding curricula, thus limiting their chances for future success.

NAEP Reading, 17 Year-Olds

NAEP Math, 17 Year-Olds
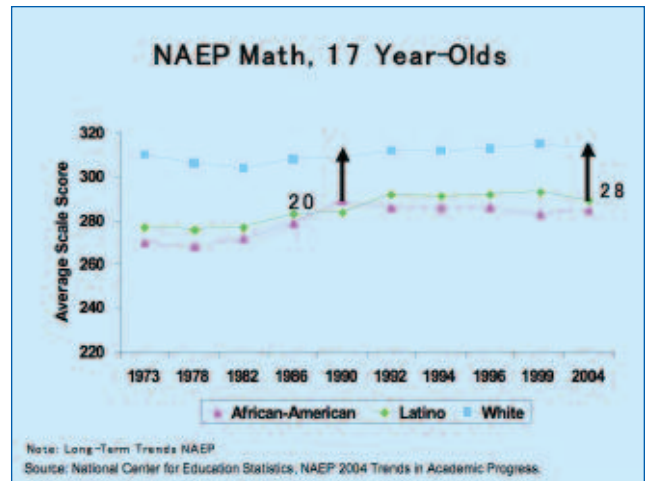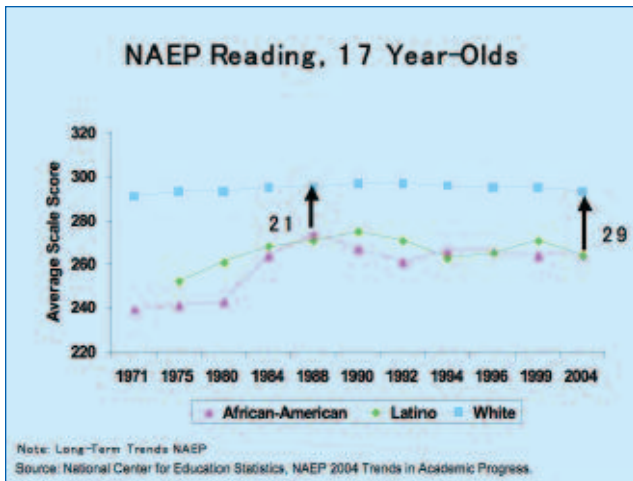
Despite these challenges and a common misconception that the achievement gap cannot be closed, The Education Trust has identified a number of schools across the country that have demonstrated success in educating low-income and minority students to high, rigorous standards. According to their findings, the following six trends are evident among these high-performing schools:

1. School leaders and educators focus on academic factors.
2. The best teachers are assigned to the students who need them most.
3. All students are expected to achieve at high levels.
4. The focus is on college readiness, not just a high school diploma.
5. All students are required to take a demanding college preparatory curriculum.
6. Extra instruction is provided for students who need it.

Standards, Assessments, and Accountability

Moderator:
Judith Rizzo, James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for
Educational Leadership and Policy

Resource Experts:
Lorraine McDonnell, University of California, Santa Barbara
William H. Schmidt, Michigan State University
Thomas Toch, Education Sector

It is well documented that standards are the foundation of a state's education system, articulating the knowledge and skills that students should acquire at each grade level. In 1994, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act required every state to create a standards-based education system. To date, all states have established *content standards* for every grade and in core subjects.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), states were also required to develop tests that measure whether students have achieved the standards set forth in reading and math. For each assessment, states set *performance standards*, also known as cut scores, that determine whether or not students have achieved proficiency in the designated subject.

To provide context regarding the challenges of implementing effective standards-based education and share current data and trends on the issue, an expert panel discussed current findings from a recent study by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and their own related research. Lorraine McDonnell served as chair of the NAS study, which was commissioned by the Hunt Institute. William Schmidt and Thomas Toch are both nationally known for their research and writing on matters of standards and assessment. These experts and other well-known researchers have analyzed content and performance standards and identified the following weaknesses among them.

CHALLENGES

State content standards are broad and lack a clear progression from basic to advanced skills. The process that states undergo to define standards is well-documented. States often rely on the consensus of committees to develop their content standards. Typically, public hearings are held to ensure buy-in from educators and the community-at-large. The resulting content standards often include far too many topics within each grade level, which can have a negative impact on instruction. Teachers must either spend insufficient time touching on many topics or limit instruction to topics that might appear on standardized tests.

Teachers also lack effective guidance from textbooks. Most standards-setting committees look to the work of national organizations (e.g., in math and science) when constructing their state's standards, yet a recent study by the NAS found that the content of state standards varies significantly. Textbook companies try to incorporate as many of the state standards as possible into their products to expand their market. The unwieldy textbooks that result exacerbate the confusion for teachers who are uncertain where to focus their instructional efforts with students.

Mathematics provides a clear example of the lack of coherence among most states' content standards. Most high-performing countries have identified a streamlined set of mathematics topics that build a foundation for advanced mathematics in higher grades. In the United States, a consensus stating when to teach specific topics is lacking. Students are taught the same topics year after year with very little depth added each time.

Reviews of state performance standards reveal a lack of rigor and significant variability among states. In comparing state and NAEP proficiency cut scores, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that performance standards vary significantly between states.

Inconsistency among state cut scores means that a student who is considered a proficient reader in one state could be placed in a remedial reading class by moving to a neighboring state. These discrepancies could cause confusion among students and parents.

In an attempt to ensure alignment of assessments and content standards, states are asking test development companies for customized tests that measure whether students mastered individual topics. These tests can cost up to five times as much to produce as the off-the-shelf tests that were previously predominant among state testing practices.

COMPARING STATE CUT SCORES TO NAEP PROFICIENCY: 4TH GRADE READING
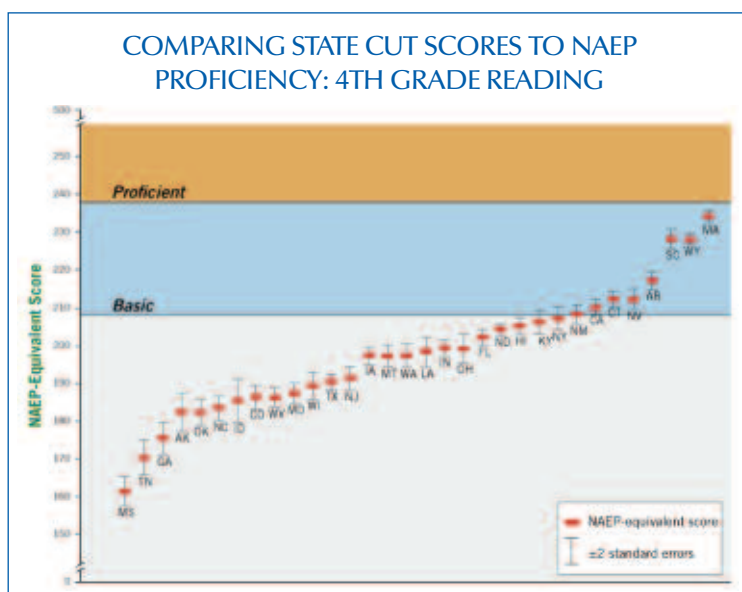
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007). Comparing State Proficiency Standards Using NAEP.

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States face an incentive to set the bar low and focus on low-level skills. Since NCLB penalizes schools when too many students fail to achieve the state's proficiency cut score, states face a perverse incentive to set proficiency cut scores at a low level. The NCES also found that most states set their cut scores far below NAEP's proficiency level. A lack of rigor in these performance standards has implications for instruction and learning in the classroom. States also tend to use multiple choice assessments that focus on low-level skills, since these exams are less expensive to construct and less time-consuming to score.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

1. **Explore interstate collaborations to improve standards and assessments.** Working together, states can establish high standards that are commonly agreed to be world-class, thus allowing policymakers to focus on the alignment of their education system to these goals. Pooling state resources is also a strategy for developing higher quality assessments, which are costly to develop and time-consuming to score. It is estimated that NCLB testing requirements cost states $1.9 billion between 2003 and 2008 and would have cost up to $5.3 billion if states had used tests with a large percentage of open-ended questions.[1]

2. **Ensure that your state's content standards map out essential knowledge and skills**. Effective content standards call for deep learning in a small number of topics each year. The content is sequenced logically from grade-to-grade, ultimately leading to college and workforce readiness. Legislators can ensure that their state's process for revising standards includes information about college readiness, workforce readiness, and standards in high-performing countries. A process for continual review and revision is needed to "ratchet up" the standards over time.

3. **Benchmark your state's goals and progress against high-performing states and nations**. Legislators can ensure that their state is considering the content and rigor of assessments such as NAEP, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) when establishing their own content standards, assessments, and proficiency cut scores. Standards-setting committees can review the standards of nations that perform well on TIMSS and PISA and can examine practices among U.S. states that perform well on the NAEP.

4. **Place all students on a path to college readiness**. Algebra is considered a gateway to college-level math and is a common requirement for middle-school students in other countries. Legislators can review their state's graduation requirements to ensure that all students are expected to take such gateway courses.

COLLABORATING TO IMPROVE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

To meet the testing demands of NCLB, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont set out to develop the **New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)** in 2002. This partnership has produced a high-quality set of standards, assessments, and support materials. By pooling their resources, the three partner states developed high-quality standards and assessments at a lower cost per student.

In 2005, Achieve, Inc., established the **American Diploma Project (ADP)**, a coalition now including 33 states dedicated to aligning high school standards, graduation requirements, assessments, and accountability policies with the demands of college and careers. Achieve, Inc., works with ADP states individually to improve their standards-based systems; however, nine ADP states worked together to develop a common Algebra II exam that is now being used in 14 states total.

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[1] Per Tom Toch, information comes from a 2003 GAO report. United States General Accounting Office, *TITLE I: Characteristics of Tests Will Influence Expenses; Information Sharing May Help states Realize Efficiencies* (USGAO, GAO-03-389, May, 2003): 15.

Using Data to Make Sound Investments

Moderator:
Former Governor Jim Hunt, James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy

Resource Experts:
Ruth Neild, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University
Jay Pfeiffer, Florida Department of Education

In 2006, state policymakers spent nearly half of their general funds on education. In an era of tight resources and competing priorities, longitudinal data are vital toward ensuring accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement. Reliable and accurate data enable leaders at all levels to make decisions that are cost-effective and programmatically sound.

A longitudinal data system allows tracking of individual student progress from year-to-year. Such systems provide feedback about how schools are doing and show which programs are working to move student achievement forward.

Across the nation, states are improving their longitudinal data systems to access better and more timely data in order to inform decision-making from the state level down to the school level. National resources exist to help states develop and implement a comprehensive data system. The Data Quality Campaign (DQC), administered by the National Center for Educational Accountability, provides technical assistance to states. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education has provided funding to 27 states to improve their data systems and, in June 2008, issued a similar invitation for additional states to apply for funding for 2009.

10 ELEMENTS OF A LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM

According to the DQC, an effective longitudinal data system must include the following 10 essential elements:

1. A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years;
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information;
3. The ability to match individual student test records from year-to-year to measure academic growth;
4. Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested;
5. A teacher-identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students;
6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned;
7. Student-level college readiness test scores;
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data;
9. The ability to match student records between the PreK-12 and postsecondary systems; and
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability.

Drawing from their own research and practice in district and state-level work and using other current research, Ruth Neild and Jay Pfeiffer described the obstacles states face in implementing data systems that effectively support students, especially those with the greatest needs.

CHALLENGES

Only four states have a data system in place that includes all of the 10 elements. According to the DQC, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, and Utah have implemented an effective longitudinal data system. Six states still lack a unique student identifier, which would allow student-level tracking and data analysis. Without this student identifier, states cannot accurately report student-specific needs and can only estimate problems and concerns among schools.

State-level data analysis is not used to identify "distress signals" among students who may drop out. With student-level longitudinal data, states would be able to look back at the achievement patterns of students who drop out and identify early warning signals that may have been evident during the elementary or middle grades. Often, high school data are used to identify students who are not on track to graduate – potential dropouts. At this point, it is usually too late to reverse a student's trajectory of failure or disengagement.

K-12 data systems are not always integrated and aligned with university-level and workforce systems. Often, state-level data are housed separately, according to the corresponding agency. Silos of data do not promote the rich analysis needed to ensure strategic use of resources across all sectors within a state. In addition, K-12 programmatic decisions are based on data only available within the education system rather than on outcome data from the university system or state labor department.

LESSONS FROM FLORIDA

For many years, the state of Florida has been at the forefront of using longitudinal data, and it was the first state in the nation to be recognized by the DQC for having all 10 essential elements in place. Wanting to ensure equitable funding for all students and to understand how they fared after leaving the education system, the Florida Legislature was the primary driver for creating the system.

Florida's data system integrates education data with other state agencies, which enables state leaders to follow students through the state's workforce system as well as track the types of public services they may use. This outcome data allow the state to answer critical questions about the effectiveness of education practices, such as:

- What factors predict whether a student will drop out of high school?
- What are the costs to the state for a high school dropout?
- What are the costs of getting a student through Algebra I, and how did the student do in college/the workforce?
- What indicators predict teacher effectiveness?
- Does assessment data for pre-K students predict success throughout the education continuum?

Florida's system depends on a few key factors that enable such in-depth data analysis, including: common course numbers and directories in all high schools; statewide articulation agreements; a state-level oversight committee; a state culture of data sharing; and a means to follow the records of individual students across geographic areas and education sectors.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

1. **Increase support for the implementation of a quality, statewide longitudinal data system**. An investment in a quality system, such as Florida's, will facilitate effective spending and better tracking of students' needs throughout the education system. Effective access to and use of longitudinal data enable state leaders to invest in effective programs for the students with the greatest needs.

2. **Provide detailed data analysis for school districts that describes the early warning signals exhibited by struggling students**. States can provide student-level information to districts that helps them to spend resources strategically – on the students who need the most support and with the right interventions. With early warning data signals identified by the state, school districts can then focus on implementing programs that prevent future failure.

3. **Support capacity building at the state and local levels to make data an essential tool for improving student achievement**. To maximize the benefit of longitudinal student data, leaders at all levels need to be equipped with the knowledge and ability to understand and analyze the information provided and to implement changes that address student needs.

4. **Update student privacy policies to clarify appropriate uses of statewide data**. Sharing student-specific data allows states to track students as they move within states and across state lines, to integrate information with other agencies that provide student services, and to conduct research that yields useful information about effective practices at all levels of the education system. States should define the policies that govern access to and use of student-specific data.

Effective Strategies for Keeping Students in School

Moderator:
Daniel J. Cardinali, Communities In Schools

Resource Experts:
Beverly Hall, Atlanta Public Schools
Ruth Neild, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University
Kim Zamarin, New Mexico Community Foundation

In every state, low high school graduation rates are cause for major concern. Nationally, approximately one-third of all public school students fail to graduate from high school and nearly half of low-income and minority students fail to graduate from high school. National graduation rates show significant differences among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. These data indicate that we continue to have an achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their counterparts.

Race/Ethnicity	Four-Year Graduation Rates
African-American	51%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	54%
Asian	79%
Latino	52%
White	72%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

Specific communities with a majority of low-income and minority students are also disproportionately affected by the dropout crisis. Research at Johns Hopkins University indicates that 1,700 high schools nationwide have weak promoting power or, in other words, they consistently fail to graduate a large portion of their students in four years. In these high schools, only 60 percent or fewer entering freshman begin their senior year three years later. A disproportionate number of these schools are located in low-income and high-minority communities. The map below offers a by-county snapshot of where these schools are located.

PROMOTING POWER ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Counties with 1 or more weak promoting power high schools (gray shading) and counties with 5 or more weak promoting power high schools (black shading).
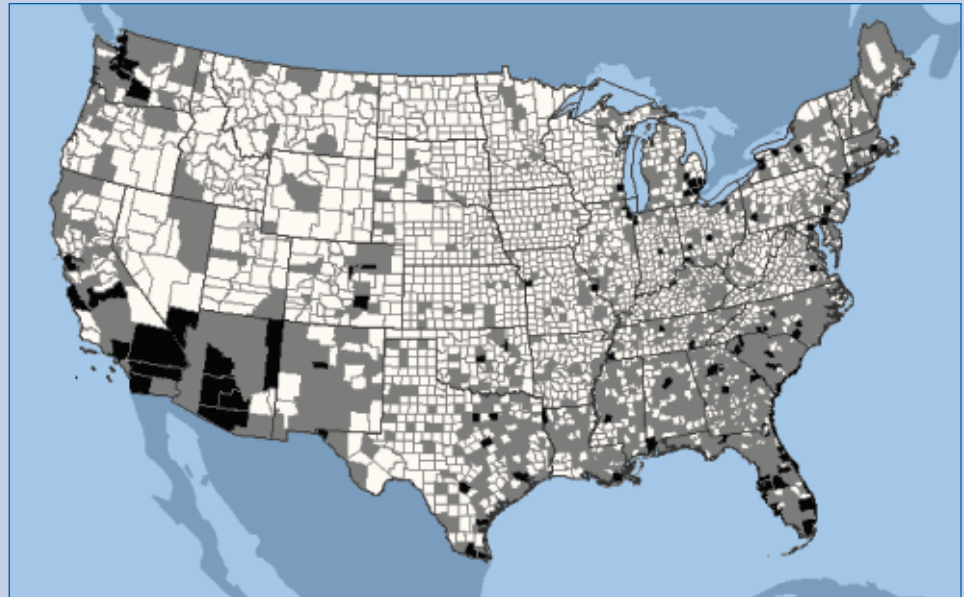
Source: Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

Graduation is not the norm for students in these schools, labeled "dropout factories" by researchers at Johns Hopkins. In addition, these schools typically require deep and systemic reform to reverse this trend. To access a searchable database of dropout factories by state, please visit: http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_and_local_info/promotingpower.

A panel of national, state, and district leaders was selected to provide current research and data on the issues of keeping students in school. These experts drew from their own work and the work of other respected researchers and practitioners to describe the current challenges schools face.

CHALLENGES

Struggling students often do not receive support early enough to have a meaningful impact. According to a recent survey, 35 percent of students who drop out of school do so because they are failing to succeed. Some students experience failure because of poor academic preparation; for others, it is rooted in unmet social-emotional needs. Regardless, few students drop out at the first sign of failure. Students who eventually drop out may struggle for several years, experiencing repeated failure before finally giving up.

Interventions for failing schools are not comprehensive. Despite good intentions, many dropout prevention efforts fail to significantly alter the school environment or a student's academic experience. Many districts and schools may implement a variety of programs to support students at risk of dropping out. For some schools, a lack of sustainable financial resources or qualified personnel may prevent the success of potentially promising interventions.

Services for students are not integrated or available. In many low-income communities, students do not have access to critical resources, such as mental health and health care, proven to help reduce the risk of dropping out. In addition, quality afterschool programs are often not easily accessible or available. In a national survey by the Afterschool Alliance, 87 percent of respondents said children in their communities lacked adequate access to afterschool programs.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

1. **Use early warning indicators to identify and provide support for students at risk of dropping out**. Longitudinal studies have identified risk factors that predict dropouts with 85 percent accuracy. These indicators help identify students who are off-track as early as the 6th grade. Creating an early warning data system based on accurate indicators can ensure that dollars are spent effectively and efforts are focused on the right students.

2. **Focus on the schools where graduation is not the norm. Statewide initiatives designed to improve student outcomes should target schools with substantial numbers of struggling students**. Research has shown that effective intervention strategies are comprehensive and include several key features, including: intensive academic and social supports during the transitions to middle school and high school; comprehensive supports that ensure on-time promotion to 10th grade; a school structure that fosters relationships between students, teachers and other caring adults; courses to connect the relevance of what is being learned to adult success; and strategies to increase parental involvement at the high school level.

3. **Integrate support services for struggling students. An integrated approach to service delivery can positively influence student performance**. Connecting the education community with mental health, health care, and other social service resources encourages effective collaboration and coordinated services for students, especially those with the greatest needs. Afterschool programs, for example, can play a vital role in reconnecting schools and communities—helping schools move beyond the constraints of the regular day and capitalize on the resources, assets, and perspectives of organizations and individuals outside of the school.

A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO INTEGRATED SUPPORT

Recent efforts in New Mexico provide a strong example of a statewide approach to providing integrated services for at-risk students. The New Mexico Integrated Services in Schools Initiative (NMISSI) is a network of educational, health, and family services integrated into the middle school experience. An initiative of the New Mexico Community Foundation, NMISSI includes the following components:

• Extended-Day Learning
Outside of regular school hours, students have access to valuable project-based learning activities that include academic enrichment, arts integration, physical activity, homework assistance, service learning, and leadership development. Students also receive mentoring from trained, caring adults.

• Comprehensive, School-Based Healthcare
Students have access to high-quality healthcare, including preventive and primary medical care, behavioral health, health education, age-appropriate reproductive health education, and dental services.

• Family Supports
Families are screened for eligibility for other public services and are supported to access them. Families also receive financial literacy guidance.

Getting Dropouts Back on Track

Moderator:

Former Governor Bob Wise, Alliance for Excellent Education

Resource Experts:

Lucretia Murphy, Jobs for the Future

Delores Parker, North Carolina Community College System

Current estimates put the number of youth who are not in school, do not have a diploma, and are not working at 3.8 million. High school dropouts, on average, earn $9,600 less per year than high school graduates, and about $1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates.

While dropout prevention strategies have received renewed interest among states, less attention has been paid to the need to reconnect individuals who have already dropped out of school.

Former Governor Bob Wise has spent the last three years as the leader of a respected organization focused on improving graduation rates and high school reform. Drawing from their state-level experiences and deep knowledge of the issues facing dropouts, Governor Wise, Lucretia Murphy, and Delores Parker provided a clear picture of the following challenges related to re-engaging students who have already dropped out of school.

CHALLENGES

Many dropouts attempt to earn a college degree, but few achieve it. A national survey has shown that most dropouts regret the decision immediately, and 63 percent will eventually earn a high school credential. Forty-three percent of dropouts re-enroll in an attempt to earn postsecondary credentials, but only nine percent of these individuals successfully complete a two- or four-year degree.

If we don't know why students drop out, it's hard to assist them in re-entry. A "one size fits all" approach to dropout recovery is not effective. Students drop out for a variety of reasons, including: financial stress, academic failure, boredom, drug and alcohol abuse, or significant family responsibilities. Most states do not collect the necessary data to analyze why students are dropping out. Data that describe the academic needs of students are needed to identify which kids are dropping out and to develop appropriate recovery efforts.

The General Educational Development (GED) program does not prepare students for college and work as well as a high school diploma. While the GED is generally thought of as a program for adults, dropouts are pursuing this route at increasingly younger ages. In 2002, 44 percent of the individuals who took the GED after dropping out of high school were not even 18 years old. Though 50 states and the District of Columbia require GED candidates to be at least 18 years old, most jurisdictions offer exemptions to this requirement. Earning a GED improves the economic prospects of dropouts who have extremely low academic skills, but a GED will not greatly improve the economic prospects of dropouts who are capable of high school and postsecondary coursework.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

1. **Redesign alternative and dropout recovery programs to reflect students' individual needs**. Effective alternative education and dropout recovery programs are designed to meet specific needs of the young adults they serve. Teens that are over-age for their grade and are severely behind in credits need an intensive, compressed academic program to quickly make up the credits needed for a diploma. Students who are on track to graduate, and drop out after reaching 11th grade, typically leave because of life events. These individuals need flexible alternatives to the traditional high school.

2. **Ensure that alternative and dropout recovery programs are rigorous and relevant**. Dropouts do not merely need more "seat time" in a classroom setting. Effective dropout recovery programs have outcomes that are meaningful. The content of these programs should be based on the state's education standards and college readiness. Some dropouts will need access to age-appropriate literacy instruction to elevate their reading and writing skills to levels that meet the demands of today's workforce.

3. **Help students transition into community colleges**. GED programs that are connected to community colleges help put dropouts on the path to a postsecondary degree. Community colleges have great potential to help dropouts obtain the credentials and skills they need to advance to further education and better careers. They offer remedial, vocational, and academic courses that can meet the needs and interests of many students. Dropouts can make the transition to mainstream education through a wide range of community college programs, from short-term training programs to two-year associate degrees.

   While community colleges are less costly than four-year institutions, money is still a barrier for many potential students. Most financial aid programs are not available to students in non-credit or non-degree programs or to those who are enrolled less than half-time. Some states have used Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) resources, along with other state dollars, to create innovative financing programs for part-time and/or non-degree students.

AN EXPERIENCED VIEW OF LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

During the program, Howard Lee, a former state senator and the current chair of the North Carolina State Board of Education, offered his thoughts on what it takes to lead effective change in education. From his wealth of experience and nuanced perspective, he shared the following points:

- **Promote education priorities that are tied to college and workforce readiness**. It may take significant time and effort to establish standards that truly lead to college and workforce readiness. Educators may fear that raising standards and expectations means sanctions for schools and higher dropout rates. Educators need to see that the legislature is willing to back their efforts to raise achievement for all students.

- **Capitalize on the longevity of legislative careers**. State legislators have developed great education ideas, and legislators are able to continue pushing for change over the course of their careers. Once changes are made, legislators play a crucial role in monitoring the effects of their legislation and making appropriate policy adjustments to improve implementation. Legislators can also protect against attempts to return to the status quo.

- **Ensure that state dollars are being used effectively**. Most education programs and efforts sound good, but programs vary in the effects that they actually have on instruction and learning. Legislators can ask their education leaders how funds are being used and whether current allocations are achieving the best results possible.

- **Build trust among the branches of government and your state department of education**. Fellow legislators and the governor's office will be more confident in legislative proposals that are relevant and based on accurate research. Legislators can also communicate with professionals in the state department of education to get a clear picture of the department's goals and progress.

- **Communicate with teachers**. State legislators can use data from surveys of teacher working conditions to identify mechanisms for retaining successful teachers. Legislators can also visit classrooms to learn more directly about the challenges that teachers and students are facing.

CONCLUSION

The United States is facing an unprecedented educational challenge: the simultaneous need to improve high school graduation rates while raising academic performance to prepare all students for success in college, a career, and civic life. Fortunately, solutions exist, and some schools across the nation are having success educating all of their students at a high level. These high-achieving schools can be found in all states. Understanding what makes them effective is a critical first step in developing a systemic approach that enables all schools to achieve success with all students.

Legislative leadership plays a key role in the development, implementation, and sustainability of such efforts. North Carolina House Speaker Joe Hackney challenged his colleagues to take at least one item from the agenda and "run with it." State policymakers must come together collaboratively to identify the priorities for change and marshal public and private resources, financial and otherwise, to accomplish meaningful and long-lasting state-level improvement in education. Focused education initiatives must use data effectively and be accountable for improving achievement gaps, graduating more students, and re-engaging those who slip through the cracks.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

There are numerous resources available to inform and support state-level improvement in education. Those mentioned or used in this report are listed below:

Alliance for Excellent Education
www.all4ed.org

Annenberg Foundation
www.whannenberg.org

Center for Social Organization of Schools
www.gradgap.org

Communities In Schools
www.cisnet.org

Data Quality Campaign
www.dataqualitycampaign.org

Education Sector
www.educationsector.org

The Education Trust
www.edtrust.org

Jobs for the Future
www.jff.org

New Mexico Community Foundation
www.nmcf.org

Woodrow Wilson Foundation
www.woodrow.org

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