

## Graduating ALL Students With A High School Diploma That Counts

### THE GOAL

Every 26 seconds a student drops out of school. In total, over 1.2 million students a year—one-third of our students overall—are leaving high school without having earned a diploma. And far too few of those who do graduate are adequately prepared for college and careers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that at least two-thirds of all new jobs—and virtually all high paying jobs—will require at least some postsecondary education. To not be prepared for this eventuality is to close the door on many attractive, family-sustaining jobs in high growth sectors.

A high school diploma that does not prepare a young adult to meet the challenges of college, the workplace and life after high school is of little value; we must ensure that all graduates receive a diploma that counts. That is why Achieve and America's Promise Alliance are committed to an agenda to increase graduation rates *and* increase the value of a high school diploma.

### THE SOLUTION

#### **Rigorous Standards, Rigorous Graduation Requirements, and Strong Supports for All Students**

It is increasingly clear that America's future competitiveness and prosperity depend on ensuring that our young people graduate ready for college and careers. As a nation we must work to ensure that all students have access to an effective education.

- All states, districts, schools and communities must adopt rigorous, college- and career-ready academic standards and graduation requirements.
- Students must receive clear and consistent messages—starting in middle school, if not earlier—about what they need to know to be ready for college and careers. This includes counseling students on middle and high school course-taking.
- All students must have access to classes that will enable them to be ready for college and careers. We can no longer place just a few students on a college-preparatory track, but must provide opportunity for all students to enroll in rigorous curriculum tracks. This means four year of grade-level English and mathematics, as well as science courses with labs, social studies, foreign language, career and technical education, and arts courses. A well-rounded, rigorous curriculum should be the norm.

### LEARN MORE

Achieve was created by the nation's governors and business leaders, Achieve helps states raise academic standards and achievement so that all students graduate ready for college, careers, and citizenship.

The American Diploma Project Network managed by Achieve is a coalition of 33 states dedicated to aligning standards, graduation requirements, assessments and accountability policies with the demands of college and careers.

To learn more about Achieve and the American Diploma Project visit [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org).

America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest cross-sector Alliance for children and youth. To address the dropout crisis, the Alliance will support 50 state and 50 city dropout prevention summits to be held by 2010.

These summits are part of a national *Dropout Prevention Campaign* to increase awareness, encourage collaboration and facilitate action in those states and communities that want to improve their graduation rates.

To learn more about the National Dropout Prevention Summit Initiative visit [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org).

## THE SOLUTION (CONTINUED):

- K-12 and postsecondary institutions should be sending consistent messages to students about college readiness. This includes aligning high school graduation requirements with minimum college admissions requirements and using high school assessments as early indicators of college readiness. Private and public incentives should also be utilized to encourage students to take rigorous courses in high school.
- Communities must not only counsel students about what it will take to be college- and career-ready, but also provide students with the support they need to succeed in the transition from high school into postsecondary and workplace settings.

## EXAMPLES:

### Leading States and Localities

- **Indiana** first developed the Core 40 curriculum—an optional set of college- and career-ready graduation requirements—in 1994 in collaboration with business, K-12 and postsecondary leaders. Since then, the percentage of students earning a Core 40 or a more rigorous Academic Honors diploma rose from 13 to 70 percent between 1993–94 and 2006–07, and the percent of college-bound graduates increased from 59 to 75 between 1995-96 and 2006-07. Building on the Core 40's early success, Indiana's Education Roundtable, co-chaired by the governor and state superintendent of education, recommended that the Core 40 become the default high school curriculum for all students, which was approved by the Indiana Legislature in 2005. Starting with the class of 2011, all students are enrolled automatically in Core 40, which also becomes an admissions requirement for the state's public, four-year colleges and universities.
- When **Washington D.C.** Mayor Adrian Fenty took office in early 2007, the District already was poised to overhaul its graduation requirements to bring them into alignment with college- and career-ready expectations. While Mayor Fenty has led some major changes in the structure and organization of D.C.'s public school system, he also readily joined district-wide efforts to double the number of high school students who graduate ready for college and careers and earn a college degree by 2015. Currently, only 9 percent of all incoming freshmen achieve that goal. The Double the Numbers coalition—of which Mayor Fenty, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, DC Public Schools, the DC Council, the DC College Access Program and the DC College Success Foundation, among others, are partners—has over 60 member organizations dedicated to preparing students for life after high school. Mayor Fenty also established an annual College Awareness Week to be held every September.
- In 1998, **San Jose Unified District** became the first district in California to require its students to fulfill the University of California's minimum subject-area requirements for freshman admission—a series of core academic courses and electives commonly called the "A-G" curriculum. As of 2004, the high school graduation rate rose to 74 percent and 65 percent of San Jose's graduates had passed every one of the courses required for entrance into the University of California and California State University systems with a C or better. Over 45 percent of San Jose's Hispanic graduates graduated university eligible compared to 21 percent statewide. This major policy change—and its subsequent success in graduating students prepared for college—is largely attributed to a strong commitment from parents, community-based organizations and the business community.