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Perspective
News and Views from Achieve

April 2008

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Commentary

Earlier this month America's Promise Alliance, a partnership of charitable foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and other education advocates, launched a national campaign to reduce high school dropout rates and prepare children for college, careers and life. The campaign includes a series of ground-breaking, high-level dropout prevention summits to be held in every state and 50 communities over the next two years. General Colin Powell, founding chair of the Alliance, joined his wife Alma in making the announcement - citing the dropout crisis as a serious threat to our economy and national security. Achieve is proud to be a partner in this effort.

This campaign comes on the heels of a new report that finds that America's largest cities are struggling to keep a majority of students in school. [*Cities in Crisis: A Special Analytic Report on High School Graduation*](#), released by the America's Promise Alliance and prepared by Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, finds that only half of all students served by the main school systems in the nation's 50 largest cities graduate from high school. In 35 of these cities' greater metropolitan areas, the graduation rates in urban schools were lower than those in nearby suburban communities, in some cases by as much as 35 percentage points. Nationwide, nearly one in three U.S. high school students drops out before graduating. In total, approximately 1.2 million students drop out each year - about 7,000 every school day, or one every 26 seconds.



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In response to these alarming statistics, the dropout prevention summits aim to increase public awareness of the dropout crisis by bringing mayors and governors, business owners, child advocates, school administrators, students and parents together to develop workable solutions. The summits are designed both to raise

awareness and develop actionable plans that will help put local high schools on the road to improve graduation rates. Importantly, the aim of the summits is to not just increase graduation rates, but to ensure that all students graduate with a diploma that counts. To that end, America's Promise Alliance is requiring that the outcomes of all of the summits include incorporating the Achieve [American Diploma Project](#) dual agenda goals of raising graduation rates AND rigor so that all students graduate ready for success.

Dropping out of high school negatively affects not just students and their families, but the nation's businesses, government and communities. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that high school dropouts from the class of 2006-07 will cost the U.S. more than \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes. "Economic success is dependent upon educational opportunities. If we are to compete, it is essential that we address America's growing dropout crisis," said Edward B. Rust, Jr., chairman and CEO of State Farm Insurance Company (and an Achieve, Inc. board member).

For more on the campaign, [go here](#).

New from Achieve

A Nation at Risk: 25 Years Later

In April 1983, [A Nation at Risk](#) was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. It sounded the alarm about the state of education in the United States and our future ability to compete on the world stage. Declining SAT scores and poor student performance on international comparisons reinforced an already growing sense that the country's future economic dominance was at risk and that schools were failing to meet the nation's current and future needs.

The 25th anniversary of *A Nation at Risk* is an important moment in time for the education reform movement because Achieve believes that there is more consensus, momentum and urgency now than at any time since *A Nation at Risk* was released; consensus that will ultimately improve student achievement, prepare high school graduates for



success in college, career and life and keep America competitive. States, and their partners, are leading the way on meeting the common goal of high school graduation, with a college and career ready diploma, for all. Download Achieve's [Risk Reversal? fact sheet](#) for more on Achieve's views.

Florida Joins ADP Network

On April 15 Governor Charlie Crist announced **Florida's** participation in the American Diploma Project Network. Florida is the 33rd state to join this effort designed to improve preparation of high school students for success in college and careers. "Florida has a proven record of improving student performance across all grade levels," Governor Crist said. "By working collaboratively with other states, we can maximize our efforts on behalf of our students." [More...](#)

Craig Barrett named Board Co-Chair

Intel chairman Craig R. Barrett has been announced as the incoming co-chair for Achieve's board of directors. Barrett, a long-time board member and outspoken advocate for improving the U.S. education system, succeeds Arthur Ryan, retiring chairman of Prudential Financial, Inc. who is stepping down from Achieve's board this spring. According to Barrett, "Achieve plays a strategic role in ensuring that U. S. students have the knowledge and skills they need to compete in an increasingly flat and complex world. By focusing policymakers and educators on raising academic standards and creating diplomas that count, I am confident that Achieve's efforts will help significantly more high school students reach their potential in college, career and life." [More...](#)

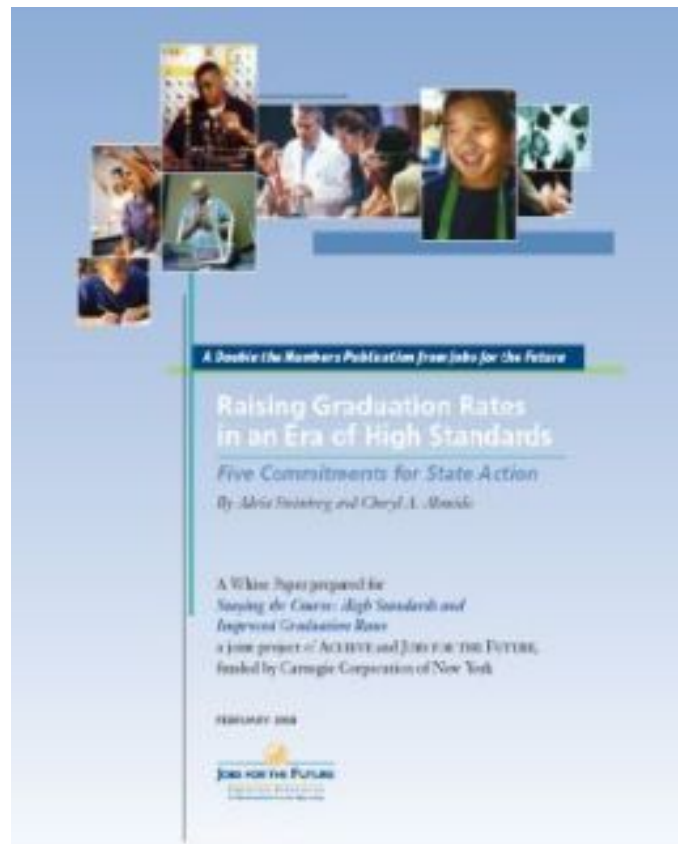
Assessment Partnership Update

The first administration of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Algebra II end-of-course exam will occur from May 1, 2008 through June 13, 2008. The exam will be administered to more than 111,000 students. The ADP Algebra II end-of-course exam is the largest effort a group of states has ever undertaken to develop a common assessment based on common standards. Currently, fourteen ADP Network states are part of the consortium. A set of released items is available, including information for teachers and students on what to expect on the exam. A fact sheet that answers frequently asked questions, including information on the core test content and how states can become members of the consortium is also available. [More...](#)

A subset of the ADP Algebra II states are also developing a common Algebra I end-of-course exam. This exam has been developed so that it aligns with and supports the purposes of the Algebra II end-of-course exam. Item development for the Algebra I exam will begin this spring, with a field test in fall 2008 and the first operational exam being administered in spring 2009.

Report on Raising Graduation Rates

As state leaders grapple with simultaneously raising academic standards and graduation rates, they need to pay particular attention to closing graduation and achievement gaps among different income and racial groups. [*Raising Graduation Rates in an Era of High Standards*](#) identifies five recommendations, and suggests action steps policymakers can take to achieve these dual goals. By building on and complementing ongoing systemic educational reform efforts, states can - and in some cases have begun to - improve the educational outcomes of and options for high school-aged students, especially low-income and struggling students. This report is part of a joint project of Achieve, Inc., and Jobs for the Future and funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. [More...](#)



Moving Beyond Tracking

Over the past year, three of the four remaining states that still required entering high school students to choose between a rigorous "college prep" and a less rigorous "technical" pathway - **Georgia**, **North Carolina** and **Tennessee** - adopted college- and career-ready graduation requirements for all students. These policy changes represent a major shift away from holding career and technical education (CTE) concentrators to a lower curricular standard, thereby limiting their post-high school opportunities, and towards providing students with multiple - but equally rigorous - pathways to a high school diploma.

News Clips

1. **New Jersey Education Framework Unveiled**

To prepare every **New Jersey** student for college and the workplace, the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee recommends focusing on five areas, including standards and high school graduation requirements, assessment alignment, teachers and school leaders, learning communities and personalized education, and

Previously, both Georgia and Tennessee offered their high school students two pathways, which culminated in a college/university diploma or a technical diploma, while North Carolina offered four pathways for students to choose from upon entering high school, ranging from Occupation and Career Prep to College Technical Prep and College/University Prep. Once the new requirements are phased in, the three states will each streamline these pathways in one college- and career-ready diploma. Equally important, the states have structured their new requirements to ensure students can still pursue a comprehensive CTE program of study.

Providing CTE or technical endorsements that go beyond a universal set of college- and career-ready graduation requirements is another promising model that can eliminate tracking. **Indiana** and **New York**, for example, both offer CTE endorsements that build on the already rigorous Core 40 and Regents Diploma, respectively. CTE concentrators in these two states graduate from high school having completed a college- and career-ready curriculum, a CTE program of study, and some demonstration of career-readiness. Holding CTE students and their non-CTE counterparts to equally high standards sends a clear signal that all students, regardless of their post-high school plans, deserve a rigorous high school education that will prepare them for any and all challenges they will face upon graduation.

P-16 alignment. [More...](#)

2. **Many Massachusetts Graduates Unprepared for College**

The Boston Globe reports that thousands of **Massachusetts** public high school graduates arrive at college unprepared, forcing them to take remedial courses that discourage many from staying in school, according to a new statewide study. [More...](#)

3. **Secretary Spellings Proposes Rules for Graduation Rates**

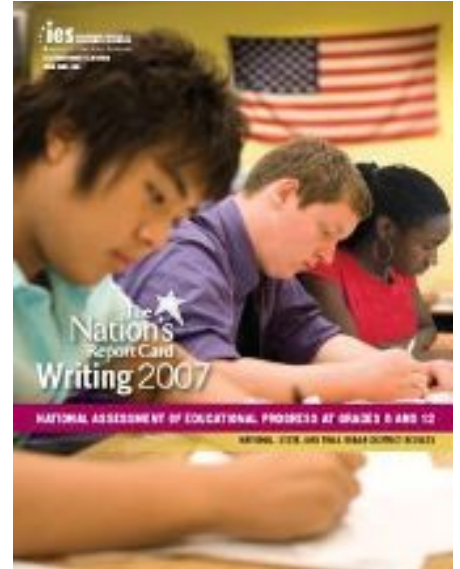
U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings proposed regulations requiring all states to adopt a uniform cohort graduation rate formula no later than 2012-13. The regulations would take effect in November, after a public comment period. In a *New York Times* article that prefaced the formal release of the proposals, Michael Cohen, president of Achieve, said the proposed measure would be considerably more important than most U.S. Department of Education regulations because "it will basically affect every high school in the country."

[More...](#)

New Resources

- The National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education issued *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2007*. At both the national and state levels, and in most of the 10 school districts tested, students are performing better on NAEP writing than they did on the 2002 and 1998 exams. More than 165,000 eighth- and 12th-graders participated in the representative-sample writing assessment. Students were asked to complete two 25-minute sections, each featuring one writing task intended to measure how well they can write for different audiences while being able to show their ability to narrate, persuade or inform.

[More...](#)



- The National Mathematics Advisory Panel presented its final report that contains 45 findings and recommendations on a range of topics including instructional practices, materials, professional development, and assessments. "The panel's research showed that if students do well in algebra, then they are more likely to succeed in college and be ready for better career opportunities in the global economy of the 21st century," said Secretary Spellings. "We must increase access to algebra and other rigorous coursework if we hope to close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their peers." The panel found that the earlier children learn mathematics, the better their chances of success.

[More...](#)

- Communities for Quality Education has analyzed State of the State gubernatorial addresses made from 2004 to 2008 and highlights specific education policy trends. Between 2004 and 2007, every governor who delivered a State of the State address stressed the importance of education to economic growth. In fact, no issue surrounding education has been focused on as much by governors in their State of the States as the link between education and economic prosperity. [More...](#)

Perspective is sent to you by Achieve, Inc., a bipartisan, non-profit organization founded by the nation's governors and CEOs to help states raise standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship. Please feel free to circulate this e-newsletter to your colleagues.

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