

Center for American Progress Action Fund



**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**



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## Five National Organizations Urge Congress to Pass the Graduation Promise Act

**WASHINGTON, DC – As students settle into a new school year, five national organizations committed to improving educational outcomes for America’s high school students are urging the passage of the Graduation Promise Act.**

The Graduation Promise Act is designed to improve high schools and reduce dropout rates, and is sponsored by U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, along with Senators Christopher Dodd, Patty Murray, Jack Reed, Sherrod Brown, Robert Casey, Jeff Merkley, and Al Franken. The Graduation Promise Act is enthusiastically supported by the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Center for American Progress Action Fund, National Council of La Raza, Jobs for the Future, and the Everyone Graduates Center.

The Graduation Promise Act reflects the recommendations in a recent report, *Addressing America’s Dropout Challenge*, co-authored by the Center for American Progress, the sister organization of the Center for American Progress Action Fund, and Jobs for the Future.

"Improving graduation rates is key to our nation’s economic success," said John Podesta, President and CEO of the Center for American Progress Action Fund. "We must strengthen our capacity at all levels to assist local school districts with resources needed to address the dropout crisis."

Every school day, more than seven thousand students become dropouts. Annually, that adds up to about 1.3 million students who will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled. The economic effect of high school dropouts is staggering. For instance, according to *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*,

a recent report by the Alliance for Excellent Education, if the students who dropped out of the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from nearly \$335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes.

"Slightly more than 10 percent of high schools produce more than half of the nation's dropouts," said Gov. Bob Wise, President of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. "Focusing on these high schools will produce immediate gains by turning thousands of dropouts into graduates. By introducing the Graduation Promise Act, these Senators have shown the will to address this problem; their legislation shows the way."

For minority and low-income students, the situation is especially dire. High school students living in low-income families are four and a half times more likely to drop out of school than their peers from high-income families, and only about 51.2 percent of Black students and 55 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 78 percent of White students.

"Students without a high school diploma are increasingly limited in their employment opportunities," said Marlene B. Seltzer, President and CEO of Jobs for the Future. "With little hope of economic independence or career advancement, millions of young people become driven towards unemployment and poverty. The Graduation Promise Act is needed to keep students in school so they can obtain economic security and better job skills."

"Far too many Latino and African American students are lost year after year to our worst performing schools," said Janet Murguia, President and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S. "The Graduation Promise Act will be able to provide the critical resources needed to close this graduation gap."

The *Graduation Promise Act* is designed to establish an appropriate federal role in secondary school reform by:

- 1) Creating a federal-state-local school reform partnership, focused on transforming the nation's lowest performing high schools;
- 2) Providing funds to build capacity for secondary school improvement, and at the same time provide states and local school districts with the resources to ensure that high schools with the greatest challenges receive the support they need to implement research-based interventions;
- 3) Strengthening state improvement systems to identify, differentiate among, and target the level of reform and resources necessary to improve low-performing high schools, while ensuring transparency and accountability; and
- 4) Advancing the research and development needed to ensure a robust supply of highly effective secondary school models for students most at risk of being left behind.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the leadership and commitment to addressing the dropout crisis in this country by the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

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