

October 6, 2009

Senator Jeff Bingaman
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bingaman:

We, the undersigned education, civil rights, and advocacy organizations, thank you for your leadership in introducing the *Graduation Promise Act* (GPA) to ensure that every student graduates prepared for the 21st century. In a world in which a meaningful high school diploma has become the *minimum* qualification necessary to obtain a good job and support a family, far too many American students are allowed to fall off the path to prosperity. These problems have escalated to crisis proportions in thousands of high schools and are hampering the opportunities of millions of students.

Nationally, only two-thirds of the students who enter ninth grade graduate four years later. Researchers have identified almost 2,000 high schools (about 13 percent of American high schools) that produce 51 percent of the nation's dropouts. By addressing the persistent failure of and transforming this relatively small number of high schools we can fundamentally improve educational outcomes for America's students and better their impact on America's society and economy.

The cost of educational failure is borne not only by individual students, but the rest of society and the American economy. If the high school 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. Furthermore, research indicates that unless high schools are able to graduate their students at higher rates, nearly 13 million students will drop out over the next decade. The result will be a loss to the nation of *\$3 trillion*. Our economy cannot afford to allow the dropout crisis to continue.

The *Graduation Promise Act* will address this crisis by establishing an appropriate federal role in secondary school reform. GPA will strengthen 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. This bill will also advance 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.

The time is right for federal action. By addressing the needs of students in middle and high schools, the *Graduation Promise Act* can ensure that every student graduates prepared for the challenges of postsecondary education and work in the 21st Century. We thank you for making this goal a priority.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
America's Promise Alliance
Association for Career and Technical Education

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
Center for American Progress Action Fund
College Board
Communities In Schools, Inc.
Everyone Graduates Center
Every Person Influences Children
First Focus
Jobs for the Future
Knowledge Alliance
League of United Latin American Citizens
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium
NCLR (National Council of La Raza)
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Women's Law Center
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Project GRAD
Public Education Network
School Social Work Association of America
Southeast Asia Research Action Center
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
YMCA of the USA