111th Congress
Graduation Promise Act (S. 1698/H.R. 4181)

Problem: Forty years ago, the United States was number one in the world in high school graduation rates; today, it ranks 17th. More than a decade after Congress declared a national goal that 90 percent of American high school students graduate from high school, the United States is far from that target and graduation rates have stagnated.

- Only about a third of the students who enter ninth grade each fall graduate four years later prepared for college or the contemporary workplace.
- High school students living in low-income families drop out of school at six times the rate of their peers from high-income families;
- Only 50 percent of American Indian, 51 percent of African American students and about 55 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 76 percent of White students.

In this country, there are about 2,000 high schools that produce the majority of dropouts.

The good news is that effective reforms exist which can transform high schools with low student achievement and low graduation rates, and keep students at the greatest risk of dropping out on the path to graduation. We know that we can improve our high schools and our graduation rates; we just need the commitment and the resources to get it done.

Solution: The Graduation Promise Act (GPA) would build the capacity of high schools to reduce dropout rates and increase student achievement 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.

Title I of GPA authorizes a $2.4 billion High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund to support the development in every state of statewide systems of differentiated high school improvement. Such systems would focus on building the capacity of secondary schools to reduce

dropout rates and increase student achievement, and would target resources to help the lowest performing high schools implement evidence-based interventions.

Title II authorizes $60 million in competitive grants to strengthen the supply of quality education options available to schools and districts through the development, implementation, and replication of effective secondary school models for the large number of off-track students in low-performing high schools and for youth who have dropped out of high school.

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