

ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

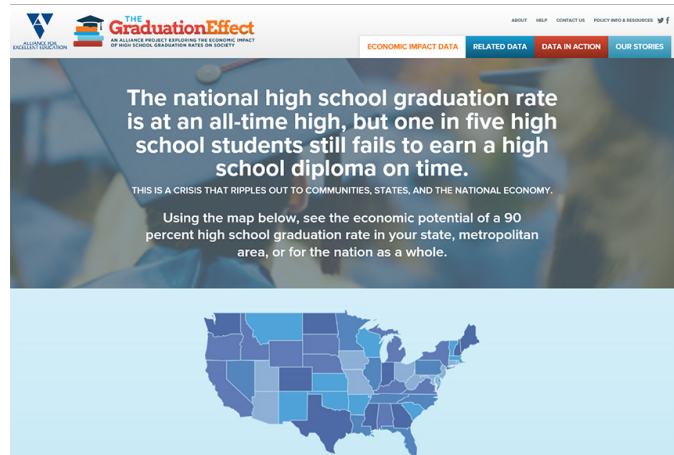
Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



THE GRADUATION EFFECT: Increasing National High School Graduation Rate Key to Job Creation and Economic Growth, New Alliance Analysis Finds

New data from the Alliance for Excellent Education demonstrates how graduating more students from high school creates new jobs, increases consumer spending, boosts tax revenues, and increases the gross domestic product. This “Graduation Effect” data is available for the United States as a whole, all fifty states and the District of Columbia, and more than 200 metro areas nationwide at impact.all4ed.org.



“The two areas of rising rates getting major attention are the Federal Reserve and the high school graduation rates,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance and former governor of West Virginia**. “For the short-term impact on the nation’s economy, the Federal Reserve’s raising of interest rates has generated a lot of attention, but over the long term, rising graduation rates are much more important for the nation’s economy.”

The national high school graduation rate is at an all-time high, but one in five students still fails to earn a diploma on time. Increasing the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent would likely have the following positive effects on the national economy:

- Create 65,150 new jobs
- Boost gross domestic product by \$11.5 billion annually
- Increase annual earnings by \$7.2 billion
- Increase annual spending by \$5.3 billion
- Increase federal tax revenue by \$1.1 billion

To put human faces on the economic gains associated with higher high school graduation rates, the Alliance is partnering with Communities in Schools (CIS), a nonprofit organization working to keep kids in school, to feature young people who overcame personal and educational challenges in their pursuit of a high school diploma.

“The struggle of not having a high school diploma isn’t something I saw in a movie or read in a book. They were friends of mine. They were my parents,” [says San Antonio City Councilman Rey Saldaña](#), who earned his diploma, graduated Stanford University, and became the youngest elected city councilman in San Antonio’s history. “The best part of my job is when I get to talk to students and provide to them a role model of somebody who looks like them, who came from their neighborhood, and who is now an example they can use ... and it all began with a high school diploma.”

Additional stories come from [Talitha Halley](#), who relocated with her family to Houston, Texas, after Hurricane Katrina made her and her family refugees, and [Jamal Tate](#), who had several run-ins with the law and served jail time during his senior year of high school but graduated from high school and college.

“The effects of poverty on today’s youth are staggering, and now impact a majority—51 percent—of our nation’s students,” says **CIS president Dan Cardinali**. “Given the enormous economic and social implications of the dropout crisis, we simply can’t afford to settle for an 80 percent graduation rate, especially when we already have proven solutions that are working for millions of low-income kids. We must focus on what is proven to work, like the Communities in Schools model, and take these methods to scale. This important study from the Alliance shows that delivering effective supports to our neediest students will have lasting, positive economic rewards that our country desperately needs.”

In December, the Alliance hosted a [video webinar](#) examining these economic findings in more detail, as well as how to ensure that more students stay in school and earn their high school diploma. It featured Wise, Saldaña, Cardinali, and **Cheryl Oldham, vice president of education and workforce at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation**.



“Compared to high school dropouts, high school graduates are [less likely to be unemployed](#), [less likely to tangle with the criminal justice system](#), and [more likely to have positive life outcomes](#), including better health and a longer life span,” said Wise. “Still, it is important to remember that a high school diploma is not an end point, but a jumping off point to greater things—college, a career, or additional training—that benefit the individual. And as these findings show, the rest of us will benefit as well.”

The Graduation Effect, which is made possible through generous support from State Farm®, builds on the Alliance’s previous work connecting improved education outcomes to economic benefits.

Visit impact.all4ed.org to explore the findings and see additional information, including technical notes and frequently asked questions.



MORE WORK NEEDED: Implementation of New Education Law Must Sharpen Focus on Traditionally Underserved Students and Nation's Lowest-Performing High Schools, Alliance for Excellent Education President Says to Education Department

During the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) January 11 public meeting on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** praised high school reform provisions within ESSA, [signed into law by President Obama on December 10](#), but urged ED to clarify the law's focus on traditionally underserved students and the nation's lowest-performing high schools.

"ESSA keeps the nation's foot on the high school graduation rate gas pedal by maintaining federal policy from both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations that, along with hard-working educators, parents, and students, have led to the highest graduation rate on record at 82.3 percent for the 2013–14 school year," said Wise.

Wise also recognized that much more work needs to be done.

"Even with those gains, one in five students drops out every year—that's more than 4,000 students every school day," Wise said. "Additionally, there remain 1,235 high schools serving nationwide that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students. These schools disproportionately enroll students of color and students from low-income communities. Graduation rate gaps also remain prevalent. In fact, over the past four years, the gap in high school graduation rates between Latino and white students grew in nine states. The gap between African American and white students grew in ten states."

As ED works to issue regulations for ESSA, Wise encouraged it to ensure that graduation rate gaps between different groups of students are addressed and high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students are appropriately targeted for intervention and support.

Specifically, Wise offered five recommendations for ED:

- 1) Use the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate to implement ESSA's requirement to identify and support high schools where one-third or more of students do not graduate.
- 2) Do not allow state accountability systems to mask the graduation rates and achievement of traditionally underserved students, such as students of color, and students from low-income communities.
- 3) Require that graduation rates carry sufficient weight within state accountability systems in order to trigger interventions in high schools that have low-graduation rates.
- 4) Use funding targeted for school improvement purposes for high-quality interventions in schools that have the lowest-performing students and the most promising approaches for school improvement.
- 5) Clarify that states have the flexibility to utilize accountability dashboards, not just indexes, to provide an array of information about school performance and practices, promote transparency, support the continuous improvement of all schools, and allow states to more

effectively measure the deeper learning skills and competencies students need to be successful in the modern world.

“The nation has made tremendous progress in increasing the high school graduation rate,” Wise said, “but more work is necessary to preserve the gains already made. Graduation rate gaps between different groups of students need to be addressed, and high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students need to be targeted to ensure that *all* students—regardless of their background or zip code—have access to a high-quality education that will secure their individual futures, as well as that of the nation.”

Wise’s complete testimony is available at <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Prepared-Testimony-of-Bob-Wise.pdf>. The Alliance will submit additional details on these and other recommendations in response to ED’s Request for Information.

For everything needed to know about ESSA, the Alliance created a series of bite-sized materials—both print and video—that provides concise yet comprehensive analyses of several key areas within ESSA, including accountability, assessments, high schools, and teachers and leaders. This information is available at www.all4ed.org/essa.



SPENDING AGREEMENT: Federal Education Funding to Receive Slight Boost in Fiscal Year 2016

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) would receive \$45.8 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 under a massive omnibus spending bill that President Obama signed into law on December 18. The total represents an increase of \$1.19 billion compared to last year, but it is \$2.3 billion less than the amount in President Obama’s FY 2016 budget request. The law, which includes all twelve of the annual spending bills, will fund the federal government until September 30, 2016.

“While an end-of-the-year omnibus is not the preferred way to do business—it is always better to complete individual bills in a timely fashion—this bill will allow Congress to fulfill its constitutional duty to responsibly fund the federal government and avoid a shutdown,” said **House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY)**. “This package reflects conservative priorities in both funding and policy, including support for critical areas such as our national defense, halting many harmful regulations, and trimming wasteful spending. But it also represents a compromise that members on both sides of the aisle can and should get behind.”

Despite being eliminated in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, which targets the nation’s lowest-performing schools, will receive \$450 million. While that amount is \$55 million less than the previous year, the omnibus bill ensures that the program will continue in 2016.

Among individual programs, Title I will receive \$14.9 million, a \$500 million increase compared to last year, and special education state grants will receive \$11.9 billion, an increase of roughly \$400 million. The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program will receive \$190 million, an increase of \$30 million.

[Education Week reporter Andrew Ujifusa writes](#) that the budget agreement “clarifies that formula-funded grant programs will continue to operate under” the No Child Left Behind Act for the 2016–17 school year. “In short, ESSA isn’t really relevant for this bill,” he writes.

Funding levels for individual programs within ED are available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget16/16action.pdf>.



“Future Ready Schools” Now Reaching 16 Million Students, Alliance for Excellent Education President Announces

On December 10, **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** announced that more than 2,000 school district leaders, representing 16 million students, have taken the [Future Ready District Pledge](#) to personalize learning for students using effective digital learning strategies. Additionally, Wise said seventeen states¹ have committed to developing a statewide program to support school district leaders in using Future Ready Schools (FRS) resources, including an interactive planning dashboard, for this digital transformation. Wise made the announcement at a White House event featuring the release of the [National Education Technology Plan](#).



“Future Ready Schools isn’t just about technology,” said Wise. “It’s about a more personalized approach to teaching and learning that ensures that all students have the skills they need to succeed in college and a career. Future Ready Schools is about empowering teachers and leaders, helping students take charge of their own learning, and keeping parents engaged and informed.”

Launched in late 2014, FRS is an Alliance project that features more than fifty partners, including the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Coming on the heels of thirteen summits attended by more than 430 school district teams, representing 4.9 million students, Wise said that the Alliance would host more national summits in conjunction with ED in Austin, Boston, Madison, southern Florida, and Seattle in 2016.

“The national summits are helpful, but by themselves, they are not enough to move the needle,” Wise said. “As we traveled across the country in 2015, the need for relevant, ongoing professional learning opportunities for district leaders around digital learning was evident. We are particularly excited about the evolution of the Future Ready Interactive Planning Dashboard, a free online tool to help school districts assess their needs and make data-informed decisions on how to effectively use technology to engage students, empower teachers, and improve learning outcomes.”

¹ The seventeen states that have launched Future Ready statewide initiatives are California, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

FRS worked with national experts and school district leaders to develop a robust set of ongoing professional learning opportunities, including

- refined [FRS framework, gears, and resources](#);
- national summits cohosted with ED through 2016;
- [Future Ready Interactive Planning Dashboard and training workshops](#);
- a one-stop shop (the [Future Ready Hub](#)) for all FRS activities and resources;
- [extension programs](#) and [powerful partnerships](#);
- [FRS state leadership program](#); and
- [FRS conference connections](#).

“Through collaboration, a robust infrastructure and personalized learning, Future Ready district leaders are shaping the vision for how technology can transform learning for all students,” said **Delegated Deputy Secretary of Education John King**.

Wise also unveiled the splash page of a brand-new website at www.futureready.org. The website also includes the Hub, a one-stop shop for school district leaders filled with webinars, interactive chats, expert talks, resources, and other professional development and mentoring opportunities.



“PROUD AND SOBERING MOMENT”: National High School Graduation Rate Hits Another All-Time High as Rate of Improvement Slows

The national high school graduation rate rose to 82.3 percent for School Year (SY) 2013–14 school year—a new record and an increase from the 81.4 percent rate posted in SY 2012–13—according to data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on December 15.

Among groups of students, Asian/Pacific Islander students (89.4 percent) posted the highest graduation rate, followed by white (87.2 percent), Hispanic (76.3 percent), black (72.5 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (69.6 percent). The data also includes graduation rates for economically disadvantaged students (74.6 percent), students with disabilities (63.1 percent), and limited English proficient students (62.6 percent).

“The hard work of teachers, administrators, students, and their families has made these gains possible and, as a result, many more students will have a better chance of going to college, getting a good job, owning their own home, and supporting a family,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “We can take pride as a nation in knowing that we’re seeing promising gains, including for students of color.”

States with Highest and Lowest High School Graduation Rates: School Year 2013–14

| State | Graduation Rate | State | Graduation Rate |
|------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Iowa | 90.5% | District of Columbia | 61.4% |
| Nebraska | 89.7% | New Mexico | 68.5% |
| New Jersey | 88.6% | Nevada | 70.0% |
| Wisconsin | 88.6% | Alaska | 71.1% |
| Texas | 88.3% | Oregon | 72.0% |

A U.S. Department of Education [blog post](#) announcing the results noted that the U.S. graduation rate gap between white students and black and Hispanic students “continues to narrow, and traditionally underserved populations like English language learners and students with disabilities continue to make gains.” Among some states, however, graduation rate gaps remain very large—as much as 20 percentage points or more in some states. Additionally, an Alliance for Excellent Education analysis has found that, over the past four years, the gap in high school graduation rates between Latino and white students grew in nine states while the gap between African American and white students grew in ten states.

Four organizations leading the GradNation campaign to raise the high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020—the Alliance for Excellent Education, America’s Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Education—issued a [joint statement](#), calling the data a “proud and sobering moment,” noting that, for the first time in four years, the nation is not on track to reach a 90 percent national graduation rate by 2020. Additionally, while recognizing that there have been some “significant gains for key subgroups,” the groups note that the nation “continues to suffer from gaps in graduation rates affecting students of color, students from low-income families, students with disabilities and English language learners.”

“These are reminders that our work is not finished, that the last leg of this campaign will be very challenging, and that we must redouble efforts to reach our goal,” the statement said. “We have seen that with hard work, big change is possible. But with only a few years to go in the campaign, every organization, community, business, school and individual must get involved so more young people will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Let’s use this moment as a reminder of the inequities that remain before us and keep our eyes on the prize of ensuring every student graduates from high school.”

National, state, and graduation rate data for different groups of students is available from NCES at http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2013-14.asp.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC, and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Kristen Loschert; Caroline Waldman; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/all4ed](https://twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).