



## The Graduation Effect

Every Student's Potential to Influence a Community, a State, and the Nation

Rapid changes in the U.S. economy demand a change in the nation's approach to education. Jobs that require critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills are expanding, while those that rely on physical skills and manual labor are declining.<sup>1</sup> These changing workforce demands mean students need more rigorous preparation during high school as well as additional education and training after they graduate. Of the 11.6 million jobs added to the U.S. economy since the end of the Great Recession in June 2009, 99 percent have gone to workers with at least some postsecondary education.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, researchers estimate that by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require education and training beyond high school.<sup>3</sup>

Students who graduate from high school and continue their education face greater job prospects, higher incomes, better health, and are less likely to live in poverty.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as educational attainment increases, communities, states, and the nation also benefit from the addition of new jobs; increased tax revenues, spending, and investments; and lower health-care costs that accompany a more educated population.

To highlight this connection between education and the economy, the Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) developed the "[Graduation Effect](#)." This online resource demonstrates the positive impacts that a 90 percent high school graduation rate could have on local, state, and national economies. Findings for the nation, all fifty states, and more than 130 metropolitan areas are available to business leaders, policymakers, community and civil rights activists, educators, parents, and others to use as they advocate for better educational experiences for youth.

The national high school graduation rate has increased steadily, reaching an all-time high of 84.1 percent for the Class of 2016. But these collective gains mask gaps in educational attainment for students of color, students from low-income families, and other historically underserved groups. Nearly 25 percent of African American students and about 20 percent of Latino students do not graduate from high school within four years.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, students of color now represent more than half of the K–12 population in the United States.<sup>6</sup> This is not a demographic shift that *is going to happen*; it *has happened*. Continuing to ignore the educational needs of these students only will limit the nation's long-term economic potential. Conversely, focusing attention and change on these students' educational needs provides a tremendous opportunity to reinvigorate local communities, break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, promote social mobility, and close the large opportunity gap separating so many Americans.

But getting more students to graduation day is only the first step. The nation's schools must ensure that students leave high school prepared for what lies ahead. Too many students, though, graduate from high school without the necessary skills to succeed in college or a career. Just one in four high school graduates is college ready.<sup>7</sup> But among Latino students, that number is one in seven and among African American students, it is a staggering one in sixteen.<sup>8</sup> Students who enter the workforce directly after high school do not fare much better. In fact, four out of five employers say that recent high school graduates have gaps in their career preparation.<sup>9</sup>

To prepare all students for success in college, a career, and life, schools and districts must shift to more innovative instructional approaches that provide students with a rigorous and relevant curriculum aligned with college-ready standards and career-related experiences. Such a transition requires school districts to collaborate with institutions of higher education, businesses, unions, parent organizations, and other community affiliates and members. School districts that maximize these types of partnerships gain valuable support to plan and implement strategies that expose students to rigorous academic content, career and technical education, work-based learning experiences, opportunities to earn college credits during high school, and supplemental student support services.

Today's students represent the nation's future workers, citizens, consumers, and leaders. As student demographics continue to change, the nation has a moral and economic obligation to ensure that all students, regardless of their race or income level, graduate from high school equipped with skills they need to succeed in a changing workforce. Through collective efforts of educators, parents, business executives, policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and other advocates, the nation's schools can provide all students with the rigorous education that will set them up for life success.

To see how an increased high school graduation rate could benefit your community, visit [GraduationEffect.org](http://GraduationEffect.org).



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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, *The State of American Jobs* (Washington, DC: Author, 2016), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/the-state-of-american-jobs/>.
- <sup>2</sup> A. P. Carnevale, T. Jayasundera, and A. Gulish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016), <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/americas-divided-recovery/>.
- <sup>3</sup> A. P. Carnevale, N. Smith, and J. Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), [https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> America's Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises, and Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, *GradNation Community Guidebook: Updated Edition* (Washington, DC: America's Promise Alliance, 2013), <http://guidebook.americaspromise.org/section/demonstrating-the-benefits-of-high-school-completion>.
- <sup>5</sup> J. Amos, "U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits Another Record High—Are the Gains Real or Manufactured?," *High School Soup* (blog), Alliance for Excellent Education, December 5, 2017, <https://www.all4ed.org/u-s-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-another-record-high-are-the-gains-real-or-manufactured/>.
- <sup>6</sup> L. A. Maxwell, "U.S. School Enrollment Hits Majority-Minority Milestone," *Education Week* 34, no. 1 (2014), [https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/08/20/01\\_demographics.h34.html](https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/08/20/01_demographics.h34.html).
- <sup>7</sup> ACT, *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2017: Profile Report—National* (Iowa City, IA: Author, 2017), [https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr2017/P\\_99\\_999999\\_N\\_S\\_N00\\_ACT-GCPR\\_National.pdf](https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr2017/P_99_999999_N_S_N00_ACT-GCPR_National.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Achieve, *Rising to the Challenge: Views on High School Graduates Preparedness for College and Careers* (Washington, DC: Author, 2015), <https://www.achievethecore.org/publications/rising-challenge-survey-ii-powerpoint>.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) is a Washington, DC-based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those underperforming and those historically underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. [www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org)