



# NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals  
Published by the NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

## Topic Highlighted in this Issue:

### Goal 2:

Page 3 Tennessee

Page 4 Vermont

Page 5 West Virginia

Page 6 Resources

Page 6 Upcoming Goals Panel  
events and products

## States in this Issue:

Tennessee  
Vermont  
West Virginia

The NEGP MONTHLY is a publication of the  
National Education Goals Panel.

1255 22nd Street NW, Suite 502  
Washington, DC 20010;  
202-724-0015  
www.negp.gov

NEGP Acting Executive Director and Publisher:  
Emily Wurtz

Author: Anne C. Lewis, The McKenzie Group, Inc.  
Research Assistant: Sarah Demma,  
The McKenzieGroup, Inc.

The NEGP hereby authorizes further reproduction  
and distribution with proper acknowledgment.

## GRADUATION RATES UP, DOWN AND ALL AROUND THE ISSUES

High school graduation has become the minimal standard for young people in the United States. For post-secondary education institutions and employers alike, the high school diploma represents persistence toward a goal and assurance of certain skills. It is such a strong indicator of these factors that the armed forces, for example, gives much greater weight to a regular diploma than to an alternative one, and almost no consideration to high school dropouts.

Beyond the behaviors that high school graduation signifies, there is an economic necessity for meeting this minimal standard. Job demands are changing dramatically. As Richard Murnane and Frank Levy explain in *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, employers demand a higher level and different set of skills for jobs that offer upward mobility. Six of every 10 new jobs as the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins require "skilled workers," defined as those with math and reading skills above the ninth-grade level and capable of problem solving, working in groups, using computers, and communicating effectively. The largest declines in jobs are in low-skill manufacturing areas. Except for those intending to enroll in a four-year college, the curriculum and academic expectations for young people tended to prepare them for lower skill employment until a few years ago.

The National Education Goals recognize the importance of obtaining a diploma or high school completion certificate. The second National Goal states that the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent. The high school completion rate for youth ages 16-24 (including regular diplomas and alternative completion certificates) is calculated differently from the secondary school dropout rate. The former is based on a three-year average from the current population survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. The latter depends on definitions of students who have left school, which vary among the states.



There is both good news about the high school completion rate and some work yet to be done. In 1998, 19 states had met the Goal of 90 percent high school completion, an increase of four states from the baseline year of 1990. The overall completion rate in the United States fell slightly during that same time period, from 86.6 percent to 84.8 percent, though the drop is not statistically significant. Five states made significant improvements in their high school completion rates; another five states experienced major decreases in their completion rates.

In the past, the highest rates of high school completion occurred in mostly rural states where high schools frequently are small and community supports strong. The latest data, however, indicate that more urbanized states such as Michigan, New Jersey, and Massachusetts—all now with a 90 percent high school completion rate—are able to keep more students on a path toward graduation.

An important indicator being followed by the National Education Goals Panel is the completion rate of various groups. According to 1998 data from the Census Bureau, the graduation rate of black students has caught up with that of white students (86 and 87 percent, respectively, which statisticians consider equal). Also, girls have higher high school completion rates than boys, or 89 percent compared to 86 percent (based on 1998 data).

The data show some areas of concern. Only 62 percent of Hispanic youth completed high school, according to the Census Bureau. Moreover, the high school completion rate has not changed perceptibly in a number of states, stubbornly remaining between 82 and 89 percent in 28 states.

States that have fewer completing high school than in the past, in a significant way, also mostly are states impacted by large numbers of immigrant students (though not California where the completion rate has improved but remains below 90 percent).

Research findings point to several issues for policymakers wanting to see more progress on this National Goal.

In terms of future earnings, young people who hold an alternative certificate, such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate, do not have an advantage in the labor market as far as earnings are concerned. Certainly, they fare better than if they had dropped out, but earn less than if they had received a high school diploma. Also, research by labor economist John Bishop of Cornell University shows that a higher grade-point average in high school affects future earnings. While all graduates are in the same labor pool at first, he says, eventually employers see differences in the capabilities of employees and begin to reward those who are more competent; longitudinal studies show that these employees had higher academic achievement in high school.

A recent conference on school dropouts sponsored by the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University and Achieve, Inc., covered research trends worth exploring by states attempting to improve their high school completion rates. Experts pointed out that efforts to improve completion rates need to focus on the ninth grade but be aware that a troubling percentage of students decide to not complete a regular high school program as late as the first semester of the senior year. Also, district data on high school completion are not as revealing as individual school data because some high schools, even in similar neighborhoods, have better completion rates than others.

The influx of immigrant students poses a challenge to states as they work on improving high school completion rates. According to 1996 data, more than one of every five young adults with fewer than 12 years of schooling was an immigrant. A new, detailed study of secondary school



## The National Education Goals Panel

### GOVERNORS

Tommy G. Thompson  
Wisconsin, Chair, 2000

John Engler  
Michigan

Jim Geringer  
Wyoming

James B. Hunt, Jr.  
North Carolina

Frank Keating  
Oklahoma

Frank O'Bannon  
Indiana

Paul E. Patton  
Kentucky

Cecil H. Underwood  
West Virginia

### MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION

Richard W. Riley  
U.S. Secretary of Education

Michael Cohen  
Assistant Secretary of Education for  
Elementary and Secondary Education

### MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman  
New Mexico

U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords  
Vermont

U.S. Representative William F.  
Goodling  
Pennsylvania

U.S. Representative Matthew G.  
Martínez  
California

### STATE LEGISLATORS

Representative G. Spencer Coggs  
Wisconsin

Representative Mary Lou Cowlshaw  
Illinois

Representative Douglas R. Jones  
Idaho

Senator Stephen Stoll  
Missouri

experiences for immigrant students, conducted by the Urban League, produced several recommendations for district and state policymakers. In addition to secondary school reform in general, the report stresses better targeting of resources, professional development for all teachers, including LEP students in accountability systems, and funding research on literacy development and content learning of young newcomers who are under-educated.

Research also is producing consensus on what keeps students in school until graduation. Smaller learning communities contribute, especially career academies that provide students with links to real work. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study-88 (the benchmark group were 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 1988) reveal that students who make decisions by 7<sup>th</sup> grade that they will attend a four-year university are more likely to graduate and less likely to make personal choices that discourage them from graduating such as using drugs or early sexual activity.

A new tool for organizing support to keep students in school is the youth council provision under the Workforce Investment Act. Dropout prevention is a specific role of the councils, which recommend providers of comprehensive services to promote youth development and leadership in the communities served by the WIA boards. Although not specified in the law, state-level Youth Councils have been started in about a dozen states.

Ultimately, higher completion rates depend on a variety of efforts as illustrated by those states that have achieved an excellent high school completion rate or dramatically improved the number of students completing high school. Included in this group are Tennessee, West Virginia and Vermont.

## TENNESSEE

The 1992 Education Improvement Act passed by the Tennessee legislature encouraged educators and the public to turn to genuine reforms and set in motion a number of strategies that allowed the state's high school completion rate to increase 13 percent between 1990 and 1998. The completion rate moved from 77 percent to 90 percent.

The efforts were enhanced by Goals 2000 funding, according to Pam Hobbins, spokesperson for the state department of education. Proposals submitted by school districts around the state have to fit with the state's goals, which parallel the National Goals, she says. This includes a goal of improving the high school completion rate in every high school to 90 percent. Although the state average is now there, many individual schools have yet to make the goal.



## What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

## Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

## What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site [www.negp.gov](http://www.negp.gov). Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

The Goals 2000 grants concentrate on improving reading and math achievement "with creative twists," Hobbins says. Earlier, the legislature had invested in more intensive reading programs. The Education Improvement Act created incentive grants—funded at \$500,000 a year—to reward schools meeting certain indicators, including decreasing the secondary school dropout rate. The state accountability plan uses both a nationally standardized test and the "value-added" data collected each year, measuring school and student achievement on the basis of performance standards. The state will begin to target resources on the poorest performing schools starting in the next school year. Officials have identified 48 schools for attention out of a total of 1,600 public schools.

Hobbins expects Tennessee to continue to make progress on student achievement and on high school completion rates because school performance is now a matter of public record. Report cards on schools that include achievement, promotion, and dropout data, averaged over three years, were released to the public for the first time this year and posted on the state education department's web site.

### CONTACT

Pam Hobbins  
State Department of Education  
Andrew Johnson Tower  
715 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, TN 37243  
615/741-7027  
[phobbins@mail.state.tn.us](mailto:phobbins@mail.state.tn.us)  
[www.state.tn.us](http://www.state.tn.us)

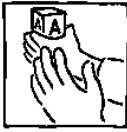
## VERMONT

Vermont also increased its high school completion rate considerably between 1990 and 1998, moving it up to 95 percent from 86 percent. "I like to think that Vermont's record in this area is due to the overall strength of the system, and not any particular program," says Douglas Walker, deputy commissioner for education quality.

Certainly, Vermont's achievement underscores the advantages of small high schools. Smaller environments for students are now an interest of federal grants, foundation initiatives, and researchers, but they always have been basic in Vermont's system of public education. The largest high school in the state has only about 1,000 students, according to Walker. While the state has minimal requirements for graduation, local school boards make



## THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

decisions about community expectations for those receiving high school diplomas.

The state also has developed integrated services to support students individually, “wrapping services around them,” Walker says. State services and local values emphasize giving students “powerful connections” to adults, he adds.

### CONTACT

Douglas Walker  
State Department of Education  
120 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620  
802/828-5400  
[www.state.vt.us/educ](http://www.state.vt.us/educ)

## WEST VIRGINIA

Several years ago West Virginia legislators adopted a high school completion tactic that has worked well in several states—denying or taking away drivers’ licenses from teenagers who do not stay in school or who are absent frequently. That is not the whole story, however, of efforts to keep students in school until graduation. “It takes a combination of a lot of things to improve the graduation rate,” says Adam Sponaugle, assistant state superintendent. Between 1990 and 1998, West Virginia’s high school completion rate improved six percent, from 83 to 89 percent.

Many of the state’s initiatives spring from a 1997 Jobs Through Education Act, which built upon actions already underway to require more academic work of high school students while, at the same time, connecting their studies more closely to post-secondary education and to job opportunities. The Act improved the state’s career development systems, set up advisory programs for students that assigns the same teacher to a small group of students for the four years of high school, and requires work-based learning.

Career development now begins with career exploration in the middle schools. In grades 9-10 students focus more on certain career clusters, then identify an occupational area in which they are most interested, taking courses related to the occupation as well as core academic subjects. This sequential support of students’ interests is seamless, extending to post-secondary institutions. Because of block scheduling in the high schools, many students meet graduation requirements ahead of time and can enroll in college-level courses before graduating from high school.

The curriculum throughout the state has been redesigned to emphasize applied learning. The content standards are high,



## RESOURCES

### High school reform efforts:

- American Youth Policy Forum working group on high school reform; summary of its recommendations published as *High Schools of the Millennium*, August 2000; 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036; www.aypf.org; 202/775-9731
- High Schools That Work, Gene Bottoms, senior vice-president, Southern Regional Education Board, 592 Tenth St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30318; 404/875-9211
- New American High Schools, a federal initiative that supports high school reform, especially smaller learning communities; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education; 330 C St., SW, Washington, DC 20202
- Ninth Grade Success Academy, an initiative of the Talent Development High School model developed by researchers at The Johns Hopkins University; James McPartland, program director; 3003 North Charles St., Suite 200, Baltimore, MD 21218; 410/516-8800
- Schools for a New Society, an initiative of the Carnegie Corp. to transform urban high schools; Michele Cahill, Senior Program Officer; 437 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022; 212/207-6273

Career Academy Support Network, David Stern, director; UC/Berkeley; 2030 Addison St., Suite 500, Berkeley, CA 94720; 510/642-2058

*Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools*, the Urban Institute, 2100 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20037; 202/833-7200

The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 444 Gutman Library, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617/496-6367; Gary Orfield, director;  
[www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights](http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights)

Sponaugle explains, but the instruction allows students to understand better how knowledge of algebra or geometry is useful outside of school. In isolated rural areas where job shadowing and mentoring are not easily arranged, state resources have encouraged school-based enterprises and computer-simulated work to help students relate school to future employment.

The state's accreditation system, which includes schools as well as each of the 55 county systems, takes attendance and graduation rates into account, according to Sponaugle.

### CONTACT

Adam Sponaugle  
Assistant Superintendent  
West Virginia Department of Education  
Building Y-6, Room 221  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East  
Charleston, WV 25305  
304/558-2346  
<http://wvde.wv.us>

## Upcoming Goals Panel Events and Products

### February 24, 2001

Meeting of the National Education Goals Panel to receive and respond to the data recommendations from Gov. McKernan, and announce plans of the new 2001 Panel chair.