

1 | What's At Stake Nationally?

- Every 26 seconds another student gives up on school, resulting in more than one million American high school students who drop out every year.
- Nearly one-third of all public high school students — and nearly one-half of all African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans — fail to graduate from public high school with their class.
- There are nearly 2,000 high schools in the U.S. where 40 percent of the typical freshman class drops out by his or her senior year.
- The dropout problem is likely to increase substantially through 2020 unless significant improvements are made.
- Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, on public assistance, and single parents to children who drop out of high school.
- Dropouts were more than twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty in a single year and three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004.
- Dropouts are more than eight times more likely to be in jail or in prison than high school graduates.
- Dropouts are four times less likely to volunteer than college graduates, are twice as less likely to vote or participate in community projects, and represent only three percent of actively engaged citizens in the U.S. today.¹

1. Source: Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org>.

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2 | *The Silent Epidemic* PowerPoint

This template PowerPoint presentation on the dropout issue can be customized and used to build awareness and urgency within your community or state. The presentation includes statistics about who drops out and why, the impact dropping out has on young people, perspectives of young people and parents, and recommendations for addressing their concerns.

Download this tool by visiting:

http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Grad_Nation/Tools/GradNation_Tool_2.ppt

STATE NAME
DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT
DATE

SILENT EPIDEMIC: BY THE NUMBERS

- Each year, almost **ONE THIRD** of all public high school students -- 1.2 million -- fail to graduate with their class. That's one student every 26 seconds.
- **ABOUT HALF** of African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans in public schools fail to graduate.
- There are nearly **2,000 HIGH SCHOOLS** with low graduation rates, concentrated in about 50 large cities and in 15 primarily southern and south western states.

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3 | State & Community Profile

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.kidscount.org>, links data from the Census Bureau and in some cases local sources, creating community profiles of 50 states and the District of Columbia, counties, Congressional districts, cities, metropolitan statistical areas, New England towns, American Indian homelands, and upper and lower chambers of state legislative districts. Databases are updated and expanded as new data becomes available.

Examples of the data available from the KIDS COUNT Data Center that is useful for developing a community portrait relating children, education, need for services, and employment are suggested below. (Read the “notes” sections in the databases to develop further understanding of the different categories used.) What other categories will you add for your community profile?

Factors	County 2006	State 2006	U.S. 2006
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS:			
The total population that is less than 18			25%
The percentage of the child population that is:			
0-4			28%
5-11			38%
12-14			17%
15-17			18%
The percentage of the total population in poverty			13%
THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT. The percentage of children:			
In poverty (100% of poverty level)			18%
In extreme poverty (50% of poverty level)			8%
Single parent homes			32%
Living with neither parent			6%
In the care of grandparents			5%
In households where the head of household is a high school dropout			16%
In households where the householder has a bachelor's degree or higher			27%
In families where no parent has full time, year-round employment			33%

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3 | State & Community Profile CONTINUED

Factors	County 2006	State 2006	U.S. 2006
THE LANGUAGE CHALLENGE. The percentage of children:			
That speak a language other than English at home			20%
Living in immigrant families			22%
In immigrant families in which resident parents have difficulty speaking English			60%
In immigrant families in which resident parents have less than a 9th grade education			13%
OTHER CHALLENGES for young adults in your community. The number or percentage of:			
Children under age 18 in foster care at any time of year			(2004) 10/1000
Persons residing in juvenile detention and correction facilities, age 10 to 15			(2006) 125/100,000
All youth residing in juvenile detention and correction facilities			(2006) 295/100,000
Teen mothers ages 15 to 19			(2003) 78/1000
Teen births to women who were already mothers			(2004) 19.8%
Births to mothers with less than 12 years of education			(2004) 22.2%
EDUCATION. The percentage of:			
Young adults enrolled in or completed college			45%
High school graduates age 25-29 who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher			27%
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT. The percentage of:			
Unemployed teens age 16-19			64%
Teens who are not attending schools and not working			8%
Persons age 18 to 24 not attending school, not working and no degree beyond high school			15%

4 | What Are the Graduation Rate Results Produced by Different Methods of Calculation?

The table below summarizes state-by-state differences in graduation rates by three different methods of calculation, and provides an overview of differences between states. It is adapted from state report cards produced by the Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org>, January, 2008.

State	State-reported for No Child Left Behind	U.S. Department of Education	Independent Source: Education Week/EPE	Greatest difference between columns (and thus calculated rates)
Alabama	—	65%	59%	6%
Alaska	61%	67%	65%	6%
Arizona	77%	67%	68%	10%
Arkansas	81%	77%	72%	9%
California	85%	74%	71%	14%
Colorado	82%	79%	75%	7%
Connecticut	90%	81%	80%	10%
Delaware	82%	73%	62%	20%
Florida	69%	66%	61%	8%
Georgia	65%	61%	56%	9%
Hawaii	80%	73%	64%	16%
Idaho	84%	82%	77%	7%
Illinois	87%	80%	76%	11%
Indiana	90%	74%	71%	19%
Iowa	90%	86%	81%	9%
Kansas	88%	78%	74%	14%
Kentucky	82%	73%	70%	12%
Louisiana	—	69%	61%	8%
Maine	87%	78%	76%	11%
Maryland	84%	80%	75%	9%
Massachusetts	96%	79%	73%	23%
Michigan	89%	73%	69%	20%
Minnesota	89%	85%	79%	10%

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4 | What Are the Graduation Rate Results Produced by Different Methods of Calculation? CONTINUED

State	State-reported for No Child Left Behind	U.S. Department of Education	Independent Source: Education Week/EPE	Greatest difference between columns (and thus calculated rates)
Mississippi	84%	63%	62%	22%
Missouri	86%	80%	75%	11%
Montana	83%	80%	76%	7%
Nebraska	87%	88%	80%	8%
Nevada	67%	57%	54%	13%
New Hampshire	85%	79%	76%	9%
New Jersey	91%	86%	83%	8%
New Mexico	79%	67%	60%	19%
New York	77%	-	65%	12%
North Carolina	96%	71%	66%	30%
North Dakota	92%	86%	79%	13%
Ohio	86%	81%	75%	11%
Oklahoma	85%	77%	70%	15%
Oregon	81%	74%	71%	10%
Pennsylvania	88%	82%	78%	10%
Rhode Island	83%	76%	71%	12%
South Carolina	78%	61%	54%	24%
South Dakota	92%	84%	79%	13%
Tennessee	76%	66%	72%	4%
Texas	85%	77%	67%	18%
Utah	84%	83%	84%	0
Vermont	86%	85%	81%	5%
Virginia	80%	79%	73%	7%
Washington	70%	75%	67%	8%
West Virginia	84%	77%	72%	12%
Wisconsin	91%	—	77%	14%
Wyoming	79%	76%	76%	3%

5 | Estimating the Magnitude of the Dropout Crisis In Your Community

Estimated Graduation Rates: Estimate district and state graduation rates for your district and state compared to national rates using the Pew Partnership for Civic Change’s Learning to Finish Calculator (<http://www.learningtofinish.org/calculator/>) for the years 2003-05.

Estimated Graduation Rates	2003	2004	2005
OUR DISTRICT (S)			
OUR STATE			
THE UNITED STATES			

Promoting Power: Estimate high school graduation rates by using the Promoting Power database provided by the Alliance for Excellent Education. The database organizes high schools by name, ZIP code, county, school districts, Congressional districts, and states (http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_and_local_info/promotingpower/).

Promoting Power in Our School District	2004 Promoting Power	2005 Promoting Power	2006 Promoting Power
WEAK promoting power (less than 60%)			
High School A			
High School B			
High School C			
High School D			
High School E			
MODERATE promoting power (61 to 85%)			
High School F			
High School G			
High School H			
High School I			
High School J			
HIGH Promoting Power (86 to 100%)			
High School K			
High School L			
High School M			
High School N			
High School O			

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6 | Dropout Profiles Related to Attendance, Credits, Credit Accumulation, Age, Withdrawal

This tool provides an Excel-based matrix that communities can download and use to create a more informed profile and analysis of the students who drop out from their schools along factors like attendance rates, credit accumulation, course performance and incidence of behavioral problems.

Download this tool by visiting:

http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Grad_Nation/Tools/GradNation_Tool_6.xls

Matrix of Student-Level Data Needed To Construct A High School Profile for Students Who Drop Out, Withdraw, or Transfer in a Given Year

* While it is possible to construct profiles of dropouts with only the data listed below in bold, additional demographics, attendance, course marks, test score, and behavior data enables more insight as to students' academic issues and needs prior to dropout.

Demographic Variables (only needed at for a single school year)	Year Before High School (if available)	High School Year 1	High School Year 2	High School Year 3	High School Year 4	High School Year 5	High School Year 6
Gender	X	X					
Race	X	X					
ESOL Status	X	X					
Special Ed Status	X	X					
Date of Birth	X	X					
Free-Reduced Price Lunch (yes/no - optional)	X	X					
School Performance Variables (needed yearly)							
Unique Numeric Student ID Number	X	X	X	X			
Number of School Days Attended	X	X	X	X			
Number of School Days Absent	X	X	X	X			
Number of Out of School Suspensions	X	X	X	X			
Required State Test Scores (if any taken that year)	X	X	X	X			
Passed/Failed Tests Needed for Graduation (not required subjects or tests)	X	X	X	X			
Final Letter Grade for Math Course(s)	X	X	X	X			
Final Letter Grade for English-Reading Course(s)	X	X	X	X			
Final Course Marks, or Overall Student GPA (if possible)	X	X	X	X			
Number of Credits Attempted	X	X	X	X			
Number of Credits Earned	X	X	X	X			
Numeric Code for School Attended	X	X	X	X			
Grade Level	X	X	X	X			
Enrollment Status (specifically, attending, withdrew, dropped out, or transferred)	X	X	X	X			
Date of School Entry	X	X	X	X			
Date of School Exit	X	X	X	X			
Date of School Re-Entry (if applicable)	X	X	X	X			
Reason for Dropout (if available)	X	X	X	X			

Template for Dropout Profiles

Using the student-level data from the previous worksheet, districts should be able to construct a profile of their dropouts that looks something like this. Other, more detailed cross-tab tables will also be possible depending on the depth of available data, but the following reports should give districts a better picture of who is dropping out of their high schools, when they are dropping out, and what their specific needs or problem areas may be.

Table 1 - Credits Needed to Graduate
Note: This can be edited based on the number of credits needed to graduate by district. The basic premise is to examine what grad level the student is in terms of credits accumulated at the time of dropout.

Credits Needed to Graduate	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Two or fewer		
14 of total credits needed		
12-14 of total credits needed		
24-12 of total credits needed		
More than 3/4 of total credits		
Total		

Table 2 - Age at High School Entry/Dropout

Age at Dropout	Age at High School Entry				Total
	14 or Younger	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old	
20 or older					
19 years old					
18 years old					
17 years old					
16 years old					
15 years old					
14 or younger					
Total					

Table 3 - Attendance Rate for School Year Prior to Dropout

Attendance Rate	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
95% or higher		
90%-94.9%		
80%-89.9%		
70%-79.9%		
Below 70%		
Total		

Table 4a - Credit Accumulation and Age of High School Dropout

Credits Needed to Graduate	Age of High School Dropout					Total
	14 or Younger	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old	18 years old	
Two or fewer						
14 of total credits needed						
12-14 of total credits needed						
24-12 of total credits needed						
More than 3/4 of total credits						
Total						

Table 4b - Credit Accumulation and Attendance Rate School Year Prior to Dropout

Credits Needed to Graduate	Attendance Rate School Year Prior to Dropout					Total
	95% or higher	90%-94.9%	80%-89.9%	70%-79.9%	Below 70%	
Two or fewer						
14 of total credits needed						
12-14 of total credits needed						
24-12 of total credits needed						
More than 3/4 of total credits						
Total						

Table 5 - Indicators of Falling Off Track, by Year
Note: The following indicators are listed in order to help determine the timing and the extent to which students fell off the path to graduation, using selected high yield indicators from other districts we have studied.

Indicator	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Repeated 9th Grade		
Repeated 9th Grade Multiple Times		
2 or More F's in 9th Grade		
D average in 9th Grade		
Attendance Rate Below 80% For First Time in 9th Grade		
Repeated 10th Grade, Did Not Repeat 9th Grade		
Promoted On-Time to 10th Grade, Dropped out in 11th or 12th Grade		
Earned Enough Credits for Graduation, Did Not Pass Exit or End of Course Exams Needed for Diploma		
Two or More Suspensions Before Dropping Out		

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7 | Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analysis: Attendance, Behavior, Age, Course-Passing and Credit Accumulation, Mobility

This sample form is suggested for the cases where it is not possible to carry out a computerized analysis as described in the Excel spreadsheets in the tool Dropout Profiles Related to Attendance, Credits, Credit Accumulation, Age, Withdrawal.

Individual High School Student Dropout Profile — Analyzing previous year (200Y-0Z)

Student ID number (confidential—for school use only): _____

Male Female

High school(s) attended (with names):

Grade 9 _____	OR	HS Year 1 _____
Grade 9R1 _____	OR	HS Year 2 _____
Grade 9R2 _____	OR	HS Year 3 _____
Grade 9R3 _____	OR	HS Year 4 _____
Grade 10 _____	OR	HS Year 5 _____
Grade 10R _____	OR	HS Year 6 _____
Grade 11 _____	OR	HS Year 7 _____
Grade 12 _____	OR	HS Year 8 _____

Age at high school entry: _____

Age at entering *this* high school: _____

Age at time of dropping out: _____

Number of years attended any HS,
at time of dropping out: _____

Number of credits completed,
at time of dropping out: _____

Highest grade level attained,
at time of dropping out: _____

Number of high schools attended,
at time of dropping out: _____

Number (and titles) of English credits
completed, at time of dropping out:

Number (and titles) of math credits
completed, at time of dropping out:

Number (and titles) of science credits
completed, at time of dropping out:

Number (and titles) of social studies
credits completed, at time of dropping out:

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7 | Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analysis: Attendance, Behavior, Age, Course-Passing and Credit Accumulation, Mobility CONTINUED

Grade Level								
<i>NOTE: This table could be modified for Year 1, Year 2, etc., rather than grade level.</i>	9	9R	9R2	9R3	10	10R	11	12
ATTENDANCE – Days missed in each grade								
0-4 days missed								
5-9 days missed								
10-19 days missed								
20 + days missed								
IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS per grade								
0-1 days								
2-3 days								
4-5 days								
6+ days								
OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS per grade								
0								
1 or more								
OVER-AGE FOR GRADE, beginning with first high school year								
One to two years								
Two to three years								
Three or more years								
GRADES OR MARKS								
More than 1 F per semester								
Failed English								
Failed Math								
Failed both English and Math								
Failed any two courses								
C/D average, missed more than 5 days of school								
TOTAL CREDITS in grade								
0-3								
4-8								
9-13								
14-18								
19-20 or higher								

8 | School Performance Trends for Dropouts and/or Withdrawals with Unknown Destinations

Use this worksheet to summarize data from the Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analyses for the cases where it is not possible to carry out a computerized analysis.

School Performance Trends Based on Transcript Analyses	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
ATTENDANCE. Number of dropouts who:			
Missed fewer than 5 days per semester			
Missed 6 to 10 days per semester			
Missed 11 days or more per semester			
BEHAVIOR. Number of dropouts who:			
Had more than 3 in-school suspensions			
Had more than 1 out-of-school suspension			
GRADES. Number of dropouts who:			
Had more than 1 F per semester			
Failed Math			
Failed English			
Failed both Math and English			
Failed any two courses			
Had a C/D average and missed 5 or more days of school			
YEARS IN SCHOOL. Number of dropouts who:*			
Spent one or more extra years in grades 6 to 8			
Attended high school for one year			
Attended high school for two years			
Attended high school for three years			
Attended high school for four years			
Attended high school for five or more years			
MOBILITY IN HIGH SCHOOL. Number of dropouts who attended multiple high schools or alternative centers during their high school years			
2 high schools and/or alternative centers			
3 high schools and/or alternative centers			
4 or more high schools and/or alternative centers			

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8 | School Performance Trends for Dropouts and/or Withdrawals with Unknown Destinations CONTINUED

School Performance Trends Based on Transcript Analyses	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
HIGHEST GRADE in which dropouts were enrolled when they dropped out			
9			
10			
11			
12			
AVERAGE NUMBER OF CREDITS EARNED by dropouts (assuming 20-24 credits required for high school graduation)			
0-3 (less than 1/5 of the credits needed for graduation)			
4-8 (1/5 to 1/3 the credits needed for graduation)			
9-13 (about 1/2 the credits needed for graduation)			
14-18 (a little more than 1/2 to 3/4 of the credits needed for graduation)			
19-20 or higher (just a few credits shy of graduation)			

9 | Attendance Survey

Here's a set of sample questions that could be asked at both the middle and high school level:

Why don't you attend school?				
REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I did not feel like coming to school				
I overslept				
I wanted to be with my friends				
I did not complete my assignments,				
It was too cold or rainy to take the bus				
I did not feel safe going to school or in school				
I did not want to be teased or bullied or picked on by a teacher				
My classes are boring and I will not miss anything				
I had to take care of siblings, or a sick family member				
I had to work				
I had to go to court.				

Estimate how many days of school you've missed this year (circle one)

0-1 2-5 6-10 11 or more

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10 | Surveys About Students' Classroom and School Experiences: Sample student surveys

To what extent do you:	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
Count on your teachers for help when you need it?			
Feel like a real part of this school?			
Perceive that teachers want you to understand your work, rather than memorizing it?			
Perceive that teachers recognize students for trying hard?			
Hear teachers comparing one student with another?			
Hear teachers pointing out the students who get the best grades?			

How often do you feel:	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
My teacher does everything possible to help us improve our understanding			
If I work hard I can learn a lot			
If someone is alone they can find someone to talk with during free time			
Students who misbehave take a lot of our class time			
Teachers and staff make everyone feel included			
My classmates want to help me do my best work			
In this school it is okay for students to disagree with each other			
In this school our teachers encourage us to say what we think			

Top Ranked Concerns of Middle and High School Youth About Transitions. Students surveyed in Chicago, Houston and Norfolk shared “what worried them” about moving to the next higher school level. The questions asked in the survey can become questions you ask of your own students. Responses can guide new initiatives in schools and classrooms.

Top-Ranked Concerns of Students Surveyed in Chicago, Houston and Norfolk*			
Students Entering Middle School (N=338)		Students Entering High School (N=324)	
CONCERNED ABOUT:	Worried/ Very Worried	CONCERNED ABOUT:	Worried/ Very Worried
1. Being sent to the principal	52%	1. Failure	51%
2. Failure	50%	2. Keeping up with assignments	50%
3. Drugs	44%	2. Taking tests	50%
3. Taking tests	44%	3. Giving a presentation in front of others	44%
4. Giving a presentation in front of others	39%	4. Hard class work	43%

* from Freiburg, H. J., “Measuring School Climate: Let Me Count the Ways,” *Educational Leadership*, September, 1998

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11 | Different Perspectives Chart

Different groups may perceive the same situation very differently. As an example, we have provided responses from teachers and students at four high schools that are part of the Talent Development High School (TDHS) comprehensive school reform network (<http://www.csos.jhu.edu>). TDHS teachers and students engage in extensive improvement activities, and as part of that effort participate in an annual survey about classroom and school management, instruction, leadership, etc. Responses differ considerably by school, reflecting each school’s uniqueness and progress along the improvement path. In addition, teachers and students within a school often perceive the same situation differently.

If you had carried out a survey in which different groups in your schools or community gave such distinctly different answers, what would be your next steps to understand the differences in perceptions and the underlying “why?”

Different Perspectives (T) = teacher responses and (S) = student responses				
SCHOOL CLIMATE. It is “true” or “very true” that the following are problems in this school:	School A	School B	School C	School D
a. Fighting among students (T)	6%	14%	30%	42%
b. Fighting among students (S)	15%	9%	14%	31%
c. Students cutting class (T)	28%	24%	49%	32%
d. Students cutting class (S)	34%	19%	42%	25%
e. Students disrespecting teachers (T)	24%	58%	91%	68%
f. Students disrespecting teachers (S)	35%	30%	46%	42%
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION. Every day or several times a week:	School A	School B	School C	School D
a. Teachers assign complete novels or plays not from a textbook (T)	39%	22%	20%	30%
b. We read from complete novels or plays not included in the textbook (S)	46%	47%	33%	44%
c. Teachers explain or demonstrate a lesson in front of the whole class for half or more of the period (T)	10%	33%	27%	23%
d. The teacher lectures or works at the chalkboard for half of more of the class period (S)	57%	37%	36%	52%
e. Teachers have students work individually at their desk on worksheets or questions from the textbook for half or more of the class period (T)	12%	14%	19%	21%
f. Students work individually at their desks on worksheets or questions from the textbook for half or more of the class period (S)	50%	45%	55%	46%

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12 | National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) Dropout Survey and Findings

A follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS:88), “Two Years Later: Cognitive Gains and School Transitions of NELS Eighth Graders” (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=95436>), explored the reasons students dropped out of school early. The study disaggregated reasons for leaving school by gender. Apparently, young men often leave school for reasons related to lack of engagement, foreshadowing *The Silent Epidemic* survey of a decade later.

Consider using the NELS:88 questions, and discuss them with last year’s dropouts and the students you consider to be potential future dropouts. With this new learning, you will be better able to design a support system to keep students in school. (Note: categorizations were added by authors of *Grad Nation*.)

Students’ Reported Reasons for Dropping Out of High School Early			
SCHOOL REASONS	Boys	Girls	Categorization
Didn’t like school	58%	44%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with teachers	52%	17%	Fade-out
Felt didn’t belong at school	31%	14%	Fade-out
Couldn’t get along with peers	18%	22%	Fade-out
Suspended too often	19%	13%	Push-out
Expelled from school	18%	9%	Push-out
Changed schools and didn’t like new one	11%	16%	Fade-out
Failing school	46%	33%	Failing
Couldn’t keep up with work	38%	25%	Failing
ECONOMIC REASONS			
Had to get a job	15%	16%	Life-event
Found a job	19%	12%	Life-event
Couldn’t work and go to school both	20%	8%	Life-event
Had to support a family	5%	14%	Life-event
FAMILY REASONS			
Became pregnant	—	31%	Life-event
Married or planned to get married	3%	24%	Life-event
Became a father/mother	5%	23%	Life-event
Had to care for my family	5%	12%	Life-event
Wanted to have a family	4%	8%	Life-event
PERSONAL REASONS			
Friends dropped out of school	17%	11%	Fade-out
Wanted to travel	3%	2%	Fade-out

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13 | Policy Audit and Next Policy Steps

Policies provide a foundation for much, but not all of what occurs within a school system and schools. With this table, we propose that your community determine at which political or organizational level some of the policies related to staying in school, dropping out, and graduating are made. You may also wish to determine whether in some cases long-term practices should be reconsidered.

Policy Audit					
POLICY	Policy determined by:				
	State legislature	District school board	District Superintendent	School-Based Decision Makers	Other (including practices)
Sets legal school-leaving age					
Sets other conditions for leaving school legally					
Defines "dropout"					
Defines the codes and practices that are used in the data system to track students who exit high school with or without graduating					
Defines the pupil progression policy (promotion/retention) grades K to grade 8					
Defines the pupil progression policy (promotion/retention) grades 9 to 12*					
Defines grading policies K to grade 8					
Defines grading policies grade 9 to 12					
Defines criteria for awarding high school credit per course, including summer school and credit recovery programs					
Defines "weights" for high school course grades					
Defines minimum GPA needed to participate in sports, extra-curricular activities, etc.					
Defines attendance and tardiness policies					
Defines relationship of attendance and tardiness policies to official "count" for daily membership					
Defines relationship of attendance, tardiness, and behavior marks to students' grades					
Defines "truancy" (chronic, habitual, sanctions and supports)					
Defines conditions for in- and out-of-school suspensions					

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Policy Audit					
POLICY	Policy determined by:				
	State legislature	District school board	District Superintendent	School-Based Decision Makers	Other (including practices)
Defines sanctions associated with in-school suspensions					
Defines sanctions associated with out-of-school suspensions					
Defines support for "off-track" students					
Defines conditions for assignment to or choice of alternative schooling					
Defines conditions for assignment to the juvenile justice system					
Defines age of eligibility for GED programs relative to legal age for leaving school					
Defines high school graduation requirements (courses and credits; examinations)					
Defines admission requirements for public technical institutes (courses and credits; examinations)					
Defines admission requirements for two-year community colleges (courses and credits; examinations)					
Defines admission requirements for the state four-year college and university system (courses and credits; examinations)					
Other important policies:					

Next Policy Steps

Review the Policy Audit and determine your community’s next steps. Ask what are the top five policies that would be most helpful to change to improve the graduation rate?

Policy	Specific aspects of the policy which should be reviewed
Legal school-leaving age	
Conditions for leaving school legally and early	
Defines “dropout”	
Defines the codes and practices that are used in the data system to track students who exit high school with or without graduating	
The pupil progression policy K to grade 8	
The pupil progression policy grades 9 to 12	
Grading policies K to grade 8	
Grading policies grade 9 to 12	
Criteria for awarding high school credit per course, including summer school and credit recovery programs	
“Weights” for high school course grades	
Minimum GPA needed to participate in sports, extra-curricular activities, etc.	
Attendance and tardiness policies	
Relationship of attendance and tardiness policies to official “count” for daily membership	
Relationship of attendance, tardiness, and behavior marks to students’ grades	
“Truancy” (chronic, habitual, sanctions and supports)	
Conditions for in- and out-of-school suspensions	
Sanctions associated with in-school suspensions	
Sanctions associated with out-of-school suspensions	
Support for “off-track” students	
Conditions for assignment to or choice of alternative schooling	

Next Policy Steps CONTINUED

Policy	Specific aspects of the policy which should be reviewed
Conditions for assignment to the juvenile justice system	
Age of eligibility for GED programs relative to legal age for school-leaving	
High school graduation requirements (courses and credits; examinations)	
Admission requirements for public technical institutes (courses and credits; examinations)	
Admission requirements for two-year community colleges (courses and credits; examinations)	
Admission requirements for the state four-year college and university system (courses and credits; examinations)	
Other important policies <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

14 | Grading Policies and Practices

Grading policies and practices for computing averages can give quite different snapshots of students' apparent performance. The feedback students obtain from grades can in turn deeply affect students' motivation and engagement, and their perceptions of whether teachers care about them and their success in overcoming personal challenges. Similarly, parents' and family members' reaction to student grades often affect relationships within the household and student effort.

For an in-depth discussion of different methods of calculating grades read the article cited below and study the table reproduced from that article. Then discuss within the school and district current grading policies and how these might be improved to take into account changes in students' improvement over time and the fact that students — as with all individuals — occasionally have “off” days.

The table below shows the results of different methods of treating grades. Each student has the same average score when grades are tallied arithmetically. But some students started out high and plunged over the course of the semester; others began low, exerted effort and rose; others had an occasional bad day. What method of grading most accurately reflects students' performance and gains in knowledge and encourages them to continue to work hard and learn?

Grades Tallied by Three Different Methods

Student	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Average score	Grade	Median Score	Grade	Deleting lowest	Grade
1	59	69	79	89	99	79	C	79	C	84	B
2	99	89	79	69	59	79	C	79	C	84	B
3	77	80	80	78	80	79	C	80	B	79.5	C
4	49	49	98	99	100	79	C	98	A	86.5	B
5	100	99	98	48	49	79	C	98	A	86.5	B
6	0	98	98	99	100	79	C	98	A	98.8	A
7	100	99	98	98	0	79	C	98	A	98.8	A

Grading Scale: 90% - 100% = A; 80%-89%=B; 70%-79%=C; 60-69%=D; 59% or lower = F

Reproduced from Guskey, T.R., “Computerized Gradebooks and the Myth of Objectivity,” Phi Delta Kappa, June 2002, vol. 83, number 10, pp. 775-780.

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15 | A College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation

Knowing whether a college- and career-ready curriculum is in place is measured not by course titles but by student outcomes. David T. Conley, in his book *College Knowledge*, and in the paper, *Toward a More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness*, prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, March 2007 (<http://www.gatesfoundation.org>), makes a distinction between two types of college readiness — comprehensive and traditional.

The comprehensive approach to college readiness envisioned by Conley focuses on evaluating:

- students’ cognitive development and growth in high school
- students’ subject-specific content knowledge
- students’ attitudes and behavioral attributes (study skills, time management, awareness of one’s performance, persistence, and the ability to utilize study groups)
- students’ contextual knowledge (how to apply to college, pay for college, and adjust to college once there)

The traditional approach, by contrast, focuses on:

- course-taking and completion relevant to college and university admission
- remedial course needs of students once in college or the workforce

College- and Career-Ready Checklists (adapted from Conley, *Toward a More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness*). What percentage of the secondary students in your community is on-track to exhibit college-ready characteristics? What is your goal? Put your estimate of present status in column 1 and your goal in column 2.

The percentage of our students who demonstrate the following college-ready characteristics is:		
PRESENT	GOAL	CHARACTERISTIC:
		Consistent intellectual growth over four years of high school
		Deep understanding and facility applying key foundational ideas and concepts from core academics
		Strong grounding in the knowledge base underlying key concepts; can expertly use knowledge to solve novel problems
		Facility with a range of cognitive skills and capabilities that can be generalized as “the ability to think”
		Reading and writing skills and strategies sufficient to address college-level material and expectations
		Success in an entry-level college science course taken by those planning to major in a discipline requiring additional scientific knowledge and expertise
		Mastery of a range of numerical concepts sufficient to take one introductory level college course that could lead to a major requiring additional proficiency in mathematics
		Ability to accept critical feedback of oral or written work
		Ability to assess objectively one’s level of subject matter competence, and to make plans to complete course requirements on time and with quality
		Ability to study independently and with a group, out of class, and over a reasonably long period of time

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15 | A College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation CONTINUED

The percentage of our students who demonstrate the following college-ready characteristics is:

PRESENT	GOAL	CHARACTERISTIC:
		Ability to interact well with a wide range of faculty, staff and students from a wide range of backgrounds and who hold perspectives which may differ from those of the student
		Understanding college values and norms and the important role played by disciplinary studies in organizing intellectual communities that study key aspects of natural phenomena and the human condition

What percentage of students are able to:

PRESENT	GOAL	CHARACTERISTIC
		Write a clear, coherent, well structured, and well reasoned three- to five-page paper, free from grammar, spelling, and usage errors, with credible references from several sources
		Read and understand a range of non-fiction publications and technical materials, decoding and comprehending technical language, remembering terminology, self-monitoring to note areas of confusion, and understanding basic points
		Employ algebra fundamentals to solve multi-step problems, including those without one obvious solution and problems requiring math beyond algebra, with accuracy and the ability to explain choice of solution strategies and methods
		Conduct basic science experiments, maintaining an inquisitive stance, making observations and interpreting data as an aid to evaluating the initial hypothesis; consider and reach explanations for unanticipated results; present results to a critical audience in the language of science
		Research a given topic, successfully identifying a series of relevant source materials, organize, and summarize the results clearly, and synthesize the findings coherently and within the context of the larger questions under investigation
		Interpret two conflicting explanations of the same event or phenomenon, taking into account the diverse beliefs, cultures, and values of the explainers, as well as possible individual conflicts of interest and strengths in argumentation
		Communicate in a second language, using language in a culturally appropriate fashion without literal translations
		Participate in a study group outside of class with a heterogeneous group of students having different academic skills and cultural backgrounds; successfully complete a project or prepare for an exam using the strengths of group members as a learning tool
		Successfully complete an assignment that requires two or more weeks of independent work and research, using feedback from teachers and others formatively to improve the final product
		Create and maintain a personal schedule with a to-do list, prioritized tasks, and appointments
		Use computers and software to complete academic tasks — analyze data sets, write papers, prepare presentations, and record data
		Navigate college and financial aid sites on the web, comparing college programs and financial requirements for feasibility of attendance
		Present an accurate self-assessment of readiness for college, using evidence from classroom work, assignments, grades, courses taken, national and state exams, and a personal assessment of maturity and self-discipline

15 | A College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation CONTINUED

Inventory of College and Career Readiness Curriculum Expectations			
	SY2007-08 or before	SY2008-09	SY2009-10 or after
Inventory of students expected to complete the recommended college preparatory curriculum (American Diploma Project and others — four years of English, three years of social studies, three years of lab science including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, and three years of mathematics including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) will do so in:			
Our state, district or school (circle all that are relevant) has a curriculum alignment committee working to revise course expectations and curriculum. Work is expected to be completed by:			
We have a plan and timeline for phasing in the expanded course and curriculum requirements. The expanded requirements will be in place by:			

The percentage of students accomplishing the following is:			
	Less than 40%	41% to 60%	61% to 80%
<i>NOTE: Enter the actual percentage in the appropriate category</i>			
High school graduates with a regular diploma who were accepted at community colleges (for SY200X-Y)			
High school graduates with a regular diploma who attended community college and received a community college degree after two years			
High school graduates with a regular diploma who were accepted at four-year colleges (for SY200X-Y)			
High school graduates with a regular diploma who graduated from four-year colleges four years later (for SY200X-Y).			
High school graduates with a regular diploma who entered the full-time workforce within four months of high school graduation (for SY200X-Y)			

Inventory of post-secondary success trends for our graduates			
OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, the trends:	Stayed about the same at:	Increased by at least five percentage points to:	Decreased by at least five percentage points to:
in two-year college acceptance rates for our high school (district) have:			
in two-year college completion rates for our high school (district) have:			
in four-year college acceptance rates for our high school (district) have:			
in four-year college completion rates for our high school (district) have:			

15 | **A College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation** CONTINUED

Inventory of high school course-passing by subject				
	PREVIOUS YEAR SENIORS		THIS YEAR'S SENIORS	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Number of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II (or, for this year's seniors, are on track to pass these courses)				
Number of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed English I, II, III, and IV (or, for this year's seniors, are on track to pass these courses)				
Number of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed three lab sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) (or are on track to do so)				
Number of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed three social sciences (or are on track to do so)				
Percentage of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II (or, for this year's seniors, are on track to pass these courses)				
Percentage of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed English I, II, III, and IV (or, for this year's seniors, are on track to pass these courses)				
Percentage of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed three lab sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) (or are on track to do so)				
Percentage of regular 12th grade diploma recipients who passed three social sciences (or are on track to do so)				

16 | Comprehensive Community Solutions Diagram

IA, IB. Ensure that Policies and Resources Enable Accomplishing Goals		
2. Enact Across-The-Board Strategies for Accomplishing Goals		
2A. Offer a College- and Career- Ready Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for all secondary school students • College-level learning opportunities • Strong teacher and student supports for achieving high expectations, including service learning 	2B. Support a Multi-Tiered Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early warning/On-track indicator system • Positive support and recognition systems • Transitional support systems that help students cross from middle grades into high school and from high school into college and careers 	2C. Develop Human Capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective and informed leadership • Highly trained and supported teachers working collaboratively • Good ratio of skilled adults to struggling students
3. Create Effective Student Support Systems		
3A. Organize Student Support Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate by students' needs 	3B. Supplement School and District Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have community adults serve as advocates, mentors, and tutors 	3C. Complement the Work of the Community Adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand or add governmental- and external organization-based wraparound supports
4. Revitalize and Reconfigure Schooling in High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Grades Schools		
4A. Enact Comprehensive School Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are reorganized into smaller units or academies and teams within the larger school 	4B. Create New Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New small schools are created or existing large schools are divided into small schools, each with its own principal, school code, and often a theme and greater latitude than conventional schools in organizing to raise student achievement 	4C. Implement Best Practices In Both Comprehensive School Improvement and New Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions are data-based • Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are revitalized with high expectations and relevance • Parents and the community are actively engaged • Teachers and leaders actively participate in professional development and frequently collaborate • Student, staff, and administrators' responsibilities are re-conceptualized to maximize and personalize the benefits of the changed organizational structure for students and adults

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17 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Taking Inventory of “What Is”

Comprehensive Community Solutions to the Dropout Crisis			
In High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Schools	IN PLACE	NOT IN PLACE	IN PLACE & NEEDS WORK
1. Ensure that policies and resources enable accomplishing goals			
1A. Enabling policies support accomplishing goals			
1B. Aligned resources support accomplishing goals			
2. Enact across-the-board strategies for accomplishing goals			
2A. Offer a college- and career-ready curriculum			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous curriculum requirements and expectations for quality of student work are adopted 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College-level learning opportunities are provided 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong teacher and student supports are provided for achieving high academic expectations 			
2B. Support a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early warning system 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-track indicators 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive support and recognition system 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional support systems that help students cross from middle grades into high school 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional support systems that help students cross successfully into college and careers 			
2C. Develop human capital			
Administrators are supported by district with coaching and professional development			
Teachers are supported by district and principal with coaching and professional development for collaboration			
Staffing ratios and teacher allocations are revised to benefit the most struggling students			

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17 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Taking Inventory of “What Is” CONTINUED

Comprehensive Community Solutions to the Dropout Crisis			
In High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Schools	IN PLACE	NOT IN PLACE	IN PLACE & NEEDS WORK
3. Create effective student support systems			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A system is in place to target student support to students’ different needs 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and district resources for the support system are supplemented by the work of community adults as advocates, mentors, and tutors 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work of the school, district, and community adults is complemented by wraparound supports provided by governmental and external organizations 			
4. Revitalize and reconfigure schooling in high schools with high dropout rates and their feeder middle grades schools			
4A. Enact comprehensive school improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is organized into smaller units or academies and teams within the larger school 			
4B. Create new schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New schools are created or existing large schools are divided into small schools, each with its own principal and school code 			
4C. Implement best practices in both comprehensive school improvement and new schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions are data-based • Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are revitalized with high expectations and relevance • Active engagement of parents and the community • Teachers and leaders frequently participate in professional development and collaborate • Student, staff, and administrators’ responsibilities are re-conceptualized to maximize and personalize the benefits of the changed organizational structure for students and adults 			

18 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Taking Inventory of the Parts

Once you’ve gotten the big picture of your community’s current status in implementing comprehensive community solutions, you’ll want to know more about each of the parts that make up the whole. Ultimately, you’ll seek to fit the parts together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Right now, find out which parts need improvement or modifications, are redundant, or are missing.

The sample inventory below (Overview of Student Support) is an example of a framework for understanding each part, or initiative, already undertaken by your community. It specifically addresses initiatives that your community might have taken in category 3, “Create effective support systems,” of the Comprehensive Community Solutions Diagram.

Complete one for each initiative and then move on to Tool 19 “Comprehensive Community Solutions – Next Steps.”

Sample Inventory — Overview of Student Support

Name or Title of this Student Support Initiative:	
Sample Questions:	Sample Answers:
What are the goals?	To improve attendance, behavior, and/or course passing? To provide academic and/or non-academic supports? To improve overall student involvement and engagement?
What is the purpose of the initiative?	Prevention, intervention or recovery? Successful transitions? Successful advancement to success in college and work?
What services are provided by the initiative?	Tutoring, mentoring, counseling, internships, other?
When does the initiative occur?	Before school begins; during the school day, after the school day, Saturdays, and/or summer?
How frequently does the initiative occur?	Yearly, by the semester, quarter, week, or day?
What is the focus?	All or almost all students; small to medium groups; or very small group/case management?
Approximately how many students are presently served, and at how many schools or other locations?	
What process does your school or community use to identify and meet student needs?	
Are there students who are distracted from a commitment to schooling because of serious health and family issues? How many?	
Who currently takes the lead on organizing the initiative?	School or district personnel? Community agency or organization personnel? Volunteers?
Who currently takes the lead on delivering services through the initiative? How many service providers are involved?	School or district personnel? Community agency or organization personnel? Student or adult volunteers?
How do you obtain formative and summative feedback about the initiative’s effectiveness in improving student outcomes? What is your overall evaluation of the effectiveness of this initiative?	

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18 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Taking Inventory of the Parts CONTINUED

Summary

Summarize the Student Support Initiative in terms of the characteristics listed above.
Are you satisfied that the initiative is achieving its goals?

Next steps for this Student Support Initiative: Using the Student Support Initiative characteristics and summary, identify the improvements you would like to make.

19 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Next Steps

If you used the Sample Inventory – Overview of Student Support – and other similar charts developed on your own to analyze the various solution initiatives in your community, you will have quite a set of them now. The next step is to compile the Overviews and develop a detailed understanding of what is going on in your community, amplifying your learning from your initial scan (Comprehensive Community Solutions —Taking Inventory of “What Is.”)

Using community expertise, figure out what’s working, what isn’t working, and what needs improvement. Because each community is different, your school, district, and community members will be the best resources to decide how to organize and how to analyze systematically the new information you’ve obtained from the set of Overviews.

Reasonable questions that will help guide your community in making decisions include:

- How many students of what ages/grade levels/transitional levels are we currently serving through all of our prevention, intervention, and recovery programs?
- How does the number of students served compare to the number of students in each category? To the need in each category?
- Are the programs that we have in place effective? How do we know this? What are our general conclusions about how effectiveness can be improved?
- Are there student needs that we are not serving (e.g., is there a gap between demand and supply and do the gaps fall, for instance, at particular age levels or kinds of services offered and taken advantage of?)
- How many organizations and people are involved in delivering the different sorts of services? Are these sufficient for best results? Would it be helpful to involve additional individuals and organizations? In what capacity?
- Is leadership for efforts coordinated or does it reside among many organizations?
- Are financial and human resources aligned with needs or is further capacity building required?

With these questions answered, you will be ready to answer the **Big Picture** questions and move on to **Next Steps**. If your community also completed other inventories mentioned in *Grad Nation* (the Policy Audit, the College and Career Readiness Audits, etc.), you may also wish to revisit these and incorporate the findings into your responses and plans below.

Big Picture Question: On balance, do we seem to have the right framework of initiatives in place to meet the needs in our community related to reducing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate?

- If so, what steps will we take for more effective and more rapid improvement?
- If not, where are the gaps or imbalances? Are we focusing on changing policies while neglecting to ramp up student support systems? Are we ramping up student support systems yet forgetting a whole-school focus? Are we revamping our school organization and curriculum yet failing to coordinate and grow our student support systems? Any one of these analyses — and many others — is a possible outcome of a community reflection effort. Together, what do they add up to overall?
- Now move on to Next Steps to Comprehensive Community Solutions.

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19 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Next Steps

CONTINUED

Next Steps to Comprehensive Community Solutions to the Dropout Crisis	
In High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Schools	THE NEXT STEPS WE'LL TAKE:
1. Ensure that policies and resources enable accomplishing goals	
1A. Enabling policies support accomplishing goals	
1B. Aligned resources support accomplishing goals	
2. Enact across-the-board strategies for accomplishing goals	
2A. Offer a college- and career-ready curriculum	
Rigorous curriculum requirements and expectations for quality of student work are adopted	
College-level learning opportunities are provided	
Strong teacher and student supports are provided for achieving high academic expectations	
2B. Support a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system	
Early warning system	
On-track indicators	
Positive support and recognition system	
Transitional support systems that help students cross from middle grades into high school	
Transitional support systems that help students cross successfully into college and careers	
2C. Develop human capital	
Administrators are supported by district with coaching and professional development	
Teachers are supported by district and principal with coaching and professional development for collaboration	
Revision of staffing ratios and teacher allocations to benefit the most struggling students	
3. Create effective student support systems	
A system is in place to target student support to students' different needs	
School and district resources for the support system are supplemented by the work of community adults as advocates, mentors, and tutors	
The work of the school, district, and community adults is complemented by wraparound supports provided by governmental and external organizations	

19 | Comprehensive Community Solutions — Next Steps

CONTINUED

Next Steps to Comprehensive Community Solutions to the Dropout Crisis	
In High Schools with High Dropout Rates and their Feeder Middle Schools	THE NEXT STEPS WE'LL TAKE:
4. Revitalize and reconfigure schooling in high schools with high dropout rates and their feeder middle grades schools	
4A. Comprehensive school improvement	
School is organized into smaller units or academies and teams within the larger school	
4B. New schools	
New schools are created or existing large schools are divided into small schools, each with its own principal and school code	
4C. Shared characteristics of comprehensive school improvement and new schools	
Solutions are data-based	
Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are revitalized with high expectations and relevance	
Active engagement of parents and the community	
Teachers and leaders frequently participate in professional development and collaborate	
Student, staff and administrators' responsibilities are re-conceptualized to maximize and personalize the benefits of the changed organizational structure for students and adults	

20 | Key Data for an “Early Warning System” with On- And Off-Track Indicators

The goal for an early warning system composed of on- and off-track indicators is ultimately to create inventories that can be used to guide interventions. There are two groups who need to be inventoried: students who are in danger of falling off-track and students who have reached the “off-track zone” already. Both groups will require serious yet somewhat different interventions. Knowing who these students are, how many there are, and in which grade level they are is the first step to changing outcomes and getting better results for the students in your community.

Your ability to produce such inventories easily depends on the type of software used by your community’s schools and districts, and in some cases by the state department of education.

We have provided two examples of summary inventories that we believe will be most useful to communities and six examples of the preliminary tables that might lead to the summary inventories. We recognize, though, that these examples can at best only provide guidelines, and that you will adapt them depending on how your data is collected and kept.

Inventory One: In Danger of Falling Off-Track In the Past Semester				
	Missed 5-9 days of school	Had 2 or more in-school suspensions	Had C or D average	Received one F in a core academic subject
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years overage for grade				

Inventory Two: Fallen Off-Track in the Past Semester				
	Missed 10 or more days of school	Had 3 or more in-school suspensions	Had 1 or more out-of-school suspensions	Received two or more Fs in a core academic subject
All students				
First-time 9 th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years overage for grade				

All of our examples are for a 9th grade early warning system. Use a similar approach to analyze grades 6, 7, 8 and 10.

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20 | Key Data for an “Early Warning System” with On- And Off-Track Indicators CONTINUED

The charts below are ways to collect the needed data

ATTENDANCE. Number of students with this number of missed days in a specific time period	0-4 days	5-9 days	10-19 days	20+ days
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade				

BEHAVIOR – IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS. Number of students with this number of in-school suspensions in a specific time period	0-1	2-3	4-5	6+
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade				

BEHAVIOR – OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS. Number of students with this number of out of-school suspensions in a specific time period	0	1	2	3
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade				

ACADEMIC FAILURE. Number of students with this number of F’s in a specific time period	1	2	3	4
All students				
First-time 9th graders				
Students who are repeating a grade				
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade				

ACADEMIC FAILURE. Number of students with an F in English, mathematics or both in a specific time period	English	Mathematics	English and mathematics
All students			
First-time 9th graders			
Students who are repeating a grade			
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade			

20 | **Key Data for an “Early Warning System” with On- And Off-Track Indicators** CONTINUED

ACADEMIC SLUMPING COUPLED WITH ATTENDANCE SLUMPING. Number of students with a C and D average, with multiple days missed in a specific time period	C/D average	0-4 days missed	5-9 days missed	10-19 days missed	20+
All students					
First-time 9th graders					
Students who are repeating a grade					
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade					

ON-TRACK FOR SUCCESS. Number of students with an A or B average, 95% or higher attendance, and no suspensions	A or B average	95% attendance	No in- or out-of-school suspensions
All students			
First-time 9th graders			
Students who are repeating a grade			
Students who are two or more years over-age for grade			

As part of the effort to increase the graduation rate, find out:

From current and potential community organizations and agencies:

- What expertise do/can these organizations bring to the table? (Accounting, management, crisis management, case management, organizational development, youth development, data collection and analysis, research, logistics, simple and complex budget development and tracking, project coordination, communications, public relations, etc.)
- What are the top one to three areas of expertise that they will contribute to the graduation improvement effort?

From current community activists:

- What type of community efforts has the individual participated in previously?
 - Political or governmental
 - Civic and social service
 - Faith-based
 - Social and recreational
 - Patriotic and fraternal
 - Youth and education
- What skills do individuals have that were learned and/or are exercised in their personal, academic, work, and civic lives?
- What are the top three skills each individual would like to contribute in the future?

From potential new leaders:

- Which successful individuals have entrepreneurial skills that have enabled them in the past to “break the mold” in some way productively? What did they do? (Be concrete and specific.)
- How can successful entrepreneurs and “break-the-mold” thinkers recruit and assist individuals or organizations who have not previously contributed?
- What is the top priority community effort that the individual would be willing to participate in?
- What can they teach others?
- Also refer to *Grad Nation’s A Checklist for Team Member Qualities* to consider additional aspects of influencing others.

22 | Identifying and Connecting the Community That Supports Students

SUPPORT COMMUNITY for the schools

What is the current “support community” for the schools? Who in the community is regularly involved in setting the school and/or district vision, or involved with school and district planning? Who regularly gives of their time, advice, collaborative and/or financial support? How would you like to expand this community? How would you like to include this community in your graduation improvement efforts?

FORMAL SUPPORT COMMUNITY for children and youth

What is the current formal “support community” for children and youth? Inside of school? Outside of school? Which organizations and which individuals play which roles? How would you like to expand this community? How would you like to include this community in your graduation improvement efforts?

INFORMAL SUPPORT COMMUNITY for children and youth

What is the current informal “support community” for children and youth? Which family members are important, regardless of whether students live with these family members? Which neighborhood or nearby stores depend on students’ purchases for a significant part of their income? Which other members of the informal support community have you not yet considered? Have you considered where these individuals might be located? Public health clinics, gyms, business clubs, book clubs, athletic or band boosters, neighborhood improvement associations? Where else? What role can they play in the graduation improvement effort?

POTENTIAL SUPPORT COMMUNITY members

Which of these potential “support community” members — both formal and informal — do members of the Summit Team and other leaders of the graduation improvement and dropout reduction effort know? How strong are the connections that already exist? How can these connections be strengthened and new connections formed?

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23 | A Checklist for Team Member Qualities

A Drive for Results

- Record of implementing change and overcoming political barriers to do so
- An unyielding belief that all children — no matter how disadvantaged — can learn
- Organizing and planning skills to keep the decision-making process and implementation efforts on track

Relationship and Influence Skills

- Good relationships with a wide range of community organizations, parents, district, and school staff
- Willingness and ability to disagree politely with others; a “thick skin”
- Teamwork skills to complete tasks responsibly and to support team members
- Strong influencing and advocacy skills

Readiness for Change

- An open mind about ways to improve students’ attendance, behavior, and performance
- An open mind about community and district/school interactions and the integration of wraparound supports into the educational fabric
- Willingness to try new strategies
- No political agenda that may interfere with student-centered decisions

Knowledge to Do What Works (or willingness to acquire it quickly)

- Knowledge of the formal and informal decision-making processes in your community, district, and schools
- Knowledge of past efforts to change and improve schools in your community
- Knowledge of the research base, with a focus on data related to increasing the graduation rate and reducing the dropout rate

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24 | **New Perspectives for Sustaining Change: An Attitude and Belief Audit**

As you gather your community's leadership and workgroup teams, consider discussing the following questions or develop your own. Ask whether the practices you observe in the district, school or community support the answers you hear. If not, what needs to be changed?

- Does high school completion really matter?
- Is it important that students work hard in high school or is “just passing” okay?
- Are schools and the community together responsible for providing safety nets for off-track students? Who’s “off track?”
- Will we differentiate the safety nets and wraparound supports we provide?
- Will we use data or guess?
- Do discipline policies support or inhibit graduation?
 - Does giving an in-school suspension to an off-track student who mildly disrupts a class and is failing multiple courses assist that student in gaining credits needed for graduation?
 - Does giving an out-of-school suspension for repeated truancy to a student who is failing multiple courses assist that student in gaining credits needed for graduation?
 - Does requiring students to make up attendance deficits for failing to come to class five or ten times — whether by sitting for four hours in a Saturday class or by doing community service such as sweeping leaves — help them learn the material they have missed?
- Do employers actually support students finishing high school?
- Do employers actually support parents and guardians in their roles as parents?
- What steps are we going to take to change community dynamics?
- What traditions will we need to change?
- What habits need to change?
- How will we back our education policymakers and teachers by voting in new policies and practices and implementing these in our community's schools?

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25 | Community Representatives Chart

Beyond parents and students, think about engaging representatives from throughout the community, including leaders from all sectors.

Community Representatives		
Local Civic and Governmental Agencies	Local Community Representatives	District- and School-Related Staff
<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor and City Council Members • Department of Health • Regional Education Service Agencies • Economic Development Agencies • Workforce Development Boards • Juvenile Justice and Law Enforcement System • Two- and Four-Year Colleges and Universities • Others? 	<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Board Representatives • Parents and Students • Hospitals • Big Brothers/Big Sisters • Chamber of Commerce Representatives • Wide range of business partners • Faith-based Organizations • Representatives of Community-based Organizations • United Way • Boys & Girls Clubs • YMCA • 4-H • Others 	<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • Principals • Director of Accountability • Counselors • Social Workers • Teachers • Classified Personnel • Others

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The work of each team will vary depending on the team goals and role in interacting with the other teams and the Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team. Here we provide an example of how a Media and Communications Team might organize and operate. You can adapt this model to other teams. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation has a complete set of guidelines for organizing media campaigns, based on its work with multiple non-profit organizations over a period of years (<http://wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=75&CID=385&NID=61&LanguageID=0>).

Characteristics

The work of the Media and Communications Team will be:

- Guided by a plan
- Characterized by a diverse mixture of media tools and strategies
- Designed for delivery in unconventional locations to reach hard-to-reach and resistant audiences, as well as audiences who are lukewarm or already positive
- Timed to address the different cycles of the school and community year

An effective plan begins with questions and tentative answers

- What do you want to accomplish?
- Who are the target audiences?
- What do you think you know about the target audiences' opinions, perceptions, and beliefs that will affect their responses to a media campaign?
- How will you find out more?
- What are the top three messages that you wish to send to your target audiences?
- Will you differentiate these messages to different target audiences?
- What is your time frame?
- What resources do you have available and which are needed?
- What communication strategies, materials, and locations will you use for reaching your target audiences cost-effectively?
- Who will do what?
- How will you learn whether your campaign is effective and how it could be modified or improved in the future?

What do you want to accomplish? The priority overarching message is that economics and education go hand in hand. In today's knowledge- and technically-based economy, a high school diploma is the first step on the ladder to further education, a good job, and a quality life style. Everyone should graduate from high school, no substitutes.

Who is the target audience? There are multiple possible target audiences. How are you going to decide whom you will reach and with what priority? Does everyone in the community need to hear via a comprehensive campaign? Are you contemplating a campaign targeted to one age group of students and the associated adults who are closest in contact with those students? Some of the choices of audiences include students, their brothers and sisters, teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, guardians, business owners, and faith leaders.

How will you shape each message for different audiences? In Jacksonville, Florida, attendance brochures were customized for elementary and secondary students. In Chicago, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education developed three short, data-based briefs carrying the same message about the factors that lead to 9th graders dropping out, but customized with data-based reasoning targeted to the three different audiences of students, teachers, and parents.

What are the top three messages you hope will be heard? That it will take the whole community working together to build a set of systems to help everyone graduate and then to succeed in college and the workforce? That attendance, behavior, and good grades are paramount? That just passing isn't good enough?

What is your time frame? Is this team attempting to influence this year's promotion and graduation rate (and the supporting factors) or is it laying a foundation for a comprehensive campaign for the next school year? Or will this team choose a mixture of strategies, some of for this school year and some for the future?

How will you learn more about what drives your community's thinking and best steps for communicating with hard-to-reach constituencies? Consult opinion-makers and marketers within the community — newspapers, television and radio stations, internet and cable providers, public relations firms, utilities, grocery chains, insurance agencies, and car dealers, just for a start. All have reason to know the nature of their community or region in detail, population characteristics, and what works.

What strategies, media, and locations for delivery will be chosen to reach target audiences cost-effectively? Many options are available for getting information from your community.

- Surveys
- Facilitated focus group discussions
- Community forums.

How will you choose and use your media? Television, radio, posters, flyers?

How will you communicate with hard-to-reach constituencies? Can the team get word out on buses, at medical clinics and grocery stores, convenience stores, and popular retailers?

What resources are available? Human capital is an essential ingredient. Which organizations within the community are already represented by their personnel and which additional organizations or individuals should be recruited to help the Media and Communications Team? Financial resources come second. What resources exist in regular budgets and what can be aligned through community campaigns?

27 | **Sample Working Session** for Increasing the Graduation Rate and Reducing the Dropout Rate in Our Community

This is a sample template for organizing a community workshop on the Dropout Crisis.

Overarching and Prompting Questions

Prompting Questions help answer the Overarching Questions

OVERARCHING QUESTION #1:

Why do we care about the dropout challenge and increasing the graduation rate in our community?

Prompting Questions:

1. What impact do dropouts have on the quality of life overall in our community?
2. What is the economic impact of dropouts in our community?
3. What are the personal impacts for high school dropouts in our community?

OVERARCHING QUESTION #2:

How many young people drop out in our community? Who drops out, and why? What are the main indicators putting students at risk of dropping out in our community?

Prompting Questions:

1. What do we “know” about the dropout issue in our community?
2. Are our responses to this question based on perception or reality?
3. Where can we obtain the information and data needed to create an accurate picture of the dropout challenge within our community? What specific communities and agencies might have this information?

OVERARCHING QUESTION #3:

What community resources do we already have available to address the dropout challenge? Are there still gaps between the need and the available resources, and if so, who can help fill them? What can we do to address the dropout challenge?

Prompting Questions:

1. What’s currently being done to address this issue in our community?
2. What can we do to help address the dropout challenge from the perspective of the different communities within our entire community?
3. What resources are still needed? Are the resources financial? Personnel? Other?
4. What connections could we make to help bring in other resources to fill the gaps?

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27 | **Sample Working Session** for Increasing the Graduation Rate and Reducing the Dropout Rate in Our Community CONTINUED

Overarching and Prompting Questions

Prompting Questions help answer the Overarching Questions

OVERARCHING QUESTION #4:

How will we galvanize our community and organize to meet the dropout challenge?

Prompting Questions:

1. What are the key opportunities to help make this a top priority in our community?
2. What are the barriers to making this a priority in our community?
3. How will we communicate the challenge throughout our community, including to those who are difficult to reach and those who question whether there is a challenge?

OVERARCHING QUESTION #5:

What should be our next steps to a solution?

Prompting Questions:

1. How will each community create a Graduation Improvement and Dropout Prevention Action Plan?
 2. How will community leaders intersect with the school district dropout prevention team and school district planning process? How will resources be used? How will additional commitments of time and talent be generated?
 3. How will a community compact be created to formalize our informal partnerships and unite all community members in support of the Graduation Improvement and Dropout Prevention Plan?
 4. Who will take the lead?
 5. What local timelines will we set?
 6. When will our next meeting be?
-

28 | Leaders Moving Forward

Below, we provide a sample set of questions that could be used by a group of leaders deciding what they will do. The wording can be adapted for different leadership groups.

- How can wraparound service providers' professional expertise be applied to raise expectations for high school graduation among different target audiences?
 - the general audience
 - those who are resistant to change
 - those who are difficult to reach through conventional communication channels
- What gains in the effectiveness of delivery of the graduation improvement message can be achieved by wraparound service providers working together? How will leading wraparound service providers rally other organizations and constituencies to galvanize the community for action?
- What areas of each wraparound service provider's professional expertise and resources (human resources, financial, other) might be useful in enhancing educators' district and school-level efforts. Examples include:
 - Strategic planning
 - Collecting and making sense out of data; finding patterns and trend lines; working towards solutions; monitoring; making improvements
 - Providing workshops for educators on the needs
 - Providing workshops for parents on how they can assist their students
 - Securing mentors and tutors
 - Training mentors and tutors
 - Providing enhanced social services for students
 - Organizing with school-based personnel in service delivery
 - Other?
- How might wraparound service providers' organizational structures enhance statewide, regional and local educator efforts and the work of dropout prevention teams? Examples include:
 - A consistent voice across a region; consistent input into goals
 - Effective service delivery within communities
 - Access to facilities, meeting sites
 - Assistance with setting messages, communication, publication, dissemination
- How will wraparound service providers organize for long-term sustainability of this effort?

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29 | Sample Community Graduation Compact

A COMMUNITY GRADUATION COMPACT

We are resolved to reduce our community’s high school dropout rate and to increase our high school graduation rate. We recognize that the future of our community lies in our success in preparing our youth for success in high school and postsecondary education, work, and civic life. The high schools and feeder middle and elementary schools for which we make this commitment are:

Setting clear goals: We acknowledge that the best estimate of the current high school graduation rate is: _____ for school year 20XX-20YY. Our community commits to using the “best practice” method of calculating graduation rates recommended by the National Governor’s Association.

We are determined to raise our community’s average high school graduation rate over the next 10 years, for all students to: _____.

Setting a clear timeline for accomplishing graduation rate improvement goals. Our community’s timeline and goals for raising the 10-year high school graduation rate incrementally are:

Year 1: ____ Year 2: ____; Year 3: ____; Year 4: ____; Year 5: ____;
Year 6: ____ Year 7: ____; Year 8: ____; Year 9: ____

Developing a plan, supporting goals, and benchmarks for accomplishing the 10-year timeline and goals. We are going to accomplish the increase in graduation rates by implementing the plan that we have developed as part of this Community Graduation Compact. We will revisit and improve our plan each year, based on our analysis of outcomes. A plan summary is set forth below. It identifies the overarching priorities we will address, the target group and size of the population to be assisted, the strategies we will use to address the priorities, the desired outcome(s), benchmarks, and target dates for achieving these goals. [See the tool Sample Short- and Medium-Term Goals for samples of supporting goals and how they can be stated.]

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Accomplishing the 10-year timeline and goals				
Overarching priorities	Target group and size of the group to be assisted	Strategies	Desired outcomes/ benchmarks of success (supporting goals)	Target date (s) for achieving the desired outcomes (supporting goals)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

Partners: The partners (individuals and groups) in our community-wide Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Plan are:

Leaders: Our work will be guided by [describe the leadership and decision-making structure]:

Planning and Implementation Structure and Process: We have created the processes and structures described below to plan and carry out our work:

Measurement and Accountability: We have established structures and identified organizations and individuals responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of efforts on a continuing basis. Outcomes of our work will be measured and reevaluated by collecting the following kinds of data on the following schedule:

The organizations and individuals who will collect the data and provide feedback include:

Rallying Our Community to End the Dropout Crisis: We intend to hold Dropout Prevention Summits annually to review progress with the community and to gain renewed commitment to meeting goals. Our target date for the next Summit is: _____.

Managing Change and Sustaining Annual Renewal: The signatures below signify agreement by members of our community and partners from within and beyond the community that we will work as a team to achieve our stated goals to reduce the dropout rate and to increase the graduation rate to _____ by the year _____.

30 | Sample Short- and Medium-Term Goals

Setting short-term and medium-term supporting goals breaks down a large and long-term effort and goals into smaller chunks whose outcomes can be more immediately understood, tweaked, and improved. Supporting goals consider the national research base, help the community translate the vision into reality, and make explicit the commitment to radical improvement. They are most effective when they are specific and therefore measurable.

Samples of short- and medium-term goals supporting the long-term goal of graduation rate improvement might include:

- 95 percent of our community’s children will miss fewer than five days of school per year (for non-health related reasons).
- 95 percent of our community’s students will receive in-school tutoring within three weeks of “falling off track.”
- 95 percent of our community’s students will leave grade 8 with grade-level reading and writing skills aligned with national expectations.
- 50 percent of our community’s students will pass an Algebra I course that is up to national standards by the end of grade 8, and 95 percent will do so by the end of grade 9.
- 95 percent of our community’s high school students will earn sufficient credits, including credits in core academic courses, as determined by our state and district for promotion each year.

As part of the process of writing short-term and medium-term goals for educational outcomes, remember that educational outcomes are unlikely to be fully achieved without community support. Thus, there is a second set of short-term and medium-term goals that reflect the community’s role. Samples might include:

- 95 percent of the grade 6 to 12 students who are falling off-track (D or F on progress reports and report cards) receive in- or out-of-school mentoring by a caring adult at least one hour and at least one day a week over the course of the year.
- 95 percent of young mothers are empowered to continue their education through community supports including child and adult health care, quality day care, early pre-school, and the frequent presence and advocacy of a caring, older adult and/or case manager.
- 95 percent of youth males who are headed off-track are empowered to continue their education through joint counseling efforts and program supports provided by case managers, after-school activity providers, attendance officers, and the juvenile justice system.
- 95 percent of the community’s residents of all ages hear the message and agree with and actively support community and school efforts to help all students finish high school. The blame game that students’ failure is someone else’s fault is over, replaced by consensus that preventing student failure and achieving student graduation is a community’s responsibility.

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Grad Nation Action Tool

<i>Please use this as a helpful way to drive your action planning and address your community's dropout challenge</i>	Answer (Yes/No)	To Do List
1. Rallying Your Community to End the Dropout Crisis		
a. Do you have accurate data concerning your dropout challenge? (p. 9, p. 17)		
b. Have you compared this data to other districts; to your state; to other states; and to the national rate? (p. 9-10)		
c. Have you assessed the costs of your dropouts to the local economy and community? (p. 11)		
2. Understanding Your Dropout Rate		
a. Do you know where the problem is the worst in your community/state? (pp. 22-24)		
b. Do you know which students are dropping out; for what reason; and at what rate? (pp. 24-27)		
c. Have you surveyed low-attendance students as to why they don't attend school regularly? (p. 28)		
d. Have you surveyed students as to how they view their classroom and school experience? (p. 29)		
e. Have you asked dropouts and those who appear close to dropping out why they are doing so? (pp. 29-30)		
f. Have you catalogued all student supports/wraparound services across the four key transitions? (p. 34)		
g. Do you know which student supports/wraparound services are most effective and how many students each is reaching? (p. 35)		
h. Have you reviewed current policies to ensure that they are all aligned with best practice? (pp. 35-38)		
i. Local District: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attendance 2. Grade retention 3. Grade promotion 4. Grading policy 5. Referral to GED programs 6. Referral to alternative schools ii. State Level <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School accountability measures (what is being measured) 2. Compulsory school age 		
i. Do you understand your high school graduates' success rate in college? (pp. 38-40)		

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Grad Nation Action Tool CONTINUED

	Answer (Yes/No)	To Do List
3. Solutions for Comprehensively Addressing Your Community's Dropout Crisis		
a. Is your approach comprehensive? (pp. 44-46)		
b. Do you have a plan to transform the middle and high schools which most of your community's dropouts attended? (pp. 47-50)		
c. Have you developed comprehensive student supports and addressed all Promises of the Five Promise framework? (pp. 52-54)		
d. Have you substantially increased the number of skilled and committed adults (including parents) who provide student supports? (pp. 55-58)		
e. Have you created and launched a community-wide campaign to improve all students' attendance? (pp. 58-59)		
f. Have you provided a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for all secondary school students? (pp. 60-64)		
g. Have you developed early warning systems based on (A, B, C's) attendance, behavior and course performance? (pp. 65-66)		
h. Have you developed a multi-tier response system based on the warning systems above that address: 1) prevention; 2) moderate intensity supports; and 3) intensive, case-managed responses when other interventions are not sufficient? (pp. 67-68)		
i. Have you developed "multiple pathways" to graduation, based on assessed needs and appropriate support structures? (pp. 69-70)		
j. Are you supporting policies that (pp. 71-75): i. Promote accurate graduation and drop-out data? ii. Raise compulsory school age requirements to 18? iii. Improve teacher quality, student achievement and higher graduation rates? iv. Adopt a return-on-investment approach to resource allocation? v. Align with current and complementary federal legislation and legislative initiatives?		

Grad Nation Action Tool CONTINUED

	Answer (Yes/No)	To Do List
4. Moving Forward To Create Lasting Change		
a. Do you have a broad-based and cross-sector collaboration (a Community Graduation Compact) to address the dropout challenge, including leadership from schools, business, government, child welfare, nonprofits service providers, youth and parents? (pp. 86-88)		
b. Is this collaboration appropriately organized and supported to drive needed progress? (pp. 77-84)		
c. Are you using a dropout prevention summit to galvanize the broader community to collective civic action on this front? (pp. 85-86)		
d. Are you institutionalizing this “Compact” to set goals, monitor progress and hold the entire community accountable for success over time? (pp. 87-90)		