

## **House Bill 09-1243 Concerning Measures to Raise the Graduation Rate in Public High Schools in Colorado**

Representatives **Middleton and Massey** and Senators Bacon and Spence

### **Please vote YES on HB 09-1243**

What HB 09-1243 does:

- Creates the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide technical assistance to “high priority” and “priority” districts to prevent and re-engage dropouts.
- Requires “high priority” and “priority” districts to conduct a research-based practices assessment for dropout prevention and develop a student graduation and completion plan.
- Requires the state office to report on effective state and local dropout prevention, student engagement, and re-engagement policies; make recommendations; and analyze attendance data annually.
- Creates a student re-engagement grant program to fund district efforts at providing educational services and supports for student engagement and re-engagement in school.
- Eliminates required expulsion for habitually disruptive students.
- Eliminates the requirement that absences resulting from suspensions or expulsions be counted as unexcused.
- Requires districts to adopt a parental notification policy for students who drop out of school.

### **Why vote yes on HB 09-1243:**

- Reducing the dropout rate leads to long-term success for Colorado kids, and benefits the state’s economy.
- Students who drop out of school have higher unemployment rates, earn less money over the course of their careers, and are more likely to commit a crime and be incarcerated.
- Students who drop out are more likely to rely on public assistance and pay half as much in state taxes as high school graduates.
- One in every four Colorado students fails to graduate from high school.
- Low-income and minority students graduate at a rate far below the state average.
- Cutting the dropout rate in half is one of Governor Ritter’s top goals for the state. Your YES vote on HB 09-1243 will help tackle the dropout problem in Colorado and put appropriate services in place to help all Colorado children stay in school and graduate.

## Mississippi's Dropout Prevention Plan

It is estimated that approximately one-third of the nation's students who enter the 9th grade fail to complete high school within four years. As better data collection and more accurate methods of calculating graduation rates has increasingly focused national attention on the number of students dropping out, local education officials and states have stepped up their efforts to retain the country's high school students. This brief looks at one state—Mississippi—and its efforts to address this crisis.

Mississippi's new dropout prevention plan was established by the state legislature under Mississippi Code 37-13-80, passed in 2006, which created the Office of Dropout Prevention (ODP) within the Department of Education. This office has the responsibility of administering state-wide dropout prevention programs and any regulations or policies adopted by the State Board of Education pertaining to dropout prevention. In addition, the legislation placed the offices of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement, School Counseling, and Alternative Education within the Dropout Prevention office.

The ODP began work by instituting a Dropout Prevention Taskforce composed of community, business, and school leaders to develop the detailed Dropout Prevention Plan. The Taskforce also focused attention on developing strategies to ensure that an adequate support system is in place to assist students. The final Dropout Prevention Plan is designed to meet several key goals:

- To increase the graduation rate for cohort classes to 85 percent by the 2018-19 school year, as established by Mississippi Code 37-13-80;
- To decrease the dropout rate by 50 percent by the 2011-12 school year, as established by the State Superintendent; and

- To reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50 percent by 2011-12.

The state's plan uses as a framework the *15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention* as developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. The strategies encompass having a school and community perspective, early interventions, basic core strategies, and making the most of education. The specific strategies include:

1. Systemic Renewal
2. School-Community Collaboration
3. Safe Learning Environments
4. Family Engagement
5. Early Childhood Education
6. Early Literacy Development
7. Mentoring/Tutoring
8. Service Learning
9. Alternative Schooling
10. After School Opportunities
11. Professional Development
12. Active Learning
13. Educational Technology
14. Individualized Instruction
15. Career and Technical Education

As part of the Dropout Prevention Plan, the Mississippi Department of Education established a set of six implementation goals, including a timeline for meeting the goals. As a first step, school districts were asked to partner with the state's Department of Education in developing local dropout prevention action teams. The teams (made up of district administration and school staff, local business and community partners, and other interested parties) are responsible for assessing the needs of their school district, identifying students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, gathering and analyzing data

related to dropouts at their schools, and beginning to make decisions regarding their schools based on current and proposed initiatives. The teams are also specifically charged with developing:

- A plan that incorporates support programs for at-risk students and parent trainings that provide strategies to motivate children to stay in school;
- Policy statements regarding district-level dropout prevention strategies; and
- A plan for the coordination and cooperation among school officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues.

The work of the local dropout prevention team will culminate in the development of Local District Dropout Prevention Plans for each school district (final plan due to the state by mid-September 2007). The Office of Dropout Prevention in the Mississippi Department of Education will offer assistance to local teams as they work to accomplish each implementation goal. The state identified seven critical components that each local team will be tasked with addressing. The components include:

1. Public Relations Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign
2. An Assessment of Current Initiatives
3. School Attendance Officer (SAO) Staff Refocusing Study
4. Dropout Recovery Program
5. Transition Plans for Dropout Prevention
6. Federal Program/Funding Opportunities
7. Research Partnerships

The state also has developed implementation schedules that will begin the first semester of the 2007-08 school year when the Office of Dropout Prevention will offer regional technical assistance and training opportunities to school districts. Local districts will be asked to submit

their draft plan during the first quarter of 2008, allowing for plans to be implemented in the 2008-09 school year

Mississippi's Dropout Prevention Plan is in its early stages. However, the plan's focus on local participation at multiple levels and buy-in will only help schools meet their goals. As support measures, State Superintendent Hank Bounds has established his own set of accompanying strategies, which include increasing the rigor of the curriculum and assessment system; increasing the quality and quantity of teachers and administrators; changing the culture and value of education in the state; and redesigning education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. As schools move forward in addressing the needs of the students, the creation of the states' Office of Dropout Prevention will help in addressing the capacity questions that many states face as they attempt to address the dropout crisis.

Speaking at the state Department of Education's annual conference in June 2007, Superintendent Bounds said that with its high dropout rate, the state is in an "academic crisis" and that big changes are in order. "If we are going to move Mississippi from the bottom, we're going to have to think differently and act with a sense of urgency," he said. "We're going to have to bulldoze everything in our way. It's something we can overcome."

#### For more information

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Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention  
National Dropout Prevention Center/Network  
[www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/default.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/default.htm)

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## High School Dropouts in America

Over a million of the students who enter ninth grade each fall fail to graduate with their peers four years later. In fact, about seven thousand students drop out every school day. Perhaps this statistic was acceptable fifty years ago, but the era in which a high school dropout could earn a living wage has ended in the United States. Dropouts significantly diminish their chances to secure a good job and a promising future. Moreover, not only do the individuals themselves suffer, but each class of dropouts is responsible for substantial financial and social costs to the communities, states, and country in which they live.

Although graduation rates are a fundamental indicator of how schools are ultimately performing, only recently have those rates been rigorously scrutinized and the extent of the crisis in America's high school been revealed. For decades, schools and districts published misleading or inaccurate graduation rates, and as a result, the American public knew little of the scope and gravity of the problems faced by far too many of the nation's high schools. Reputable, independent research has exposed alarmingly low graduation rates that were previously hidden behind inaccurate calculations and inadequate data.

### Who Is Dropping Out?

Overall, far too many students are not graduating on time with a regular diploma; low-income and minority students fare the worst in the dropout epidemic.

- Each year, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school, more than half of whom are from minority groups.<sup>1</sup>
- Nationally, about 71 percent of all students graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma, but barely half of African American and Hispanic students earn diplomas with their peers. In many states the difference between white and minority graduation rates is stunning; in several cases there is a gap of as many as 40 or 50 percentage points.<sup>2</sup>
- A sixteen- to twenty-four-year-old coming from the highest quartile of family income is about seven times as likely to have completed high school as a sixteen- to twenty-four-year-old coming from the lowest quartile.<sup>3</sup>

### Where Are Students Dropping Out?

A relatively small number of chronically underperforming high schools are responsible for more than half of the nation's dropouts.

- Approximately two thousand high schools (about 12 percent of American high schools) produce more than half of the nation's dropouts. In these "dropout factories," the number of seniors enrolled is routinely 60 percent or less than the number of freshmen three years earlier.<sup>4</sup>
- Eighty percent of the high schools that produce the most dropouts can be found in a subset of just fifteen states. The majority of dropout factories are located in northern and western cities and throughout the southern states.<sup>5</sup>

- Dropout factories produce 69 percent of all African American dropouts and 63 percent of all Hispanic dropouts, compared to 30 percent of all white dropouts.<sup>6</sup>

## Why Do Students Drop Out?

While there is no single reason that students drop out, research indicates that difficult transitions to high school, deficient basic skills, and a lack of engagement serve as prominent barriers to graduation.

- Most dropouts are already on the path to failure in the middle grades and engage in behaviors that strongly correlate to dropping out in high school. Various researchers have identified specific risk factors, such as low attendance or a failing grade, which can identify future dropouts—in some cases as early as sixth grade.<sup>7</sup>
- Ninth grade serves as a bottleneck for many students who begin their freshman year only to find that their academic skills are insufficient for high school-level work. Up to 40 percent of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat ninth grade; only 10 to 15 percent of those repeaters go on to graduate.<sup>8</sup>
- Academic success in ninth grade course work is highly predictive of eventual graduation; it is even more telling than demographic characteristics or prior academic achievement.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, many students are not given the extra support they need to successfully make the transition to high school. As a result, over one third of all dropouts are lost in ninth grade.<sup>10</sup>
- The six million secondary students who comprise the lowest 25 percent of achievement are twenty times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the top-performing quartile.<sup>11</sup>
- Both academic and social engagement are integral components of successfully navigating the education pipeline. Research shows that a lack of student engagement is predictive of dropping out, even after controlling for academic achievement and student background.<sup>12</sup>

## What Are the Costs of Dropping Out of High School?

Dropouts suffer from reduced earnings and lost opportunities; there is also a significant social and economic cost to the rest of the nation.

- Over the course of his or her lifetime, a high school dropout earns, on average, about \$260,000 less than a high school graduate.<sup>13</sup>
- Dropouts from the Class of 2008 alone will cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes.<sup>14</sup>
- If the United States' likely dropouts from the Class of 2006 had graduated, the nation could have saved more than \$17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care over the course of those young people's lifetimes.<sup>15</sup>
- If U.S. high schools and colleges raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income would add more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy.<sup>16</sup>
- Increasing the graduation rate and college matriculation of male students in the United States by just 5 percent could lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$8 billion each year by reducing crime-related costs.<sup>17</sup>



## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Editorial Projects in Education, "Diplomas Count 2008: Diplomas Count 2008. School to College: Can State P-16 Councils Ease the Transition?," special issue, *Education Week* 26, no. 40 (2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2006* (NCES 2007-017) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> R. Balfanz, "Locating and Transforming the Low Performing High Schools Which Produce the Nation's Dropouts," paper presented at Turning Around Low-Performing High Schools : Lessons for Federal Policy from Research and Practice, August 16, 2007, Washington, DC.
- <sup>5</sup> R. Balfanz and N. Legters, *Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Nation's Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, 2004).
- <sup>6</sup> Balfanz, "Locating and Transforming the Low Performing High Schools Which Produce the Nation's Dropouts."
- <sup>7</sup> C. Jerald, "Dropping Out is Hard to Do," (Washington, DC: The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> R. Balfanz and N. Legters, "Closing 'Dropout Factories': The Graduation Rate Crisis We Know and What Can Be Done About It," *Education Week* 25, no. 42 (2006): 42-43.
- <sup>9</sup> E. Allensworth and J. Easton, *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures and Attendance in the Freshman Year* (Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, University Publications Office, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> Editorial Projects in Education, "Diplomas Count 2007: Ready for What? Preparing Students for College, Careers, and Life After High School," special issue, *Education Week* 26, no. 40 (2007).
- <sup>11</sup> A. Carnevale, *Help Wanted...College Required. ETS Leadership 2000 Series* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2001).
- <sup>12</sup> R. Rumberger, "Why Students Drop Out of School," in *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* ed. G. Orfield, 131-155 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004).
- <sup>13</sup> C. Rouse, "Labor Market Consequences of an Inadequate Education," paper prepared for the symposium on the Social Costs of Inadequate Education," October 24, 2005, New York.
- <sup>14</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, "The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools," (Washington, DC: Author, 2008).
- <sup>15</sup> ———, "Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment," (Washington, DC: Author, 2006).
- <sup>16</sup> ———, "Demography as Destiny: How America Can Build a Better Future," (Washington, DC: Author, 2006).
- <sup>17</sup> ———, "Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings," (Washington, DC: Author, 2006).



**Colorado Statewide Dropout Initiative (SDI):  
Partnering for Early Intervention and Student Retention**

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***What is the Statewide Dropout Initiative?***

The Statewide Dropout Initiative (SDI) is a collaboration of partners who seek to make measurable and meaningful progress towards decreasing Colorado's student dropout rate and increasing Colorado's high school graduation rate. The Initiative includes several Colorado school districts, direct-service organizations working with at-risk youth, advocacy organizations, researchers, and leaders in philanthropy who recognize the urgent need for action to address this critical issue.

The Initiative was launched by the Donnell-Kay Foundation and is being coordinated by the Colorado Children's Campaign, working in collaboration with the Partnership for Families and Children, Colorado Youth for a Change, school districts, the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, as well as professional groups providing assistance in communications and other technical needs. Although not a project of Colorado state government, the Initiative is working closely with both the Office of Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. and the Colorado Department of Education.

The Statewide Dropout Initiative is focused on action to improve policies and practices that promote engagement, re-entry and graduation at both the local and state levels. The group also recognizes the need to pursue both short- and long-term activities. Short-term efforts seek to take advantage of efforts already underway at the state and local level that can be strengthened by input from leaders committed to better serving potential dropouts. Long-term efforts require a significant degree of study and analysis with various partners to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and to thoughtfully develop systemic solutions.

A prominent theme of SDI's efforts is to vertical integration of teaching, learning and behavior management efforts by educators from middle through high school s that are targeted at reducing dropouts by improving attendance, reducing suspensions and preventing course failures. The long-term strategy is premised upon research into adoption of these "early warning" indicators that districts can use to effectively intervene earlier on in a student's career and reduce the need for traditional dropout recovery programs. Evidence indicates that a critical link exists between future dropouts and negative experiences students have prior to entering ninth grade, and that student absenteeism and course failures numbers at 9<sup>th</sup>

grade and middle school levels may be critical indicators of the need for intervention. The Initiative will target activities for middle grades as well as high school.

### ***Why was the Statewide Dropout Initiative launched?***

Colorado has a recognized problem getting all young people to succeed in high school. State leaders including Dwight Jones, Commissioner of Education, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Jr., members of the the P-20 Education Coordinating Council and other leaders have committed themselves to ensuring that more students graduate from high school, that fewer students dropout, and that all young people get an education that prepares them for future success.

Because of this commitment at all levels, Colorado has a unique opportunity to approach this problem differently. Stakeholders are realizing that piecemeal dropout prevention and recovery programs are largely ineffective. This has resulted in a desire for a state effort that empowers and drives schools and communities to develop and implement their own coherent and integrated reform strategies, rather than a hodge-podge of programs to manage. Partnering with districts willing to implement such strategies, combined with increased public and political will to address this problem, creates an opportunity for a bold, agile, resourced, and committed effort to make a real and lasting impact on Colorado's current and future students.

### ***What is the research basis behind the Statewide Dropout Initiative?***

At the heart of the SDI effort is research that provides a policy and practice framework for Colorado schools to use in designing programs to increase their graduation rate. While statistics about who drops out are important for understanding issues of equity and achievement, they have not been as effective in driving interventions to improve outcomes for students. Building upon research conducted in other cities, the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University is analyzing the attendance, behavior and course failures of eventual dropouts in the years preceding their withdrawal from school. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) at the Partnership for Families and Children will also conduct a companion study of over 90 rural Colorado school districts. Both the Hopkins and NCSE research will include a separate analysis of the impact of gender in their respective findings.

The SDI will build upon the research findings by incorporating the wealth of resources compiled by NCSE. NCSE has prepared summaries of the major evidence based dropout prevention and intervention practices from the major research centers including Johns Hopkins, The National Dropout Prevention Center (Clemson), and the What Works Clearinghouse and Institute for Education Sciences (federal sources) . Ongoing research and resources are available from NCSE in improving attendance, reducing truancy and current policy initiatives at <http://www.truancyprevention.org/>.

### ***Who Supports the Statewide Dropout Initiative?***

The Statewide Dropout Initiative is supported by the in-kind and ongoing efforts of the SDI partner organizations – Colorado Youth for a Change, Partnership for Families and Children



and the Colorado Children's Campaign, each of which is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization. In addition, the Initiative builds upon the efforts already underway at the participating school districts across Colorado, as well as the Colorado Department of Education.

Financial support for these efforts is currently being funded by private foundation grants. To date, this work has been funded by the generous contributions of the Carson Foundation, Donnell-Kay Foundation, Piton Foundation, Qwest Foundation and the Women's Foundation of Colorado. Contributions of additional support are currently being solicited. For information about how you can support the Statewide Dropout Initiative, please contact Nina Lopez at the Colorado Children's Campaign (see below).

### ***What is the work plan for the Statewide Dropout Initiative?***

#### **Short-Term Work (2007-2009)**

##### *School/District Level*

- Johns Hopkins University begins analysis of partner districts (the five school districts in Colorado with the highest *raw* numbers of dropouts, including: Adams 12, Aurora, Denver, Jefferson County, and Pueblo);
- Begin a design and innovation phase using the Hopkins analysis and recommendations to develop school and district action plans. Explore immediate changes in policy and practice in these districts. Share these initial outcomes with other district and community leaders to expand the number of districts engaged in such self-study activity;
- In collaboration with CDE, Partnership for Families and Children initiates a companion rural study of roughly 100 rural school districts in Colorado; and
- Provide 2-3 networking opportunities to district and school leaders interested in pursuing best practices to improve graduation rates.
  - February 13, 2009, the Office of Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. and the SDI will co-host a Policy Forum for the 5 currently participating school districts for the purpose of sharing initial research results, action planning and inform state policy efforts
  - June 2009, the Office of Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. and the SDI will co-host the second annual Statewide Dropout Summit for the purposes of a) sharing final results of Hopkins research in the 5 urban districts, b) sharing initial results of rural district research study, c) continuing development of a state plan to reduce dropouts and d) soliciting interest by additional school districts in participating in the SDI.

##### *Policy/State Level*

- Inform the P-20 Education Coordinating Council. The Initiative has arranged expert testimony from Professor Martha Maclver of John Hopkins University and can arrange for ongoing input and interaction with experts and practitioners working locally on dropout issues, including national experts as well as people in Colorado working on this research or local efforts to change practices and policies;
- Inform the Colorado Department Education's (CDE's) implementation of new programs and activities, such as the recently launched Counselor's Corps. These efforts to shape programs are intended to encourage districts seeking funding or launching programs to examine their own policies and practices and to plan and implement systemic reforms and practices to improve graduation rates;
- Inform state legislative efforts to reduce the dropout rate and increase graduation rates;

- Following the passage of the CAP4K legislation, provide input into the state’s deliberations about setting standards and developing or choosing an assessment system that is more likely to help students transition from secondary schools into post-secondary education and the workforce;
- Develop a long-term vision and benchmarks for what must occur if the state is to make real progress toward the Governor’s goals of halving the dropout rate and doubling the number of credentials awarded in the state; and
- Identify and pursue other policy changes that national level research indicates should be in place to support dropout reduction efforts.

**Long-Term Work (2-10 years)**

*School/District Level*

- Evaluate implemented recommendations and determine policy and practice changes at both the district and state level. Determine if work can be “scaled up.”
- Provide similar implementation support with rural districts.
- Continue to support networking and learning opportunities to influence policy and practice and to allow districts to learn from their peers facing similar challenges.

*Policy/State Level*

Develop a policy agenda based on the analysis of Colorado districts’ and nationwide best practice. Possible issues and activities at the state-level include:

- Use data from the state’s new definition, recording, and reporting of student truancy to inform the state’s accountability or reporting system;
- Find incentives and support structures that help, encourage, or direct districts and schools to adopt the best practices identified by the SDI research;
- Conduct an evaluation of the Initiative and its local implementation efforts; and
- Commission studies and reports that deepen public and policymaker understanding of the options and urgency of decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the number of kids who complete high school and are adequately prepared to succeed in further studies and in life.

***For more information:***

Nina Lopez at the Colorado Children’s Campaign is coordinating this project. Nina can be reached at [nina@coloradokids.org](mailto:nina@coloradokids.org) or 303-620-4573.

*Contacts at the other Initiative partner organizations can be reached at:*

Steve Dobo, Colorado Youth for a Change: [steve.dobo@comcast.net](mailto:steve.dobo@comcast.net)

Ken Seeley, Partnership for Children and Families: [kseeley@pffac.org](mailto:kseeley@pffac.org)

A website with resources and additional information will be available soon!