The Progress of Education Reform 2007

Dropout Prevention

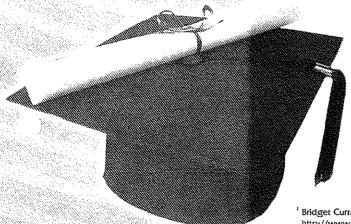Education Commission of the States

What's Inside

- State policy approaches aimed at keeping students in school

- The indicators most closely associated with dropping out

- Cost/benefit analysis of initiatives that improve graduation rates

Research Sheds Light on the Students Most at Risk of Dropping Out – and How to Keep Students on the "Graduation Track"

Improving high school graduation rates has in recent years become a growing concern to state and local policymakers for a number of reasons: the reduced economic opportunities and increased social costs for individuals without a high school diploma; the economic consequences, such as reduced tax revenues; and the need for more college graduates. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has projected, for example, that 90% of the fastest-growing jobs will require some form of postsecondary education – not a likely proposition for high school dropouts.

Pressure also is emerging from other sources. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires high schools to factor in graduation rates in calculating whether a high school has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) or is subject to sanctions for failing to do so. And in one survey after another, high school students themselves report that they hope to finish high school and go to college – but without a high school diploma, these young people are relatively unlikely to earn a postsecondary credential. State longitudinal data systems are providing more accurate information than ever on the number of young people dropping out – with these figures often much higher than previously believed. Finally, an increasing number of states are using a more accurate method of calculating graduation rates, the method proposed in the National Governors Association "Graduation Counts Compact" (the number of students graduating within four years with at least a standard diploma, divided by the number of first-time entering 9th graders four years earlier, plus transfers in, minus transfers out) – again, generating lower (but more accurate) graduation rates than former methodologies.[1]

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* summarizes the findings of five recent studies that address:

⊙ Early (6th-grade) predictors for dropping out of school

⊙ Ninth-grade predictors of risk in an urban environment

⊙ School characteristics linked to higher graduation rates

⊙ Economic benefits of several programs that positively influence high school completion rates

⊙ A synthesis of the research on dropping out and the importance of state data systems to support dropout prevention efforts.

[1] Bridget Curran, *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date*, National Governors Association, 2006. http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0608GRADPROGRESS.pdf