



FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY TOOLKIT
A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AND STATE ADVOCATES ON THE KEY FEDERAL POLICY ISSUES
AFFECTING GRADUATION RATES AND COLLEGE-READINESS

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The Dodd-Ehlers Standards to Provide Educational Achievement for Kids (SPEAK) Act

PURPOSE: To create, adopt, and implement rigorous, voluntary American education content standards in math and science in grades K-12 and incentivize states to adopt them.

FINDINGS:

- America's leadership, economic competitiveness and national security rest on our commitment to educate and prepare our youth to succeed in a global economy. The key to succeeding educationally is to have high expectations for all students.
- Recent international comparisons make clear that American students have significant shortcomings in math and science and many lack the basic math or science skills required for college or the workplace.
- With more than 50 different sets of academic standards, 50 state assessments, and 50 definitions of proficiency under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), there is great variability in the measures, standards and benchmarks for academic achievement in math and science across states.
- As a result of varied standards, assessments and proficiency levels, America's highly mobile student-aged population moves through the nation's schools gaining widely varying levels of knowledge, skills and preparedness.
- In order for the United States to compete in a global economy, the country needs to strengthen its educational expectations for *all* American children.
- Grounded in a real world analysis and international comparisons of what students need to succeed in work and college, rigorous, voluntary, core American standards will keep the United States economically competitive and ensure that American children are given the same opportunity to learn to a high standard no matter where they reside.

WHY AMERICAN EDUCATION STANDARDS?

- To ensure that all American students are given the same opportunity to learn to a high standard no matter where they reside.
- To allow for meaningful comparisons of student academic achievement across states.
- To ensure American students are academically qualified to enter college, or training for the civilian or military workforce.
- To ensure that students are better prepared for the global marketplace and, consequently, maintain America's competitive edge.

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

- Tasks the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), in consultation with relevant constituencies and upon review of existing standards, with creating rigorous and voluntary core American education content standards in math and science for grades K-12.
- Ensures that such standards are internationally competitive and comparable to the best standards in the world.
- Requires the standards to be anchored in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and science frameworks and achievement levels.

- Ensures that special education students and English Language Learners are considered in development of the standards.
- Establishes the American Standards Incentive Fund as a means to incentivize states to adopt the standards.
- Provides an additional bonus grant to states that successfully meet the requirements of the incentive fund to enhance statewide student-level longitudinal data systems.
- Allows the Secretary to extend the NCLB timeline for participating states.

WHAT DOES THE BILL NOT DO?

- The bill does not establish a national test.
- The bill does not establish a national curriculum.
- The bill does not tell teachers how to teach their subject matter.
- The bill does not establish national standards - participation is voluntary.
- The bill does not limit states to the core standards when developing state academic standards.

AUTHORIZATION LEVELS

- The bill provides \$3 million for creation of the math/science standards and \$400 million for the American Standards Incentive Fund.



Every Student Counts Act Summary

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with bipartisan support because of the consensus that the nation needed to close the achievement gaps that existed between students of differing racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, and that schools should be held accountable for the success of all students. NCLB held the promise of ending what was coined “the soft bigotry of low expectations.”

Unfortunately, the soft bigotry of low expectations persists unabated in the nation’s high schools. Recent estimates demonstrate that, nationally, one-third of our students leave high school without a diploma; that’s about 1.23 million each year or 7,000 each school day. There are large “graduation gaps” between racial groups; about half of American Indian students and black students and 60 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time with a regular diploma, compared with more than three quarters of their white and Asian counterparts.

Graduation rates are a fundamental indicator of whether or not the nation’s public school system is doing what it is intended to do: enroll, engage, and educate youth to be productive members of society. In today’s increasingly competitive global economy, graduating from high school is more critical than ever to securing a good job and a promising future. Since an estimated 85 percent of current jobs and almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs now require some postsecondary education, a high school diploma and the skills to succeed in college and the workplace are essential. High school dropouts often have trouble finding stable, well-paying jobs. Individuals with less education are generally less healthy, die earlier, and are more likely to become parents when very young. Dropouts are also more at risk of becoming embroiled in the criminal justice system, or of needing social welfare assistance.

Schools, districts, and states have a responsibility to accurately measure and report graduation rates for all students, and an obligation to significantly progress towards the goal of having all students graduate high school prepared for college and work. Unfortunately, unacceptably low graduation rates have been obscured and accepted for far too long due to inaccurate data, misleading calculations and reporting, and flawed accountability systems.

In drafting NCLB, Congress recognized that holding schools accountable for their test scores could create perverse incentives to “push out” low-performing students and intended for high schools to also meet graduation goals to make AYP. Unfortunately, there are three significant flaws in NCLB (as written and implemented) that undermine the intention of the law and weaken the role of graduation rates in both accountability for student success and as a tool for identifying low-performing high schools and targeting support and interventions.

- NCLB has permitted the use of inconsistent and misleading graduation rate calculations that overestimate graduation rates.
- NCLB does not require meaningful increases of graduation rates over time.
- NCLB does not require the disaggregated graduation rates of student subgroups to increase as part of AYP determinations.

To remedy these significant problems, the *Every Student Counts Act (H.R. 2955)*

- Builds on the National Governors Association’s Graduation Rate Compact, originally signed in 2005 by all fifty of the nation’s governors, to ensure the use of accurate and consistent measurements for high school graduation for reporting and accountability purposes.
- Gives schools credit for graduating students who need extra time by allowing increases in both the four-year and five-year graduation rates to count towards achieving AYP.
- Ensures that schools are held accountable for increasing the graduation rates of all students by requiring graduation rates to be disaggregated for both reporting and accountability purposes.
- Mirrors the mounting support for “growth models” of accountability by setting annual benchmarks as a specified increase from current graduation rates.
- Reflects existing research by setting meaningful annual goals based on rates of improvement that have been achieved in successful high schools.



The Graduation Promise Act (GPA) Summary

Forty years ago, the United States was number one in the world in high school graduation rates; today, it ranks 17th.

- About 1/3 of the students who enter 9th grade each fall will not graduate from high school within four years, if at all;
- High school students living in low-income families drop out of school at six times the rate of their peers from high-income families;
- Only about 55% of African American students and 52% of Hispanic students graduate on time from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 78% of white students.

In this country, there are about 2,000 high schools that produce the majority of dropouts.

The good news is that effective reforms exist which can transform high schools with low student achievement and low graduation rates, and keep students at the greatest risk of dropping out on the path to graduation. We know that we can improve our high schools and our graduation rates; we just need the commitment and the resources to get it done.

The GPA is designed to establish an appropriate federal role in secondary school reform by:

- 1) creating a federal-state-local school reform partnership, focused on transforming the nation's lowest performing high schools;
- 2) providing \$2.5 billion to build capacity for secondary school improvement, and at the same time provide states and local school districts with the resources to ensure that high schools with the greatest challenges receive the support they need to implement research-based interventions;
- 3) strengthening state improvement systems to identify, differentiate among, and target the level of reform and resources necessary to improve low-performing high schools, while ensuring transparency and accountability;
- 4) advancing the research and development needed to ensure a robust supply of highly effective secondary school models for students most at risk of being left behind; and
- 5) supporting states' efforts to align state policies and systems to meet the goal of college and career-ready graduation for all students.

Title I of the GPA authorizes a \$2.4 billion High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund to support the development in every state of statewide systems of differentiated high school

improvement. Such systems would focus on building the capacity of secondary schools to reduce dropout rates and increase student achievement, and would target resources to help the lowest performing high schools implement evidence-based interventions.

Title II authorizes \$60 million in competitive grants for the development, implementation, and replication of effective secondary school models for struggling students and dropouts.

Title III authorizes \$40 million in competitive grants to states to remove barriers and create innovative incentives to improve student outcomes for every young person in the state.



THE DREAM ACT: SECURING AMERICA'S FUTURE IN EDUCATION

After living in the U.S. since the age of four, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Princeton University's 2006 salutatorian, left to study at Oxford University, risking a 10-year bar for re-entry into the U.S. due to his status as an undocumented immigrant. Unfortunately, experiences like Dan-el's are becoming more common due to lack of congressional action reforming America's immigration laws. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act can help retain bright minds like Dan-el and strengthen America's future.

Impact of U.S. Immigration Policy on Education

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could not violate the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution and deny undocumented immigrant children access to a free public K-12 education (*Plyer v. Doe*). However, no such protections apply to undocumented students seeking higher education. Restrictions have, instead, been adopted to limit their access to higher education, including the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), which includes a provision (Section 505) that prohibits undocumented immigrants from accessing "any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit." As a result, many states have blocked access to in-state tuition for undocumented students in their state, fearing that federal law would require them to allow a U.S. citizen residing in another state to pay in-state tuition and, in turn, impose great costs on the state.

College-bound undocumented youth face other barriers in their pursuit of higher education, including lack of access to state and federal financial aid, including loans. In addition, they are not eligible for most private scholarships, which are typically limited to citizens and legal permanent residents, and are unable to work legally and pay for higher education on their own. Because of the limited opportunities that await these students beyond high school, many fail to pursue higher education. National estimates pertaining to the enrollment of undocumented students in colleges and universities vary, but generous estimates indicate that only 14 percent of U.S.-raised undocumented students who have graduated from high school are enrolled in college.¹

Some drop out of high school with limited hope of a better future without higher education. In fact, it is not surprising that immigrants make up a significant proportion of America's dropouts – nearly 30 percent.² Among non-Hispanic undocumented immigrants aged 18 to 24 who came to the U.S. before the age of 16, 84 percent of males and 89 percent of females graduate from high school. Completion rates, however, are significantly lower among undocumented Latino students (40 percent for males, 49 percent for females).³ If passed, the DREAM Act can increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates by providing an opportunity to earn citizenship to a population of youth lacking the means to obtain legal status.

¹ Batalova, Jeanne and Michael Fix, *New Estimates of Unauthorized Youth Eligible for Legal Status under the DREAM Act*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2006.

² Laird, Jennifer, Michael DeBell, Gregory Kienzl, and Chris Chapman, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

³ *New Estimates of Unauthorized Youth Eligible for Legal Status under the DREAM Act, op. cit.*

Key Features of the DREAM Act

The DREAM Act allows immigrant youth to earn legal status if they came to the U.S. before the age of 16, are of good character, and graduate from high school, providing motivation for many of these children to finish high school. Upon graduating from high school, DREAM-eligible youth would be granted conditional legal permanent status, safeguarding them from deportation and allowing them to work legally. The conditional status is made permanent if individuals pursue two years of higher education or military service within six years, providing further incentive for these youth to reach their full potential. Some versions of the DREAM Act also repeal Section 505 of IIRIRA, clarifying that states have the freedom to determine criteria for in-state tuition rates regardless of immigration status. A repeal of Section 505, however, would not mandate that states provide in-state tuition to undocumented students.

DREAM Students

Children make up approximately 16 percent of the undocumented immigrant population, numbering 1.8 million.⁴ An estimated 65,000 undocumented youth graduate from American high schools every year. Due to the eligibility criteria in the DREAM Act, 1.1 million individuals would have the opportunity to earn citizenship if the proposal was implemented. Affected students include class valedictorians, honor students, star athletes, and class presidents. Many have gained acceptance into some of the nation's most prestigious universities. Some are bilingual, while others speak only English. Others have been forced under deportation orders to return to their country of birth despite their unfamiliarity with the language and culture. Other young people, like Dan-el, have voluntarily left in search of opportunities and freedom elsewhere. All are students who, if given the chance, could become our much-needed teachers, nurses, and community and national leaders.

Status of the DREAM Act

Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL), Chuck Hagel (R-NE), Richard Lugar (R-IN) are championing the DREAM Act, S.774 and S.2205, in the U.S. Senate. Representatives Howard Berman (D-CA), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), and Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL) are spearheading the companion bill, the American Dream Act, H.R. 1275, in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate considered the DREAM Act in October 2007, but in a procedural vote that needed 60 votes to advance, the bill stalled with a vote of 52-44. Nonetheless, the majority of the Senate supported the advancement of the DREAM Act, and because American high schools and institutions of higher education will continue to grapple with this unique cohort of graduating students every year, the issue will very likely to return for consideration.

Federal Inaction Leads to State Action

In spite of inaction at the federal, and likely due to it, 10 states have taken steps to remove barriers that immigrants residing in their state face in pursuing higher education. In 2001, Texas was the first state to pass a law that would allow individuals, regardless of immigration status, to qualify for in-state tuition if they have graduated from a Texas high school and have lived in the state for three years. Since then, California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Utah, and Washington have followed Texas's lead. In addition, approximately 20 other states, including Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, have debated similar legislation. It is clear from the representation of states that this is not a regional issue but a growing national issue requiring federal action.

⁴ Passel, Jeffrey S., *The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.: Estimates Based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006.



Statewide Longitudinal Data System Support (S. 2014) Summary

Our nation's schools must perform better at higher levels than ever before to prepare every student to graduate with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in postsecondary education and the modern workplace. Educators and policymakers increasingly recognize that better information is paramount in improving policy, practice, and student achievement.

Longitudinal data – data that shows how students and teachers perform over time – provides a depth of information that is crucial for collecting meaningful results and improving educational processes and outcomes. Establishing robust, longitudinal data systems to gather this type of data is integral to the success of many vital policy solutions currently on the table, including, but not limited to calculating accurate graduation rates, implanting growth models, measuring teacher effectiveness, and leveraging data-driven decision making. However, significant investment and support is needed to help policymakers at every level overcome the challenges of building and using such systems. In an effort to fulfill this need, the data bill seeks to:

Purposes:

- Support the design, implementation, and augmentation of aligned longitudinal statewide data systems in every state by 2012.
- Increase alignment, training, and capacity at the state and local levels for effective data use to enhance instruction and improve student achievement.
- Leverage the use of common definitions and compatible data systems to ensure data is comparable and transferable across districts and states and with higher education and other related systems.

Section I requires States to include, as part of the State plan required by No Child Left Behind, a description of state progress towards implementing a longitudinal data system and a plan to fully establish such a system by 2012 that includes the ten essential elements and key structures identified by the Data Quality Campaign.

Section II reauthorizes and expands the existing Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grants program by authorizing, as part of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, \$100 million in competitive 5-year grants to State educational agencies to build and upgrade statewide longitudinal data systems that include the elements and capabilities described in Section I. The grant requires a state match that increases over time to help build state and political will to invest in the building and maintenance of these systems.

Section III authorizes \$100 million in formula grants to State educational agencies to build capacity for educators and policymakers to effectively use data and data systems. This includes providing data integrity training to state and local education officials, aligning local systems to state systems, and providing professional development for teachers and administrators to effectively use data for improved instruction. There are number of allowable uses of funds, including awarding subgrants to districts or consortia of districts for local efforts to improve data-driven instruction. There is a required 25% state funding match.

Section IV authorizes such sums as may be necessary for contracts or grants as part of a jointly funded project to help support a state education data center and state educational data coordinator to improve data collection, reporting, and compliance processes.



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

WORKING TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY ACTION AND RESPONSIBILITY IN EDUCATION (WE CARE) ACT – H.R. 3762

What is the purpose of the WE CARE Act?

We cannot let the challenge of educating our students fall to schools alone; the whole community must be engaged. The WE CARE Act will strengthen ties among schools, families and communities to improve student achievement.

Why is the WE CARE Act necessary?

Roughly 25 to 30 percent of ninth graders do not graduate with a regular diploma in four years, and for young people of color, high school graduation is a 50-50 proposition. It is easy to point fingers at the education system, but solutions will only be found if we remember to look outside of it as well.

Research demonstrates that students are more likely to be successful in school and in life if they receive academic and non-academic support to meet their needs. In addition to quality curricula and highly effective teachers, students need a variety of other supports – caring adults; access to health and mental health care; safe, constructive, and fun learning opportunities during non-school hours; and others – in order to be ready for school and meet challenging academic standards.

Efforts to support high standards, ensure strong accountability, and promote teacher quality should be complemented by efforts to meet the often complex needs that students bring to the classroom – ranging from poor access to health care to a need for extra support from mentors and tutors. By leveraging community resources more efficiently and effectively, students will come to school ready to excel and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for college and adulthood.

What will the WE CARE Act do?

This legislation amends Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act to more strategically engage the community in the education of our students. Specifically, it would:

- Provide incentives for school districts, community-based organizations and others to work together to develop and implement Community Involvement Policies. These policies would leverage resources from the community to help meet students' non-academic needs and prepare them for success in the classroom.
- Call on State educational agencies and local educational agencies to include an analysis of the non-academic needs of students in their plans, along with a strategy for partnering with community-based organizations and others to meet those needs.
- Call on local educational agencies and schools to engage community stakeholders in the development of school improvement plans in order to utilize every possible resource available to help our students and schools make adequate yearly progress.

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FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ACT H.R. 2323

What is the purpose of the Full-Service Community Schools Act?

The purpose of the legislation is to strengthen student success. It will do so by supporting public/private partnerships that integrate services – academic, developmental, health, and more – into schools to more effectively serve students and families.

What is a Full-Service Community School?

A Full-Service Community School is a public elementary, middle or high school that coordinates and provides students and families with comprehensive services through partnerships with community based organizations and other public and private partners.

What will the Full-Service Community Schools Act do?

The legislation provides competitive grants from the Department of Education to local programs and to State collaboratives. It also establishes a federal Advisory Committee.

- Local programs will support and expand Full-Service Community Schools through public/private partnerships including a local educational agency and one or more community-based organization.
- State collaboratives will coordinate the expansion and evaluation of full-service community schools and include the state education agency and at least two other state government agencies or non-profit agencies.
- The Federal Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from the Departments of Justice, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Labor, will consult with the Secretary of Education on the development and implementation of full-service community schools and report annually to Congress.

What services will students and families receive?

Full-Service Community Schools will coordinate or provide at least three services for students in families, including: early childhood programs; literacy/reading programs for youth and families; parenting education activities; community service/service-learning; mentoring and other youth development programs; child care services; job training/career counseling services; nutrition services; and primary health and dental care.

How will Full-Service Community Schools be held accountable?

To be eligible to receive a grant, local programs must establish a set of performance measures to ensure the availability and effectiveness of services. Additionally, the legislation directs the Department of Education to require grantees to conduct evaluations of their efforts, make the results of their evaluations public, and use the results of their evaluations to improve their performance. The Department of Education is also directed to conduct an evaluation of State and local grantees.

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How much will the Full-Service Community Schools Act cost?

The Full-Service Community Schools Act authorizes \$200 million for FY 2009 and such sums for FY 2010 through 2013. Local grants would receive 75 percent of the appropriation, State collaboratives would receive 20 percent, and the remaining funds would support technical assistance and evaluation. The Department of Education may require a match of grantees up to an amount equal to the amount of the grant.



KEEPING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES ENGAGED (PACE) ACT S. 1302

What is the purpose of the Keeping PACE Act?

The purpose of the Keeping PACE Act is to increase graduation rates and strengthen student performance in school. It will do so by improving parent involvement in education and leveraging community resources to support students' needs in and outside the classroom.

What will the Keeping PACE Act do?

The Keeping PACE Act provides competitive grants to states. States will use the funds to provide competitive subgrants to:

- LEAs receiving Title I funding so they can hire Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators
- Community based organizations so they can support students, their schools, and their families
- Consortia consisting of a school, school district, mayor, and one or more non-profit or for-profit community partners in order to renovate school facilities to more effectively use them as the center of community.

What will Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators do?

Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators will connect students who are struggling in school with resources available in the community to help them succeed in the classroom. They will also develop strategies to more intentionally engage parents in the education of their children, establish effective communication between schools and families, and help resolve issues between parents and school staff.

What will Community Based Organizations do?

Community based organizations will assess the needs of students and their families and then link them with support services available in the community. For example, students could be connected to mentors, after-school programs and health services available in the community, and parents could be connected to job training and classes in English as a Second Language.

What will Consortia do?

Consortia will work together to renovate school facilities to maximize their use by the community. Renovations could include refurbishing classrooms so they can be used for continuing education classes during evenings or adding health centers to existing school buildings. Funds used for renovations would require a match from non-Federal sources equal to 50 percent of the cost of the renovations.

Why will the Keeping PACE Act work?

Research shows that students are more likely to achieve in school when they are supported by parents and the community. The Keeping PACE Act recognizes the need to strengthen parent

engagement in education, as well as the need to build stronger connections between schools and communities. It isn't just about more programs. It's about leveraging existing resources to help students succeed in the classroom.

How much will the Keeping PACE Act cost?

The Keeping PACE Act authorizes \$260 million per year for five years. Half of the funds would support Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators. The other half would support the work of Community Based Organizations and Consortia to support student achievement.