

# Further Improving Graduation Rate Measurement to Drive Progress: Starting a Conversation



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# Presenters

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# Thesis

A collective effort to improve high school graduation rate measurement over the past decade has played a key role in raising graduation rates.

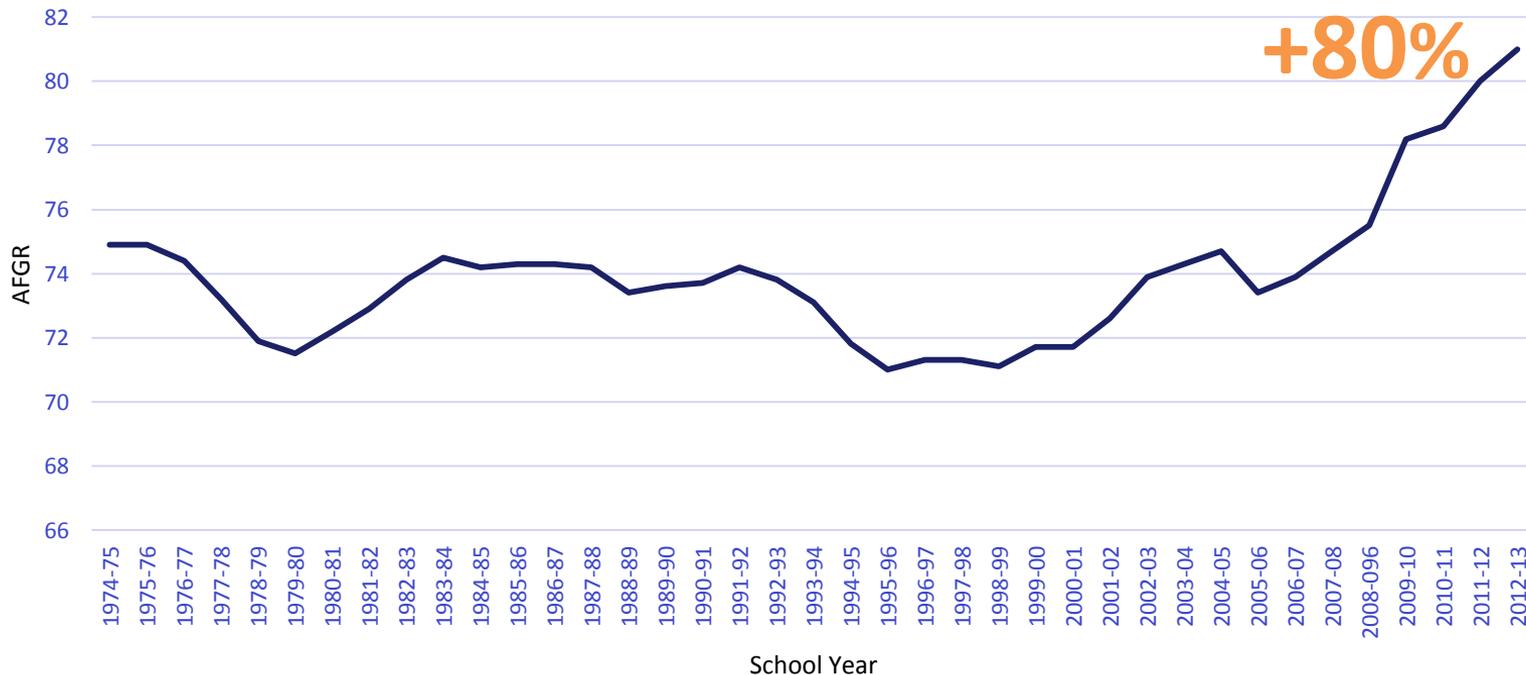
To keep graduation rates rising, these measurements must continue to improve.

# Bipartisan, federal-state effort

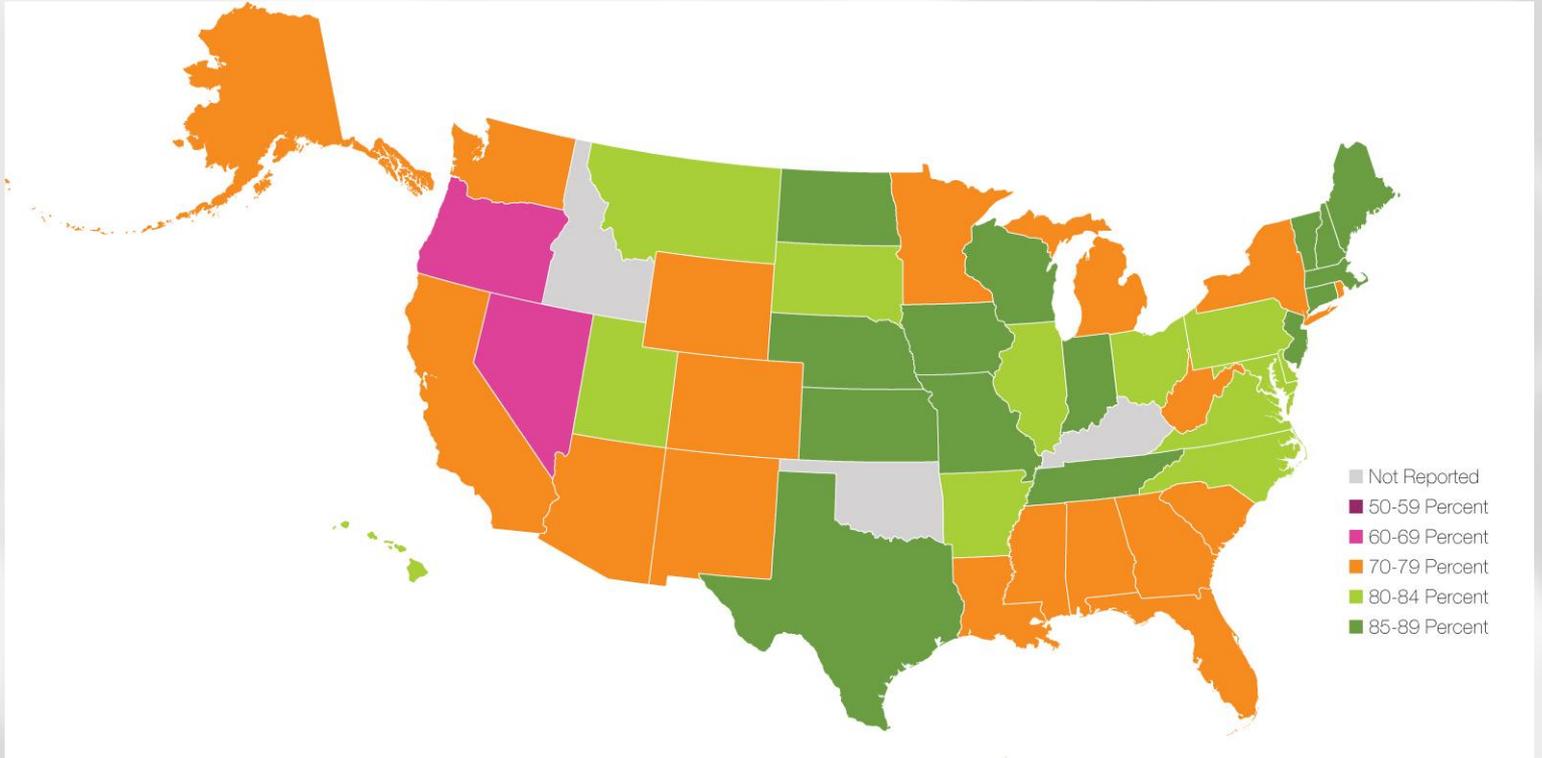
- NCLB-2002-High school graduation rate accountability and subgroup reporting
- NGA Compact-2006-Governors agree to common high school grad rate measure based on 4-year cohort rates
- U.S. Dept. of Ed Regulations-2008-Common parameters established for adjusted cohort graduation rate
- Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates (2011-12)-Reported for all students and key subgroups by 47/50 states

# Leads to A Historic Moment - Grad Rates Hit 80!

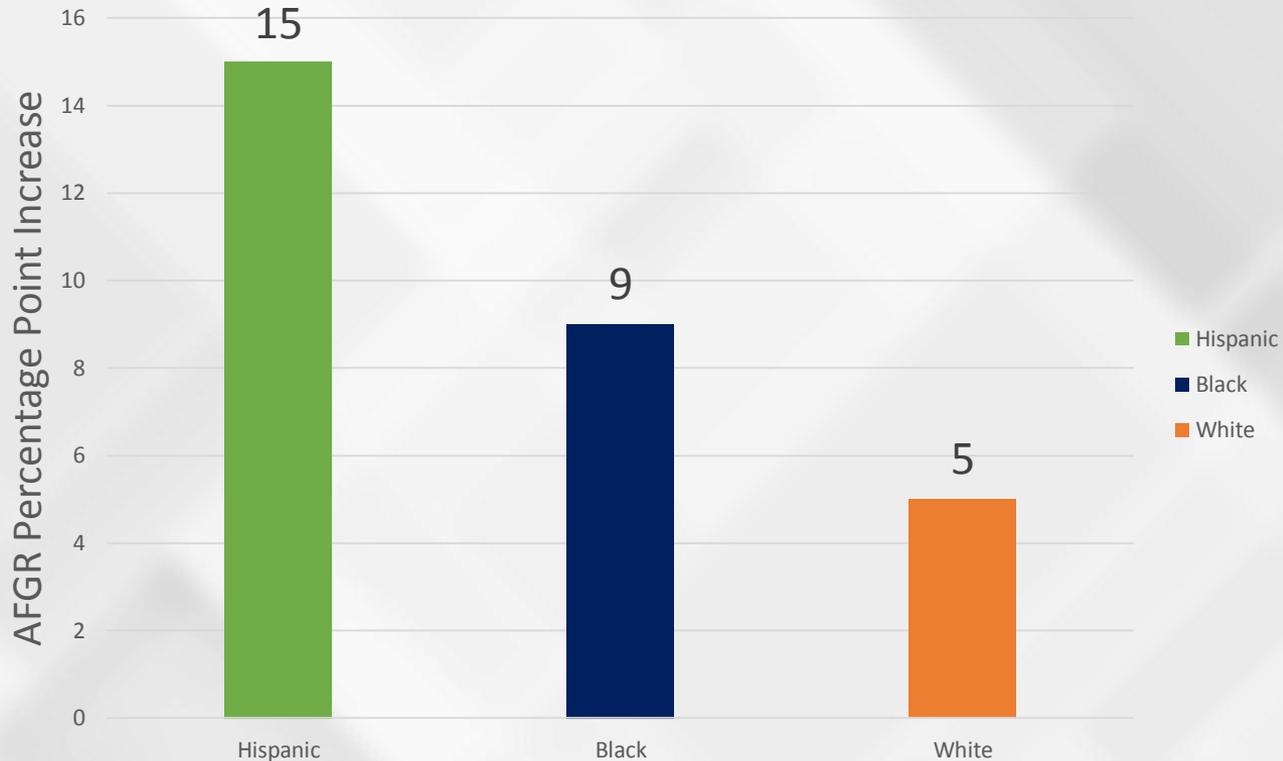
## Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) Trend 1974-2012



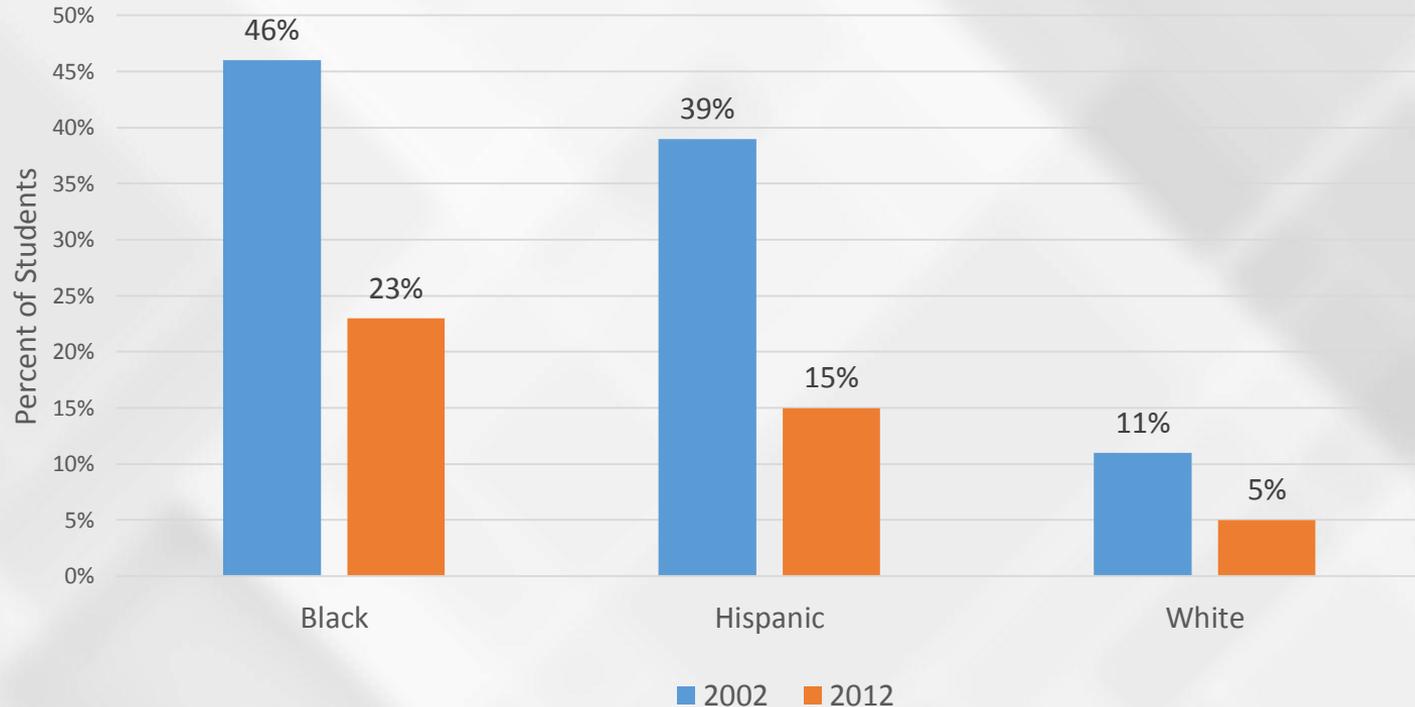
# ACGR by state, 2012



# Change in AFGR by ethnicity, 2006 - 2012



# Percent of students attending high schools with low promoting power 2002-2012



# What drove increases?

- Awareness
- Expectations and accountability
- Secondary school district and state reforms
- Enhanced student supports
- Improved state and district data systems
- Increasing use of data to inform policy, legislation and practice

# Driving Questions for 2014 and Beyond

**What it will take to get to**

**90% in 2020**

**In each state?**

**In each district?**

# Key drivers for improvements

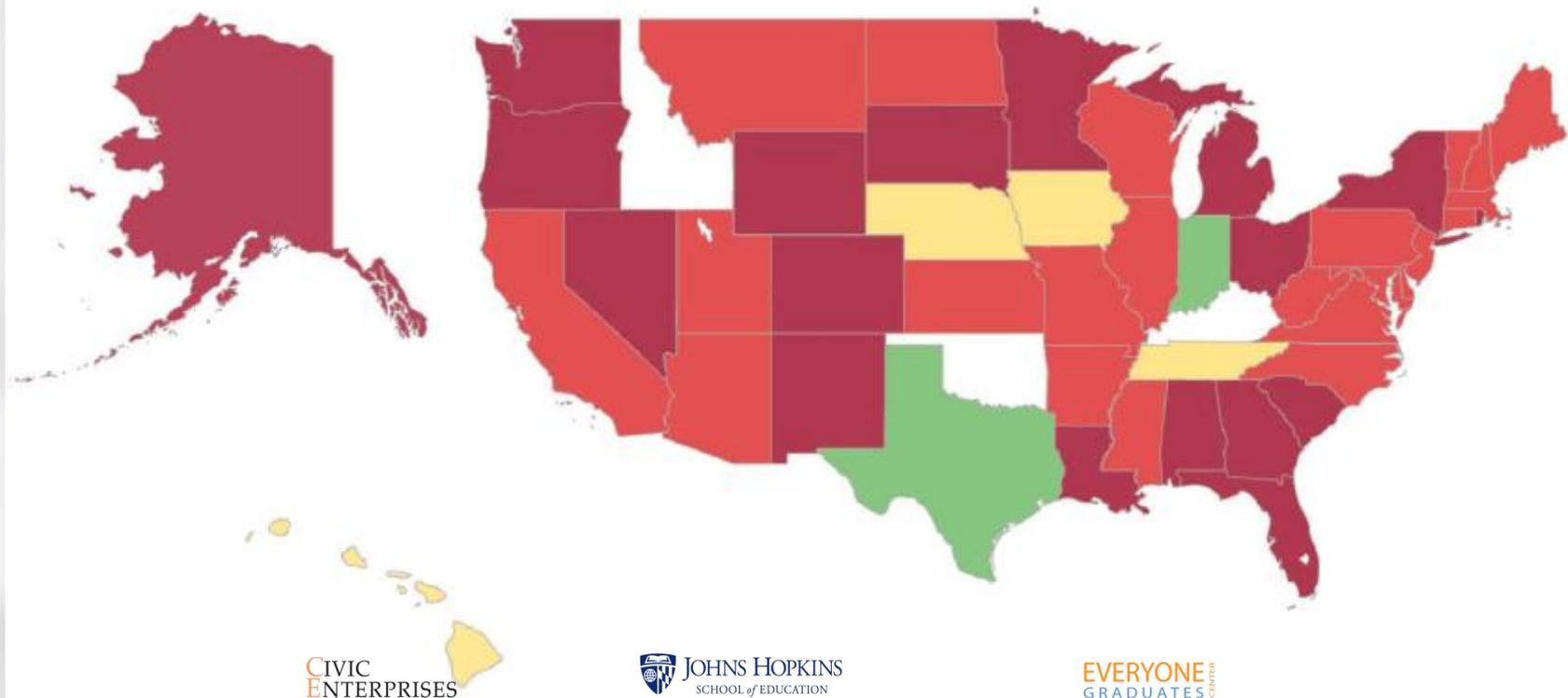
- Student subgroups: low-income students, students with disabilities and young men of color
- Big cities: single or multiple districts – populous and/or lagging states
- Better data

# Why precise and comparable graduation rates matter

- Where to target additional supports and resources
- Who to learn from
- Where to build community coalitions

# Closing the opportunity gap for low-income students

## LOW-INCOME 2012 ACR RANGES BY STATE



# Focusing on students with disabilities

- Students with disabilities represent **13 percent** of all students nationally
- The average graduation rate for these students **lags the national average by 20 percent**

State	2012 ACGR for Students with Disabilities	2012 ACGR Gap with General Population
Montana	81	-3
Arkansas	79	-5
Kansas	77	-8
<b>And on the other end of the continuum .....</b>		
Oregon	38	-30
Georgia	35	-35
Louisiana	33	-39
Mississippi	32	-43
Nevada	24	-39

# Accelerating graduation rates for young men of color in key states

State	2012 ACGR – African American	2012 ACGR - Hispanic
New York	63%	63%
Michigan	60%	64%
Ohio	61%	68%
Georgia	62%	60%
Colorado	66%	62%
<b>Combined % of High School Population for this sub-group</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>

# Solving the big city challenge

District Name	Overall 2012 ACGR	% Low-Income Students	% of State's Total Cohort
City of Chicago	69	82.9%	17.5%
Los Angeles Unified	67	89.8%	8.4%
New York City School Districts	66	71.3%	35.4%
Atlanta Public Schools	51	71.6%	3.0%
Minneapolis Public School District	50	59.9%	3.6%

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# Solving a metro challenge

District Name	2012 ACGR	2012 ACGR Black and % of district	2012 ACGR Hispanic and % of district	District as % of State's Total Cohort
Atlanta Public Schools	51	50/90%	40-44/4%	3.0%
Clayton County Public Schools	54	56/76%	43/12%	3.2%
Cobb County Public Schools	76	66/35%	60/12%	7.1%
Dekalb County Public Schools	57	57/78%	47/7%	6.6%
Fulton County Public Schools	71	56/45%	51/9%	5.9%
Gwinnett County Public Schools	71	64/30%	53/21%	9.8%

# Solving major state challenges



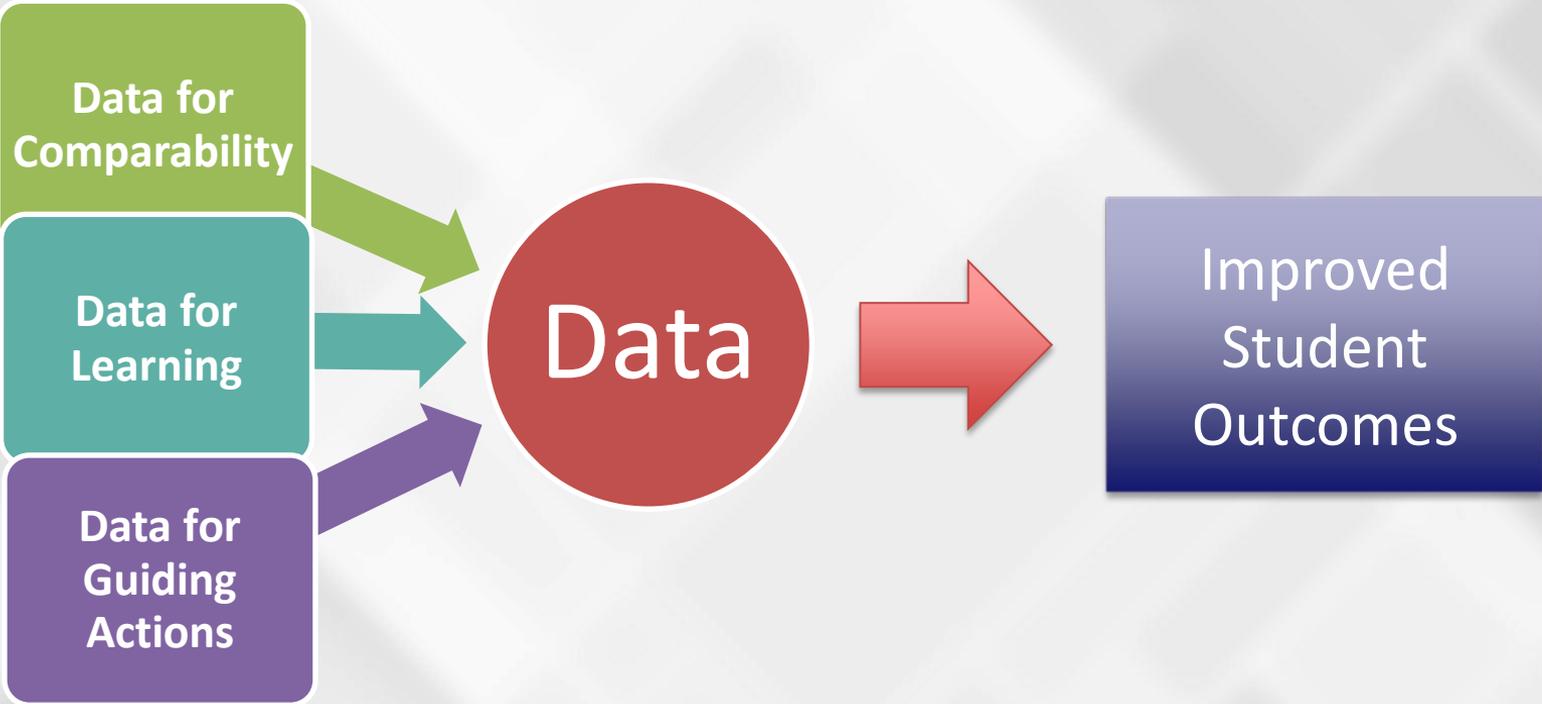
California educates **14%** of the nation's school-age children and **20%** of the nation's low-income students

# Focusing on the Measurement of High School Graduation Rates

# **Guiding Question: How can graduation rate measurement be improved?**

**...to best support schools, districts, communities and states in raising high school graduation rates?**

# Theory of action



# Do graduation rate data currently tell...

- Which reported improvements in student outcomes are real?
- Which are the result of variations in how graduation rates are measured?
- What is working and what is not? Where? For whom?

# Unanswered measurement questions complicate analysis

- Why are the two federally reported graduation rate measures - AFGR and ACGR - similar in some states yet disparate in others?
- To what extent are widely reported differences among states in overall graduation rates and subgroup outcomes driven by variation in measurement?
- How common is it for graduation rate measures to accurately follow federal regulations, state statutes, and business rules and result in rates that are not comparable state to state?
- How often do false negatives or positives occur?

# Does it matter that 10 states have significant ACGR-AFGR gaps?

- 21 states: within 1 percentage point, plus or minus
- 16 states: within 2 to 4 percentage points, plus or minus
- 4 states: AFGR > ACGR by 5 to 12 pp
- 6 States: ACGR > AFGR by 5 to 10 pp

# What can be learned when AFGR and ACGR differ greatly in a state?

- AFGR < ACGR
  - Net out-migration in AFGR?
  - ACGR 9<sup>th</sup>-grade cohort is undercounted?
  - 8<sup>th</sup>-grade repeaters or dropouts in AFGR?
- AFGR > ACGR
  - Extended-time (5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> year) graduates in AFGR?

**Thinking together:  
Where does variability in how  
graduation rates are measured  
impact their precision and  
comparability and how might  
this variation be addressed?**

# Sources of state variability?

- Stricter and looser interpretation of federal regulations?
- Different solutions where federal regulations are silent (i.e. Who is a first time 9<sup>th</sup>-grader?)
- Difference in state statutes and organizations of schooling?

# Who is a first time 9<sup>th</sup>-grader?

- 8<sup>th</sup>-grade graduates?
- All students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup>-grade for first time?
- All 9<sup>th</sup>-graders enrolled as of a specific date after the start of school?
- Can it differ for schools and districts?

# Solutions?

- For school districts, use 8<sup>th</sup>-grade graduates (captures students who dropout between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> or early in 9<sup>th</sup> grade)
- For schools, pick a common date, for example, four weeks after school starts -- no later than October 1 (provides time to remove duplicate enrollments)

# Who is removed from the cohort?

- Students who say they will be homeschooled?
- Students whose relatives report they moved out of the country?
- Students enrolled in private schools without accreditation recognized by the state university system?

# Solutions?

- District and state reports on the impact of students being removed from cohort for homeschooling or moves out of the country
- Only remove students from cohort who enroll in private schools with accreditation recognized by the state university system

# Who is not removed from cohort but should be?

- Students who transfer to schools that do not seek or require transcripts from prior schools?

# Who is added to the cohort?

- Students who transfer in second semester of senior year?
- Students with disabilities whose IEPs say they need extra time to graduate?
- Immigrant students who do not speak English?

# Who earns an on-time regular diploma?

- Students with disabilities whose IEP team says they are ready to graduate?
- Students who completed necessary credits or passed required exit exam the summer after their fourth year of high school?
- Students who participate in joint high school and associates' degree programs?

# Solutions?

- Reach consensus on common rules for including students in the cohort, and for who is in a subgroup, and who is counted as receiving a regular, on-time high school diploma
- Give special attention to the relationship among IEPs, regular diplomas and years for graduation. Create consistency across states aligned with expert recommendations. Consider creating a few categories from which states could choose.

# Where Else Might Variability Occur in How Graduation Rates are Measured by States?

**When Could Graduation Rate Measures be Technically Correct but Create False Impressions of Success or Struggle (i.e. false positives and negatives)?**

# Some scenarios to consider

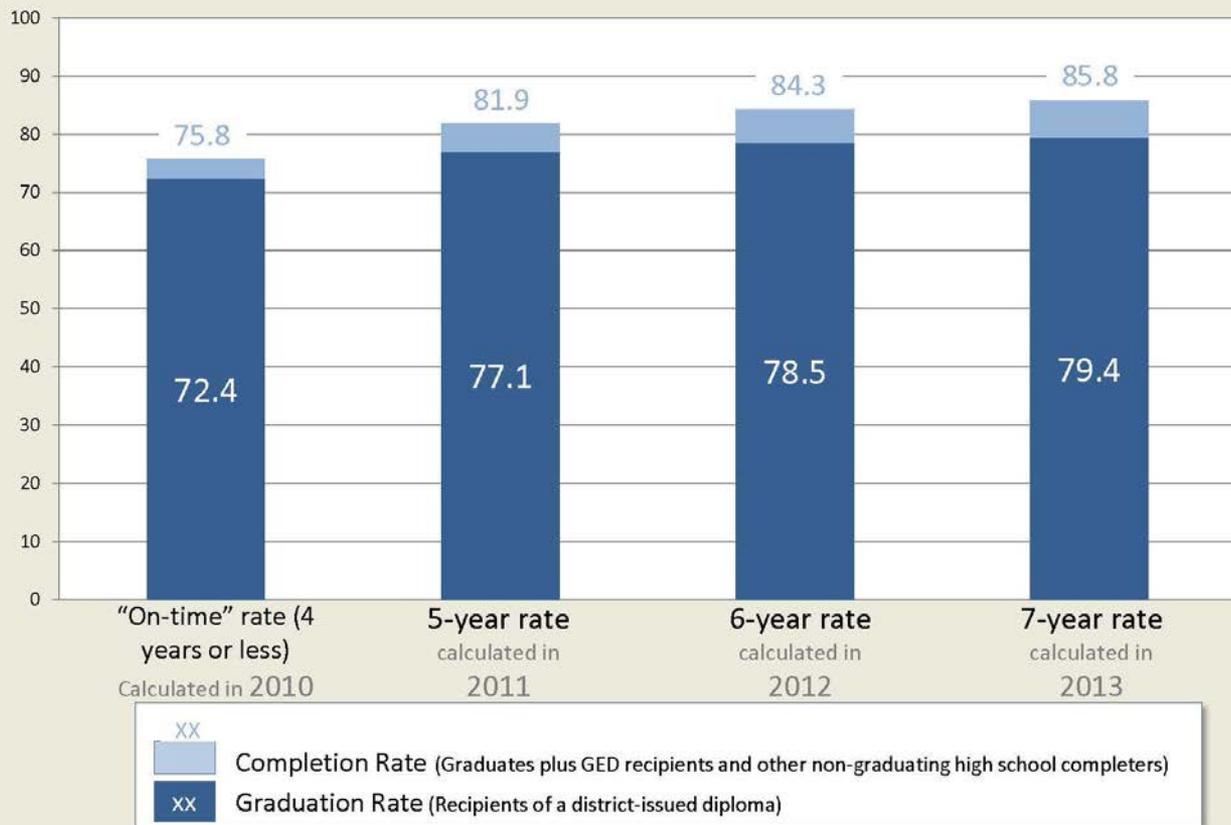
- Under accountability pressure some schools become more savvy than others in insuring that all struggling students transfer
- Majority of alternative schools in a district are charters with low graduation rates but considered their own LEA
- Significant numbers of seniors transfer to private schools (with lower graduation requirements)
- Statewide “Recovery or Achievement” school districts
- Others?

# Going beyond current graduation rate measures

How can we improve graduation rate measurement to bring about higher graduation rates?

**How many variability issues are solved by clearly defining terms and collecting 5-, 6-, and even 7-year high school graduation rates?**

# Colorado Statewide Graduation and Completion Rates Over Time for the Class of 2010



# Can we construct graduation rates for all students attending schools (district, charter, private?) in political and metropolitan boundaries?

- Mayors whose city encompasses multiple school districts and charters
- Metropolitan areas pursuing integrated economic and social development efforts

# How can we measure students who drop out before 9<sup>th</sup> grade?

- At the state level?
- At the district level?

# Can we gather accurate data on where students are falling off-track to graduation?

- How many credits earned when the student is a first time 9<sup>th</sup>-grader?

# Can we gather accurate data on how entering 9<sup>th</sup>-grade classes vary among schools?

- By 8<sup>th</sup>-grade test scores?
- By 8<sup>th</sup>-grade attendance?

# Initial recommendations

- Working groups (existing or new) make recommendations on technical issues in six to nine months.
- Working groups (existing or new) make recommendations on complicated issues in 12 to 18 months.

# We would like your help to

- Identify elementary and middle schools that feed low-performing high schools
- Identify all districts in a metro area easily, whether public, private or charter (with different types of chartering organizations); easily identify the numbers of students and those in subgroups in a metro area.

# Building a Grad Nation

Progress and Challenge in Ending  
the High School Dropout Epidemic

*A Report By:*  
Civic Enterprises

Everyone Graduates  
Center at the School  
of Education at Johns  
Hopkins University

America's Promise  
Alliance

Alliance for Excellent  
Education

*Lead Sponsor*  
AT&T

*Supporting Sponsor*  
Target

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