



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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Graduation rate moving in the right direction

In recent years, the high school graduation rate became a critical measure of success for our schools and districts across the nation. The National Governor's Association developed a common definition for high school graduation rates, the cohort rate, and No Child Left Behind required all states to report the cohort graduation rate so a common report would be available for comparison.

President Obama and Secretary Duncan added incentives for schools and districts to improve graduation rates through programs such as School Improvement Grants and Race to the Top.

Two leading national organizations developed a collaborative model to focus the nation on improving graduation rates. [America's Promise Alliance](#), led by General Colin Powell and his wife Alma, joined forces with the [Alliance for Excellence in Education](#), led by former West Virginia Governor Bob Wise. The collaboration led to an effort called [GradNation](#) and a national goal of a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020. GradNation produces an annual [report](#) which is available online. Here are some highlights from this year's report.

The 2013, graduation rate for the nation was 81.4 percent which is on target to reach 90 percent by 2020. Kentucky had a graduation rate of 86.1 percent, which was well above the national average and among the top ten rates in the country. Kentucky's class of 2014 reached an all-time high grad rate of 87.4 percent, which will probably place Kentucky among the top five states in the nation.

Hispanic/Latino and African American students are beginning to close the graduation gap. Historically they have not graduated at the same high rates as most of their counterparts. However, in 2013, Hispanic students registered a 75.2 percent graduation rate and African American students recorded a 70.7 percent rate. Again, Kentucky again outperformed the nation with a 2013 graduation rate of 79.8 percent for Hispanic/Latino and 78.4 percent rate for African American students. According to state data, these rates continued to improve in 2014 with an 84.4 percent rate for Hispanic and 79.4 percent rate for African Americans.

Perhaps the report's most exciting news for Kentucky was the results for economically disadvantaged students. Most researchers know that Kentucky has one of the highest percentages of children living in poverty and one of the highest percentages of children qualifying for free- and reduced-price meals.

Despite these challenges, the GradNation report revealed that Kentucky had the highest graduation rate in the nation for economically disadvantage students – 85 percent! It is a strong testament about the expectations of parents, communities and students; and a strong testament to the terrific work that teachers and school leaders do every day.

While the GradNation report should give Kentucky a reason for celebration, we must continue to work to address the challenges of those students who are not reaching graduation. Under the leadership of

Governor Beshear and the advocacy of First Lady Jane Beshear, Kentucky raised the dropout age from 16 to 18. The new policy takes effect in nearly all 173 school districts in August with the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. This effort coupled with improvements in alternative schools, career and technical education, early warning systems, high school transition courses and many other strategies that our schools are implementing will certainly result in continued improvements for our high school graduation rate.

I feel certain that, when it comes to graduation rates, Kentucky will continue to be a top performing state and will continue to help more students achieve a bright future.

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Education Commissioner