



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
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## Good News on Graduation Rate; Challenges Ahead

*Education Week* released its annual "[Diplomas Count](#)" study this week. The Diplomas Count project is an effort by the [Editorial Projects in Education](#) that publishes *Education Week* and is an ongoing study of high school graduation issues. The report includes national and state level data and can be accessed through the links above. There was some good news for Kentucky in the report and also some continuing concerns that our state must address.

The good news is that the Kentucky graduation rate for the Class of 2010 (the most recent data available for this report) was 77.2 percent -- better than the national average of 74.7 percent. Of particular importance was the fact that Kentucky ranked 3rd in the nation for most improvement in the graduation rate since 2000. Kentucky improved 13.5 percentage points compared to a national improvement of 7.9 points.

Kentucky legislators, who have often been concerned that we were over estimating the graduation rate since we were unable to move to the cohort graduation rate until the Class of 2013, should find solace in the "Diplomas Count" report. According to the numbers Kentucky's state-reported graduation rate is the same as the graduation rate calculated for this report.

While there is much to be proud of in Kentucky's efforts toward improving high school graduation rates, there remain several areas that we need to work on to help more students graduate from high school. According to "Diplomas Count," Kentucky had 53,524 students enter 9th grade in 2009-10. However, only 42,067 students were estimated to graduate four years later (2012-13). That means 11,457 students did not graduate within four years. This translates to 64 students dropping out of Kentucky high schools every day.

What do these 11,457 students look like and how does this impact the economy in Kentucky? More than 73 percent of the dropouts are white, more than 60 percent are male, and more than 72 percent of these dropouts are unemployed.

What if we were able to recover half of these students through dropout prevention work and recovery efforts with our community colleges?

According to research done by the Alliance for Excellence in Education, if we decreased the number of dropouts by half, the Kentucky economy would see \$68 million in increased savings, \$54 million in increased spending, \$121 million in increased home sales, \$7.1 million in increased auto sales, 450 new jobs, \$80 million increase in gross state product, and a \$5.9 million increase in state tax revenue PER YEAR!

As we close in on the date for [SB 97](#) to take effect, we are hearing from districts that intend to adopt a policy that raises the dropout age from 16 to 18. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is providing planning [grants](#) of \$10,000 per district to help develop a plan to implement their policy. While we guaranteed at least 57 districts would receive funding, we are working to increase that number with funds from other sources. My commitment to districts is that KDE will work to ensure we get funding for at least 55 percent of districts over

the next two years so we can move forward with a statewide effort to increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school.

It is also critically important that districts have rigorous programs in place to ensure high school graduates are **ready for college and career**.

The numbers are very clear. While a high school diploma is a good start, it isn't enough. The high school dropout unemployment rate is as high as 28 percent or higher for some demographics; for high school graduates it's in excess of 10 percent. Yet, the unemployment rate for 2 or 4 year college graduates is less than 4 percent.

Educators should take a few moments and celebrate the successes in the "Diplomas Count" report and then begin working on specific plans and strategies to implement SB 97 and our work around college/career-readiness.

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