

Message: GRADUATE!

This briefing paper describes state and local initiatives designed to increase the North Carolina graduation rate and share some future directions and policy considerations.

Purpose/Rationale

The national high school dropout rate has continued to be a pressing problem for policy makers, schools, and ultimately, society. Even beyond high school, today, more than ever, students require some sort of postsecondary education. The lack of a high school diploma is not only critical to individuals but to the economy of North Carolina and the country. North Carolina specific statistics are as follows:

- If all members of the Class of 2008 had graduated, they would have generated an additional \$10.8 billion in income over the course of their lifetimes (Amos, 2008).
- If the graduation rate for males increased by only five percent, North Carolina would realize \$151.9 billion in savings related to crime, \$80.9 billion in additional earnings by those men, and \$232.8 billion in overall benefits to the state economy (Amos, 2008).
- The state saves \$12,355 per additional graduate on health-related expenses (Amos, 2008).
- If all heads of households were high school graduates, the state’s families would have an additional \$2.6 billion in personal wealth (Amos, 2008).
- If all community college students graduated from high school, the community college system would save almost \$100 million in remediation costs (Amos, 2008).

State Graduation Rates Trend Data (2006-2011)

North Carolina's high schools’ four- and five-year state cohort graduation rates continued their upward trend in 2010 with 74.2 percent of high school students graduating in four years and 74.7 percent of students graduating in five years. The rate has improved each year since 2006.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Four-Year Rate	68.3%	69.5%	70.3%	71.8%	74.2%	77.9

DPI Graduation Improvement Targeted Initiatives

Divisions in the Academic Services and Instructional Support area of the Department have provided leadership in the development and implementation of targeted programs and services designed to support improved academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education and careers. Some examples of DPI targeted statewide initiatives and their outcomes are listed in the table below.

DPI Statewide Initiatives	Outcomes
PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention & Support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented in 883 schools and 103 districts across the state, the PBIS process helps schools design optimum environments in which to educate all students. • High schools implementing PBIS have shown a drop in the rate of suspensions from 70 per 100 students in 2004-05 to 30 per 100 students in 2008-09. In addition, 50% of high schools implementing PBIS showed improvement in their graduation rates .

Statewide System of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Transformation Model partners with districts for district and school transformation. Schools with comparable rates receiving transformation services from 2005-2010 showed an average gain of 12.7% on ABCs performance composite.
Career and Technical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and Technical Education provides students with a focused concentration and encourages them to graduate and pursue further education or advanced training. • The graduation rate among students in NC’s 2009 four-year cohort who completed a four-credit CTE concentration was 86.7 percent, compared to 71.8 percent among students in the overall cohort.
Early College High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 10,000 students were enrolled in 70 schools that were open in 2009-10 in 63 districts statewide. • Nineteen of the schools had graduating classes in 2010, with a combined four- or five-year graduation rate of 89.9 percent. Approximately 60 percent of the graduating students earned associate degrees.

Broader DPI Initiatives that Impact Graduation

Improving graduation rates requires a comprehensive plan of support that begins in the early years and spans the entire educational experience. The following initiatives provide the necessary foundation and/or support in order to implement targeted approaches.

DPI Statewide Initiatives	Foundations and Supports
FirstSchool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-K – Grade 3 initiative working intensively with four elementary schools. • Focus on positive accelerated learning experiences of vulnerable children in the early grades.
School Improvement Grants (SIG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty-four schools in eighteen school districts received SIGs allocating resources to implement comprehensive reform interventions and supports to improve persistently low-achieving schools.
Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system. • Maximizes student achievement and reduces behavior problems.
Family and Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance to families and community groups in facilitating better communication with schools. • Assists schools and school districts in identifying and developing programs and strategies to assist and support family and community engagement. • Customized support for academic achievement.

<p>Technology Immersion Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful projects focus on educational goals supported by technology. • Teachers’ use of technology for teaching and learning increased student engagement. • Graduation rates for most participating high schools increased, on average, between 1% and 2%. (www.fi.ncsu.edu)
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LEA Initiatives

LEAs continue to innovate and implement programs and services designed to foster students’ academic and social engagement in learning. As a result, many LEAs have implemented best practices with regard to preventing students from dropping out. The following table highlights those efforts.

Type of Best Practice	Examples	Sample Sites
Smaller Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Academies • Specialized High Schools • Early/Middle Colleges • Freshman Academies 	Highland School of Technology Central Academy of Technology and Arts South Granville School of Business
Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Coaches • Life Coaches • Literacy Coaches • Graduation Coaches 	Durham Public Schools Edenton-Chowan Schools Orange County Schools Madison County Schools
Customized and Alternative Learning Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways Program • Credit Recovery • Engineering is Elementary 	Beaufort County Schools Harnett County Schools New Hanover County Schools

External Contributing Partners

The Department of Public Instruction has many partners who collaborate to increase the graduation rate. The following partners are those who provide either direct funding or specialized programs for students in collaboration with DPI to increase the graduation rate.

Future Strategic Initiatives

In addition to current state and local initiatives, plans are underway for future efforts. Some of them are listed below.

- **Race to the Top:** NC’s Race to the Top award will enhance initiatives designed to graduate every student ready for a career, two- or four-year college, or technical training; support curriculum and accountability systems that reflect internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments; robust data systems; effective instructional and administrative systems; and support for lowest-achieving schools.

- **Early Warning Systems:** DPI has been working with SAS on the development and deployment of graduation resiliency software which would enable LEAs to use selected data collected in NCWISE identified as the key risk factors contributing to potential dropouts to target specific interventions to students or groups of students as prevention measures and support mechanisms.
- **“What Works”:** DPI collects and reports on annual dropout data but to date, no systematic process is in place to collect and showcase practices which decrease the dropout rate and improve graduation rates. As a result, DPI will develop a mechanism to collect and report “What works” with respect to dropout prevention.
- **Advisory Groups:** DPI will form an internal roundtable of agency representatives to promote research-based practices to reduce achievement gaps and increase graduation rates. An external group of stakeholders will be convened to challenge the examination of policies that may have unintended outcomes that impede rather than facilitate student achievement.

Policy Considerations

Although many efforts are underway at state and local levels to increase the graduation rate, problems still persist. There are local and state policies and practices which may be contributing to the dropout issue and precluding students from graduating. Closer attention and consideration should be given to the following state or local issues:

- Attendance Policies
- Zero Tolerance Policies
- Grading Policies
- In-School and Out-of-School Suspension Policies
- Compulsory School Attendance Age

Amos, J. (2008, August). *Dropouts, diplomas, and dollars: U.S. high schools and the nation’s economy*. Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>.

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