



All youth ready for college, work & life.

Ready for College

Advocates' Series

Action Brief #1

Ready by 21™ is the bold new national initiative started by the Forum for Youth Investment in 2005 to challenge states and localities to better harness their collective horsepower to ensure that all youth are Ready by 21: Ready for college, work and life.™ Advocates' work is critical.

The Forum has compiled this brief as a part of our work with KIDS COUNT grantees focused on older youth. The working group and this series have been generously supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Forum is pleased to present this new action brief series in conjunction with two national dissemination partners:

Connect for Kids



Voices for America's Children



the forum

FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

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Contact Information:

The Forum for Youth Investment
The Cady-Lee House
7064 Eastern Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20012
T: 202.207.3333 • F: 202.207.3329
youth@forumforyouthinvestment.org
www.forumfyi.org

To succeed in today's economy, all young people have to be ready for college, work and life — those in school and those not in school. Reports from higher education, business and youth development leaders suggest that while the pathways to college, work and adult responsibilities are different, the skills needed are largely the same.¹ Research studies and population surveys, however, suggest that too few young people have the skills needed to succeed.²

Nationally, 3.8 million 18–24 year olds are neither in school nor in the workforce — almost one in six.³ Several research studies suggest that a small number of these young adults have opted out of school and work in order to start families or see the world. Most, however, are on the sidelines because they are ill-prepared for college or work or life.⁴

Who are these young people? Why are they getting lost in the systems? How can we get them back? What can be done to not lose them?

Forty percent of public high school graduates say they are unprepared for college or work.⁵

Our country has a dropout crisis. Our schools are losing too many students before graduation. Our country also has a college crisis. Too few of the young people who graduate from high school are well-equipped for college or work, and too few of those who want to attend college get the support they need to complete their studies.

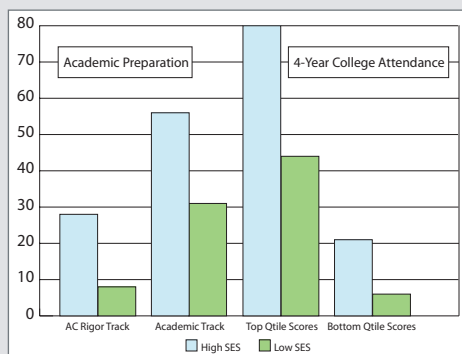
- **Dropout rates are rising in most states.** The Educational Testing Service reports that dropout rates are rising in all but seven states and finds that more students are dropping out between ninth and tenth grades.⁶
- **The proportion of ninth graders who graduate four years later is alarmingly low.** The Urban Institute and the Harvard Civil Rights Project estimate that 32 percent of ninth graders do not graduate from high school on time. Seventy-five percent of white students graduate on time but only half of African American, Hispanic and Native American students do so.⁷
- **College readiness rates are equally low.** Researchers at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research have calculated college-readiness rates, using graduation rates, high school transcripts and NAEP reading scores. They report that nationally, only 32 percent of all high school seniors are college ready; but again, there are significant differences between racial groups.⁸
- **College failure rates are too high.** Up to a fourth of all students at four-year colleges do not return for their second year of school. And the dropout rates are particularly high for African American, Hispanic and first-generation college students. According to national studies, as many as 30 percent of students will take at least one remedial class during their college years.⁹

For every 100 students entering ninth grade, only 18 complete an associate's degree within three years of high school graduation or a bachelors degree within six years. The figure drops to six in 100 for low-income students.¹⁰ Such low success rates are unacceptable. They fly in the face of the high value employers, parents and even students themselves place on getting an adequate education. Low success rates represent substantial losses to young people and to our economy.

What Do Youth Need to Succeed In College?

Efforts to improve college readiness have to address the core issue of academic preparation and high school completion.¹¹ But increased academic rigor alone is insufficient; in high school and throughout their college years, young people need a range of supports, from encouragement to employment, to be available in schools, families, workplaces and communities. And those youth on the margins of the system — dropouts, immigrants, first-generation college-goers, young parents, youth transitioning out of foster care — need to know that such supports are intended and available for them.

According to a 2005 poll, 95 percent of Hispanics and 80 percent of African Americans in Florida not currently enrolled in college said they would have been more likely to attend college if they had better information about how to pay for it.



Race and Income Matter

High school completion, college readiness and college attendance rates differ greatly by race and ethnicity. Studies show, however, that these differences are often driven by underlying differences in family SES (parental income and education) and K–12 access to rigorous instruction.

Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey analyzed by ETS found that high SES students are 3.5 times as likely to attend college as their equally well prepared low SES peers.

- Accelerated Instruction.** As noted, only one-third of high school graduates are ready for college. Most do not understand how unprepared they are until their senior year of high school. Efforts to align high school curricula with college and work standards and to then assess and accelerate learning have to begin in ninth grade, if not earlier, and continue into college.
- High Expectations.** In 2000, national survey data showed that despite nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of students' plans to attend a four-year college, just over half (52 percent) of their parents thought their children would make it. Moreover, high-school teachers expected only one-third of their students to go to four-year colleges.¹² Every student does not need to attend a four-year college, but every student should have the option and the skills to engage in life-long learning. Clear, consistent expectations are a critical factor in helping students create and implement realistic educational plans.
- Accurate Information.** A recent survey conducted by students in Nashville found that the combination of counselors' high caseloads and new responsibilities under NCLB mean significant difficulties for students in getting information about how to get in and pay for college.¹³ The college application process is complex for many students, but it is especially daunting for first-generation college goers (about 16 percent of the college student population),¹⁴ immigrants and those with very limited means. A 2005 poll found that 95 percent of Hispanics and 80 percent of African Americans in Florida not currently enrolled in college said they would have been more likely to attend if they had better information about financial aid. Six in ten respondents said they would have worked harder in high school if they had known that financial aid was available.¹⁵
- Financial Support.** College costs are outstripping inflation, especially at public institutions, making financial aid a necessity for the majority of college goers. For low income-students, the Pell Grant program is considered the cornerstone of financial aid; however, the \$2,421 average Pell Grant covers less than 30 percent of average total charges (tuition and fees, room and board) at public four-year colleges and universities.
- Employment.** Working while attending college is the norm. Of the 11 million 16–24 year olds in college, 58 percent are in the workforce. The family income demographics of minority students suggest that they might have a greater need to be employed while in school, but white 16–24 year olds are the most likely to be employed while in high school and college.
- Alternative Pathways.** According to Jobs for the Future, an estimated 20 percent of students drop out of high school — 40 percent of students in the lowest socio-economic group, but also ten percent of students in the highest two SES levels. School leaving, analyses show, is associated with parents' income and education, not race. The JFF study shows that these young people show remarkable persistence in their drive for education, but they face institutional barriers that could be reduced with better planning and higher priorities.¹⁶

Ready for College: State of the States

Across the country, policy makers are responding to the issues around college preparation, entry, participation and completion. Below, we compile a sampling of recently enacted or proposed legislation at various points along the education pipeline.

- **Instruction.** Utah recently passed legislation providing stipends for supplemental instruction to students who have not passed basic skills competency tests. [HB181 (Utah, 2006)]
New Hampshire's legislation addressing dropout prevention and recovery may also be a good starting point, providing tutoring, study skills training and instruction, as well as a school-site mentor. [HB619 (New Hampshire, 2003)]
- **Expectations.** A high-level policy team in Arkansas is working to align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills that are needed to be successful for college and work, including the requirement that all high school graduates must take challenging courses. [www.achieve.org]
- **Information.** Florida has established in statute and allocated appropriations annually for the statewide College Reach Out Program to prepare disadvantaged students in grades 6–12 to complete post secondary education. The statute includes clear tracking and evaluation requirements for programs that receive funding. [Florida Stat. 1007.34]
- **Financial Support/Access.** In Oklahoma, the proposed Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program (OHLAP) would provide free in-state tuition for students whose family income is \$50,000 or less. Other proposed state-level policies to increase access to higher education for special populations include in-state tuition for undocumented students who have graduated from a state high school and tuition waivers for youth leaving the foster care system.
- **Alternative Pathways.** Several states have accessed state and local education funds to support viable education options and alternative pathways for disconnected youth. Legislation in Indiana has also passed recently to support alternate methods for youth to earn high school credits other than by classroom work. [SB 310 (Indiana, 2006)]

Profile: Advocates Improving the Odds

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) is a statewide child advocacy organization and member of Voices for America's Children. In 2005, PPC worked with the Forum for Youth Investment to launch the Ready by 21 Coalition, a diverse group of cross-sector stakeholders committed to developing youth-centered public policies and programs and ensuring all of Pennsylvania's young people are ready for college, work and life by age 21. Capitalizing on Governor Rendell's college readiness and high school reform agendas, PPC has been especially successful in aligning their work with new initiatives in state policy.

According to a recent interview with president and CEO Joan Benso, the collaborative nature of their work has led to successes including "more than 50 organizations that are working on college preparedness together; not only the traditional K–12 education community but higher education, career and technical education, and workforce development are all at the table." When asked about how she would translate her experience into advice for other state-level advocates and what message points she has found to be most hard-hitting, Ms. Benso described how "We made a decision to try to build on what's here. There is a lot of history in the education community of blowing it all up and trying to start over

Who Tracks State Policies?

The following resources offer a plethora of analyses, examples and overviews of developments in state policies and programs.

The State Policy Inventory Database Online (SPIDO), a joint project between the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and the Pathways to College Network, provides policies and resources in areas such as student achievement, access and success in higher education. Search by state or issue for statutes, state board policies, links to state agencies, resources and studies. Visit www.wiche.edu/Policy/spido

Education Bill Tracking Database is maintained by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The Database is searchable either by state, issue area, bill number or type of legislation. Issue area list include alternative education, assessment and testing, high school, higher education (with topics in admission, affordability, college preparatory and finance). Visit www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/educ_leg.cfm

Achieve.org provides state profiles of closing the expectations gap and aligning high school policies with the demands of work. Clicking on a state will allow you to see education pipeline data, analysis, reports and policy agendas. Visit www.achieve.org/achieve.nsf/StateProfiles

Education Commission of the States has a database of current policy developments searchable by either state or a variety of issue areas, along with summaries of the most recent "state of the state" education agenda items, policy maker contact information and links to media sources. Visit www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/statesTerritories/state_map.htm?am=2

Where to Learn More

Facts and Figures

● **NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policy Making and Analysis.**

Offers comparative data on the student pipeline - transition and completion rates from ninth grade to college. This site also provides data on preparation, participation, affordability, student learning and completion. Visit www.higheredinfo.org

● **Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates.**

(Manhattan Institute for Policy Research) Provides data on graduation and college-readiness by state and race and ethnicity. Visit www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm

● **Education Watch 2004 State Summary Reports.**

(Education Trust) Facts and figures on achievement, attainment and opportunity from elementary school through college, including educational performance by race, ethnicity and family income. Visit www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/summaries2004/states.html

● **By the Numbers: State Goals for Increasing Postsecondary Attainment.**

(Jobs for the Future) This 50-state survey examines which states have set numerical targets for college enrollment and completion. Visit www.jff.org

Other Key Resources

● **Connect for Kids** maintains online resource guides for:

Beyond High School

www.connectforkids.org/taxonomy/term/230

Graduation and Dropout Rates

www.connectforkids.org/taxonomy/term/245

Silent Crisis: Large Numbers of Youth Are Not Completing High School

www.connectforkids.org/node/2776

● **Pathways to College Network** has created the College Readiness for All Toolbox. www.pathwaystocollege.net

● **Lumina Foundation for Education** provides college access and success resources. www.luminafoundation.org

● **National High School Alliance.** Resources in research, policy and practice from the Alliance's fifty-partner organizations. www.hsalliance.org/resources/index.asp

To read more about the resources cited in this action brief, **click here.**

again; we seek out ways to better deploy resources that are already present and to change the landscape in a deliberate way.”

“What has been heartening to me is that there is an incredibly strong belief that if a kid gets to twelfth grade they should be ready to graduate and be ready for what’s next. And people get really angry and charged up about doing something when they find out kids aren’t being prepared.”

— Joan Benso, President and CEO
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Perhaps one of the most salient points hit on by Ms. Benso underscores the importance of thinking about “readiness” as a meta-strategy: that young people need the same rigor and preparation for work in the technical trades as they do for four-year colleges. “[T]he high school curriculum that is needed for young people to be successful in college is the same high school curriculum that is needed to be successful in career and technical education. The notion that youth that are going technical schools don’t need the same level of rigor is not true... This is where the business community has been invaluable, helping people understand that there are good jobs — jobs that pay a family sustaining wage — that don’t require college but do require more than a high school education and to succeed in those training programs, youth need to be well prepared.”

For the full interview, which includes links to sample testimony, fact sheets and other resources, **click here.**

Endnotes

1. *Learning for the 21st Century* (Partnership for 21st Century Skills)
2. *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development* (M. Gambone, A. Klem, J. Connell); *Some Things Do Make a Difference and We Can Prove It: Key Take-Aways from Finding Out What Matters for Youth* (The Forum for Youth Investment); *Graduation & Dropout Rates Resources* (Connect for Kids); *Voices Study Research Findings* (America’s Promise)
3. *Kids Count Data Book 2004* (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
4. *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (P. Edelman, H. Holzer, P. Offner); *America’s Disconnected Youth: Toward a Preventive Strategy* (D. Besharov)
5. *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* (Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies conducted for Achieve, Inc.)
6. *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities* (Educational Testing Service)
7. *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis* (Urban Institute and the Harvard Civil Rights Project)
8. *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002* (Manhattan Institute)
9. *Colleges Striving to Retain New Students: Research Highlights Effective Strategies* (ACT Policy Brief); *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* (Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies conducted for Achieve, Inc.); *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000* (NCES)
10. *Forum Focus: Education Pipeline* (The Forum for Youth Investment); *Access Denied: Restoring the Nation’s Commitment to Equal Educational Opportunity* (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance)
11. *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College* (U.S. Department of Education)
12. Data cited in *Seattle Times* article “College-prep Expectations Don’t Mesh with Realities” (December 8, 2003)
13. *College Access from the Inside Out* (Oasis/Community IMPACT!)
14. *The American Freshman: Norms for 2005* (Higher Education Research Institute)
15. Mason-Dixon poll commissioned by the Sallie Mae Fund
16. *Making Good on a Promise: Supporting the Educational Goals of Dropouts* (Jobs for the Future).