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Where Have All the Students Gone?

New Study Shows Southern States and New York Lead Nation in Low Graduation Rates and Decline of Students between 9th and 10th Grades Florida Has Worst Record on Measures of Educational Progress

Boston, MA – A new study released today concludes that despite a significant increase in kindergarten attendance, there is a growing bulge of students in the 9th grade, significantly fewer students reaching 10th grade, and major declines in high school graduation rates, especially in some of the nation's largest states.

The study, "The Education Pipeline in the United States, 1970-2000," by Drs. Walter Haney, George Madaus and Lisa Abrams of Boston College, analyzes educational statistics collected by the federal government to examine the education pipeline and identify key transition points through which students progress, or fail to progress, from kindergarten through the grades to high school graduation.

The study, which examines enrollment and graduation rates nationally and by state, finds that over the last thirty years the rate at which students disappear between grades 9 and 10 has tripled. Between the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 academic years, nine of the twelve states with the worst declines in numbers of students moving from grade 9 to grade 10 were in the South – Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. The other states were Nevada, Hawaii and New York.

"These findings," said Haney, "are quite disturbing. Despite all of the high-sounding rhetoric about reforming our schools, the data on enrollment and graduation demonstrate that many states hold students back in 9th grade, encourage dropping out, and graduate a declining percentage of students."

"It appears that the pressures of high stakes tests are generating educational strategies that deform, rather than reform the system for the customers of our public education system – our children," said Haney.

"Most disturbing," continued Haney, "despite setting a national goal of a high school graduation rate of 90% in 1994, only two states – New Jersey and Wisconsin – met that goal in the academic year 2000-2001. Shockingly, there were 24 states with graduation rates of 75% or less."

Most states do not report data on rates at which students are flunked to repeat grades and state data on dropouts have been shown to be unreliable. The best way of studying rates of student progress through high school graduation is by analyzing annual data on enrollments and graduation.

Measuring graduation rates from 9th grade which incorporate the 9th grade bulge and attrition rate mentioned above shows the states with the worst graduation rates in the 2000-2001 academic year were: South Carolina (51%); Florida (52%); Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee (57%); and New York (58%). The states with the highest graduation rates were: New Jersey (86%); North Dakota (84%); Iowa and Utah (83%); and Minnesota (82%).

The comprehensive study also identified the states with the largest declines in graduation rates (the number of graduates divided by the number of students in grade 8 four and a half years earlier) over the last decade. Between the academic year 1988-89 and 2000-01, graduation rates declined by 5% or more in fifteen states: Hawaii (90% to 73%); Maine (84% to 70%); Arizona (75% to 65%); Delaware (79% to 70%); Tennessee (71% to 63%); New Mexico (78% to 70%); South Carolina (70% to 62%); Alabama (72% to 65%); Indiana (80% to 73%); South Dakota (84% to 78%); New York (78% to 72%); North Carolina (74% to 69%); Minnesota (91% to 86%); Florida (68% to 63%); and Illinois (83% to 78%).

“When it comes to educational progress, the state with the overall worst record is Florida with the highest 9th grade attrition rate (23.8%); the highest ‘bulge’ or increase in 9th grade enrollment relative to 8th grade (32%) and second worst graduation rate (52%),” said Haney. “In contrast, the state with the best high school graduation rate over the past decade is New Jersey.”

Among the studies other findings:

- Kindergarten enrollment nationally has grown. Before 1970 only about 60% of students started school in kindergarten. By 2000, that number grew to about 90%.
- Comparing grade 1 enrollments to the previous year’s kindergarten enrollments shows that over the last 15 years, five states – Mississippi, Oregon, Vermont, South Carolina and Texas – have made dramatic progress in boosting rates of kindergarten attendance. The state with the worst record is New Hampshire.
- Nationally, 440,000 ninth grade students (11.4%) in 1998-1999 did not show up as enrolled in 10th grade in 1999-2000. As recently as the mid-1980s, the national attrition rate between 9th and 10th grades at slightly less than 5 percent. States with the highest 9th to 10th grade attrition rates between 1999-2000 and 2000-01 include: Florida (23.8%); South Carolina (22.7%); Georgia (20.3%); Texas (20%); Nevada (18.8%); North Carolina (18.0%); Louisiana (17.3%); Hawaii (15.9%); Alabama (15%); Mississippi (14.4%); New York (13.9%) and Tennessee (13.9%).
- Between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, more than half the states had 10% or more students enrolled in the 9th grade than in the 8th grade the previous year. Six states had “9th grade bulges” of more than 20 percent: Florida (32%); South Carolina (24%); Nevada (24%); New York (21%); Hawaii (21%); Kentucky (20%); and Texas (20%).

The research is funded in part by the Ford Foundation.

The full report, including all of the data on which it was based, is available on the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy website at <http://www.bc.edu/nbetpp>.

High School Graduation Rates 1987-88 – 2000-01

From Worst to Best

| State | 1987-88 | 1988-89 | 1989-90 | 1990-91 | 1991-92 | 1992-93 | 1993-94 | 1994-95 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| South Carolina | 65% | 65% | 59% | 61% | 58% | 59% | 57% | 55% | 54% | 52% | 52% | 52% | 51% | 51% |
| Florida | 63% | 61% | 61% | 61% | 65% | 61% | 59% | 59% | 58% | 58% | 57% | 56% | 55% | 52% |
| Tennessee | 69% | 69% | 68% | 68% | 69% | 67% | 63% | 64% | 63% | 58% | 55% | 55% | 55% | 57% |
| Mississippi | 68% | 60% | 64% | 62% | 62% | 64% | 62% | 60% | 57% | 56% | 56% | 56% | 56% | 57% |
| Georgia | 63% | 62% | 63% | 64% | 64% | 62% | 59% | 57% | 55% | 55% | 51% | 50% | 52% | 57% |
| New York | 66% | 65% | 65% | 64% | 67% | 65% | 64% | 62% | 61% | 63% | 61% | 59% | 59% | 58% |
| North Carolina | 68% | 69% | 68% | 68% | 69% | 68% | 66% | 66% | 62% | 61% | 61% | 60% | 59% | 59% |
| Arizona | 67% | 69% | 73% | 72% | 73% | 72% | 69% | 63% | 58% | 62% | 61% | 60% | 59% | 59% |
| Alabama | 74% | 68% | 65% | 66% | 66% | 62% | 60% | 60% | 58% | 57% | 60% | 56% | 59% | 60% |
| Louisiana | 61% | 58% | 58% | 55% | 54% | 57% | 56% | 58% | 55% | 53% | 55% | 55% | 59% | 60% |
| Delaware | 70% | 72% | 68% | 68% | 70% | 70% | 66% | 65% | 66% | 67% | 68% | 64% | 61% | 61% |
| Hawaii | 82% | 82% | 87% | 76% | 78% | 75% | 76% | 75% | 75% | 63% | 62% | 60% | 64% | 61% |
| New Mexico | 73% | 71% | 68% | 69% | 68% | 68% | 67% | 64% | 63% | 58% | 58% | 59% | 60% | 61% |
| Texas | 65% | 64% | 64% | 66% | 61% | 59% | 60% | 60% | 58% | 59% | 61% | 61% | 62% | 62% |
| Alaska | 70% | 64% | 68% | 72% | 74% | 73% | 71% | 68% | 65% | 64% | 65% | 66% | 62% | 64% |
| Kentucky | 69% | 67% | 69% | 70% | 70% | 73% | 75% | 70% | 68% | 68% | 67% | 65% | 66% | 64% |
| Oregon | 72% | 71% | 72% | 72% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 69% | 67% | 67% | 67% | 67% | 67% | 66% |
| Indiana | 78% | 76% | 75% | 74% | 76% | 75% | 71% | 70% | 70% | 70% | 71% | 71% | 68% | 68% |
| Nevada | 73% | 72% | 77% | 77% | 71% | 70% | 67% | 65% | 65% | 73% | 70% | 71% | 69% | 69% |
| California | 69% | 67% | 68% | 68% | 69% | 68% | 66% | 64% | 65% | 66% | 67% | 68% | 69% | 69% |
| Washington | 78% | 76% | 77% | 73% | 76% | 76% | 77% | 73% | 72% | 71% | 71% | 71% | 71% | 69% |
| Colorado | 76% | 76% | 74% | 74% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 73% | 72% | 72% | 71% | 70% | 70% | 69% |
| Rhode Island | 72% | 72% | 69% | 72% | 77% | 75% | 73% | 73% | 71% | 71% | 70% | 69% | 70% | 70% |
| Ohio | 76% | 76% | 74% | 72% | 72% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 70% | 71% | 73% | 70% | 70% | 70% |
| Illinois | 78% | 78% | 77% | 78% | 79% | 78% | 77% | 75% | 76% | 77% | 77% | 75% | 71% | 71% |
| South Dakota | 87% | 86% | 86% | 84% | 85% | 89% | 91% | 87% | 87% | 82% | 76% | 72% | 74% | 72% |
| Missouri | 75% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 73% | 71% | 71% | 72% | 72% | 73% | 72% |
| Maine | 78% | 77% | 78% | 79% | 81% | 74% | 72% | 72% | 72% | 72% | 79% | 75% | 77% | 72% |
| Oklahoma | 74% | 74% | 78% | 75% | 76% | 76% | 76% | 75% | 73% | 72% | 72% | 73% | 73% | 73% |
| Wyoming | 78% | 76% | 79% | 82% | 84% | 87% | 84% | 78% | 78% | 78% | 77% | 77% | 75% | 73% |
| Connecticut | 82% | 83% | 75% | 79% | 80% | 81% | 79% | 75% | 74% | 74% | 73% | 72% | 77% | 73% |
| Arkansas | 79% | 78% | 77% | 77% | 78% | 78% | 76% | 73% | 75% | 70% | 73% | 73% | 74% | 73% |
| West Virginia | 77% | 77% | 77% | 78% | 77% | 78% | 78% | 75% | 76% | 75% | 75% | 76% | 75% | 73% |
| Massachusetts | 74% | 75% | 80% | 77% | 79% | 78% | 78% | 76% | 76% | 76% | 76% | 75% | 75% | 74% |
| Kansas | 83% | 82% | 82% | 81% | 81% | 80% | 79% | 77% | 76% | 74% | 73% | 75% | 74% | 75% |
| New Hampshire | 81% | 74% | 74% | 76% | 78% | 78% | 78% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 74% | 73% | 74% | 75% |
| Virginia | 75% | 75% | 74% | 74% | 74% | 74% | 72% | 72% | 76% | 75% | 74% | 74% | 74% | 75% |
| Michigan | 73% | 71% | 70% | 70% | 71% | 70% | 70% | 69% | 70% | 71% | 72% | 73% | 65% | 75% |
| Maryland | 76% | 74% | 73% | 73% | 76% | 76% | 75% | 74% | 74% | 71% | 71% | 72% | 73% | 75% |
| Vermont | 81% | 81% | 92% | 81% | 82% | 82% | 85% | 89% | 90% | 82% | 81% | 80% | 79% | 75% |
| Pennsylvania | 81% | 79% | 79% | 79% | 82% | 81% | 79% | 77% | 76% | 76% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 76% |
| Montana | 85% | 85% | 83% | 85% | 85% | 87% | 84% | 86% | 83% | 81% | 80% | 78% | 78% | 77% |
| Idaho | 77% | 78% | 79% | 80% | 81% | 82% | 80% | 80% | 80% | 79% | 78% | 78% | 77% | 78% |
| Nebraska | 86% | 86% | 86% | 86% | 87% | 87% | 85% | 84% | 83% | 82% | 85% | 86% | 84% | 78% |
| Wisconsin | 83% | 82% | 84% | 82% | 82% | 84% | 82% | 82% | 80% | 80% | 79% | 78% | 78% | 79% |
| Minnesota | 90% | 89% | 90% | 90% | 89% | 89% | 88% | 87% | 85% | 77% | 84% | 85% | 84% | 82% |
| Iowa | 87% | 86% | 88% | 86% | 88% | 88% | 87% | 85% | 85% | 85% | 84% | 83% | 83% | 83% |
| Utah | 81% | 82% | 79% | 79% | 81% | 81% | 80% | 79% | 78% | 83% | 82% | 83% | 84% | 83% |
| North Dakota | 88% | 88% | 88% | 87% | 87% | 86% | 88% | 87% | 89% | 87% | 85% | 84% | 84% | 84% |
| New Jersey | 80% | 80% | 80% | 82% | 84% | 86% | 85% | 84% | 83% | 86% | 78% | 80% | 85% | 86% |

Note: The graduation rate reported here is the measure from 9th grade thus combining the effects of the 9th grade bulge and the attrition rate in the final graduation rate.

Attrition Rates between Grades 9 and 10, 1999-2000 to 2000-01

| State | Rate |
|----------------|-------------|
| Florida | -23.8% |
| South Carolina | -22.7% |
| Georgia | -20.3% |
| Texas | -20.0% |
| Nevada | -18.8% |
| North Carolina | -18.0% |
| Louisiana | -17.3% |
| Hawaii | -15.9% |
| Alabama | -15.0% |
| Mississippi | -14.4% |
| New York | -13.9% |
| Tennessee | -13.9% |
| Kentucky | -13.4% |
| New Mexico | -13.1% |
| Alaska | -12.6% |
| Delaware | -12.4% |
| Maryland | -11.3% |
| Ohio | -11.0% |
| Massachusetts | -10.7% |
| Michigan | -10.6% |
| Rhode Island | -10.2% |
| Indiana | -9.7% |
| Virginia | -9.1% |
| Oklahoma | -8.7% |
| Vermont | -8.6% |
| Illinois | -8.6% |
| West Virginia | -8.5% |
| Colorado | -8.0% |
| New Hampshire | -7.8% |
| Missouri | -7.7% |
| Connecticut | -7.7% |
| South Dakota | -7.6% |
| Pennsylvania | -7.4% |
| Arizona | -7.1% |
| Washington | -7.1% |
| Maine | -7.0% |
| Wisconsin | -6.5% |
| Kansas | -6.2% |
| Nebraska | -6.0% |
| California | -5.6% |
| Montana | -5.0% |
| Oregon | -4.4% |
| Wyoming | -4.2% |
| Iowa | -3.5% |
| Idaho | -3.4% |
| North Dakota | -3.1% |
| Arkansas | -1.6% |
| New Jersey | -1.0% |
| Minnesota | -0.2% |
| Utah | 1.5% |

| State | Percent More Students in Grade 9 in 2000-01 than in Grade 8 in 1999- 2000 |
|----------------|--|
| Florida | 32% |
| South Carolina | 24% |
| Nevada | 24% |
| New York | 21% |
| Hawaii | 21% |
| Kentucky | 20% |
| Texas | 20% |
| Georgia | 19% |
| Delaware | 19% |
| North Carolina | 16% |
| Virginia | 16% |
| Wisconsin | 15% |
| New Mexico | 14% |
| Maryland | 14% |
| Washington | 13% |
| California | 13% |
| Colorado | 12% |
| Ohio | 11% |
| Pennsylvania | 11% |
| Illinois | 11% |
| Rhode Island | 11% |
| Connecticut | 10% |
| Tennessee | 10% |
| Massachusetts | 10% |
| Michigan | 10% |
| Alaska | 10% |
| Arizona | 8% |
| Nebraska | 8% |
| New Jersey | 8% |
| Missouri | 8% |
| Alabama | 8% |
| Indiana | 7% |
| Iowa | 7% |
| Oregon | 7% |
| Kansas | 7% |
| West Virginia | 6% |
| Oklahoma | 6% |
| Mississippi | 5% |
| Vermont | 5% |
| Idaho | 5% |
| New Hampshire | 5% |
| Minnesota | 4% |
| South Dakota | 4% |
| Montana | 3% |
| North Dakota | 2% |
| Utah | 1% |
| Wyoming | 1% |
| Arkansas | -1% |
| Maine | -2% |
| Louisiana | -3% |