

TURNING AROUND THE DROPOUT FACTORIES: INCREASING THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

“It is time for all of us, no matter what our backgrounds, to come together and solve this epidemic. Stemming the tide of dropouts will require turning around our low-performing schools. Just 2,000 high schools in cities like Detroit, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia produce over 50% of America’s dropouts... Let us all make turning around our schools our collective responsibility as Americans.”

- President Barack Obama

President Obama has set the ambitious goal that all adult Americans commit to at least one year of higher education or career training and that America lead the world in college graduates by 2020. In pursuing this goal, ensuring that all students get a quality K-12 education will be crucial. Unfortunately, one in four students in this country fails to graduate from high school. Roughly 1,600 schools (about 10 percent of all high schools) produce nearly half of our nation’s dropouts, and up to two-thirds of minority dropouts. These dropout factories are unacceptable and devastate the communities in which they exist.

The President’s 2013 budget request and the *Blueprint for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* build on the Administration’s current commitment to turning around these dropout factories and ensure that more students remain in school and receive a quality education.

- **Getting students through middle school and into college (\$1.1 billion).** This investment will support the GEAR UP and TRIO programs, which provide intensive services to students in middle school through college. GEAR UP, which serves students beginning in the middle grades, provides early college preparation and awareness activities to entire cohorts of students at individual schools that help them stay on a path to higher education. The TRIO programs, which include Upward Bound and Talent Search, provide intensive support, including summer learning opportunities, for students in high school to help more low-income, first generation students access and succeed in higher education.
- **School Turnaround Grants (\$534 million).** Funds will continue to support subgrants from States to districts to help low-performing schools implement rigorous interventions that bring about dramatic improvements in student achievement and school performance. High schools received approximately 40 percent of the over 1,200 subgrants awarded by States under this program in fiscal year 2009, and in fiscal year 2010, preliminary data from 37 States and the District of Columbia indicate that high schools received 38 percent of subgrants.
- **College Pathways and Accelerated Learning (\$81 million).** This new program would provide grants to LEAs and eligible entities to provide college-level and other accelerated courses and instruction in middle and high schools with high concentrations of students

from low-income families. Although students who drop out, or are at risk of doing so, are often thought of as low achievers who need a watered-down curriculum, educators find that often the opposite is the case. This program will improve the education of students who may otherwise drop out because they are bored with and not challenged by the standard curriculum.

- **Promise Neighborhoods (\$100 million).** This program will continue to support projects that significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth by providing a birth-to-career continuum of rigorous and comprehensive education reforms, effective community services, and strong systems of family and community support – with high quality schools at the center. The comprehensive services provided by grantees will also help engage disconnected youth and keep them in school until graduation.
- **College- and Career-Ready Students (\$14.5 billion)** (formerly Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies). Since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, Title I funds have been available to support disadvantaged youth, including in middle school and high school. Under the Administration’s proposal to reauthorize the ESEA, States and districts would be required to identify and take aggressive action to improve the lowest-performing schools based on achievement and graduation rates, including the lowest-performing high schools. States and districts could also set aside funds to build capacity in high-priority areas, such as using data to identify low graduation rates as an area of need and improving outcomes in this area.
- **Investing in Innovation (\$150 million).** This program provides competitive grants that expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative and evidence-based practices, programs and strategies that significantly improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. In its first two competitions, the program awarded grants to innovative projects aimed at turning around schools with high dropout rates. For example, the Talent Development Secondary Program at Johns Hopkins University received \$30 million in 2010 to improve middle and high schools in 14 districts across the country by providing greater student support, including college mentoring.
- **Support Early for Warning Data.** Building on \$5 billion in investments through ARRA, our network of technical assistance programs will ensure that States and districts have the expert guidance and technical support to use data more effectively. In the upcoming competition for the Comprehensive Centers program, the Department will emphasize the need for technical assistance on using data to develop early warning and college- and career-readiness indicators to identify secondary school students needing additional support. In December, the Department awarded 10 new contracts for the Regional Education Laboratories, which will support research partnerships with SEAs and LEAs to help them use data, particularly longitudinal data, to better inform decision-making. Technical

assistance also continues to be available to SEAs and LEAs working to develop robust data systems through our Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems program and our Privacy Technical Assistance Center.

- **Accountability for Graduation Rates through ESEA Flexibility.** The Administration has offered States the opportunity to request flexibility from certain provisions of No Child Left Behind that have become barriers to State and local innovation and implementation of forward-looking reforms designed to raise academic achievement. As part of their requests for flexibility, States must put in place systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support that target the most rigorous interventions to the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps, including all Title I high schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent over a number of years. States must also have in place meaningful accountability for improving graduation rates for all schools, and must continue to report the performance of all students and all subgroups against meaningful targets for improving graduation rates.
- **Engaging Disconnected Youth.** As a nation, we are sending the wrong message to students when we allow them to walk away from their education. This is why we are requesting \$5 million to strengthen services for youth who are neither employed nor enrolled in an educational institution or who are at high-risk of dropping out of high school. In implementing the program, the Department would work closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (which requested \$5 million to serve disconnected youth) and the Department of Labor (which requested \$10 million) to increase awareness and coordination at the state, local and federal levels. A portion of these funds would be used to invest in innovative re-engagement strategies and comprehensive approaches to preparing this population for college and career success.