

# GradNation | Accelerating Progress to 90



## THE CHALLENGE

For nearly 30 years, the nation's graduation rate was stuck at just over 70 percent. But over the past dozen years, the nation has seen remarkable gains. Graduation rates have climbed more than 10 percentage points – reaching an all-time high of 83.2 percent in 2015. Over the past two years, however, the pace of increase has slowed, putting the goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020 at risk. We are determined to meet the goal, as nothing less will meet the needs and aspirations of young people or the economic needs of the nation. What do we need to change to meet the 90 percent goal?

## THE PLAN

After a close analysis of progress and shortfalls, America's Promise has concluded that the next phase of the campaign will require a more focused and directive approach. To accelerate progress toward our goal, we will:

**Develop a new GradNation issues platform** that lists the practices and policies shown to improve graduation rates, then advocate for implementation of these proven strategies.

**Prioritize places for state and community activation** where intervention will accelerate progress and where there is a real opportunity to provide meaningful support. In these target places, we will focus on closing graduation gaps and involving key influencers who can drive change.

**Activate a more diverse network of GradNation partners to take coordinated action**, capitalizing on one of America's Promise's greatest assets – the Alliance – to connect the field to more resources, tools, tactics, and data critical to raising graduation rates.

## DEVELOP A GRADNATION ISSUES PLATFORM

With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) shifting power back to states, we will recommend ways to improve graduation rates in states, communities, and especially low-graduation-rate high schools. Each recommendation will be supported by a menu of evidence-based models. To date, our list includes the following:

1. Use **high quality data** to monitor cohort progress, identify struggling students, mobilize effective responses, and provide accountability for overall progress.
2. Pay close attention and respond to **non-academic factors** that influence school participation and performance (e.g., chronic absenteeism, social-emotional development, impacts of poverty).
3. Clearly connect high school completion with **post-graduation pathways** to postsecondary education, workforce readiness and participation, and overall adult success.

4. Increase the number and quality of **caring adult relationships** (with school counselors, teachers, other school staff, social workers, youth workers, national service members, volunteers, and coaches) in students' lives.
5. Improve **school climate** by adopting disciplinary and inclusionary practices and policies that give all students the opportunity to complete high school.
6. Provide **equitable access** to the educational opportunities, student supports, and extracurricular/**enrichment experiences** that prepare students for postsecondary success.
7. Provide current students and youth who have left school with **effective options to complete high school** ready for college and/or career.

### **PRIORITIZE PLACES FOR STATE AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION**

To determine where to focus, we are conducting quantitative and qualitative analyses at both the state and community level. We will target a subset of states and communities, including:

- Places where there are a significant number of **non-graduates**
- Places where there are big **graduation gaps and inequities**
- Places with many **opportunity or disconnected youth**.

After identifying several states and creating comprehensive state profiles, we will support activation efforts through targeted and ongoing outreach, priority state events, dissemination of tools and resources, publication of blogs and news stories about challenges and solutions, opportunities to apply for grants, and media activation.

### **ACTIVATE A DIVERSE NETWORK OF GRADNATION PARTNERS**

America's Promise Alliance, the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University will continue to lead the GradNation campaign as co-conveners. We will invite more partners – both nationally and in strategic states and communities – that focus on high school graduation, have significant reach, offer critical advice and counsel, and engage civic and business leaders and groups.

### **LEARN MORE**

- Visit [GradNation.org](http://GradNation.org)
- Join the GradNation Learning Community
- Contact Rachael Tutwiler Fortune, [rachaelf@americaspromise.org](mailto:rachaelf@americaspromise.org)

 **WHAT CAN YOUR STATE DO TO BOOST GRAD RATES?** Tweet your answer [@AmericasPromise](https://twitter.com/AmericasPromise) using [#GradNation](https://twitter.com/GradNation).

# GradNation

January 5, 2017

The Honorable Nikki Haley  
Office of Governor Nikki R. Haley  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

We know that in today's economy a high school diploma isn't a guarantee of adult success, but the absence of a diploma makes success virtually impossible. After decades of stagnation, over the past several years the nation has seen graduation rates climb more than 10 percentage points –reaching an all-time high of 83.2 percent in 2015. That means an additional 2 million young people graduated from high school on time over the past decade, keeping them on track toward adult success. These gains demonstrate that real progress is possible, even on a challenge that for many years seemed intractable. We've demonstrated that progress is possible, and now we must redouble our efforts to help millions more young people stay on track to adult success.

The GradNation campaign is a large and growing movement of dedicated individuals, organizations, communities, and states working together to raise the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the Class of 2020. The Class of 2020 are now 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and as the pace of graduation rate increase has slowed and flattened in the past two years **the goal is now at risk.**

It is no surprise that gains have become more difficult to make as the graduation rate has gotten higher. African American and Hispanic students helped drive increases in high school graduation rates nationally, but persistent graduation and achievement gaps remain for low-income students (including homeless students), students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners, threatening America's promise of equal opportunity for all.

The 90 percent goal remains a crucial milestone to meet the needs and aspirations of young people, and meet the economic needs of the nation.

As 2017 dawns, we hope you will consider re-committing to that goal on your state's behalf. It is a moral, social, and economic imperative that we continue to work together to prepare all young people for success through high school and onto post-secondary education and career.

**We hope you will consider including in your forthcoming State of the State Address the need to increase the number of students who graduate high school and are prepared for college and employment in your state.**

In South Carolina, 5,189 additional high school graduates are needed to reach 90 percent for the class of 2020. We hope that you will use your office as a powerful platform to lead the charge to get more young people across the graduation stage.

Over the past decade, Governors have been great leaders in pushing for better graduation rate data and working to boost high school graduation rates in their states.

We look forward to working with you to close achievement gaps, increase high school graduation rates, and ensure all students are better prepared for college, work and life.

Sincerely,



John S. Gomperts  
President and CEO, America's Promise Alliance



Robert Balfanz  
Director, The Everyone Graduates Center



John Bridgeland  
President and CEO, Civic Enterprises



Bob Wise  
President, The Alliance for Excellent Education

*For additional information, and to join our GradNation Learning Community of states working to adopt strategies to improve graduation rates, please contact Rachael Tutwiler Fortune [rachaelf@americaspromise.org](mailto:rachaelf@americaspromise.org).*