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## **High School Recommendations: Ensuring High Schools Prepare Students for College and the Workplace**

***Too many of the nation's high school students are being left behind.*** Each year, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school (Education Week 2006). The numbers for African Americans and Hispanics are particularly alarming: only 51.6 percent of African American students and 55.6 percent of Hispanic students graduated in four years with a standard diploma, compared with more than three-quarters of whites and Asians (Education Week 2006).

***Those who do graduate are often left unprepared for life in an increasingly competitive global economy.*** Forty percent of students at four-year institutions and 63 percent at two-year colleges require remedial education (Callan et al. 2006). In a survey of human resources professionals, 42 percent of respondents said that new entrants with a high school diploma were “deficient” in their overall preparation for the entry-level jobs they typically fill. The same survey found that 81 percent of employers rate graduates’ skills in written communications as deficient, while 70 percent said high school graduates were deficient in critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Conference Board et al. 2006).

***This comes at a time when the demand for highly skilled and knowledgeable workers is strong.*** Over the next decade, more than 87 percent of new high-wage jobs will require more than a high school diploma (U.S. DOL 2006). One-third of the human resources professionals surveyed said that their companies will reduce hiring of new entrants with only a high school diploma over the next five years; meanwhile, 60 percent said they will increase their hires of four-year college graduates (Conference Board et al. 2006).

***We must spur broad and significant improvement in our high schools so that they can properly equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to compete in today's global economy.*** Efforts to improve our high schools cannot—and should not—rest solely on the shoulders of the schools themselves. Low-performing high schools cannot go it alone; they often lack the resources and capacity to bring about meaningful change. We recommend requiring districts with large concentrations of struggling high schools to develop and implement comprehensive, district wide high school improvement plans.

- We believe that districts can and should play a crucial role in turning around struggling high schools.
- These high schools need the leadership and support of the district to spur significant reform and increased student achievement.

***We also must ensure that our students graduate prepared for what lies ahead.*** We need a stronger assessment and accountability system in high schools, one that helps spur continuous student growth through graduation and ensure that our graduates are adequately prepared for college and the workplace.

- Schools would be required to implement a 12th grade assessment.
- This assessment would be designed to measure 12th graders’ mastery of content they will need to be college and workplace ready.
- It would not be used as the sole determinant for graduation purposes.

- The 12th grade assessment would be used in AYP calculations and would provide information on student and school performance at a critical year in students' careers.

***We must ensure that graduation counts.*** We recommend holding schools accountable for improving the graduation rates of all students by closing the graduation-rate gap by 2014 and requiring states to conform to the National Governors Association compact on graduation rates. We also recommend requiring schools to disaggregate graduation-rate data by NCLB's subgroups, as well as the elementary school indicator used for AYP purposes (often school attendance), and use this disaggregated data and indicator in AYP calculations.