

## States Finally Able to Compare Graduation Rates

### NASSP remains concerned that formula only counts four-year graduates

» On November 26, the Department of Education (ED) released data detailing each state's four-year high school graduation rate from the 2010–11 school year. The data represents the first time that all states used a common, rigorous measure to calculate graduation rates. The measure was mandated by ED through a 2008 Title I regulation.

While 24 states reported increased or unchanged rates and 26 states reported lower rates under the new metric, these changes, according to ED, are not comparable in absolute terms to previously reported rates. Instead, they should be viewed as a more accurate snapshot of a state's standing.

In 2008, NASSP supported this final regulation that requires all states to calculate graduation rates consistent with the definition adopted by the National Governors Association in 2005. Under this formula agreed to by all 50 governors, states must calculate their graduation rate by dividing the number of students who graduate with a diploma within four years by the number of first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier. NASSP has long advocated for such a formula to counter the confusion and inconsistencies in previous graduation rate calculations that made it impossible to compare state performance and blurred any views of a nationwide graduation rate.

At the same time, NASSP continues to have concerns with defining the graduation rate as a "four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate." Because not all students enter the ninth grade reading and writing at grade level, NASSP has consistently recommended that the graduation rate be extended to within at least five years of entering high school. States should be required to use, as a supplement to the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, extended adjusted cohort graduation rates that are approved by the US Secretary of Education. In addition, identified special needs students who complete high school with a

state-approved exit document should have until age 21, inclusive, to be counted as graduates as defined by IDEA.

"The 2008 regulations allowed states to also report an extended-year graduation rate, and we are anxious to see the data from those states that chose to do so," said NASSP Director of Government Relations Amanda Karhuse. "NASSP feels strongly that all students should leave high school college- and career-ready, and schools should be rewarded for helping more students reach that goal—even if it takes five or six years."

### Accountability in NCLB Waivers

The same day that the data was released by ED, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to all chief state school officers reiterating that the 2008 regulations mandating the use of a uniform graduation rate calculation must continue to be considered as a "significant" part of state accountability systems under NCLB waivers. This letter was sent in response to loud concerns about graduation rate accountability raised by Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the Ranking Member on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, and several other education stakeholders. NASSP and 35 other national organizations wrote to Duncan last September sharing concern over the number of states that have received NCLB waivers that are inconsistent with, or in violation of, the 2008 graduation rate accountability regulations.

While ED has provided a state-by-state list of graduation rate targets for all waiver-approved states, it has not taken the recommended next step requiring non-compliant states to change the way that they are calculating or using graduation rates in their newly approved accountability systems. **NL**



See your state's graduation rate:

[www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/  
state-2010-11-graduation-rate-data.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/state-2010-11-graduation-rate-data.pdf)

WASHINGTON PARTNERS, LLC  
[washingtonpartners@wpllc.net](mailto:washingtonpartners@wpllc.net)