

# ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



## THE OPPORTUNITY PICTURE

**According to the 2014 Opportunity Index, 45 states and the District of Columbia increased their four-year high school graduation rates.**

Nationally, on-time high school graduation rates are rising in most states – an encouraging trend that has contributed to higher Opportunity Scores in some places. But with one million students failing to graduate each year, the U.S. continues to lose too many students along the way. Particularly troubling are communities where just 50 to 60 percent of students graduate each year. In these cases, whole communities are precluded from economic advancement.

Research consistently shows that students who drop out of high school, even temporarily, are at higher risk of never graduating, not pursuing higher education and neither working nor attending school in early adulthood than their peers who graduate on-time. In fact, the average American without a high school diploma makes 27 percent less in annual income than the average high school graduate.<sup>1</sup> Over a lifetime, this means more than \$250,000 in reduced personal capital.<sup>2</sup> According to one study, 75 percent of state prison inmates and 59 percent of federal inmates never finished high school.<sup>3</sup> Adults without a high school diploma are also more likely to require public assistance,<sup>4</sup> and less likely to vote or participate in civic activities.<sup>5</sup> Failing to earn a high school diploma has grave consequences for the individual, communities and the economy.

Many states are experimenting with multiple pathways to help at-risk students stay engaged and graduate. These include internships where students can earn academic credit and a paycheck; improved career and tech programs; collaborations with local businesses; and flexible class schedules. And though 88 percent of states improved their high-school graduation rates, there is still a long way to go. The national goal is a 90 percent high school graduation rate by the class of 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Keith Melville, Ph.D., The School Drop Out Crisis, Why One-Third of all High School Students Don't Graduate & What Your Community Can Do About It (Nathan Jones, et al. eds., Suzanne Morse, Ph.D. 2006), available at [http://www.pew-partnership.org/pdf/dropout\\_overview.pdf](http://www.pew-partnership.org/pdf/dropout_overview.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Nina R. Frant, The Inadequate Resume of School Education Plans, 51 How. L.J. 819, 833 (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Regina Ramsey James, How to Mend a Broken Act: Recapturing Those Left Behind by No Child Left Behind, 45 Gonz. L. Rev. 683, 699 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Russell W. Rumberger, Silicone Valley Education Foundation, America Cannot Afford the Stiff Price of a Dropout Nation (June 24, 2012), available at <http://toped.svefoundation.org/2012/01/24/america-cannot-afford-the-stiff-price-of-a-dropout-nation/>.

## INDICATOR QUICK FACTS

### INDEX DIMENSION

- Education

### MEASURE

- On-Time High School Graduation (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)

### SOURCE

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009-2010, Table 1
- County Health Rankings analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics and Departments of Education of various states
- University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute
- County Health Rankings

## OPPORTUNITY INDEX DATA

- Two states tied for first place with the highest on-time high school graduation rate—Vermont and Nebraska.
- The state with the lowest on-time high school graduation rate—60%—is also ranked as the last state for opportunity – Nevada.
- Washington D.C. was most improved with a 71% graduation rate in 2014, up from 59.9% in 2013.
- Five states saw a slight decline in on-time high school graduation rates (less than 1%): Utah, Rhode Island, Wyoming, New Jersey and Minnesota.

**+88%**

States with increased on-time high school graduation