



# Building a Grad Nation

Data Brief: Overview of 2013-14  
High School Graduation Rates

CIVIC  
ENTERPRISES

EVERYONE  
GRADUATES CENTER

DATA BRIEF  
**2016**

Over the past fifteen years, schools, districts, and states have focused increased attention on boosting high school graduation rates. During this time, the nation has seen more evidence-based educational reforms in low-performing schools, support for struggling students, and better data and stronger accountability to chart progress and challenge. In 2006, an emerging group of leaders and institutions that would become the “GradNation” campaign set an ambitious goal: to raise the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent by the Class of 2020 and to take that goal seriously by fostering the reforms, supports, and accountability that could ensure more students stay on track to graduate.

Since the 2010-11 school year, when most states began reporting graduation rates using the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), the number of students graduating on time has increased every year, and in 2014, the rate surpassed 82 percent for the first time. These trends reflect and build on the increase in high school graduation rates since 2001, as measured by the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR). This progress is tempered by the persistent graduation rate gaps that continue to hold back large numbers of minority, low-income, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, as well as those with disabilities. These gaps must be addressed for the nation to achieve a 90 percent graduation rate for *all* students.

This Data Brief highlights state high school graduation rate trends and the progress being made to raise graduation rates for key student subgroups. It is accompanied by graduation progress reports for each of the 50 states and data tables providing more in-depth state-by-state graduation rate analysis, which can be found on the websites of Civic Enterprises, The Everyone Graduates Center, and GradNation.org. This brief keeps pace with the release of graduation rate data by the National Center for Education Statistics and lays a foundation for the more comprehensive annual *Building a Grad Nation* report that will be published in spring 2016.

## CIVIC ENTERPRISES

Civic Enterprises is a public policy firm that works with corporations, nonprofits, foundations, universities, and governments to develop innovative initiatives and public policies in the fields of education, national service, civic engagement, conservation, global health and more. In 2006, Civic Enterprises released *The Silent Epidemic*, a seminal report that drew domestic and international attention to the nation’s dropout crisis and gave voice to our disconnected youth. Since that time, it has also released more than a dozen reports on the high school dropout challenge, including the annual *Building a Grad Nation* report. Civic Enterprises led the first National Summit on America’s Silent Epidemic, co-led the development of a Civic Marshall Plan to establish and meet a national goal for high school graduation rates, and co-convenes the annual GradNation summit with America’s Promise Alliance, Alliance for Excellent Education, and The Everyone Graduates Center.

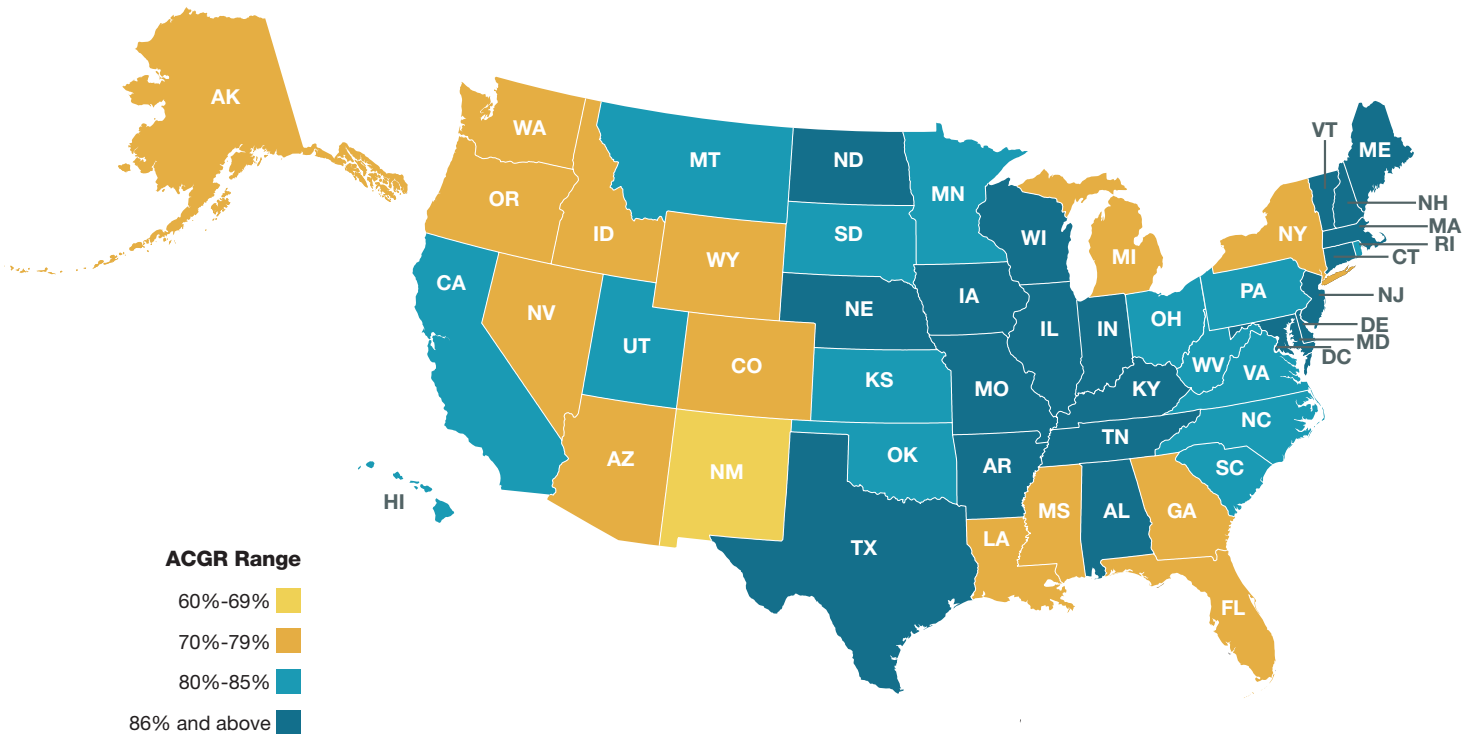
## EVERYONE GRADUATES CENTER

The Everyone Graduates Center, School of Education, Johns Hopkins University is a research and development center that focuses on understanding who graduates high school in America, and the characteristics of students, schools, communities and states that are making progress and those that are not. Seminal work includes *Locating the Dropout Crisis*, a 2004 report pinpointing the number and locations of the nation’s “dropout factories” and bringing the dropout challenge to the nation’s attention. Subsequently, the center has released more than 30 research reports on the dropout challenge and related success stories, including the annual *Building a Grad Nation* Report and advancement of the Civic Marshall Plan. Research and dissemination underpin the second half of the center’s work – development and advancement of models and tools, including Talent Development Secondary, Diplomas Now and Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Systems to identify off-track students as early as the sixth grade and help get them back on track. The center partners with states, districts, schools, universities and “think tanks.”

## OUR SPONSOR:

AT&T Inc. is committed to advancing education, strengthening communities, and improving lives. Through its community initiatives, AT&T has a long history of investing in projects that create learning opportunities; promote academic and economic achievement; or address community needs. AT&T Aspire is AT&T’s signature philanthropic initiative that drives innovation in education by bringing diverse resources to bear on the issue including funding, technology, employee volunteerism, and mentoring. Through Aspire, AT&T has passed the \$250 million mark on their plan to invest \$350 million in education from 2008-2017.

## US ACGR Ranges by State, 2013-14



The latest state-level 2013-14 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) data revealed that more than half of all states were on pace to reach a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020.

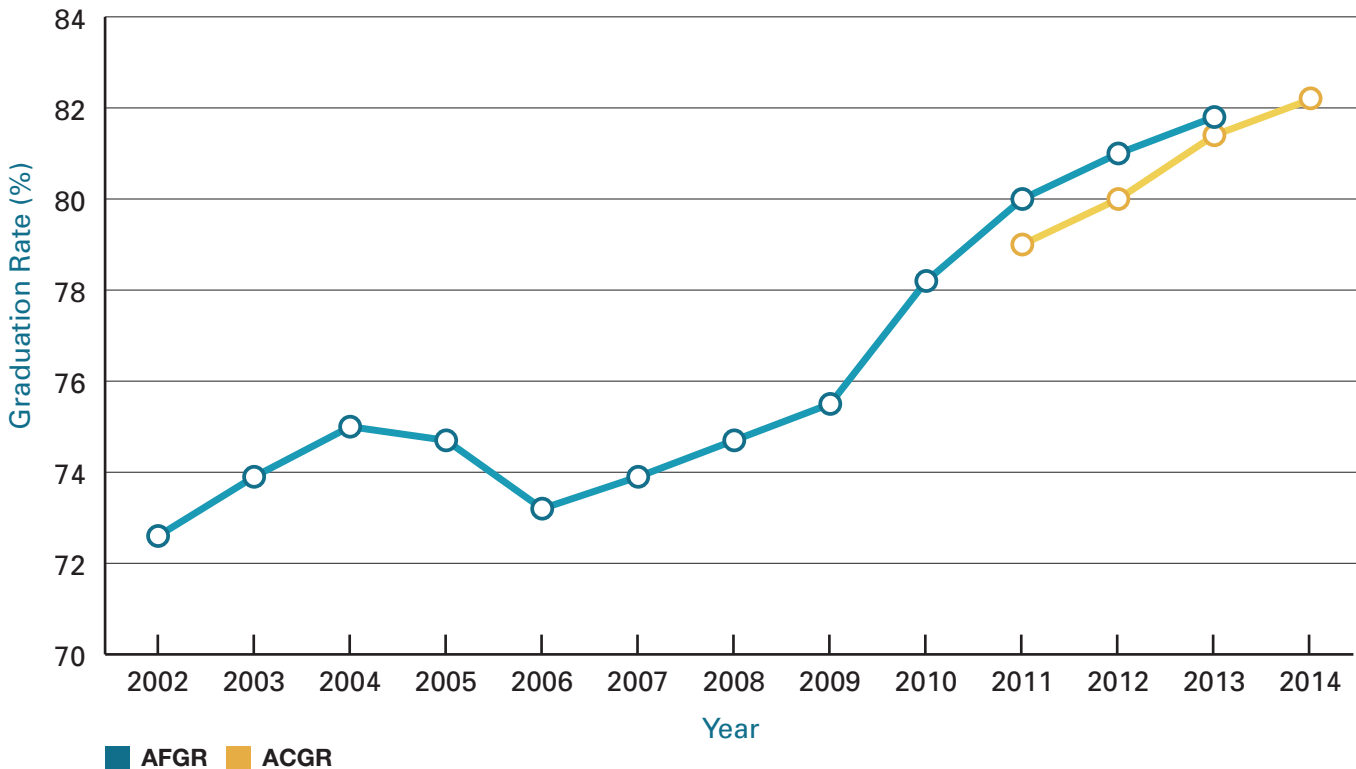
- Iowa became the first state to surpass the 90 percent mark, achieving a graduation rate of 90.5 percent.
- Twenty-nine of the 50 states equaled or exceeded the national average, and four of those states - Nebraska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Texas - were within two percentage points of reaching the 90 percent goal.
- Fifteen states, with graduation rates between 70 and 79 percent, however, still have much further to go, and one state - New Mexico - still remains more than 13 points behind the national average.

The state-level data also show troubling trends in many states for key student subgroups:

- 11 states have Hispanic/Latino graduation rates below 70 percent.
- 17 states graduate less than 70 percent of their African American students.
- 16 states have low-income graduation rates below 70 percent.
- In 35 states, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students graduate at rates less than 70 percent, and seven of those states have LEP graduation rates under 50 percent.
- 33 states graduate less than 70 percent of their students with disabilities (SWD), and six of those states graduate less than 50 percent of SWD.

*See Appendix A for more detail.*

## Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) and Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), 2002-2014

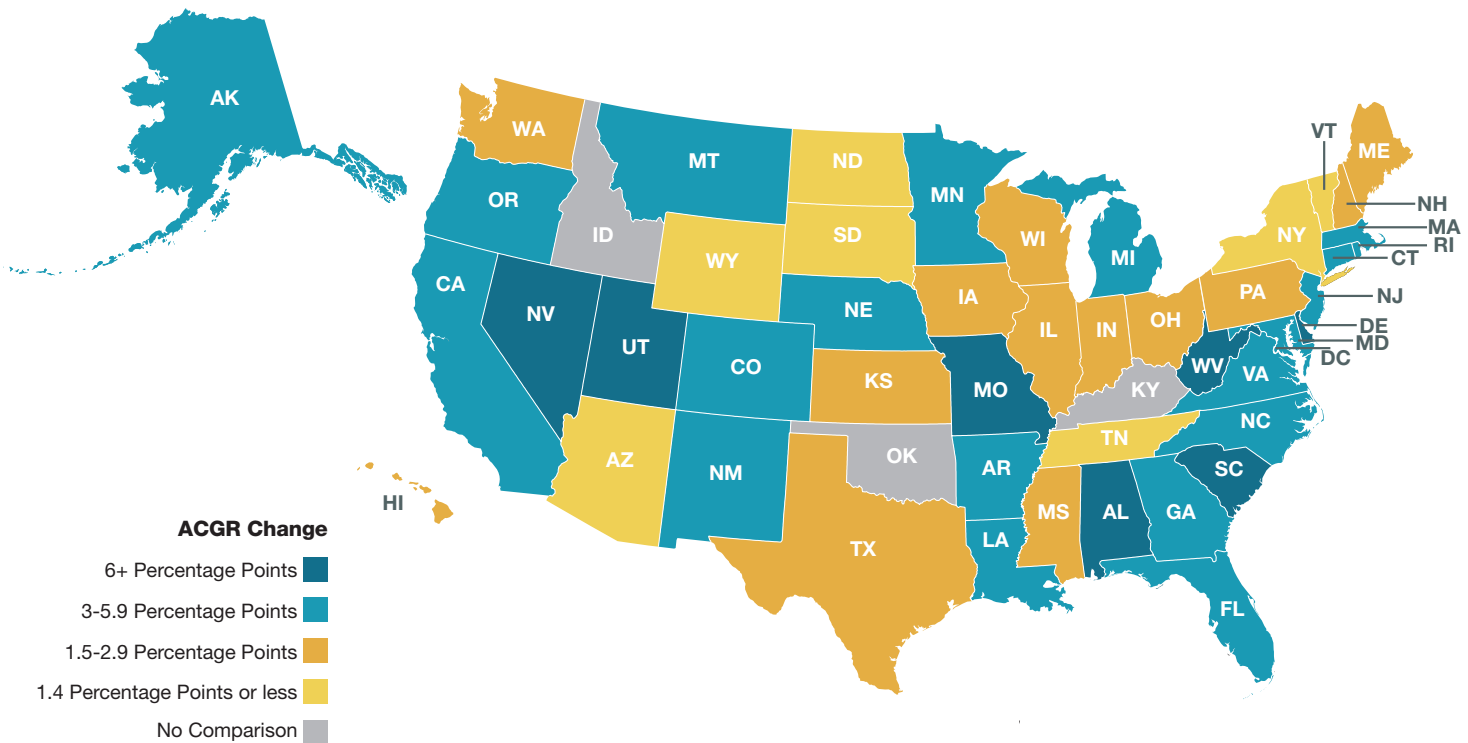


Sources: Stetser, M. & Stillwell, R. (2014). Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13: First Look (Provisional Data) (NCES 2014-391). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education (2013). Provisional Data File: SY2012-13 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates.

After flatlining for 30 years, high school graduation rates began to rise in 2002. This steady climb became more accelerated in 2006, and in 2012, the nation reached an historic milestone by achieving an 80 percent high school graduation rate. This trend continued through 2014 – the fourth year of the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate – as the national graduation rate hit yet another record of 82.3 percent, up more than 10 percentage points from the turn of the century.

This impressive achievement is worthy of celebration, but it also presents an early warning sign. This is the first time in four years that the national graduation rate has seen an increase of less than one percentage point, and it marks the first time the nation is not on track to reach the 90 percent goal. Though the margin is narrow (0.4 percentage points), it cannot be ignored. To reach 90 percent by the Class of 2020, there will need to be a redoubling of efforts and a renewed sense of urgency to ensure the nation gets back on track.

## ACGR Change by State, 2010-11 to 2013-14



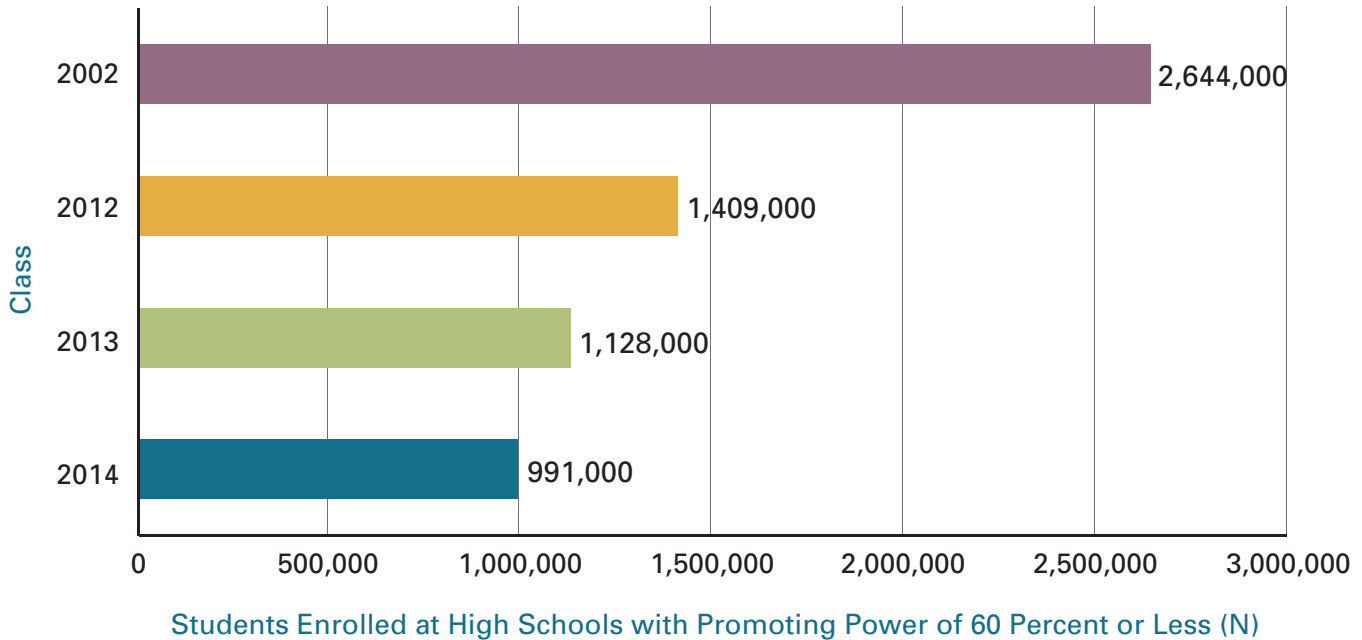
The 2013-14 school year marks the fourth year of state graduation rate reporting in the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate era, and the first year in which *all* states publicly reported rates using this common measure. Of the states reporting ACGR since 2010-11, more than 90 percent have increased the number of students graduating high school in four years. Many of these states, however, have seen only minimal gains, while three others have experienced graduation rate declines.

### Between 2010-11 and 2013-14:

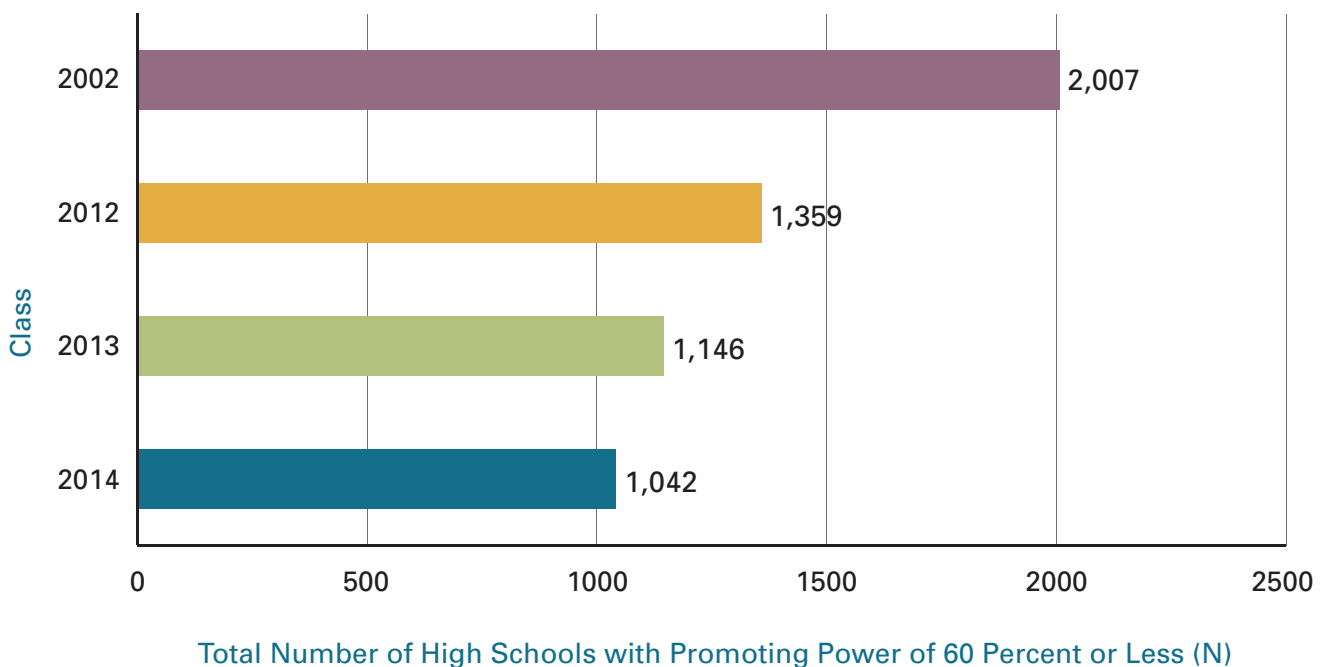
- Six states - Alabama, Missouri, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah, and West Virginia - increased their graduation rates by six points or more, and an additional 19 states saw their rates go up by more than three points. Just over half of states with gains of three points or more are above the national average and on track to reach 90 percent by 2020, but the others, despite impressive gains, are still off track. Of these latter states, nine have graduation rates below 80 percent, and four others - South Carolina, California, Minnesota, and Rhode Island - fall below the national average of 82.3 percent.
- The high school graduation rate has increased between 1.5 and 2.9 percentage points in 13 states. Nine of these states graduate 85 percent or more of their high school students on time, and one state, Iowa, is the first state in the nation to reach the 90 percent goal. About one-third of these states - Mississippi, Washington, Hawaii, and Ohio - have graduation rates below the national average and will not meet 90 percent by 2020 at their current pace.
- Seven states have seen graduation rate gains of 1.4 percentage points or less since 2010-11. Three of these states - North Dakota, Tennessee, and Vermont - have graduation rates well above the national average, but like many states close to reaching the 90 percent goal, they have experienced significant stagnation.
- In three states - South Dakota, Wyoming, and Arizona - graduation rates have declined over the past four years. This is particularly troublesome for Wyoming and Arizona, given that both have graduation rates below 80 percent and are well off pace to reaching 90 percent.

*See Appendix B for more detail.*

## Change in the Number of Students Enrolled in High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60 Percent or Less, 2002-2014



## Total Number of High Schools with a Promoting Power of 60 Percent or Less, 2002-2014



In this year's reporting, we begin the transition from Promoting Power to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate to identify low-graduation-rate high schools. Whereas Promoting Power has been historically used to identify "dropout factory" high schools (in which a school's 12th grade enrollment is 60 percent or less than its 9th grade enrollment three years earlier), ACGR provides a common metric to easily identify low-graduation-rate high schools, which we define as having an ACGR of 67 percent or less.

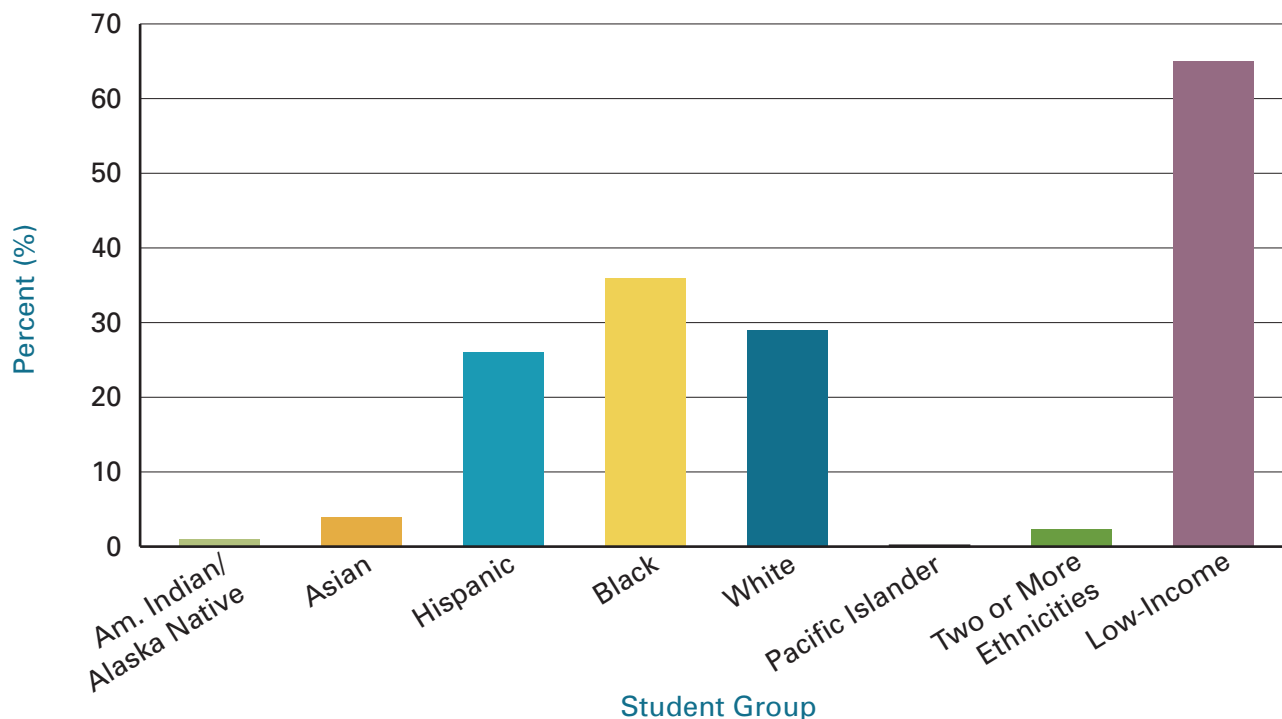
It is important to note, however, that both metrics show a decline in the number of high schools with low graduation rates and the number of students attending them. There are now approximately 1,000 of these high schools and less than one million students attending them – a staggering reduction

from the more than 2,000 schools and 2.5 million students in them in 2002. Between 2012-13 and 2013-14, high schools graduating 67 percent or less of students dropped by 225 and the number of students enrolled in them was cut by nearly 210,000.

Altogether, there were at least 1.6 million fewer students attending high schools with low graduation rates in 2014 than in 2002 – a significant decline given that they educate so many low-income and minority students. Unfortunately, these students are still overwhelmingly represented in these schools. Of the roughly 924,000 students in low-graduation-rate high schools, 65 percent were low-income and 63 percent African American or Hispanic/Latino. It is clear these schools and students need greater support to improve and become places where graduation is the norm.

*See Appendices H, I, and J for more detail.*

## Students in High Schools with ACGR below 67%, by Subgroup

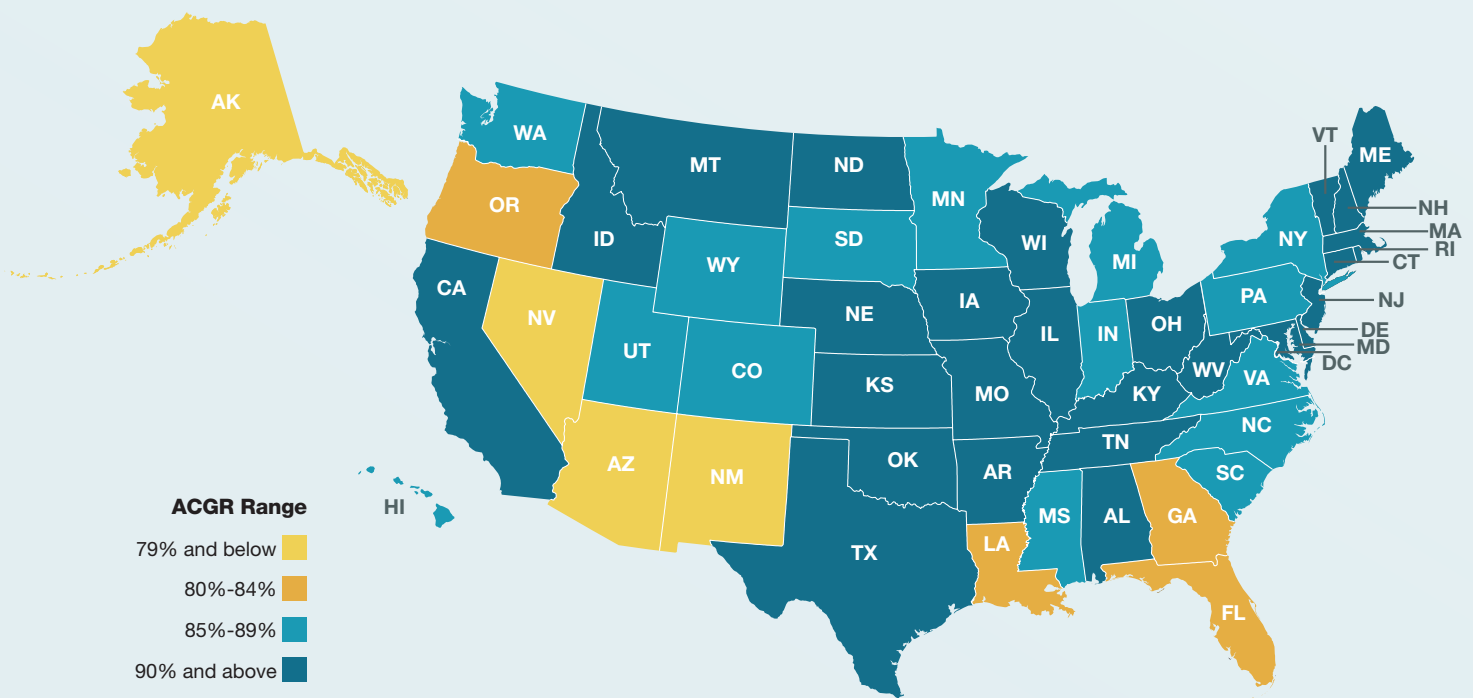




Nearly half of the country's 2014 graduating cohort – 47 percent – came from low-income families. There were vast disparities in the percentages of low-income graduates across states, ranging from a low of 26.1 percent in sparsely populated Utah to a high of 66.9 percent in California. Overall, nearly two-thirds of states have student populations that are at least 40 percent low income. Clearly, this is a segment of students that must be addressed if the country is to graduate 90 percent of all students.

- Twenty-eight states graduate 90 percent or more of their non-low-income students, up from 21 states in 2013. An additional 13 states graduate between 85 and 90 percent of their non-low-income students. Only seven states - Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico, Nevada, and Oregon - have non-low-income graduation rates below the national average.

## 2013-14 ACGR for Non-Low-Income Students

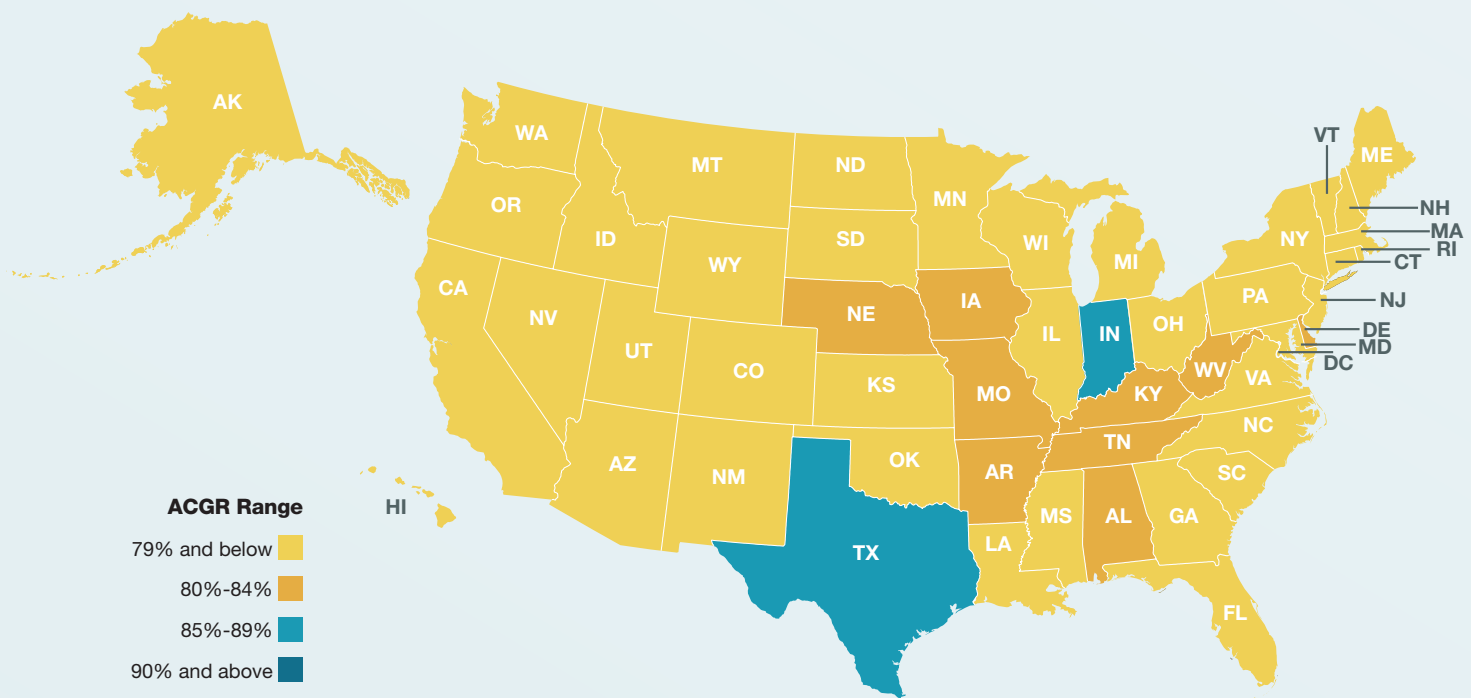




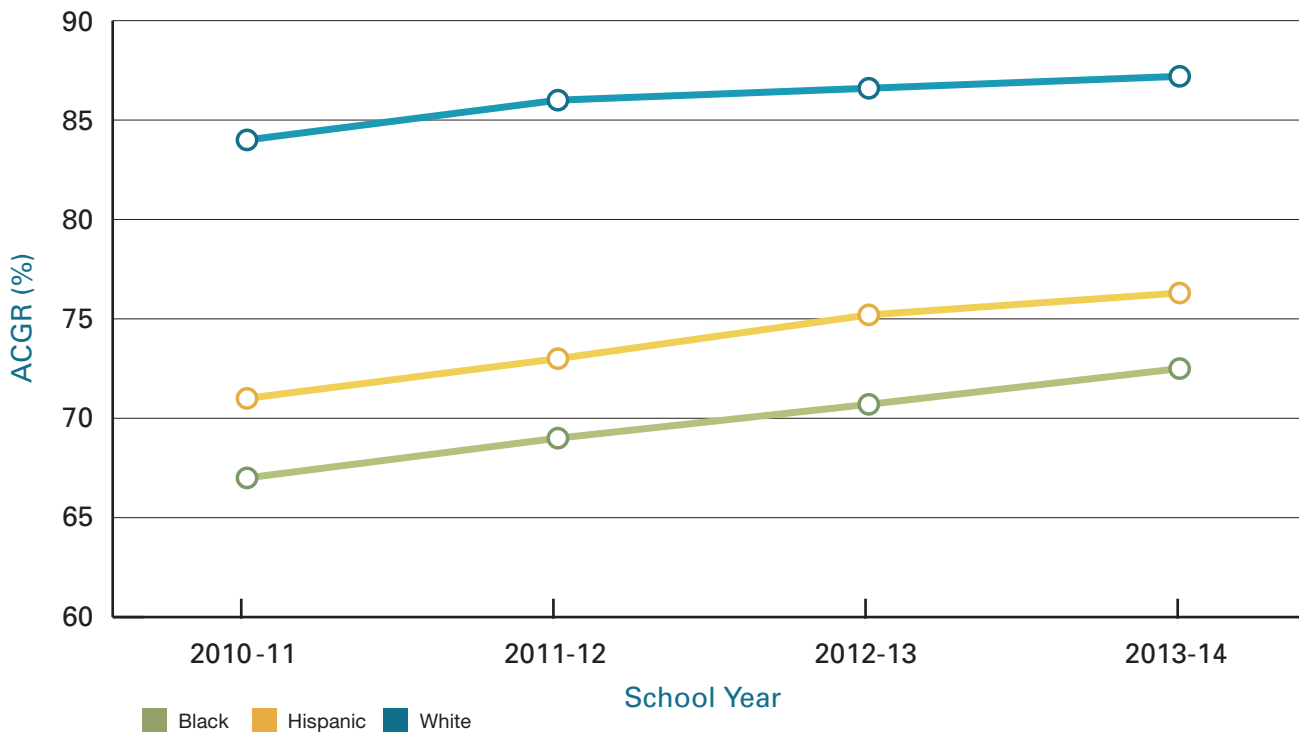
- These statistics are markedly different for low-income students. Only six states - Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Texas - have low-income graduation rates above the national average of 82.3 percent, and just five additional states graduate more than 80 percent of these students.
- Nearly one-third of states graduate less than 70 percent of their low-income students.
- The graduation rate gap between low-income and non-low-income students ranges from a high of 25.6 percentage points in South Dakota to a low of 4.0 percentage points in Indiana. In nearly half of all states, the gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers is 15 percentage points or greater, and in 18 additional states the gap is at least 10 points. Only eight states have a low-income/non-low-income gap less than 10 percentage points.

*See Appendices E and F for more detail.*

## 2013-14 ACGR for Low-Income Students



## Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for Black, Hispanic, and White Students from 2010-11 to 2013-14



Between 2006 and 2012, Hispanic/Latino and African American students made the greatest gains in graduation rates (as measured by the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate) – 15 and 9 points, respectively. This trend continued into the ACGR era, with Hispanic/Latino students making gains of 5.3 percentage points and African American students increasing 5.5 percentage points since 2011. Both of these student subgroups exceeded the national rate of improvement (0.9 points) between 2013 and 2014, and with average yearly gains since 2011 averaging more than 1.3 percentage points, Hispanic/Latino and African American students have been key drivers in raising the national graduation rate.

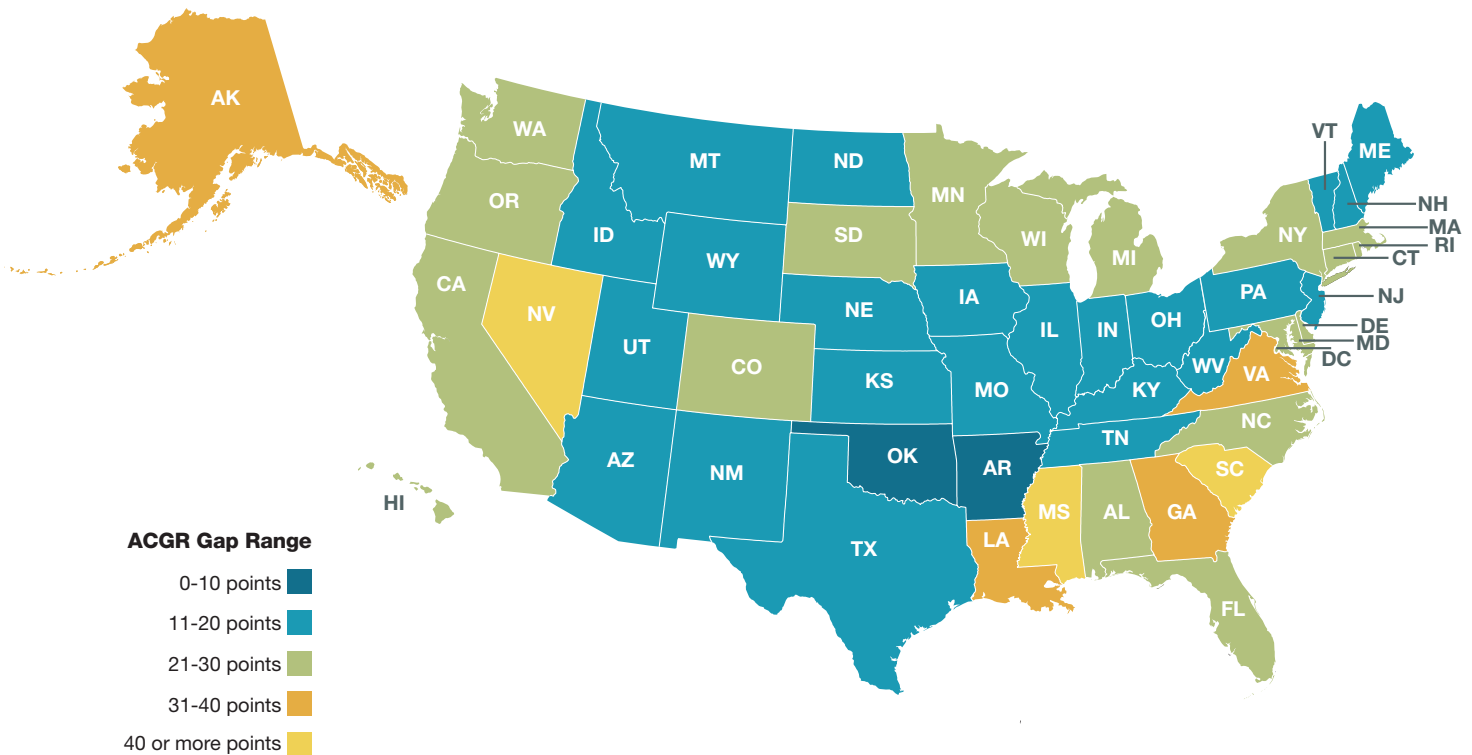
These impressive gains, however, should not overshadow the fact that Hispanic/Latino (76.3 percent) and African American (72.5 percent) students have yet to reach an 80 percent graduation rate, and the gaps between them and White students, though

narrowing, are still large. The gap between Hispanic/Latino and White students was 10.9 percentage points in 2014, down from 11.4 points in 2013. Similarly, the gap between African American students and White students narrowed from 15.9 percentage points in 2013 to 14.7 points in 2014.

These gap closures have come largely from the gains made by Hispanic/Latino and African American students, but they can also be attributed, in part, to the modest gains made by White students in recent years. Though White students have historically high graduation rates, their rates have increased by only 3.2 percentage points since 2011, an average of less than a point a year. Still, White students are on track to exceed the 90 percent graduation rate goal, while Hispanic/Latino and African American students are not, proving that much more work needs to be done to get *all* students successfully through high school.

*See Appendices C and D for more detail.*

## Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Gaps between Students with Disabilities (SWD) and Non-SWD, 2013-14



As noted in the 2015 Building a Grad Nation report, making cross-state comparisons of graduation rates for students with disabilities (SWD) is complicated by the variation in state requirements for students to receive a regular high school diploma and how students with disabilities are defined for graduation rate calculations. It is, however, important to take note of the enormous disparities nationally and within states between students with disabilities and their peers in the general education student population. Across the nation, students with disabilities graduate at a rate of nearly 20 points lower than the average graduation rate for all students, and the gaps in more than half of all states meet or exceed the national gap.

- Twenty-nine states graduate 85 percent or more of their general population students; only one state graduates more than 80 percent of its students with disabilities.
- States' graduation rates for students with disabilities range from a low of 27.6 percent in Nevada to a high of 83.1 percent in Arkansas. Six states graduated less than 50 percent of students with disabilities, and 27 others had SWD graduation rates between 50 and 70 percent.
- The SWD/Non-SWD graduation rate gap ranges from 4.2 percentage points in Arkansas to 54.5 points in Mississippi. The gap is greater than 10 percentage points in 48 of 50 states.

These trends are all the more troubling given that many advocates for children with disabilities estimate that 85 to 90 percent of these students should be able to graduate with a regular diploma with the right supports. To achieve a 90 percent graduation rate for all, the nation will need to do much more to ensure students with disabilities are provided the same opportunities to succeed as all others.

*See Appendix G for more detail.*

## CONCLUSION

For the third year in a row, the nation achieved a record-breaking high school graduation rate, ensuring more students than ever before earned a diploma. As it becomes more difficult to earn a meaningful living with less than a high school diploma, getting students to graduation becomes all the more important, and we must honor the hard work being done by educators, parents, community members, and many others to set students on a path to success.

However, now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Though progress has been great, many challenges still remain. The nation has fallen off track to reaching the GradNation goal and huge graduation rate gaps still exist for many. If we are to meet our nation's greatest ideals, we cannot be satisfied with graduating only the easiest to reach students and much work lies ahead to ensure opportunity exists for every student.

The full *2016 Building a Grad Nation Annual Update* will focus on what it will take to reach a 90 percent high school graduation rate goal by 2020 for all students. The wealth of data available over the past decade through enhanced graduation rate definitions and data collection promoted by governors and the federal government will be used to further examine the state, district, and student subgroup trends underlying the national picture. The report will illuminate the areas of greatest challenge, and consider where efforts must be focused to make the most progress for students, our communities, states, and the nation. America has made great strides in addressing the dropout challenge, but renewed efforts must be made so that every student graduates ready for the challenges of college, career, and civic life.

**To find your state graduation progress report and state-by-state appendices, please visit:**  
**[www.civicenterprises.net](http://www.civicenterprises.net) • [www.every1graduates.org](http://www.every1graduates.org) • [GradNation.org](http://GradNation.org)**

