



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

The Impact of Raising the Compulsory Attendance Age

A study report in response to Senate Bill 900, Session Law 2010-152,
Section XIV

Date Due: November 15, 2010

Report # 15

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**The Impact of Raising the Compulsory Attendance Age:
A study report in response to Senate Bill 900, Session Law 2010-152, Section XIV**

Introduction

Senate Bill 900, Session Law 2010-152, Section XIV (14.1-14.2), directed the State Board of Education to establish a Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impacts of raising the compulsory public school attendance age prior to completion of a high school diploma from 16 to 17 or 18. The task force is directed to respond to four questions and report its findings and recommendations no later than November 15, 2010, to the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. This report serves as the response.

Due to the brevity of time within which the blue ribbon task force was to complete its work on a complex issue, the following is the overall recommendation:

- Form a task force to complete a comprehensive long range study of the impacts of raising the compulsory attendance age, including policy and cost benefit fiscal analyses, spanning a period of at least a year, in order to garner input from a variety of stakeholders, including students currently in school as well as those who have dropped out.

The blue ribbon task force did however, review relevant literature, conduct interviews with states that have raised their compulsory attendance age, and reached consensus of some key findings and recommendations. Following is a brief historical state overview, the blue ribbon task force's key recommendations, review of relevant research, and descriptions and findings relative to each of the legislated questions.

Historical Overview

North Carolina's current compulsory school attendance age statute (N.C.G.S. § 115C-378) has been in place, at least since 1955 when the laws were recodified. There is prior legislation of 1923 with similar language and a recorded age of 14. The purpose of the compulsory school attendance age is to prevent those in charge or control of children from encouraging or enticing said children to be absent from school unlawfully (In re McMillan, N.C. Ct. Appeals, 1976). The current statute is as follows:

Every parent, guardian or other person in this State having charge or control of a child between the ages of seven and 16 years shall cause such child to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session. N.C.G.S. § 115C-378

The North Carolina's compulsory attendance age has been 16 for over fifty years. At the time that the law was passed, North Carolina was predominantly an agricultural and manufacturing state. In 1986 the North Carolina State Board of Education, passed a policy, stating that LEAs must enforce the state laws and regulations which relate to compulsory attendance and that they may adopt rules which allow teachers to consider a student's absences in the computation of grades (16 NCAC 06E. 0103). This policy has an unintended consequence of hurting those students most at risk of dropping out. North Carolina is one of 24 states whose compulsory attendance age is 16.

In May 2005, the State Board of Education supported Representative Fisher's HB 779 to raise the compulsory attendance age from 16 to 18. The bill was never ratified.

Blue Ribbon Task Force Key Recommendations:

There are pros and cons when considering any issue as complex as this. The task force's key recommendations are based on the following premise:

*Regardless of whether or not the compulsory attendance age is raised, schools need to be inviting places where learning is personally relevant, curriculum is meaningful, teachers take a vested interest in every child, and systems are put in place to ensure that schools are places where students **want** to learn. Just raising the age in and of itself, will not result in better outcomes for students.*

Determining an appropriate compulsory school age is a complex issue that requires the collective efforts of educators, policymakers, business and civic leaders, law enforcement, parents and students. Raising the compulsory attendance age, in and of itself, cannot be done unless other agencies, such as the court system, law enforcement, social services, and juvenile justice change rules, regulations, policies and practices in tandem with educational statutes and policies.

Besides the blue ribbon task force's overall recommendation (*see Introduction*), the following are additional key recommendations:

- Increasing the compulsory school attendance age can only attain the benefits of education if supplemental programs targeting at-risk students are in place. Supplemental programs must be research-based, include other agency partners, and respond to the learning needs of the individual student.
- A larger, more comprehensive study should be conducted within the context of law enforcement and juvenile justice.
- Eight pilot programs should be conducted on raising the compulsory attendance age; one in each region of the state, giving LEAs the flexibility to develop a pilot based on the unique needs of their student body and community needs, involving all stakeholders (see Manatee pilot attendance project, Section 1003.61, Florida Statutes)
- Regardless of whether or not the compulsory attendance age is raised, consistent and ongoing teacher training, supplemental programs which are personally relevant to

students and curriculum materials which are meaningful, must be developed and implemented for at-risk populations.

- Alignment of the laws, rules, regulations as well as data systems among governing agencies that interact with students ages 16-18, such as Department of Social Services, Law Enforcement, the court system, and Juvenile Justice, etc must occur.
- The decision to amend (or not) N.C.G.S. § 115C-378 must be justified by effective research, policy, and cost benefit findings and result in a comprehensive strategic plan.

The blue ribbon task force's key recommendations were derived from the review of relevant research, descriptions and findings relative to each of the legislated questions and input from community organizations, such as the submitted resolution (*see Appendix A*) from the Catawba County Champions of Education.

Review of Relevant Literature

Consideration of whether or not to raise the compulsory school attendance age is a complex issue. There are some who would argue that just raising the age will keep students in school and increase the graduation rate. There are others who would argue that keeping students in school who do not want to be there is disruptive to the other students and the overall school experience. To highlight this complexity, several superintendents were interviewed from states that have raised their compulsory attendance age. Following are some samples of their quotes.

One superintendent stated, "This is a sensitive issue for most secondary educators. One pro is that some children, at the age of 16, are not stable enough to make a sound choice. Nor completing high school is such a life altering decision. Increasing the compulsory age would force them to wait, which would save some students. On the other hand, keeping this student on campus may deprive others of an opportunity to learn." Another superintendent stated, "We have compulsory age for drinking, driving, and voting and they are all higher (with the exception of driving) than the attendance requirement. What makes any of us think that a young teen is in a better position to decide their academic future, than they are any of those other legal requirements?"

The national high school dropout rate has continued to be a pressing problem for policy makers, schools, and ultimately, society. Even beyond high school, today, more than ever, students require some sort of post-secondary education. The lack of a high school diploma is not only critical to individuals but to the economy of North Carolina and the country. North Carolina-Specific Statistics:

- If all members of the Class of 2008 had graduated, they would have generated an additional \$10.8 billion in income over the course of their lifetime (Amos, 2008).
- If the graduation rate for males increased by only five percent, North Carolina would realize \$151.9 billion in savings related to crime, \$80.9 billion in additional earnings by those men, and \$232.8 billion in overall benefits to the state economy (Amos, 2008).
- The state saves \$12,355 per additional graduate on health-related expenses (Amos, 2008).

- If all heads of households were high school graduates, the state's families would have an additional \$2.6 billion in personal wealth (Amos, 2008).
- If all community college students graduated from high school, the community college system would save almost \$100 million in remediation costs (Amos, 2008).
- It costs taxpayers \$104,000 per year per youth in a Youth Development Center (NC Department of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, 2010) as compared to a per pupil expenditure of approximately \$5,600. For students attending North Carolina public schools (NC Department of Public Instruction, Financial Business Services)

Bridgeland, DiLulio, & Streeter (2007) reported that 17 states and the District of Columbia require students to remain in school until they graduate or are 18. Over 20 states' compulsory attendance age remains at 16 and another 14 states are in the process of introducing or passing legislation to increase their respective compulsory attendance age. According to the authors, "At a time when two-thirds of high-growth, high-wage jobs require a college degree and only one-third of Americans have college degrees, it makes little sense to us that state laws would continue to make it easy for students to avoid the prerequisite to college: a high school diploma." (p. 3)

Yet, others argue that raising the age is not the answer. The John Locke Foundation cites in its 2007 report, "Raise the Bar, Not the Age," that states with a compulsory attendance age of 16 have higher average and median graduation rates than states with an attendance age of 17 and 18 and conversely, states with a compulsory attendance age of 16 have average and median dropout rates comparably to states with an attendance age of 17 and 18. The report concludes that there is no observable relationship between raising the compulsory attendance age and increasing graduation rates. Additionally, they argue that forcing likely dropouts to stay in school will lead to greater classroom disruptions and an overall negative influence on the remaining students.

Task Force Questions and Findings

Senate Bill 900, Session Law 2010-152, Section XIV (14.1-14.2), directed the State Board of Education to establish a Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impacts of raising the compulsory public school attendance age prior to completion of a high school diploma from 16 to 17 or 18. There were four questions that were to be studied. Following are the questions and task force findings.

1. *What impacts, including fiscal impacts, has raising the compulsory school attendance age had in states which have raised the compulsory school attendance age in the last 15 years.*

The majority of states have raised their compulsory school attendance age to either 17 or 18. The breakdown by age and corresponding number of states is as follows:

Age 16: 24 states and the Virgin Islands

Age 17: 8 states

Age 18: 18 states and the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico

While most of the states have raised their compulsory attendance age to 17 or 18, nearly half of those states have additional provisions beyond merely raising the age, such as sanctions or penalties for failing to attend classes. Other states allow children ranging from age 14 to 18 to be exempt from the compulsory attendance requirement if they meet one or more of the following stipulations: are employed, have a physical or mental condition that makes the child's attendance infeasible, have passed the 8th-grade level, have their parents' permission, have the permission of the district court or the local school board, meet the requirements for an exit interview, or have arranged alternative education such as vocational or technical school (Education Commission of the States, 2007).

Some of the major impacts in states that have raised the compulsory school attendance age include fiscal, programmatic, and teacher education. Additional impacts beyond education include larger community and society considerations such as law enforcement, social services (eg Medicaid, SCHIP) or juvenile justice.

Fiscal impacts may include additional teachers and supplies, transportation, etc. as well as the cost of providing comprehensive and appropriate programs for potential dropouts between the ages of 16 and 18. Due to the variance among pupil expenditures models employed across states, one cannot ascertain a specific amount increase. In an analysis of the cost to New York public schools if they implemented a policy increasing the compulsory school attendance age, Burkhauser (2002) estimated that the monetary cost of increasing the compulsory school attendance age would cost New York an additional \$360 million dollars in order to educate an additional 35,000 students.

Programmatic impacts in those states that have raised the compulsory attendance age, include the increased use of graduation coaches, alternative school options for students needing extra help and customizing programs predominantly targeting at-risk populations, however due to varying degrees of program fidelity and limited program and student evaluation data, results are mixed. There is evidence to suggest that the use of graduation coaches combined with small class sizes results in increasing graduation rates. Regardless of the program model teacher education and ongoing training must occur.

Lastly, there appears to be a growing consensus among states that the long-term costs associated with the dropout problem warrant additional measures to help students stay in school. State education leaders are collaborating with other agencies, such as juvenile justice or law enforcement to develop comprehensive strategies among multiple agencies to prevent students from dropping out. Many states for example, suspend driving privileges to students who have dropped out. Another example of collaboration is Virginia which combines community supports outside of school once a student has obtained over six unexcused absences.

Question 1 Findings:

- **Fiscal:** Increases in cost should be considered (eg additional teachers, classrooms, transportation, materials, etc) when considering raising the compulsory attendance age yet, cost alone should not be a determining factor.
 - **Policy:** Almost all states that have raised the compulsory attendance age allowed for exemptions and extenuating personnel circumstances and added additional provisions.
 - **Programmatic:** Changes in state policy must be accompanied by changes in educational programming and teacher training.
 - **Community:** The states which combine policy changes in tandem with law enforcement and juvenile justice have a higher success rate of decreasing the dropout rate.
2. *What conclusions can be drawn as to the impact the compulsory school attendance age has made in the dropout and high school completion rates for states who require compulsory school attendance to ages 16, 17, and 18, respectively.*

In a sampling of some states that have increased their compulsory attendance age to 18, the graduation rate pre and post the change in legislation has remained fairly constant. In some states it rose; in others it fell. The table below compares the 4 year cohort graduation rate from 2000-2001 and 2005-2006 in selected states.

State	2000-2001 4 year cohort graduation rate	2005-2006 4 year cohort graduation rate
Hawaii	77.7%	75.5%
Indiana	Data not reported	73.3%
Kansas	Data not reported	77.6%
Ohio	81%	79.2%
Texas	Data not reported	72.5%
Virginia	83.8%	74.5%
Wisconsin	84.8%	87.5%

The 1999 Florida legislature created the “Manatee pilot attendance project (Section 1003.61, Florida Statutes) requiring the Manatee County school board to implement a pilot project raise the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 years of age. The pilot is a collaborative

effort between the school district, local law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary. In 2006-07, Manatee County experienced a successful year in both graduation and dropout rates. The district's graduation rate increased from 76.9% to 78.7% and the dropout rate decreased from 3.1% to 1.3%, the most significant improvement in high school completion rates in Manatee County's history. The pilot involved themed academies at all district high schools, and alternative programs that focus on strong relationship building with potential dropout students. Since the pilot's initial implementation, the school district graduation rate has increased from 56.2% to 78.7% and the dropout rate has steadily declined from 7.6% to 1.3%

Angrist and Krueger (1991) found that approximately one out of every four potential dropouts remain in school because of compulsory schooling laws. Since many states have changed their statute within the last three years it is too early to tell whether or not the increased compulsory school attendance age has resulted in increased graduation rates.

Question 2 Findings:

- Results are inconclusive in determining whether raising the compulsory attendance age increases or decreases the state's four year cohort graduation rate.
- Some evidence exists to suggest that potential dropouts remain in school because of compulsory attendance laws.
- In order for students to stay in school, programmatic changes must be made academically and socially.
- Anecdotally several interviewed Superintendents responded that it made a huge difference in graduation rates but impacted other areas.

3. What best practices for working with at-risk populations of students who remain in school have been employed in states that have raised the compulsory attendance age in the last 15 years.

Raising the graduation rate requires a multi-pronged approach. These efforts demonstrate that raising the school age must be supplemented by additional measures and supports both within school and in the broader community. In a review of ten states that have raised their compulsory attendance age, a variety of practices had been put in place. Some of them include virtual learning and credit recovery online, graduation coaches, alternative schools and school flex programs.

Examples of Best Practices:

- Tennessee-a school flex program was developed which requires students to attend school a minimum of two hours per day while working toward a degree or maintaining employment.
- Michigan-Superintendent in 2009 introduced the “Dropout Challenge” in which each school identifies 10-15 at-risk students and provides research-based supports and interventions including adult advocates, academic support and enrichment, programs to improve student behavior, and a personalized learning contract.
- Missouri-the University City School District an alternative to long term or out of school suspension is called, “Earn Your Way Back,” where there is reduction in suspension time for work completed. Still other states have only increased the compulsory attendance age and not augmented the educational program for potential dropouts.
- Kansas-Kansas City’s First Things First (FTF) program is aimed at struggling urban students and attempts to lower dropout rates and increase graduation rates by developing small “learning communities.” These communities have small teacher-to-student ratios and foster teacher-student interaction. The program began in 1998 and Kansas City reported a 50% reduction in dropout rates between 9th and 10th grade along with a 20% increase in the completion rate in 2000.
- Several states interviewed reported that early intervention, (as early as 3rd grade) was critical in prevention. They cited that if intervention took place earlier, it would cost less and get better results in the long term. Waiting to do interventions with at-risk populations until middle or high school was too late.
- Many states, including North Carolina, have tried implementing innovative programs, such as themed schools (eg STEM), Early/Middle Colleges, 9th grade academies, utilization of on-line delivery, and other programs to provide a broader array of services to its student body (for a comprehensive description of the Department of Public Instruction’s statewide efforts on raising the graduation rates *see Appendix B*).

Question 3 Findings:

- A variety of effective programs exist for keeping at risk students in schools.
- Regardless of the program model, professional development, modifying the learning environment, and customizing instruction must be in place.
- Identifying at-risk students early and then providing interventions are essential.

4. *What would be the fiscal impact in raising the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17 and 16 to 18, respectively, for each local administrative school unit in North Carolina.*

The costs associated with the proposed legal mandate fall into two major categories: Direct costs associated with the increase in the high school population, and intangible costs associated with the unintended consequences of the change. For the purposes of this report, only the direct costs will be reported.

The policy change would not affect the number of students who are now staying in school and graduating. The only impact will come from those who are now dropping out younger than 18. To estimate the fiscal impact, first we need to look at the age distribution of those who dropped out. **Table 2** below shows, for the 2008-09 school year, the age and grade of students at the time they dropped out.

Table 2: Age and grade distribution of dropouts 2008-09¹

AGES	GRADES						Total by Age	Cumulative % of dropouts		Cum. Of ages	9-12 Total only
	07	08	09	10	11	12		All	percentage		
12	10	2	-	-	-	-	12	0.1	0.1	12	-
13	22	9	3	-	-	-	34	0.2	0.2	46	3
14	14	55	45	3	-	-	117	0.6	0.8	163	48
15	25	106	723	185	13	-	1,052	5.4	6.2	1,215	921
16	24	164	2,826	1,450	597	25	5,086	25.9	32.1	6,301	4,898
17	1	20	1,979	1,938	1,601	635	6,174	31.4	63.5	12,475	6,153

¹ Note that data for this year contains some unusually low and high ages.

18	-	4	764	1,255	1,655	1,417	5,095	25.9	89.5	17,570	5,091
19	-	-	137	278	529	741	1,685	8.6	98.0	19,255	1,685
20	-	-	18	36	95	178	327	1.7	99.7	19,582	327
21	-	-	1	8	12	33	54	0.3	100.0	19,636	54
22	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	0.0	100.0	19,640	4
ALL AGES	96	360	6,496	5,153	4,505	3,030	19,640	100.0			19,184
C.T. Of grades	96	456	6,952	12,105	16,610	19,640					

The age distribution of dropouts in the past years shows that dropouts tend to be a little older than their classmates. The implication is that most of them have repeated one or more grades prior to dropping out. Currently most are dropping out in the 9th and 10th grades. Note that 9th grade is the transition grade from middle to high school. It is also the grade at which most students who have failed one or more grades turn 16.

In all likelihood, the age change requirement will shift the grade at which most students drop out from the current 9th and 10th grades to 10th and 11th grades. This is because over the years the percentage of dropouts from each grade did not change much. On the other hand the age at which they are dropping out has been increasing. This implies that most of those who drop out were not promoted for one or more years before they reached the grade at which they dropped out. Whether or not the long term dropout rate will be reduced by a changed age requirement is unclear. Unless other corrective remedies are implemented at earlier grades, the data suggest that students who are prone to drop out will postpone it one or two years and then drop out.

Table 2 above shows the number of 2008-2009 dropouts by their age and grade. Of the 19,640 dropouts in that school year, 1215 (6.2 percent)² were younger than 16.

<i>Age at the time they dropped out</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Total cost increase</i>
Number in the most recent year	5,086	6,174	
Percent that may be retained in school with the age change	% 75	% 70	
Increase in the student population that stay in school	3,815	4,322	
Increase in the costs from State funds	\$ 21,570,998	\$24,439,779	\$46,010,777
Increase in the costs from all funds	\$ 33,045,014	\$37,439,753	\$70,484,767

Table 3: Estimated additional costs in the first year of implementation

Table 3 above shows the potential costs using the 2008-09 dropout data with the per pupil expenditures (PPE) in that school year. The state PPE was \$ 5,655, and total per pupil actual

² This percentage is almost twice the 2007-08 school year.

expenditure from all sources was \$ 8,633. It is assumed that the minimum age change would retain 75 percent of the 16 year olds, and 70 percent of the 17 year olds who dropped out in the most recent school year. The table shows how much more would have been required from state sources and how much more would have been needed from all sources had the policy change been implemented in the 2008-09 school year.

Two facts need to be considered. First, the costs will depend on the year in which the policy change is made and implemented. Second, they will not be one-time but continuing costs that will recur every year and will keep on increasing as other expenses increase. If the policy were to be implemented in the 2011-12 school year, the other costs would increase to about \$ 9,060 per student if the costs increased only 1.5 percent per year.³ The total increase in high school enrollment attributable to the policy change will be in the order of 8,000 additional students.

The cost estimates given below are the minimum for at least the following reasons. First, they do not include the cost of additional classroom space in LEAs that may be operating at the margin of their school building capacities. Second, the student population increase will be in the high school grades. High school PPE are higher than the PPE used here. Third, some students would likely require special attention and would be accommodated in Alternative Schools with very small class sizes and high teacher student ratios. Therefore, students retained in school under this proposal will have a much higher cost than an average student. Fourth, the most recent PPE increase (1.5 %) observed is from a period in which all funds were scarce because of recession. The costs are calculated for the five fiscal years after the implementation. It is possible that if the recession ends and more money becomes available, the rate of expenditure increase may be much higher than the 1.5 % used.

Also notice that the costs estimates above are only for current expenses; there is no allowance for the additional classroom space that may be required. In places where there is slack classroom capacity, there may be no additional costs involved. But in fast growing LEAs where building capacity is scarce, these additional students may require more capital expenditure. We have no way of making a reasonable estimate of these potential costs.

Assuming per pupil expenditures increased only one and a half percent per year, if the age change becomes effective in the 2011-12 school year, the total cost increase over the first five years of implementation will be close to \$ 373 million⁴; the state's share in this would be around \$ 243⁵ million.

Current economic conditions present a significant challenge. Dropping out of school and the state's employment status are inversely connected – when jobs are hard to find, more students choose to stay in school. The implication is that in years when state revenues are down, the total

³ The annual percentage increase suggested is fairly close to current recession cost trends.

⁴ $\$ 72,480,000 * \sum_{i=0}^4 (1 + 0.015)^i =$ about \$ 373 million,

⁵ The state share of the total is about 65 percent.

cost associated with the retained students will go up. This will happen even without the dropout age change.

Question 4 Findings:

- It will cost North Carolina (state share) close to \$243 million dollars over five years to increase the compulsory attendance age.
- In the past ten years, the age at which students are dropping out has been increasing.
- Costs include state share and other funding sources (eg federal and local)
- The short term increase in costs must be considered within the context of long term economic development in North Carolina.

In summary, the blue ribbon task force overall and key recommendations which have been substantiated by the research findings and key interviews are as follows:

Overall recommendation:

- Form a task force to complete a comprehensive long range study of the impacts of raising the compulsory attendance age, including policy and cost benefit fiscal analyses, spanning a period of at least a year, in order to garner input from a variety of stakeholders, including students currently in school as well as those who have dropped out.

Key recommendations:

- Increasing the compulsory school attendance age can only attain the benefits of education if supplemental programs targeting at-risk students are in place. Supplemental programs must be research-based, include other agency partners, and respond to the learning needs of the individual student.
- A larger, more comprehensive study should be conducted within the context of law enforcement and juvenile justice.
- Eight pilot programs should be conducted on raising the compulsory attendance age; one in each region of the state, giving LEAs the flexibility to develop a pilot based on the unique needs of their student body and community needs, involving all stakeholders (see Manatee pilot attendance project, Section 1003.61, Florida Statutes)
- Regardless of whether or not the compulsory attendance age is raised, consistent and ongoing teacher training, supplemental programs which are personally relevant to students and curriculum materials which are meaning must occur.

- Alignment of the laws, rules, regulations as well as data systems among governing agencies that interact with students ages 16-18, such as Department of Social Services, Law Enforcement, the court system, and Juvenile Justice, etc must occur.
- The decision to amend (or not) N.C.G.S. § 115C-378 must be justified by effective research, policy, and cost benefit findings and result in a comprehensive strategic plan.

Conclusion

The Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impacts of raising the compulsory public school attendance age reached consensus that we need to improve upon the many successes North Carolina has had by creating a sound educational environment that provides ALL students the skills and habits of mind to meet and exceed graduation requirements and to become productive citizens. In order to more comprehensively prepare students for the competitive workforce that is increasingly impacted by national and global dynamics, we need to improve the system that serves students by examining our current practices and policies, hiring and retaining great teachers and leaders and strategically working hand in hand with business and other agencies.

On behalf of the North Carolina State Board of Education this report is respectfully submitted to the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee for its consideration.

North Carolina State Board of Education Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impacts of raising the compulsory public school attendance age members

Special gratitude go to the following individuals for their time, commitment, and willingness to serve the NC State Board of Education in this effort. Members are listed below in alphabetical order.

Name	Organization
Susan Brigman	Richmond County Schools-Principal
Dr. Elissa Brown	Department of Public Instruction: Academic Services & Instructional Support
Dr. Lori Bruce	Department of Public Instruction: Title I, Program Monitoring & Support
Rob DiDomenico	Kilpatrick Stockton LLP
Jessica Garner	Teacher Advisor, State Board of Education (2010-2011)
Dr. Jack Hoke	Superintendent Advisor, State Board of Education (2009-2011)
Dr. Robin Jenkins	Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Dr. George Litton	Cleveland County Board of Education
Sheriff Dane Mastin	NC Sheriffs' Association
Cindi Rigsbee	Teacher Advisor, State Board of Education (2009-2010)
Alexis Schauss	Department of Public Instruction: Financial Services Business
Debora Williams	Department of Public Instruction: Special Assistant on Graduation and Dropout Prevention

With special assistance from M. Engin Konanc, NC Department of Public Instruction, School Business Services, Statistical note #17.

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APPENDIX A: Catawba County Champions of Education

A Resolution to Support Raising the Compulsory Public School Attendance Age In North Carolina

Whereas school dropouts hinder economic development and add significantly to the public's tax burden through expenditures for public health, crime prevention, incarceration facilities, and welfare assistance; and

Whereas the lifelong financial earnings potential for school dropouts is significantly less than for students with a high school diploma; and

Whereas today's globally competitive economy requires at least a high school diploma; and

Whereas studies indicate that higher age requirements for school attendance can deter students from dropping out of school, and

Whereas in 2009 Catawba County instituted the Education Matters in Catawba County program for which 80 participating businesses representing over 14,000 employees have adopted or strengthened hiring policies stating they will not hire anyone without a high school diploma or GED equivalent; and

Whereas at least seventeen states and the District of Columbia currently require students to remain in school until they graduate or turn 18, and additional states are considering an increase to age 18; and

Whereas the Governor, the State Legislature, and the State Board of Education have established a Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impact of raising the compulsory public school attendance age in North Carolina, and

Whereas the fiscal impact for local administrative school units in raising the compulsory school age would be minimal due to the fact that North Carolina and counties already provide funding for alternative schooling options and support services that other states have had to initiate in conjunction with increasing age requirements for school attendance;

Be it now resolved

That the Catawba County Champions of Education, a non-profit corporation which— in partnership with local government, schools, and businesses— seeks to be a resource partner in Catawba County and to develop “champions” throughout the community to serve as advocates for education by:

- Raising the level of awareness of the value of education and its link to economic development for all citizens in the county
- Stimulating businesses, government, families and schools to contribute toward the improvement of education, individually and collaboratively

Hereby

Commends the Governor, the State Legislature, and the State Board of Education for commissioning a Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the impact of raising the compulsory public school attendance age in North Carolina, and Encourages the Task Force to recommend that North Carolina require students to attend school until they graduate or reach the age of eighteen.

APPENDIX B: Message: GRADUATE!

This briefing paper describes state and local initiatives designed to increase the North Carolina graduation rate and share some future directions and policy considerations.

Purpose/Rationale

The national high school dropout rate has continued to be a pressing problem for policy makers, schools, and ultimately, society. Even beyond high school, today, more than ever, students require some sort of postsecondary education. The lack of a high school diploma is not only critical to individuals but to the economy of North Carolina and the country. North Carolina specific statistics are as follows:

- If all members of the Class of 2008 had graduated, they would have generated an additional \$10.8 billion in income over the course of their lifetimes (Amos, 2008).
- If the graduation rate for males increased by only five percent, North Carolina would realize \$151.9 billion in savings related to crime, \$80.9 billion in additional earnings by those men, and \$232.8 billion in overall benefits to the state economy (Amos, 2008).
- The state saves \$12,355 per additional graduate on health-related expenses (Amos, 2008).
- If all heads of households were high school graduates, the state's families would have an additional \$2.6 billion in personal wealth (Amos, 2008).
- If all community college students graduated from high school, the community college system would save almost \$100 million in remediation costs (Amos, 2008).

State Graduation Rates Trend Data (2006-2010)

North Carolina's high schools' four- and five-year state cohort graduation rates continued their upward trend in 2010 with 74.2 percent of high school students graduating in four years and 74.7 percent of students graduating in five years. The rate has improved each year since 2006.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Four-Year Rate	68.3%	69.5%	70.3%	71.8%	74.2%
Five-Year Rate		70.3%	71.8%	72.9%	74.7%

DPI Graduation Improvement Targeted Initiatives

Divisions in the Academic Services and Instructional Support area of the Department have provided leadership in the development and implementation of targeted programs and services designed to support improved academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education and careers. Some examples of DPI targeted statewide initiatives and their outcomes are listed in the table below.

DPI Statewide Initiatives	Outcomes
PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention & Support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented in 883 schools and 103 districts across the state, the PBIS process helps schools design optimum environments in which to educate all students. • High schools implementing PBIS have shown a drop in the rate of suspensions from 70 per 100 students in 2004-05 to 30 per 100 students in 2008-09. In addition, 50% of high schools implementing PBIS showed improvement in their graduation rates in 2008-09.

Statewide System of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Transformation Model partners with districts for district and school transformation. Schools with comparable rates receiving transformation services from 2005-2010 showed an average gain of 12.7% on ABCs performance composite.
Career and Technical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and Technical Education provides students with a focused concentration and encourages them to graduate and pursue further education or advanced training. • The graduation rate among students in NC's 2009 four-year cohort who completed a four-credit CTE concentration was 86.7 percent, compared to 71.8 percent among students in the overall cohort.
Early College High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 10,000 students were enrolled in 70 schools that were open in 2009-10 in 63 districts statewide. • Nineteen of the schools had graduating classes in 2010, with a combined four- or five-year graduation rate of 89.9 percent. Approximately 60 percent of the graduating students earned associate degrees.

Broader DPI Initiatives that Impact Graduation

Improving graduation rates requires a comprehensive plan of support that begins in the early years and spans the entire educational experience. The following initiatives provide the necessary foundation and/or support in order to implement targeted approaches.

DPI Statewide Initiatives	Foundations and Supports
More at Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on language/literacy, math, general knowledge and social skills. • Results suggest a positive impact on language and literacy development for children during pre-k. • Prepares students to develop more advanced reading skills in kindergarten and beyond. • More at Four participants score significantly higher in reading at Grade 3 than those who did not participate in the program.
FirstSchool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-K – Grade 3 initiative working intensively with four elementary schools. • Focus on positive accelerated learning experiences of vulnerable children in the early grades.
School Improvement Grants (SIG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty-four schools in eighteen school districts received SIGs allocating resources to implement comprehensive reform interventions and supports to improve persistently low-achieving schools.
Responsiveness to Instruction (Rtl)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes student achievement and reduces behavior problems.
Family and Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance to families and community groups in facilitating better communication with schools. • Assists schools and school districts in identifying and developing programs and strategies to assist and support family and community engagement. • Customized support for academic achievement.
Technology Immersion Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful projects focus on educational goals supported by technology. • Teachers' use of technology for teaching and learning increased student engagement. • Graduation rates for most participating high schools increased, on average, between 1% and 2%. (www.fi.ncsu.edu)

LEA Initiatives

LEAs continue to innovate and implement programs and services designed to foster students' academic and social engagement in learning. As a result, many LEAs have implemented best practices with regard to preventing students from dropping out. The following table highlights those efforts.

Type of Best Practice	Examples	Sample Sites
Smaller Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Academies • Specialized High Schools • Early/Middle Colleges • Freshman Academies 	Highland School of Technology Central Academy of Technology and Arts South Granville School of Business
Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Coaches • Life Coaches • Literacy Coaches • Graduation Coaches 	Durham Public Schools Edenton-Chowan Schools Orange County Schools Madison County Schools
Customized and Alternative Learning Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways Program • Credit Recovery • Engineering is Elementary 	Beaufort County Schools Harnett County Schools New Hanover County Schools

External Contributing Partners

The Department of Public Instruction has many partners who collaborate to increase the graduation rate. The following partners are those who provide either direct funding or specialized programs for students in collaboration with DPI to increase the graduation rate.

Partner	Collaborative Support Effort
NC General Assembly	Dropout Prevention Grants to support programs and initiatives that target students at risk of dropping out of school.
Communities In Schools of North Carolina	Performance Learning Centers (PLCs) designed to enable students whose academic success may be threatened, to become successful students who are prepared to move to the next level educationally, vocationally and as citizens.
NC Community College System	Multiple programs and/or schools in which students earn high school and college credit as well as options for career credentialing.
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, UNC-CH	FirstSchool (Pre-K – Grade 3) initiative works intensively with four elementary schools to focus on the school experiences for vulnerable children in the early grades.
LEARNNC, UNC-CH	Lesson plans created by North Carolina educators as well as high-quality materials from state and national partners. Learning materials include text and multimedia on all areas of the curriculum used to supplement or replace a traditional textbook.
New Schools Project	Partners with teachers and administrators in 72 districts to build the essential knowledge and expertise required for educators to challenge and support students so they finish high school ready for college, career and life.
NC Virtual Public School	Offers over 72 courses including Advanced Placement (AP), world language, and credit recovery courses to students across the state.
NC Parent/Teacher Association (NC PTA)	Family Resource Guide that helps families help their children to succeed in school and work effectively with teachers and principals.
NC Division of Public Health, NC DHHS	Collaborative support to increase and sustain state and local level capacity to decrease educational and health disparities and increase academic achievement and graduation rates for all students through a Coordinated School Health approach.

Future Strategic Initiatives

In addition to current state and local initiatives, plans are underway for future efforts. Some of them are listed below.

- **Race to the Top:** NC's Race to the Top award will enhance initiatives designed to graduate every student ready for a career, two- or four-year college, or technical training; support curriculum and accountability systems that reflect internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments; robust data systems; effective instructional and administrative systems; and support for lowest-achieving schools.
- **USED Grant:** Ongoing efforts to increase the graduation rate include the submission of a USED grant, entitled, *Back on Track.PR*, which targets economically disadvantaged students who attend schools which have the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates in the state (*Back on Track.P*), and students who have dropped out and enrolled in a community college program for dropout re-entry, but are at serious risk of not completing the program (*Back on Track.R*).
- **Early Warning Systems:** DPI has been working with SAS on the development and deployment of graduation resiliency software which would enable LEAs to use selected data collected in

NCWISE identified as the key risk factors contributing to potential dropouts to target specific interventions to students or groups of students as prevention measures and support mechanisms.

- **“What Works”**: DPI collects and reports on annual dropout data but to date, no systematic process is in place to collect and showcase practices which decrease the dropout rate and improve graduation rates. As a result, DPI will develop a mechanism to collect and report “What works” with respect to dropout prevention.
- **Advisory Groups**: DPI will form an internal roundtable of agency representatives to promote research-based practices to reduce achievement gaps and increase graduation rates. An external group of stakeholders will be convened to challenge the examination of policies that may have unintended outcomes that impede rather than facilitate student achievement.

Policy Considerations

Although many efforts are underway at state and local levels to increase the graduation rate, problems still persist. There are local and state policies and practices which may be contributing to the dropout issue and precluding students from graduating. Closer attention and consideration should be given to the following state or local issues:

- Attendance Policies
- Zero Tolerance Policies
- Grading Policies
- In-School and Out-of-School Suspension Policies
- Compulsory School Attendance Age

Amos, J. (2008, August). *Dropouts, diplomas, and dollars: U.S. high schools and the nation's economy*. Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>.

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