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## Mississippi Kids Count: High School Graduation Rates

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**Mississippi Kids Count:  
High School Graduation Rates  
Prepared Fall 2010**

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**Table of Contents:**

INTRODUCTION .....	2
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN MISSISSIPPI .....	5
BEST PRACTICES IN OTHER STATES .....	8

## I. Introduction

Though national dropout rates have generally fallen over the past twenty years,<sup>1</sup> almost 1.2 million students in the United States drop out of school each year, representing nearly one-third of high school students.<sup>2</sup> At about 61%, Mississippi's high school graduation rate falls slightly below the national figure,<sup>3</sup> though school districts in the Mississippi Delta fare particularly poorly. Five of the ten districts with the highest four-year dropout rates in the state are located in Delta region counties: Leflore, Tallahatchie, Sunflower, Tunica, and Panola Counties.<sup>4</sup>

Mississippi's demographic statistics in terms of dropouts are consistent with national trends. A disproportionate number of high school dropouts nationwide are from disadvantaged demographic groups. For example, only 55% of Latino and 51% of black students graduate from high school,<sup>5</sup> and the gap between minority students and white students can be as high as 50 percentage points.<sup>6</sup> Other groups generally at risk for dropping out include members of single-parent households,<sup>7</sup> students of low socioeconomic status,<sup>8</sup> and students with limited English-proficiency.<sup>9</sup>

Recent studies of high school dropouts note the significant role of "dropout factories" in contributing to these figures. Researchers have identified approximately 2000 schools that reliably produce half of the nation's high school dropouts, and demographics at these dropout factories further reinforce the relationship between race and dropout rate. Located primarily in urban areas and throughout the South and Southwest, dropout factory high schools produce 73% of African-American and 66% of Latino dropouts, but only 34% of their white counterparts.<sup>10</sup> Forty-nine of these dropout factories are located in Mississippi and represent over one quarter of the state's high schools.<sup>11</sup>

High school dropouts in Mississippi and elsewhere face serious disadvantages in income and employment outlook for both the short and long term. For the class of 2009, just five months after graduation, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that high school graduates not attending

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<sup>1</sup> *The Condition of Education 2010*, U.S. DEPT. OF EDUC., NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Issue Brief, *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2007), <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Fact Sheet, *Understanding High School Graduation Rates in Mississippi*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2009).

<sup>4</sup> *Dropout/Graduation Rate Information*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout\\_Prevention/rate\\_information\\_1.html](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout_Prevention/rate_information_1.html) (click "4-Year DISTRICT-LEVEL COMPREHENSIVE Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Data.") (last visited November 26, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Dugger, *Why We Care About High School Dropouts*, RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH, Sept. 1, 2010, [www2.timesdispatch.com/news/2010/sep/01/ed-dugger01-ar-481620](http://www2.timesdispatch.com/news/2010/sep/01/ed-dugger01-ar-481620).

<sup>6</sup> Fact Sheet, *High School Dropouts in America*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Sandra L. Christenson & Martha L. Thurlow, *School Dropouts: Prevention Considerations, Interventions, and Challenges*, 13.1 CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE, 36, 36-39 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> David Levinson, Peter W. Cookson, & Alan R. Sadovnik, EDUCATION AND SOCIOLOGY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA at 316 (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Balfanz, *Locating and Transforming the Low Performing High Schools Which Produce the Nation's Dropouts*, CTR. FOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS AT JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, (PowerPoint Presentation 2007), <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Balfanz.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *Mississippi High Schools*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2009).

college had a 70% participation rate in the labor force, which is the proportion of the population either working or actively looking for work. High school dropouts' labor force participation rate, by contrast, was only 48.5%. Similarly, only 35% of 2009 high school graduates were actually unemployed, compared to over 55% of high school dropouts.<sup>12</sup> Data from the most recent census indicates that over the course of their lifetimes, high school dropouts make nearly \$10,000 less in income per year compared to high school graduates, a figure that only increases when compared to two-year college graduates, four-year college graduates, and those with advanced degrees.<sup>13</sup>

Because “living wages and benefits have virtually disappeared for students without a high school diploma,”<sup>14</sup> the resulting costs to society due to underemployment, welfare programs, and other factors are significant. Each dropout costs an additional \$260,000 in public funding over their lifetimes when compared to high school graduates.<sup>15</sup> This toll adds up – it is estimated that dropouts account for an additional \$8 billion each year in expenditures on food stamps and other public assistance programs.<sup>16</sup> Healthcare represents a significant proportion of these additional costs. Dropouts are less likely to be employed in positions with comprehensive health insurance coverage and, as a result, receive less medical care and experience poorer health outcomes.<sup>17</sup> A 2006 study of the relationship between high school dropouts and state Medicaid expenses found that each high school dropout in Mississippi costs the state nearly \$8,000 in lifetime Medicaid costs.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, if the state had been able to graduate all of its students in the class of 2006, it would have saved over \$121 million in Medicaid costs over the students' lifetimes.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the students would enjoy an additional \$4 billion in income,<sup>20</sup> a figure that increases to \$4.2 billion for the Mississippi dropouts in the class of 2009.<sup>21</sup>

High dropout rates also significantly affect crime and incarceration. An estimated 60% of federal inmates are high school dropouts,<sup>22</sup> and data from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice indicates that high school dropouts are about three times as likely to be incarcerated as are high school graduates.<sup>23</sup> Statistics become even more sobering when one takes race into account. A recent California study found that the largest increase in national incarceration rates is for black male high school dropouts, and an astonishing 90% of these dropouts between the ages of 45 and

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<sup>12</sup> *College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2009 High School Graduates*, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgsec.nr0.htm> (2010)

<sup>13</sup> *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 2

<sup>14</sup> Christenson & Thurlow, *supra* note 7

<sup>15</sup> *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 2

<sup>16</sup> *High School Dropouts in America*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 6

<sup>17</sup> Issue Brief, *Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2006).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Muennig, *State-Level Health Cost-Savings Associated with Improvements in High School Graduation Rates*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (2006)

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 2

<sup>21</sup> *Mississippi High Schools*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 11

<sup>22</sup> Bill Whitaker, *High School Dropouts Costly for American Economy*, CBS NEWS (May 28, 2010), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/28/eveningnews/main6528227.shtml>

<sup>23</sup> Stefanie Thomas, *High School Dropouts More Prone to a Life of Crime*, DEER PARK BROADCASTER NEWS (Apr. 04, 2010),

[http://www.hcnonline.com/articles/2010/04/17/deer\\_park\\_broadcaster/news/041510\\_hhysdropoutcrime.txt](http://www.hcnonline.com/articles/2010/04/17/deer_park_broadcaster/news/041510_hhysdropoutcrime.txt)

54 are estimated to have served a prison term sometime in the last decade.<sup>24</sup> The good news is that even modest improvements in the dropout rate could significantly mitigate these figures. One study estimates that increasing the male high school graduation rate by only 5% would save the nation \$4.9 billion per year in crime-related costs.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the failure to graduate more students from high school represents significant opportunity costs for state and local governments. Dropouts with lower incomes can contribute less through taxation. One study indicates that each high school dropout pays \$60,000 less in taxes than a high school graduate over the dropout's lifetime.<sup>26</sup> However, high dropout rates also affect states in less quantifiable ways; for example, a chronically undereducated workforce often struggles to attract new businesses and investors to the region.<sup>27</sup> For all these reasons, it is crucial that Mississippi address the problem of high school dropouts as an important step toward making headway in various other economic development issues in the state.

## II. High School Graduation Rates in Mississippi

### The State of Graduation Rates in Mississippi

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2008, Mississippi's public high school graduation rate was below the national average.<sup>28</sup> Mississippi's graduation rate was 61% in 2009.<sup>29</sup> A more detailed look at the statistics behind Mississippi's graduation rate provides a fuller perspective. In 2008, the graduation rate for Whites (67%) was 14% below the national average for Whites while the graduation rate for Blacks (60.5%) was 1% below the national average for Blacks.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Mississippi is similar to the rest of the country in that there is an achievement gap regarding graduation rates between its White and Black populations. However, the disparity is not as great as the national average. Breaking the numbers down by grade level adds another layer of nuance: Mississippi's dropout rates for 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> graders exceed the national averages for dropouts in each of these grades.<sup>31</sup> However, the dropout rate for 12<sup>th</sup> graders falls well below the national average for 12<sup>th</sup> grade dropouts (4% in the state compared to 6.1% nationally).<sup>32</sup> These numbers should help focus efforts to graduate more Mississippi students: once they get to twelfth grade, they tend to finish school.

### The Consequences of Mississippi's Graduation Rates

While it is commonly known that low graduation rates vastly reduce earning potential (*see supra* note 13), Mississippi's low rates have other, less obvious consequences. Low graduation rates have a direct impact on health care costs and crime-related costs within the state. Mississippi has about "168,000 high school dropouts on Medicaid, costing the state more than \$208 million

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<sup>24</sup> Steven Raphael, *The Socioeconomic Status of Black Males: The Increasing Importance of Incarceration, in* POVERTY, THE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME, AND PUBLIC POLICY 319 (Alan Auerbach, David Card, and John Quigley eds., 2006).

<sup>25</sup> *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 2

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Understanding High School Graduation Rates in Mississippi*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC., *supra* note 3

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> Robert Stillwell, *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data; School Year 2007-08* U.S. DEPT. OF EDUC., NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS (2010), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010341.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

annually.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the Alliance for Excellent Education has found that “were Mississippi to increase the graduation rate and college matriculation of its male students by only 5 percent, the state could see combined savings and revenue of almost \$93 million each year in crime related expenses.”<sup>34</sup> Between lost revenue and added costs for welfare and incarceration, high school dropouts cost the state over \$458 million per year.<sup>35</sup>

### Addressing the Problem

#### *The Office of Dropout Prevention*

In 2006, the Mississippi legislature directly addressed the state’s graduation rate problem by creating the Office of Dropout Prevention and by mandating that all school districts implement a dropout prevention program by the 2008 school year.<sup>36</sup> The Office’s top goal is to raise the state graduation rate to at least 85% by the 2018-2019 school year.<sup>37</sup>

The Office established a State Dropout Plan shortly after it was created. The State Dropout Prevention Plan puts forth the following strategies:

- Facilitating the development of Dropout Prevention Teams and Dropout Prevention Plans in every school district by giving districts “the framework and required components for the development of the Local District Dropout Prevention Plan”
- Providing training opportunities to local districts to assist with their Dropout Prevention Plans
- Creating a public relations dropout prevention awareness campaign,
- Compiling data on graduation rates from the local districts.<sup>38</sup>

The Leflore County School District Dropout Prevention Plan provides an example of the approaches to the problem that school districts are taking under the guidance of the Office of Dropout Prevention. Leflore County’s dropout prevention initiatives include:

- “Right Track,” a program providing extra guidance to seventh and eighth grade students struggling academically or socially
- “Jobs for Mississippi Graduates,” a program teaching job skills
- Abstinence Education Program
- Teen Parenting Program
- Redesigning Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Work Force.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Facts and Statistics, ON THE BUS: MISSISSIPPI’S DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM (2008)*, [http://www.onthebus.ms/facts\\_and\\_stats.html](http://www.onthebus.ms/facts_and_stats.html).

<sup>34</sup> *Five Percent Increase in Male Graduation Rate Could Save Mississippi Millions in Crime Related Spending*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. (Aug. 2006), <http://www.all4ed.org/files/SavingFutures.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> *Facts and Statistics, ON THE BUS*, *supra* note 33

<sup>36</sup> MISS. CODE § 37-13-80.

<sup>37</sup> *Office of Dropout Prevention & Compulsory School Attendance*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout\\_prevention/](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout_prevention/)

<sup>38</sup> *State Dropout Prevention Plan: 2007-2019*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout\\_prevention/Dropout%20Prevention%20Plan%20-%20Final.pdf](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout_prevention/Dropout%20Prevention%20Plan%20-%20Final.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Willie Jean Hall & Roy Curry, *Leflore Country School District Dropout Prevention Plan*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout\\_Prevention/superintendent/Leflore5.pdf](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Dropout_Prevention/superintendent/Leflore5.pdf). See also *Office of Dropout Prevention District Plans*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout\\_prevention/plan.htm](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout_prevention/plan.htm) (containing PDF versions of all district plans throughout the state).

Many districts' local dropout prevention plans specifically include reference to early childhood education as part of the long-term strategy for keeping kids in school. For example, the Greenville Public School District lists its Pre-Kindergarten program as a current initiative contributing to its dropout prevention plan.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the South Delta School District's plan includes Pre-Kindergarten in each of its "15 Dropout Prevention Strategies."<sup>41</sup>

In addition to facilitating these local dropout prevention plans, the Office of Dropout Prevention has created the On The Bus campaign. The On The Bus Campaign, which began in 2008, has released television, print, and radio advertisements and launched a website all aimed at raising public awareness of the graduation rate issue and building public support for the state's efforts.<sup>42</sup> The University of Arkansas' Arkansas Safe Schools Initiative considers Mississippi's comprehensive dropout prevention program, particularly On the Bus, a model approach to solving the dropout problem.<sup>43</sup>

### *Alternative Education Programs*

Mississippi law requires each school district to operate an alternative school system for students with major behavioral issues so as to facilitate such students' continuing education despite their (at least temporary) inability to participate in mainstream schools.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the state Department of Education contains within it the Office of Vocational and Technical Education (OVTE), which licenses and provides resources for various vocational education programs throughout the state.<sup>45</sup> These programs are offered in over 500 Mississippi schools, and upon completion students obtain national industry certifications.<sup>46</sup>

While the OVTE encourages vocational programs throughout the state, it does not presently include wholly alternative options for students who drop out of mainstream high school programs to obtain high school diplomas. However, the Department of Education's Career Pathways program more directly links vocational training to the goal of dropout prevention.<sup>47</sup> The Pathways program aims to provide students with alternative school hours, online vocational training, a personalized learning environment, and a "relevant connection between school and work" in order to keep them in school even if they are not in traditional programs.<sup>48</sup> School districts can choose to implement individual "pathways" in several vocational training areas, including business (information technology, management, and/or marketing), health sciences, construction, and several other fields.<sup>49</sup> The program is promising, but districts must opt in to

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<sup>40</sup> *Office of Dropout Prevention District Plans*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout\\_prevention/plan.htm](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout_prevention/plan.htm) (click "Greenville School District")

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* (click "South Delta School District")

<sup>42</sup> *A Model Approach: Dropout Prevention in Mississippi*, ARKANSAS SAFE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE (2010), [http://www.arsafeschools.com/dropoutpreventionsafety/Mississippi\\_2-25-09.pdf](http://www.arsafeschools.com/dropoutpreventionsafety/Mississippi_2-25-09.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> MISS. CODE § 37-13-92

<sup>45</sup> *Office of Vocational & Technical Education*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/vocational/OVTE/>

<sup>46</sup> *Schools*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC. OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL & TECHNICAL EDUC., <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/vocational/schools/>

<sup>47</sup> *Redesigning Education: Goals (Goal 3)*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC., <http://redesign.rcu.msstate.edu/GOALS/>

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Career Pathway Training Information*, MISS. DEPT. OF EDUC. (Apr. 19, 2010), <http://redesign.rcu.msstate.edu/Pathways/>

participate. In addition, districts and individuals must share some of the costs of implementing the program, which may serve as a deterrent to widespread participation.

### III. Best Practices in Other States

Many states have taken measures to improve their high school graduation rates, with some states experiencing success and others remaining relatively stagnant. However, states in both categories have developed promising and noteworthy policies and programs. The primary objectives of these measures are to provide more opportunities and incentives for students to stay in school, encourage those who dropped out to reenroll, identify the students that are most at risk of dropping out, and incentivize schools to keep students in the classroom and to recover those students who have already dropped out.

#### Dropout prevention strategies

##### *1. Have an early impact on students*

An important factor in preventing students from dropping out is to reach students before they get to high school. Research has shown that reducing class sizes from twenty five to fifteen students from kindergarten through third grade corresponds to an increase in graduation rates of eleven percentage points.<sup>50</sup> Even more striking, one study found that attending a quality preschool would improve graduation rates among disadvantaged students from 41 percent to 66 percent.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, a comprehensive approach to increasing high school graduation rates must necessarily include a focus on early childhood education.

Additionally, to help ensure that at-risk students are given the proper resources and attention before they drop out, it is crucial to have a mechanism for flagging these students. Louisiana has an early warning data system that identifies students who are deemed to be at risk of dropping out.<sup>52</sup> The system flags a student if he is absent for ten percent of his enrolled days, if he receives disciplinary action on seven percent of his enrolled days, if his grade point average is 1.00 or less or has dropped by at least 0.50, or if he is over-age for his grade.<sup>53</sup>

##### *2. Provide novel incentives to students*

Tennessee has recently seen major improvements in its freshman graduation rates. In the period from 2002-2008, the graduation rate rose nearly twelve points.<sup>54</sup> This amazing progress can be at least partially attributed to some creative state policies. State law requires students to make satisfactory academic progress or else have their driver licenses suspended.<sup>55</sup> Satisfactory progress is defined as passing at least three of four classes or five of seven classes, depending on

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Princiotta & Ryan Ryena, *Achieving Graduation for All: A Governor's Guide to Dropout Prevention and Recovery* at 26, NAT'L GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION FOR BEST PRACTICES (2009), <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF>.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 23

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> Stillwell, *supra* note 30 at 9

<sup>55</sup> TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-3017 (2010).



the type of schedule.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, a student's license is suspended if he or she has ten consecutive unexcused absences or a cumulative total of fifteen unexcused absences.<sup>57</sup>

### 3. *Provide more options and resources for students*

Georgia is another of Mississippi's southern neighbors that has experienced gains in graduation rates, with an increase of approximately 5 points from 2002-2008.<sup>58</sup> Georgia has instituted a number of promising prevention programs and policies. In 2006, Georgia provided funding for a "graduation coach" for each high school in the state.<sup>59</sup> The role of graduation coaches includes connecting students to mentoring, tutoring, and life skills programming, as well as intervening with school attendance issues.<sup>60</sup> In the 2007-2008 school year, graduation coaches worked with almost 35,000 students who had poor attendance, and successfully got over 13,700 of those students back to regular attendance.<sup>61</sup>

Georgia's Department of Education also operates Georgia Virtual School, which offers high school courses online to all Georgia public school students.<sup>62</sup> Students may take up to 1.0 Carnegie unit of online courses free of charge as part of their state reported school day, and they may also take additional courses for tuition.<sup>63</sup> Depending on the attendance policies of the local school or district, students may have the option of taking the online courses off-campus and on their own schedule.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Georgia offers a credit recovery program through the virtual school, in which students can work to earn credit for courses that they failed.<sup>65</sup> The credit recovery program offers options for after school, intersession, and summer school programs.<sup>66</sup>

### 4. *Increase accountability and incentives for schools*

A factor contributing to Tennessee's increased graduation rates is that the state set a high benchmark for improvement, aiming for a 90% graduation rate by the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>67</sup> The state held local principals accountable for improving their schools and working toward this goal.<sup>68</sup> The number of percentage points needed for each school to reach 90% graduation was evenly apportioned across ten years, and each school had to steadily increase its graduation rates by the apportioned amount in order to make adequate yearly progress.<sup>69</sup>

Another strategy is to provide a state accountability system that incentivizes schools to retain students rather than letting them drop out. The Louisiana Graduation Index, which was created in

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<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> Stillwell, *supra* note 30, at 9

<sup>59</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 26-27.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 26

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 27

<sup>62</sup> *Georgia Virtual School*, GA. DEPT. OF EDUC., <http://gavirtualschool.org/>

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 36.

<sup>66</sup> *Georgia Virtual School*, GA. DEPT. OF EDUC., <http://www.gavirtualschool.org/CreditRecovery/> (follow "Suggested Best Practices" hyperlink).

<sup>67</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 20.

<sup>68</sup> *National Rankings Show Tenn. High Schools with Rise in Grad Rates*, WEAKLEY COUNTY PRESS, Sept. 23, 2010, <http://www.nwtntoday.com/news.php?viewStory=46476>

<sup>69</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 20.

2007, seeks to reward schools for preventing dropouts.<sup>70</sup> Under this accountability system, seventy percent of the school's state accountability score is based on test performance and thirty percent is based on students graduating.<sup>71</sup> Schools receive points for students who remain in school, even if they do not graduate within four years, but are penalized for each student that drops out.<sup>72</sup> By treating graduation rates as part of the accountability system as opposed to solely relying on test scores, the state has given schools an incentive to keep struggling students in the classroom as opposed to letting them drop out for the sake of increasing the schools' average test scores.

##### *5. Help to ensure juvenile delinquents reenter school after release from confinement*

Some states have also sought to ease the transition process for juvenile offenders who seek to return to school. Nationally, most youth who are incarcerated in juvenile detention centers do not return to school after leaving confinement.<sup>73</sup> The rates of delinquents failing to reenter school may range from two-thirds in New York City to 95% in the state of Kentucky.<sup>74</sup> In combating this problem, important considerations include making sure each juvenile receives a timely school placement, his or her family is involved in the reenrollment process, and the interagency roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.<sup>75</sup> Virginia has enacted policies aimed at addressing these considerations. Virginia's Department of Juvenile Justice must begin the school enrollment process for a juvenile offender one month preceding his or her release.<sup>76</sup> During this time period, the local school authority is notified, the youth and his or her family receive documentation of the enrollment process, and a reenrollment plan is developed regarding the youth's placement and academic program.<sup>77</sup> The primary goal is to ensure that the youth is reenrolled in school within two school days of release.<sup>78</sup>

##### Recover dropouts by making it easier to return to school

An option for encouraging older students to return to school is to increase the maximum allowable age for public education. Mississippi's upper age limit on public high school attendance is twenty one.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, Texas has an age limit of twenty six, while Indiana and Massachusetts have no upper age limit on public high school enrollment.<sup>80</sup>

A promising strategy is to provide incentives for educational entities to recover dropouts. A noteworthy approach is seen in Texas. Texas Education Agency created a Dropout Recovery Pilot Program in 2008, whose mission is to identify and recover students who have dropped out of Texas public schools and to provide them with the resources to earn a high school diploma or

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<sup>70</sup> *Id.* at 19

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at 20

<sup>73</sup> Brock, L., O'Cummings, M., and Milligan, D., *Transitional Toolkit 2.0: Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System (2008)*, [http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/docs/transition\\_toolkit200808/full\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/docs/transition_toolkit200808/full_toolkit.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 31

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 37-45-1

<sup>80</sup> Princiotta & Ryena, *supra* note 50, at 18

to demonstrate college readiness.<sup>81</sup> Entities such as school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, nonprofit organizations, and Education Service Centers may apply for incentive-based grant funding of up to \$2,000 per student above the base state funding: \$1,000 for meeting certain benchmarks along the way (such as moving on to the next grade), and an additional \$1,000 for graduating or demonstrating college readiness (such as earning a diploma or GED plus college credit).<sup>82</sup> This grant funding provides monetary incentives for these entities to recover dropouts, get them back in the classroom, and ensure that they are performing adequately and making progress.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The full range of approaches taken by various states to combat dropout rates deserves strong consideration for implementation within Mississippi. Some of the measures involve minimal costs for the state, while other programs would require a more substantial investment. However, the cost of ensuring that the state has an educated and skilled citizenry pales in comparison to the various costs associated with maintaining a significant portion of the population that is unable to fill important jobs or attract economic development.

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<sup>81</sup> *Dropout Recovery Pilot Program*, TEX. EDUC. AGENCY (2010), <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3686>

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*