

10 of California High Schools Considered Dropout Factories

Written by Robert ID4568

Tuesday, 09 December 2008 22:02 -

"10% of California's high schools are considered dropout factories -- schools where more than 60 percent of the freshman class fails to graduate in four years".

Campaign for High School Equity Calls on California and Federal Policy Makers to Address Dropout Crisis.

Civil rights coalition releases white paper emphasizing inequities in education; high school accountability, data reporting, and student performance among policy reform priorities.

The Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), a coalition of leading civil rights groups working for education reform, gathered education and civil rights leaders at a policy briefing to discuss recommendations from its white paper, "High School Policy Reform: A Plan for Success."

At the briefing, held to coincide with the California School Boards Association's annual education conference, CHSE sent an urgent message to state legislators and Congress: Education policies that hold high schools accountable and give schools the resources to adequately prepare students for college and the modern workforce are necessary to improve graduation rates, reverse dropout trends, and strengthen the economy.

The California dropout crisis has reached epidemic proportions, which is reflective of national trends. Ten percent of California's high schools are considered dropout factories -- schools where more than 60 percent of the freshman class fails to graduate in four years. And while 70 percent of all California students graduate, two out of every five African American and Latino students do not, and more than 50 percent of California's Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong students did not graduate in 2000 according to the California Department of Education. Nationwide, only 50 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native, 55 percent of African American, and 57 percent of Latino students graduate from high school each year compared to more than 75 percent of white students.

"The economic crisis that is looming large in California and across the country is inextricably connected to education policy," said Michael Wotorson, CHSE executive director. "A high-quality high school education represents real dollars and employability, especially vital to

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the financial health of California, a state that has one of the world's largest economies. We can't afford to wait any longer for education policies that hold high schools accountable for graduating every student and preparing them for college and the 21st century workplace."

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, the nearly 162,000 non-graduates from California's class of 2008 will forgo more than \$40 billion in lifetime earnings. If California can raise the graduation and college enrollment rates of students of color to the levels of their white peers by 2020, the state would see more than \$101 billion injected into its economy. Nationally, the same increase in graduation rates would add, conservatively, more than \$310.4 billion to the U.S. economy.

Jack O'Connell, superintendent, California Department of Public Instruction; Ramón Miramontes, dean of Academic Affairs, Los Angeles Southwest College and Los Angeles district director, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC); Ray King, president and CEO, Urban League of San Diego County; Phoumy Sayavong, PhD, senior researcher, Oakland Unified School District; and Carmen Iniguez, statewide campaign director, Californians for Justice, joined Wotorson and political, education, and civil rights leaders from across California at the briefing, where they emphasized the importance of high school reform.

"High School Policy Reform: A Plan for Success," offers specific policy recommendations to eliminate the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for every student. These recommendations include:

-- requiring the public reporting of data broken down by racial and ethnic background in order to highlight subgroups of students;

-- holding high schools accountable for increasing graduation rates for all student subgroups and considering graduation rates on an equal footing with high-quality assessments aligned to college and work readiness;

-- improving student reading and math skills without sacrificing access to high-level academic subjects;

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-- giving students excellent teachers, and helping parents play a greater role in their children's education; and

-- ensuring that federal policy provides sufficient resources to serve the needs of all students, including English language learners.

"The No Child Left Behind Act and other legislative vehicles provide systems to improve educational opportunities for every student, especially students of color," said Brent A. Wilkes, executive director of LULAC, a CHSE partner. "For example, California can ensure that students of color in high-need schools have access to the same quality instruction as students in affluent areas by gathering and openly reporting school data that show differences in achievement and graduation rates by race, ethnicity, and income.

CHSE is a coalition of leading civil rights organizations representing communities of color that is focused on high school education reform. Members include the National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.