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Texas leading the way to address challenge of reducing dropouts

AUSTIN –A new report on dropout prevention and recovery called *Achieving Graduation for All* released today by the National Governors Association noted that Texas is implementing many of the necessary steps recommended to tackle the dropout problem.

The report calls for state policy makers and departments of education to institute four actions that will help improve graduation rates:

1. *Promote high school graduation for all* by raising the maximum compulsory and allowable school attendance ages, counting graduation rates in accountability systems, and assigning responsibility for dropout prevention and responsibility;
2. *Target youth at risk of dropping out* by creating early warning data systems to identify students who are likely to drop out and supporting efforts to provide students with effective intervention and support;
3. *Reengage youth who have dropped out of school* by creating incentives for dropout recovery, employing outreach strategies to reengage dropouts, and establishing re-entry programs; and
4. *Provide rigorous, relevant options for earning a high school diploma* by turning around low-performing schools and awarding credit for performance, not seat time.

“One student who drops out is one dropout too many,” Gov. Perry said. “Working with legislators, educators and community leaders, Texas has taken deliberate steps to decrease the dropout rate to ensure students have a chance to succeed, and we will continue working together to apply innovative approaches to keep our students in the classroom and on the path to success.”

Texas is one of only 20 states with a maximum compulsory attendance age of 18, and in 2007, Texas passed legislation allowing individuals up to age 26 to attend public schools to promote high school graduation for all and reengage students who have dropped out. With these laws, Texas makes a strong statement that dropping out of school is not an option.

In addition, Texas holds schools and districts accountable by including dropout rates and graduation rates into our state accountability system. The NGA recommends that states not only calculate their dropout rate, but calculate the cohort dropout rate, which measures the proportion

of students in a certain cohort who left school in a defined period of time. Texas is one of 22 states that calculate and publicly report dropout rates based on cohort data and one of only 15 states that factor the four-year cohort graduation rates (called completion rates) into our state accountability system.

The report notes that the cohort rate is the most accurate means of portraying the dropout problem because it is based on longitudinal data. For the class of 2008 cohort, Texas had a graduation rate of 79.1 percent.

“Texas believes that it’s important to hold schools accountable for students who drop out and that accountability has produced gains in the fight for our children’s future,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott.

To target students at-risk of dropping out, Texas has fostered the development of numerous dropout prevention programs that provide academic and social services to help them stay in school and earn a high school diploma. Dropout prevention programs and services are targeted to the needs of students at-risk of dropping out of school at every stage of their education—from early childhood programs to summer learning to 9th grade transition programs. Just a few of the many dropout prevention and recovery programs, grants and initiatives provided in Texas include:

- [9th Grade Transition](#)
- [Collaborative Dropout Reduction Pilot Program](#)
- [Communities In Schools \(CIS\)](#)
- [Dropout Recovery](#)
- [Intensive Summer Programs](#)
- [Intensive Technology-Based Academic Intervention Pilot](#)
- [Texas GEAR UP](#)

A complete list of dropout prevention and recovery programs and strategies is located on the Texas Education Agency’s Web site at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4721>.

To ensure that our dropout prevention strategies are effective, Texas commissioned a third party to conduct a study on best practices in dropout prevention. The study identifies programs with the most potential for success in Texas, highly effective dropout prevention programs and strategies, and provides recommendations for legislative and other actions regarding dropout prevention efforts.

The report stated that prevention efforts should be coupled with effective recovery programs because “no matter how effective a state’s dropout prevention efforts, students will invariably fall through the cracks.” To this end, the Texas Education Agency in 2008 created a Dropout Recovery Pilot Program that provides grants to school districts, non-profit education organizations, and education service centers to identify and recruit students who have dropped out of school. Grantees receive \$1,000 for each student who earns a high school diploma, obtains a GED plus college credit, or gains advanced technical credit.

In addition, many school districts have stepped up their dropout recovery efforts with a program called Reach Out to Dropouts. Volunteers, including superintendents and principals, visit the homes of students who do not return to school in the fall. Since 2004, Houston Independent School District has recovered more than 5,500 students with this outreach program.

Though Texas still has much work to do to ensure that every student receives a high school diploma and is college- and career-ready, the evidence demonstrates that we are making significant progress to reduce the dropout rate. With the help of business and industry, educators, volunteers, parents and policymakers, Texas can continue to reduce the dropout rate and increase the number of public school students headed down a clear path to success.

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