



**James M. Jeffords Center's
Vermont Legislative Research Service**
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Graduation Rates & Apprenticeship Programs

In 2008, U.S. high school graduation rates climbed to 72%. This is the highest percentage seen in the U.S. over the past 20 years, set of policies or practices adopted to explain these improvements, but each state did make reforms such as increasing the legal dropout age, creating small learning communities in large high schools, increasing the number of disabled students who receive diplomas, and making increasing graduation rates a priority.

³ Some states are also implementing apprenticeship programs as a strategy to increase graduation rates.

Table 1: High School Graduation Rates in 2002 and 2006 and the Percent Increase. EMC Tf 0 Tc 5.665

	79	85	5.3%
Arkansas	75	80	
		72	3.6%
New York	64	67	3.5%

¹ EPE Research Center, "Diplomas Count 2011" Press Release, Education Week 30 (2011), accessed January 2, 2012, http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2011/06/09/index.html?intc=EWDC11_FL1

72

76

3.4%

Disabilities

From 2004-2007, 28 states increased their graduation requirements for receiving a diploma for both students with and without disabilities. All 50 states and the District of Columbia offered regular diplomas to students with and without disabilities.¹⁶ Special education for students with disabilities can be defined as any academic program aimed at serving students who have mental, physical, or emotional disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed in 2004, regulates most aspects of special education.¹⁷ Under IDEA, "public schools are required to provide special education services for all children with disabilities ages three through twenty one at no cost to the families."¹⁸ Developing appropriate graduation policies and testing approaches for students with disabilities continues to be a challenge for all states. One of the main goals of state education agencies has been to treat students with and without disabilities as equals.¹⁹

A study done for the Center for Public Education researched the number of students with disabilities receiving diplomas. According to the results, the percentage of students served under IDEA who graduated with a regular diploma increased from 41% in 1993 to 57% in 2006.²⁰ While the numbers are low, it has still been an upward trend. The study's findings suggest that "students with disabilities are now more likely to graduate from high school with [some form] of a certificate or academic credential."²¹ Both studies prove that states are becoming more aware of the needs of students with disabilities, thus helping to raise graduation rates.

Graduation Rates as a Priority

Multiple states have vowed to make increased high school graduation rates for every student a state priority. In 2009, the Vermont Department of Education passed Act 44, which included the "One Hundred Percent by 2020" Initiative.²² This act made it a "priority of the general assembly and the department of education to take all necessary measures to increase the Vermont secondary school completion rate to 100% by 2020."²³ The

Other states have set similar goals to help raise their

the program had just as much

cooperatively.”³⁸ While this was only a specific program based in the sciences, it shows that there may be a correlation between field experience such as apprenticeships and increasing student interest in education.

The Canadian Council on Learning conducted a study in 2009 on the impact of experiential learning programs on student success. Apprenticeships emphasize the importance of “hands on,” or experiential learning. The executive summary states that “experiential learning complements students’ academic learning and provides youth with experiences and knowledge that maximize their growth and development while meeting their needs for career exploration.”³⁹ The results of this study suggest that “high school students who experienced any type of EL program demonstrate psycho social benefits in terms of self esteem, engagement in workplaces or schools, socialization and leadership, and motivation.”⁴⁰ The study did not conclusively find a positive connection between experiential learning and academic success, claiming that “it

interest in academia and futur

have been shown to increase the probability of finding post school employment for participating students.⁴⁵ Additionally, students who participate in apprenticeship programs are likely to experience increased self esteem, motivation, and engagement.⁴⁶ States have a variety of tools and methods at their disposal when it comes to increasing graduation rates.

This report was completed on January 2, 2012 by Monica Johnson and Michael Lawliss under the supervision of graduate student Kate Fournier and Professor Anthony Gierzynski in response to a request from the Senate Education Committee.

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Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Anthony Gierzynski. The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.

⁴⁵ David Neumark, "How Effective are School to Career Programs?" Public Policy Institute of California, published May 2004, accessed November 4, 2011, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/RB_504DNRB.pdf.

⁴⁶ Canadian Council on Learning "Impact of Experiential Learning" p. 2.