

GRADUATES Act

“Getting Retention and Diplomas Up Among Today’s Enrolled Students Act”
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“America’s high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don’t just mean that they’re broken, flawed or underfunded, though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean our high schools — even when they’re working as designed — cannot teach all our students what they need to know today.”

Bill Gates, Chairman, Microsoft Corporation
NGA National Education Summit, February 26, 2005

In a world in which a meaningful high school diploma has become the *minimum* qualification necessary to support a good job and family well-being, far too many American students are being allowed to fall off the path to prosperity. These problems have escalated to crisis proportions in thousands of the nation’s high schools and are hampering the opportunities of millions of students, and particularly poor and minority students. Today, only about a third of the students who enter ninth grade each fall will graduate four years later prepared for college or the contemporary workplace. Another third will leave high school with a diploma but without the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in college or the contemporary workplace. And another third will not graduate from high school within four years, if at all.

Without the opportunity to try innovative approaches to increasing student achievement and increasing graduation rates, the nation’s high schools will remain obsolete. Worse, high school students will be ill-prepared to succeed in the 21st century workforce and, therefore, the nation will not be able to compete in a global economy. Secondary schools must be redesigned to prepare every student for college, with rigorous and relevant coursework and with supportive relationships for all students.

The GRADUATES Act provides the appropriate federal role in the creation of innovative secondary school models. The GRADUATES Act would:

- Provide grants to partnerships between state education agencies or local education agencies with institutes of higher education, community based organizations, non-profits, business, or school development organizations to create innovative models of reform in our nation’s secondary schools.
- Create evidence-based, systemic and replicable models of reform in secondary schools that improve student achievement and prepare students to succeed in post-secondary education and the 21st century workforce.
- Provide for tight research, evaluation and accountability to ensure that while the legislation would support a wide-range of strategies, federal funding would only be sustained for programs with proven improvement in student achievement; the Secretary would distribute “best practices” based on the research and evaluation.
- Support a variety of strategies for innovation in secondary schools such as multiple pathways, personalization, early college and dual enrollment, career academies, improved transitions and alignment, expanded learning time, post-secondary and work-based learning opportunities, increased autonomy and flexibility at the school level, improved learning opportunities in rural schools, and increasing rigor at all levels of secondary education aligned with post-secondary education and the workforce.
- Authorize \$500 million in competitive grants for five years.