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A Nation of High School Graduates

The recent 2021 report, *Building a Grad Nation*,¹ documents improvements made over the past decade on high school graduation rates and makes several recommendations.

National Data

In 2019, the national graduation rate reached nearly 86%, marking an all-time high and a seven percentage point increase from 2011 when the graduation rate was 79%.

Ohio Data

During the same eight-year time period, Ohio increased its graduation rate from 80% in 2011 to 82% in 2019 – a relatively modest gain compared to other states. Additionally, Ohio had a 71% graduation rate for low income students, compared to a rate of nearly 90% for non-low-income students – a gap of 18.9%. The graduation rate for Ohio's black students was 69.4% compared to 85.3% for white students, representing a 15.9% gap. Both of these gaps are large compared with the national trends.

When looking at non-graduates, Ohio has room for improvement. The data for Ohio's students with disabilities is disappointing. In 2019, 48% of Ohio's students who did not graduate were those with disabilities, although they represented only 16.3% of the overall cohort of students. Additionally, over 25% of Ohio's non-graduates were from charter high schools and over 10% were from virtual high schools.

Another data point reveals that Ohio experienced a decrease on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math exam in 2018. This is concerning, because eighth-grade math is a strong determinant of success in STEM high school courses and important for those entering STEM job sectors in the future.

The final data point shows that prior to the pandemic, Ohio experienced between 20% to

29% chronic absenteeism (missing 10% of the total days in a school year). Without improving attendance rates and decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate, Ohio will struggle to improve graduation rates.

Stark County Data

Taking a look locally,¹

Stark County districts saw an increase in the graduation rate – from 89.4% in 2011 to 92.6% in 2019. Overall, our schools performed higher than the state averages.



There were clear gaps, however, between Stark students who were economically disadvantaged and those who were not. Ohio Department of Education graduation data reported in 2019 show Stark students from disadvantaged backgrounds were 11.2 percentage points less likely to graduate high school. The graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students was 85.9% while those for whom economics was not an issue was 97.1%.

Similarly, Stark students with disabilities had a graduation rate of 83.7% compared to 94.3% for those without disabilities.

Finally, the graduation rate for Stark's white, non-Hispanic students was 94.6% while in the same year, the non-white graduation rate was 84.2%.

¹ Stark County includes 17 public school districts.

Two Recommendations



Our challenges are many. That is obvious by the data. Too many students are not attending school on a regular basis, and far too many students with disabilities are not graduating. However, with challenges come opportunities, including the following two recommendations from the *Building a Grad Nation* report:

1) Early Warning Data: School systems can and should increase the use of early warning data – such as attendance, behavior, and course performance – known as the “ABCs.” These three data indicators are strong predictors of high school completion.

2) Transition Points: Key transition points include school readiness, third grade reading performance, and eighth grade math performance. All of these should be reviewed routinely to inform educators of needed adjustments to instruction. Additionally, the transition from high school to career or postsecondary settings can be strengthened by providing resources and support in the areas of FAFSA completion, the application process, pathway requirements, access to dual enrollment, increase in work-based learning opportunities, increased exposure to in-demand job sectors, and curriculum and instruction aligned to college requirements and job skills.

Fortunately, Stark County's strengths are many, including our capacity for collaboration and innovation. Together, we can and will work to address these issues and recommendations!

The Stark Education Partnership (a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) collaborates with education, business, civic and community members across the entire spectrum – cradle to career – to create and respond to opportunities that will provide ALL students with education and career success. [View as Webpage](#)

