



# *Educating* **America**

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING ALL YOUTH  
WITH THE EDUCATION THEY NEED FOR ADULT SUCCESS

THE FIRST IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATION AND ATTAINMENT RATES, INCLUDING AT THE STATE AND DISTRICT  
LEVELS

THE GRAD  
**PARTNERSHIP**

Advancing Student  
Success Systems

[GRADPARTNERSHIP.ORG](https://gradpartnership.org)



**Report Release**  
11/19/2024

# About the GRAD Partnership

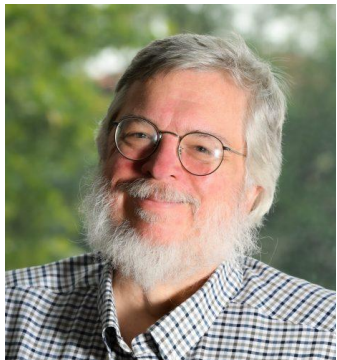
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The GRAD Partnership for Student Success is a coalition of nine organizations partnering with schools, districts, and communities to implement student success systems so that schools are empowered to graduate all students ready for the future.



# Today's Speakers

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**Dr. Robert Balfanz**

Director

Everyone Graduates  
Center (EGC)



**Dr. Saashya Rodrigo**

Principal Researcher

National Center for  
Learning Disabilities  
(NCLD)



**Michael Wotorson**

National Program  
Director

Schott Foundation for  
Public Education

# Educating America: Purpose & Context

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- The GRAD Partnership's first annual report on high school & postsecondary attainments
- Goal: Apprise key stakeholders of nation's and states' current successes and challenges in increasing the educational attainment of all its youth, and putting them on a pathway to adult success.
- Continues and expands role played by the Building a Grad Nation reports from EGC and Civic.
- Provides a baseline from which future post-pandemic progress can be measured.
- Points to where more work and insight are needed.

# Overview of Content

- **Analysis of recent progress** at national and state levels on array of attainment indicators, including:
  - High school graduation rates
  - Advanced course taking
  - 9th grade on-track data (for states that have it)
  - Chronic absenteeism
  - College enrollment and attainment
- Featured **in-depth analysis on key current topic**
  - This year: The first in-depth look at the pandemic's impact on high school graduation rates at state and district levels.
- Insights from the GRAD Partnership
  - **Learnings from the Field**
  - **The Path Forward**



# Key Findings

Please share ideas and questions in the chat for our Q&A at the end

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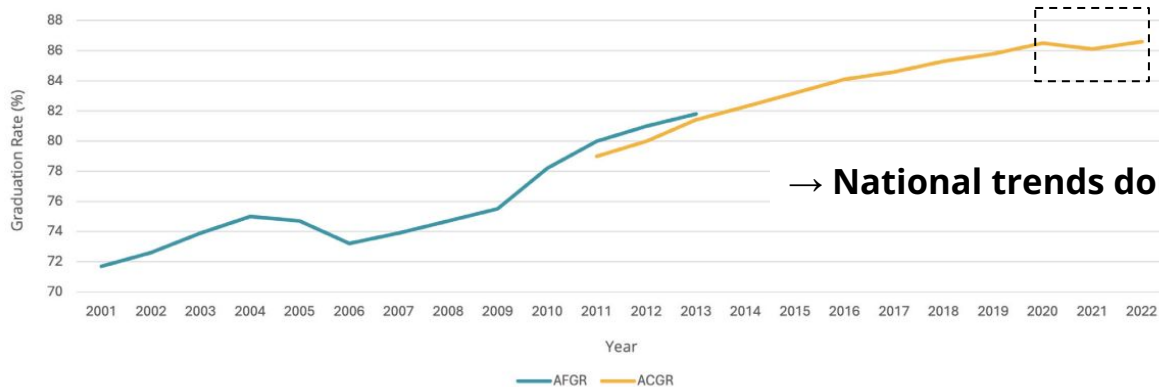
# Pandemic Impact on National Educational Attainment

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- A complicated story just beginning to unfold.
- National averages mask significant state and local variation in the pandemic's impact on high school graduation rates and attainment.
- We have not yet seen the full impact of the pandemic on high school graduation rates and educational attainment.
  - Available data only captures pandemic impact of students who were seniors, juniors, or sophomores in the 2019-20 school year (corresponding to high school graduation and college enrollments in 2020, 2021, and 2022, respectively).

# High School Graduation Rates: National Story

- Went up a small amount (+ 0.7 points) in the spring of 2020 when pandemic started.
- Declined a small amount (- 0.4 points) in 2021 at height of pandemic.
- Rebounded a small amount (+ 0.5 points) in 2022.
- As a result, **national high school graduation rates were a little higher (+ 0.8 points) after the three main pandemic years (2022 versus 2019).**



→ National trends don't tell the full story



# Most Subgroups Experienced Bigger Shifts

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- In 2020, when the pandemic began in the spring, historically underserved populations saw the largest increases in high school graduation rates.
  - Students with Disabilities: + 2.4 points
  - English Language Learners: + 2.1 points
  - Black: + 1.5 points
  - Low Income: + 1.3 points
  - National Average: + 0.7 points

→ **We need to pay more attention to providing these students with the supports they need in last quarter of high school.**

# Students with Disabilities Had Largest Gains

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- Largest high school graduation rate gains in year pandemic started 2020: + 2.4 points
- Smallest declines at peak of pandemic 2021: - 0.1 points
- Strong rebound in first year back 2022: + 0.9 points
- **From 2019 to 2022 had largest gains of any sub-group: + 3.2 points**
  - High school graduation rates improved twice as fast in pandemic years than in three years before pandemic.

→ **What was different in the pandemic years for students with disabilities compared to other students that made it more likely they would graduate?**

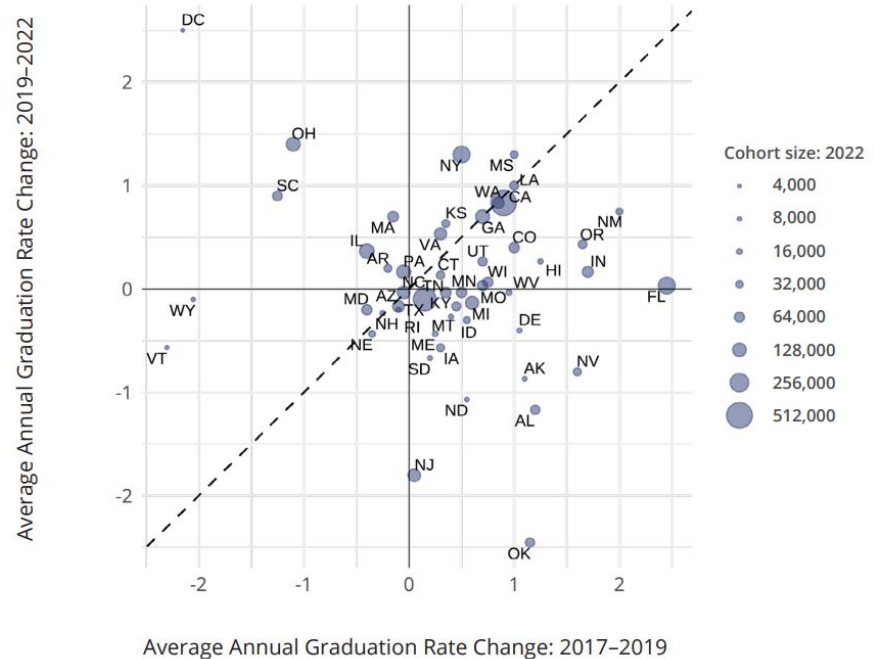
# Rate of Improvement Shows Greater Pandemic Impacts

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- **Black students:** Pandemic years cut growth rate for high school graduation rates in half.
  - Over the three years before the pandemic, were averaging just under a percentage point gain in high school graduation rates per year.
  - During pandemic years, average annual growth of 0.46 percent.
- **American Indian and Alaska Native students:** Improvement trend reversed.
  - Pre-pandemic, were averaging about a percentage point gain in high school graduation rates annually.
  - During the pandemic years, lost ground, with rates declining on average 0.4 points per year.

# Most States Did Not Follow the National Pattern

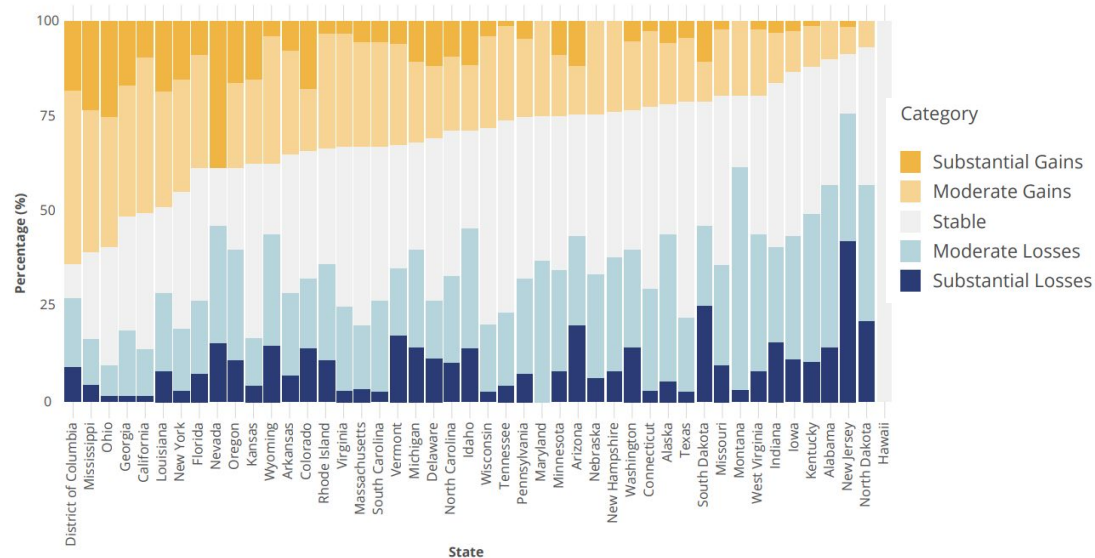
- **Four different trends emerge among states**
- National rebound in 2022 driven by a substantial gain in a few large states, New York (waived graduation exams) and California (allowed districts to waive additional grad requirements beyond state requirements).
- **26 states had lower graduation rates** in 2022 than 2019



# Impact of Pandemic Varied by Place

- **Greatest differences in pandemic impacts on high school graduation rates are at the district level**
- Each state has a different story: Big variation in percent of districts that had high school graduation rate gains, losses, and stability.
- Some districts (9%) saw rates decline by six or more percentage points, others (9%) increased by same amount
  - A 12-percentage point difference between the districts where pandemic had the largest negative and positive impacts on high school grad rates.

Distribution of U.S. School District High School Graduation Rate Changes from 2019 to 2022 by State



# Factors Driving State & District Variation

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→ The impact of pandemic on high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates, was determined by an interplay of factors which both push down graduation rates and lifted them up.

- **Factors Driving High School Grad Rates Down** - e.g., Direct impacts of pandemic on student and family health and income, limited access to wi-fi, chronic absenteeism, insufficient supports offered by school - all which varied by place.
- **Factors Driving High School Grad Rates Up** - e.g., States waiving exit exams, states waiving or allowing districts to waive extra local graduation requirements beyond state requirements, schools making extra effort to help students graduate during pandemic years - these also varied by place.
- **Different Sets of Factors** in different locales and different interactions between them result in variation by state and districts.

# Some Findings on What Mattered

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*In-depth district-level analysis looking at some of the potential plus and minus factors (those for which data could be found for most school districts)*

- On average, districts where high school students spent more **time in remote or hybrid learning in 2020-21** had lower graduation rates that year.
- On average, districts in the 12 states that require students to pass an **exit exam** to graduate and waived them during the pandemic had higher graduation rates in years when exams were waived.

→ In both cases, the impacts were statistically significant but modest +/- 10,000 to 20,000 on-time graduates, among 400,000 students not graduating on time

# High School Chronic Absenteeism in 2021-22

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- 35% of high school students were chronically absent from school
- In half of the nation's high schools, *at least one-third* of the students were chronically absent.
- In 28% of high schools, *half or more* of the students were chronically absent.
- About 5,000 high schools had 400 or more chronically absent students.
  - Essentially half of all high school students attended one of these schools.

→ **At least for high school students, 2021-22 was not a “return to school” year - rather, was a 3rd year of direct pandemic impacts**



# Impacts on Younger Cohorts Could be Greater

- Pandemic impact on high school graduation rates may be greater for students who experienced the pandemic in middle grades or elementary years
- Students who were in the middle grades during pandemic:
  - Had record low 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP scores in 2022.
  - Entered 9th grade, during period of high chronic absenteeism
  - In the five states where we have 9th grade on-track data:
    - Had significantly lower 9th grade on-track rates than pre-pandemic cohorts



*Students who were in middle grades during pandemic are scheduled to graduate high school in 2025, 2026, and 2027*

# The Path Forward

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# The Path Forward to Educating America

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## Organize K-12 and higher education to be student success systems.

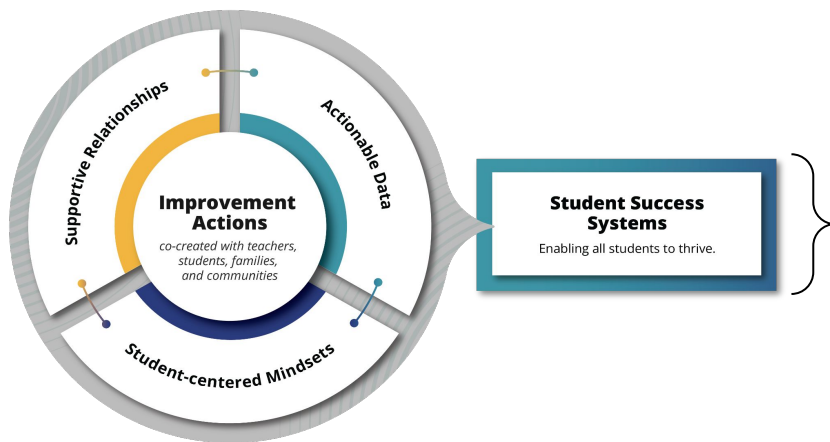
- School and district student success teams need easy access to actionable data and human insight in order to get the right supports and experiences to students at the right time.
- Additional people power is needed to provide evidence-based student supports at the required scale.
- Bring families, youth, K-12, community organizations, higher education, and workforce training together at the local level to create supported pathways to adult success for all youth in their community.
- Secondary schools and colleges need to be redesigned to meet 21st century needs.

## Efforts to boost educational attainment need to be human-centered.

- Agency, belonging, and connectedness

# Student Success Systems

- Findings of state & district variation make it clear that recovery must go beyond one-size-fits-all solutions.
- Districts & schools need to focus on relationship-centered and data-informed approaches tailored to the specific needs of their students and communities.



**A unified system that integrates, extends, and increases the capacity of existing student support efforts, including early warning, on-track, and multi-tiered systems.**

# GRAD Partnership Resources

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Read the report & download state-by-state data:

[Gradpartnership.org/EducatingAmerica](https://gradpartnership.org/EducatingAmerica)

- [Student Success Team Reflection and Action Planning Tools](#)
- [Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#)
- Many others



The screenshot shows the top portion of the website [www.gradpartnership.org/resources](https://www.gradpartnership.org/resources). The page title is "Resources". Below the title, there is a section titled "Filter by resource category:" followed by a row of ten buttons: ALL, AGENCY, ATTENDANCE, BELONGING, CONNECTEDNESS, COURSE PERFORMANCE, RELATIONSHIPS, RESEARCH, TOOLS, and WELL-BEING. The "TOOLS" button is highlighted in a darker teal color, indicating it is the selected filter.

# Partner Perspectives

Saashya Rodrigo, Ph.D., National Center for Learning Disabilities

Michael Wotorson, Schott Foundation for Public Education

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# Thank You

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