

## Graduation Rates: Southern States See Biggest Improvements

By Andrew Ujifusa on February 25, 2013 4:09 PM

For important news on graduation rates across the country, check out my colleague Caralee Adams' blog post today about the latest "**Building a Grad Nation**" report, which tracks the country's progress toward having 90 percent of its high school students graduate by 2020.

Caralee points out Southern states' notable gains—five of the 10 states with the best progress in the nation on graduation rates were in the South, in terms of annual average growth. In fact, the state with the biggest average gain in graduation rates from 2006 to 2010 was Tennessee, which not only had the highest average percentage-point increase per year (2.45, compared to the national average of 1.25), but also improved to the point where its 2010 graduation rate (80.4 percent) topped the national average that year of 78.2 percent.

All the other Dixie states in the top 10, despite their robust progress, are still significantly below the national average graduation rate. Louisiana, for example, came in second for average percentage-point increase behind Tennessee, but its graduation rate in 2010 stood at 68.8 percent. Only Florida and Tennessee cracked the 70 percent mark among the Southern states that made it into the top 10.

Other Southern states, like Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina, can celebrate beating the national average for growth in graduation rates. Arkansas was the only Southern state that saw its average graduation rate decline from 2006 to 2010.

Keep in mind that high graduation rates won't completely mollify a state lawmaker who is looking grumpily at very high remediation rates for high school graduates who subsequently attend in-state colleges and universities. During his successful campaign last year, for example, North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory, a Republican, highlighted the fact that **65 percent** of North Carolina's high school graduates need remediation once they reach community colleges.

Back to Southern states: They didn't fare so well when it came to graduation rates for students with disabilities. Among the states with the 10 lowest graduation rates for that population in 2011, Southern states accounted for seven of them. Mississippi tied for the worst graduation rate for students with disabilities with Nevada, at 23 percent. They fared a little better for students with limited English proficiency: of the states with the ten lowest graduation rates for LEP students, the South accounted for three (Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana).

More bad news is reserved for Minnesota when it comes to graduation rate gaps. In 2011, it had the biggest gap in the graduation rate between whites and blacks (35 percentage points), and the biggest gap between whites and Hispanics (33 points). At the other end of the spectrum, Hawaii and Maine had graduation rates for its Hispanic students that narrowly beat out the graduation rate for its white students.

Wisconsin and Vermont can celebrate good news—they have already hit the 90 percent graduate rate goal.

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