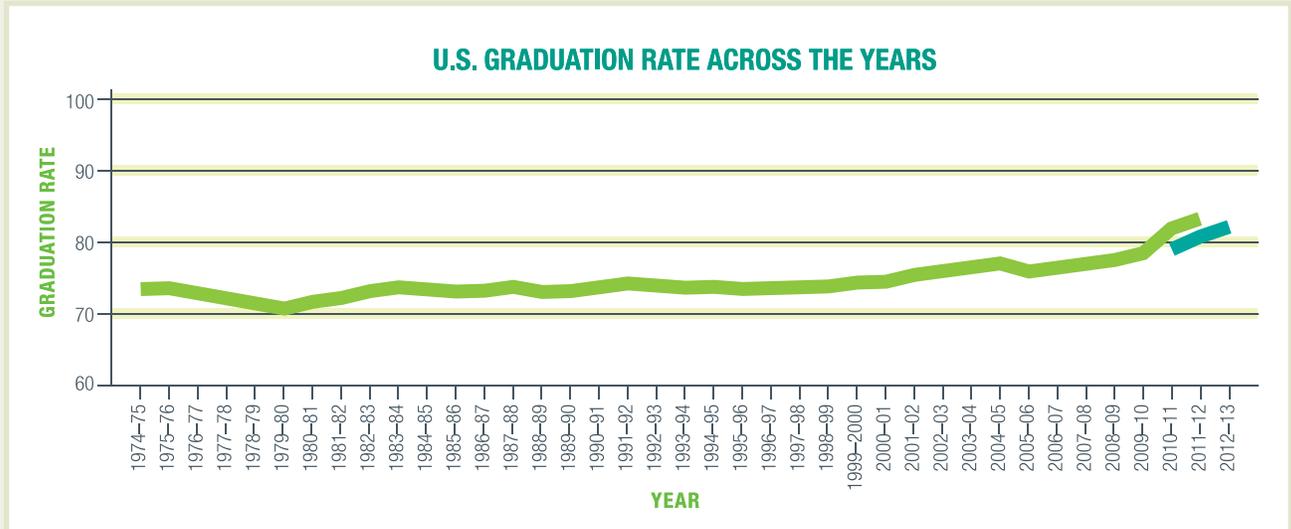


## TOP FOUR GRADUATION RATE TAKEAWAYS

1

### The high school graduation rate is the highest it has ever been.

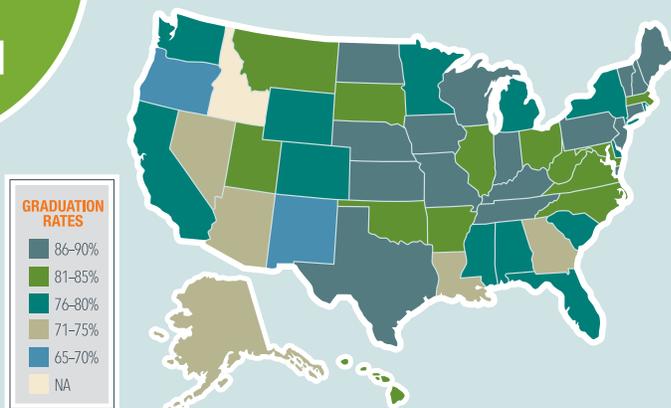
The U.S. high school graduation rate is 81.4 percent, reaching a record high after three consecutive years of improvement. In fact, the rate has increased nearly ten percentage points in the last decade, compared to a decrease of three percentage points the decade prior. Now, six states are within two percentage points of reaching an unprecedented 90 percent graduation rate. Furthermore, the number of students attending “drop-out factories”—schools that promote fewer than 60 percent of their students—has been cut in half over the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Not only is the nation graduating more students than ever before, these students are completing high school having taken more rigorous academic courses.



■ Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) ■ Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

2

### Until recently, state-by-state and long-term comparisons were difficult due to varying measurement methods.



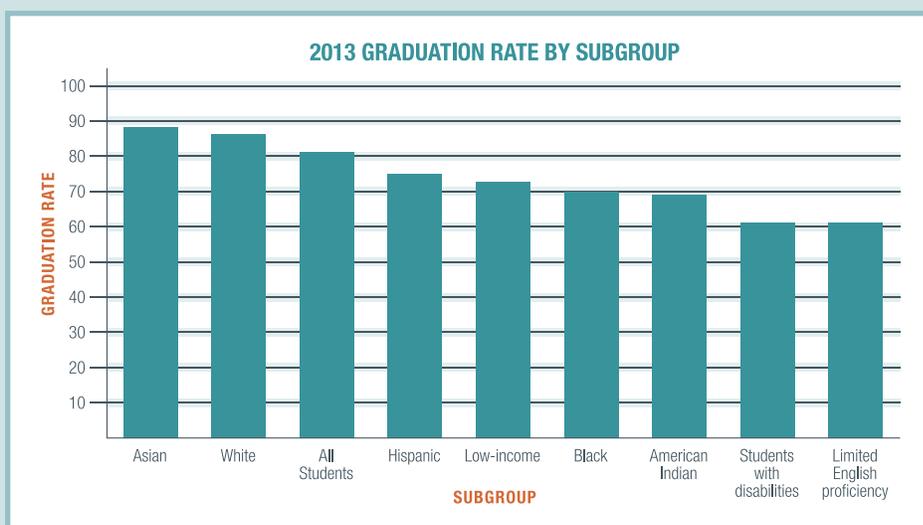
Schools, districts, and states used different graduation rate calculations up through the 2000s, limiting the ability to compare current rates or track progress over time. To address those issues, the U.S. Department of Education required that all entities transition to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) to measure and report high school graduation rates, beginning with the 2010–11 school year. The ACGR requires that individual students be tracked over time to determine the percent of students who enter 9th grade and receive a regular diploma four years later. This measurement may be adjusted to account for school transfers.<sup>4</sup> The nation’s 81.4 percent graduation rate is a result of the ACGR calculation.

The other measurement still in play is the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), which estimates the percentage of high school students who graduate within four years of first starting 9th grade. Although the AFGR is less accurate than the ACGR, it provides useful longitudinal analysis of graduation rates because it uses data that go back decades.<sup>5</sup>

## 3

## Despite the increasing graduation rate, gaps between subgroups remain.

All subgroups of students have made recent graduation rate gains; however, significant gaps remain. For example, while Hawaii and South Carolina are the only two states to graduate black students at a rate within five percentage points of the state's overall graduation rate, six states—Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin—have at least twenty percentage points between their overall graduation rate and black students' graduation rate.<sup>1</sup>



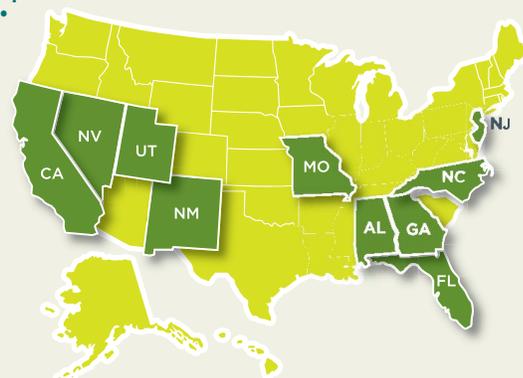
Patrick Miller, superintendent of North Carolina's Greene County Schools, explains that his district has improved its graduation rate by more than 20 percentage points in six years by focusing on individualization and comprehensive counseling. Teachers and counselors work together to ensure that students have access to the supports and resources necessary to graduate—this collaboration often includes making home visits so that parents can more actively engage in the process. The district has also introduced online course recovery opportunities for students who meet certain criteria but do not pass a particular course during initial enrollment. Educators work with individual students to ensure that they complete recovery courses and assignments in time to graduate.

In Washington's Tacoma Public Schools, providing staff with real-time data that supports a system of multiple measures has led to innovation and increased student achievement. Deputy Superintendent Josh Garcia explains, "we developed data systems that allowed any teacher to know where their students are in relation to state and federal graduation requirements. As a district we are able to identify [and address] local policy gaps that were serving as barriers to student success."

## 4

## The increase in the national graduation rate is due to focused, local efforts as opposed to broad, sweeping changes.<sup>1</sup>

Some states and districts have recently demonstrated significant graduation rate gains, contributing to the historic high mark in the nation's graduation rate. Texas, for example, enrolls 10 percent of U.S. high school students and has an 88 percent graduation rate—well above the nation's average. California, which enrolls 13 percent of the nation's high school students, has increased its ACGR by more than five percentage points since 2010. In all, ten states have improved (see map) their graduation rates by four percentage points or more in the past two years. Yet, some states have made only minor improvements and still others have lost ground, indicating that graduation rates are increasing not because of broad national reforms but rather because of targeted localized state and district efforts.<sup>1</sup>



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