SOLVING THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CRISIS
IDENTIFYING AND USING SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERNS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

THE CHALLENGE

Over the past 10 years, the graduation rate has increased from 71.8 percent to 78.2 percent, with the greatest gains occurring since 2006. Moreover, students of color have largely helped to power these gains – African American graduation rates have increased by 6.9 percent and Hispanics graduation rates rose 10.9 percentage points.

Despite this progress, disparities remain and graduation rates for minority and low-income students still lag significantly behind their peers. Increasing the number of students that graduate high school on-time, prepared for college, work, and life, is essential to ensuring a more prosperous future for individuals, the communities they live in, and our nation overall.

Accelerating our progress will require ratcheting up our efforts within and across communities by identifying and supporting students who are struggling and the least likely to succeed without additional help. This means acting earlier, and not waiting to intervene until students are already on their way to dropping out.

WHY IDENTIFY SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERNS?
The Dropout Crisis Starts Early...

- A child who starts behind falls even farther behind, long before the start of school. Disparities in child outcomes are evident by nine months.

- For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still have trouble reading in the third grade.

- Students who are not reading on grade level by third grade are less likely to graduate from high school, without interventions and assistance.

- Although students physically drop out in high school – many initially disengage in the middle grades. Student academic performance generally declines in the middle grades and is most problematic for students attending high-poverty, low-performing middle schools.

- If students do not experience success in the middle grades, they are much less likely to experience success in high school.

- Middle school students who are held back are seven times more likely to eventually drop out, and 80 percent of students who repeat a class more than once are likely to drop out as well.

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Longstanding efforts to make graduation and school performance data publicly accessible have made it easier for communities to identify the high schools that are experiencing the greatest numbers of students failing academically or dropping out. However, given that the path to dropout starts early, it is critical to identify students most likely to drop out *before* they enter high school.

An effective starting point for targeting and focusing early efforts on students with the greatest needs is to first identify the middle and elementary schools that serve the highest concentrations of academically at-risk students and feed into the lowest-performing high schools.

USING SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERN DATA TO DRIVE IMPACT

As United Ways work with their communities to develop and implement collective impact strategies to increase the number of students that graduate high school on time, it is necessary to take into consideration where these students are located in the community. Knowing which elementary and middle schools feed into the lowest-performing high schools is critical information for the community to make decisions on the strategies to deploy when, and where.

Instead of a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach to improving education outcomes, communities can target their efforts and tailor in-school and out-of-school strategies based on the specific characteristics of the schools and neighborhoods identified. For example, early warning and response systems (discussed in the guide), can be placed in these feeder schools to help identify students "off-track" to graduation based on their attendance, behavior and course performance.

United Ways can play key roles in collecting and using school feeder pattern data to deploy effective interventions to the most challenged neighborhoods, schools and students. Whether it is initiating discussions about the benefits of mapping feeder patterns, working with the school systems and community leaders to identify schools feeding into the lowest performing high schools, and/or building coalitions to provide wrap-around supports in identified schools, United Way can be a critical backbone in this effort.

NEW RESOURCE: GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERNS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

United Way Worldwide, Civic Enterprises, and Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University have developed a guide to assist United Ways and their community partners to map out a process to identify school feeder patterns and help the community begin a discussion on how to use the information.

This guide can help your United Way and your community partners:

- Understand the graduation crisis and effectively convey the rationale for identifying and using school feeder pattern data

- Understand your community's education landscape

- Find out where to access key education national, state, and local information and data

- Know how graduation rates are calculated and determine your community's graduation rates

- Identify school feeder patterns in your community

- Use school feeder pattern data for greater impact in your community

Download the guide **here**, along with tips we've generated to help United Ways reach out to partners and key stakeholders to gather this critical data.

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[i] Balfanz, Robert, Bridgeland, J., Bruce, and Joanna Hornign Fox. *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic 2013 Annual Update.* Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises, the Everyone Graduate Center at John Hopkins University School of Education, Americas Promise Alliance, and the Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved from http://www.civicenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/Building-A-Grad-Nation-Report-2013_Full_v1.pdf.

[ii] Halle, Tamara, Nicole Forry, Elizabeth Hair, Kate Perper, Laura Wandner, Julia Wessel, and Jessica Vick. *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort.* Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009. http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_07_10_FR_DisparitiesEL.pdf.

[iii] Ramey, Craig T. & Sharon L. *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life.* (1999) Goddard Press, Inc.