

November 26, 2012

Commission for High School Graduation Achievement and Success

**RE: Policy Recommendation**

I would make the following recommendations for new policy based upon the deliberations of the Governor's Commission for High School Graduation Achievement and Success.

The research provides several district targets for policies that would seem to have a positive impact on high school graduation. My recommendations focus on several of these: 1) focus on reading at grade level by third grade, 2) focus on being "on track" to graduate by the end of the freshman year of high school, and 3) establishing drop out recovery programs at the county level in suburban or downstate areas or within large systems.

Regarding the first point, policy should require elementary schools and elementary and unit school districts to show evidence of and publish the percentage of its students who are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. I recommend that the State determine the metric or set of metrics to determine whether a student is reading at grade level. While it is inevitable that some students will not be reading at grade level by the end of third grade, school improvement (and resources to support school improvement) should be directed toward that goal. While I do not recommend a specific remedy to those schools where large numbers of students have failed to attain grade level, I also acknowledge some very effective programs exist for dealing with slow learners in reading—Reading Recovery is an example of such a program with proven quantitative support. Also, each school and district should report about those students below grade level after third grade who have moved to grade level by fifth grade or seventh grade. Note that such policy supports the implementation of the Response to Intervention or RtI initiative so that it would be part of an existing effort.

Regarding the second point, policy should require each high school and high school and unit district to show evidence of and publish the percentage of its students on track to graduate in four years after the freshman year. The metric for determining on track status is the school district's definition of sophomore status. While it is inevitable that some students will not be on track to graduate by the end of freshman year, school improvement (and resources provided for school improvement) should be directed at this goal. While I do not recommend a specific remedy to get students on track, this should involve addition counseling, parent involvement and support; and specific academic courses to improve students' reading, mathematics, and study skills. I also recommend that high schools and districts report about students who failed to be on track as freshmen but moved to "on track" status as sophomores or juniors. Such a policy would also support RtI work at the high school level as a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention.

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Regarding the third point, research indicates that simply extending the mandatory attendance age does not impact the likelihood a student will drop out from high school. Mandating a historically unsuccessful student to remain in a regular school setting seems to be counterproductive. Given the presentation about successful programs for students who have dropped out of school in the City of Chicago, I believe more programs specifically for dropouts could be developed outside the city at the county level administered by Regional Offices of Education.

Respectfully submitted,



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Superintendent of Schools