

Progress made; challenges ahead

Written by Special to the NNPA from TheDefendersOnline.com
Monday, 03 January 2011 13:00

In the last decade, a coalition of public school educators, parents and civic activists across the country have charted substantial progress in deterring tens of thousands of students from dropping out of high school, according to a newly-published study.

Among other things, the study showed there were 120,000 more high school graduates in 2008 than in 2001 (holding population constant) – a result fueled by overall graduation-rate increases in 29 states and significant graduation-rate increases among African American, Latino American and Native American pupils.

It also resulted in the closing of more than 200 “dropout factories” – high schools that fail to graduate 40 percent or more of their students, giving the 400,000 students who would have attended them a better chance to earn a diploma.

These successes in pushing the national high school graduation rate from 72 percent in 2001 to 75 percent in 2008 show that the U.S. “is turning a corner on meeting the high school dropout epidemic,” write Colin and Alma Powell in introducing the report, *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic*.

The detailed, 88-page document is the latest in a series of studies from the Powells’ organization, America’s Promise Alliance, which has sought to build a broad-based coalition to eliminate the dropout crisis of American public high schools. Today, according to the report, more than a million public high school students, each year don’t graduate with the class in which they entered high school; many of them have dropped out. Taken together, nearly 40 percent of minority high school students don’t graduate with their entering Class.

Earlier America’s Promise reports determined that while dropping out is a widespread phenomenon, the dropout epidemic is concentrated in a relatively small number of urban, suburban and rural high schools that over time have become dropout factories. A decade ago, they numbered about 2,000. Now, through strategies that ranged from transforming individual schools to closing individual schools, the report declares the number has been pared to 1,746.

Nonetheless, the report warns that despite the successes, “the rate of progress over the last decade ... is too slow to reach the national goal of having 90 percent of students graduate from high school and obtain at least one year of post-secondary schooling or training by 2020.” It goes on to match on a one-to-one basis the “progress” made since 2001 with the “challenges” in that area which remain to be overcome.

For example, while 400,000 fewer pupils attend dropout factories, there are yet 2.2 million high school youth in the dropout factories that still exist. And, while the Class of 2008 graduated 120,000 more students than the Class of 2001, the Class of 2020 needs to graduate 600,000 more students than the Class of 2008 (holding population constant) in order to reach the goal of a 90-percent national graduation rate.

The report concludes by noting that “while the results of the past decade have been mixed, with progress in some areas, and limited improvement in others, these efforts have laid the groundwork for more rapid and systematic progress in the next decade.”

Progress made; challenges ahead

Written by Special to the NNPA from TheDefendersOnline.com
Monday, 03 January 2011 13:00

Those future initiatives, however, could be significantly undermined by something the report does not discuss: the impact of budget deficits at the federal, state, and local level on funds available for public school initiatives