

Twelfth-Graders Without a Diploma: Committee Report and Recommendations



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Background

Ohio's high school graduation requirements boast a rigorous set of options that prepare students for life beyond high school.¹ In certain cases, these rigorous requirements can leave some Ohio students having completed their 12th-grade years without having met the requirements to graduate. In Ohio, there are at least 1 million adults who left high school without a high school diploma.

Data shows that earning a high school diploma can increase an individual's earning power by, at minimum, 35%. Over a lifetime, this can amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars.² In addition to the improvements in quality of life for those graduating high school, the increase in economic impact due to reduced health care costs, increased tax revenue and workforce participation create a rationale for helping more students earn a diploma. Most individuals without a diploma will experience challenges that will negatively impact the likelihood of their individual success and may require more social supports over their lifetime.

What can Ohio do to support more individuals to earn a diploma even when they have completed the 12th-grade year? To find answers to this question, a committee of education professionals was assembled to closely examine the data and research. To better understand the background of these students, the committee began by asking a few key questions:

- What are the demographics of students who finish their 12th-grade year in Ohio without earning a diploma?
- What are the characteristics of students who are more likely to fall into this category?
- Where in the state are students most likely to enter their 13th year of school without earning a diploma?
- Which schools have a high rate of helping these students graduate in their 13th year?

The committee captured the findings and recommendations in this report. As the committee members reviewed data on what Ohio schools currently are doing and learned about promising practices throughout the state, one key question came to the front of their minds: ***What works to help these students?*** This report summarizes the findings of this committee in its search to answer this most critical question.

Introduction

In July 2019, Governor Mike DeWine signed Am. Sub. House Bill 166. Section 733.51 of this bill required the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with the chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, to establish a committee to develop ***policy recommendations regarding methods to assist high school students who completed the 12th-grade year but did not meet the graduation requirements to achieve a high school diploma.*** Specifically, Section 733.51(B) describes the nature of the recommendations as follows:

“The recommendations developed by the committee shall include identifying additional assistance and supports to aid students who completed the twelfth grade, but did not meet the graduation

¹ For detailed information about Ohio's Graduation options, visit education.ohio.gov/graduation.

² <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/research-summaries/education-earnings.html>

requirements to achieve a high school diploma, as well as the amount of state funding necessary to ensure the adequate operation of the identified assistance and supports. The recommendations also shall address methods to minimize the social stigma associated with not graduating on time. Additionally, the recommendations may include any changes to the Revised Code or the Administrative Code necessary to implement the identified assistance and supports.”

As stated in Ohio’s strategic plan for education, [Each Child, Our Future](#), “High schools set the stage for a student’s future success. As students grow and mature, most begin to see they are becoming responsible for their own lives. Unfortunately, many students struggle with the transition that comes after high school. Some do not graduate from high school.” This committee sought methods to aid students in completing high school and helping schools provide these supports.

The committee consisted of individuals representing the following:

- (1) Career-technical educators;
- (2) Community colleges;
- (3) Guidance counselors;
- (4) Ohio technical centers;
- (5) Principals;
- (6) Superintendents; and
- (7) Teachers.

Process Overview

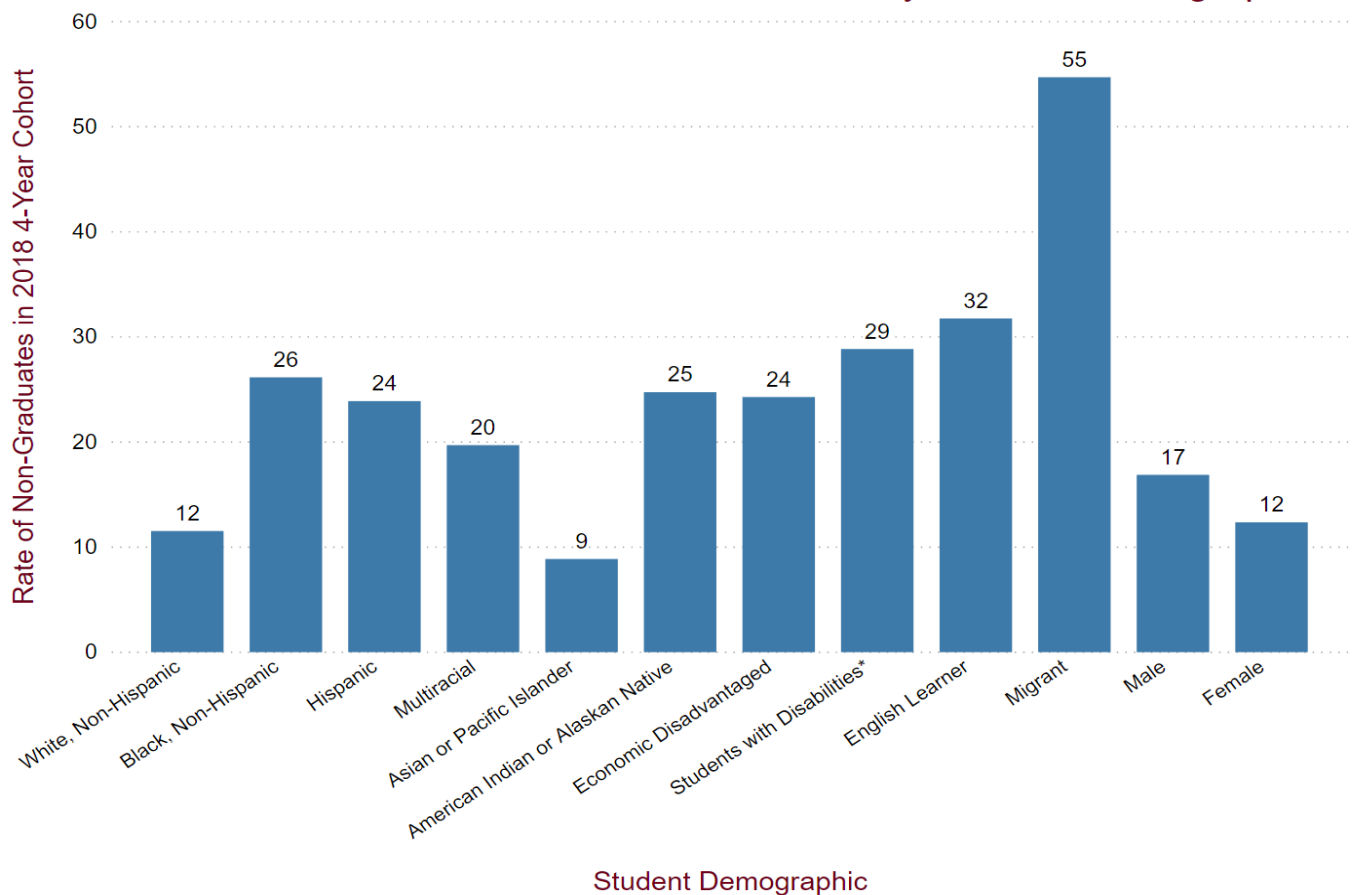
During a six-month period, committee members explored data and reports, examined and shared promising practices and collaborated to make recommendations. The graphic below illustrates the timeline of the committee’s work.



Data Findings

To better understand the population of students who fall within the category of “twelfth graders without a diploma,” the committee began its work by studying data available to the Ohio Department of Education. As summarized in Chart 1 below, the committee reviewed the rate at which each subgroup of students who were part of the 2018 graduation cohort was *not graduating* on time.

Students of color were, on average, twice as likely as their white peers to not graduate on time. Students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, English learners and migrant students also were significantly more likely to not earn a diploma on time.

Chart 1: Rates of Non-Graduates in 2018 4-Year Cohort by Student Demographic**Rates of Non-Graduates in 2018 4-Year Cohort by Student Demographic**

* In this case, this term is inclusive of students with any disabilities, not only those who receive accommodations through Individualized Education Programs.

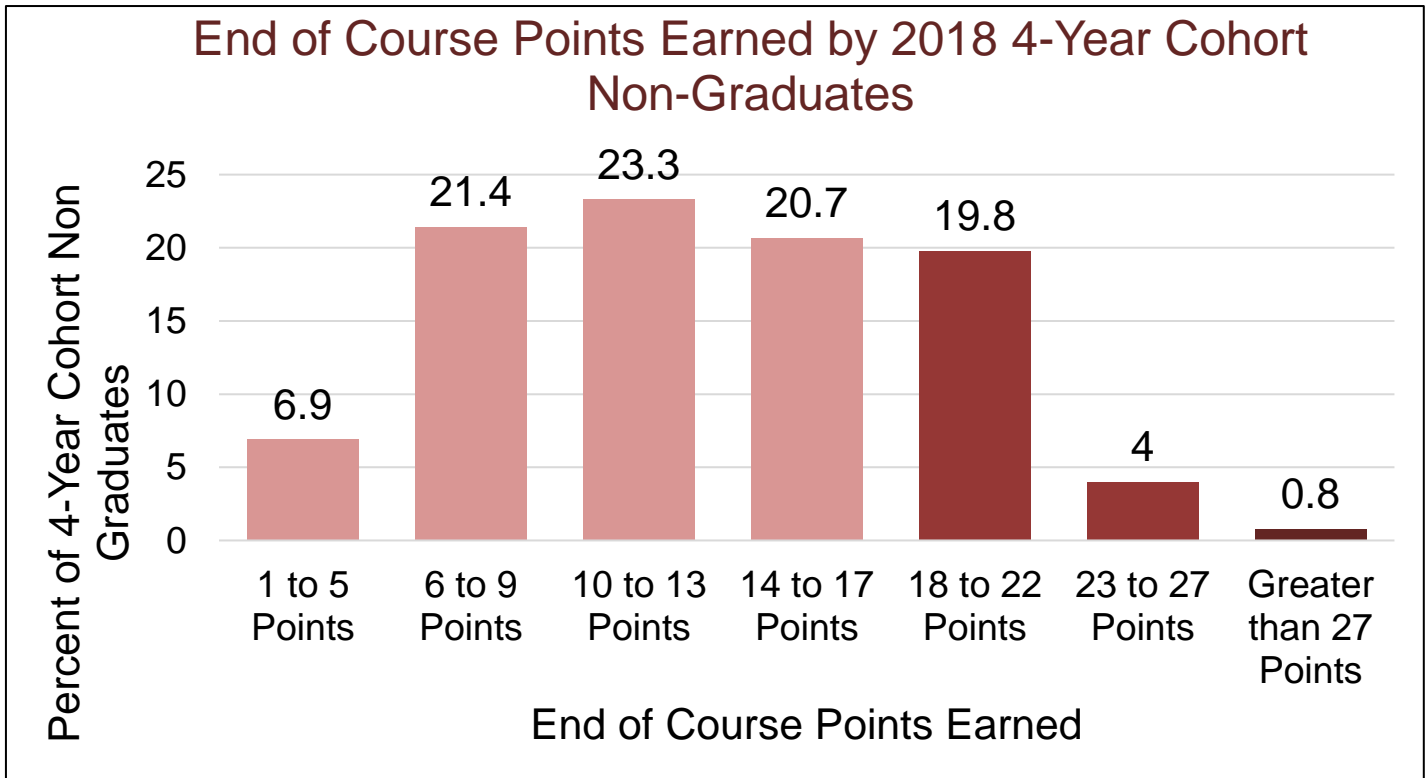
Chart 2 shows how many graduation points³ had been earned by students who did not graduate with the 2018 graduation cohort. Analysis of this data leads to a couple observations.

- About 25% of students in the 2018 cohort who did not graduate in four years had earned 18 points on end-of-course exams. This means that for these students, the factor holding them back from graduation most likely was not completing all required course credits.
- Another 20% were very close to earning the necessary end-of-course assessment points but needed between 1 and 4 more points.

³ For the classes of 2018-2022, one way to show readiness for graduation is to earn 18 out of a possible 35 points on end-of-course assessments. Each of the seven assessments has five performance levels that can earn students between 1 and 5 points.

For many students, earning just a few more course credits or earning just a few more points on end-of-course tests would mean the difference between whether they graduate or not. Providing support to these students could cut Ohio’s non-graduation rate in half.

Chart 2: Graduation Points Earned by 2018 4-Year Cohort Non-Graduates

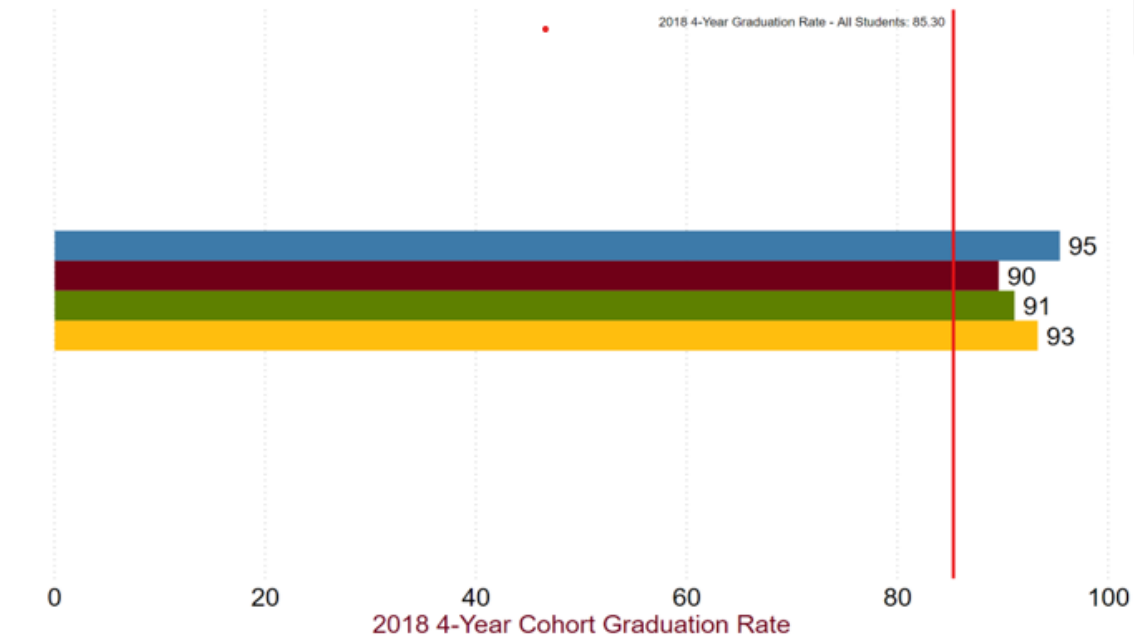


The charts below show the effect of both economically disadvantaged status and race as it relates to student poverty levels across districts. Ohio school districts are classified as either high, average, or low student poverty districts. These graphs show the difference in student graduation rates across race/ethnicity in low- and high-poverty districts. The first two graphs show graduation rates for the four race categories most prevalent in Ohio and the second two graphs show graduation rates for populations of those students who also were classified as economically disadvantaged.

Charts 3 and 4: Graduation Rates – Low- and High-Poverty Districts

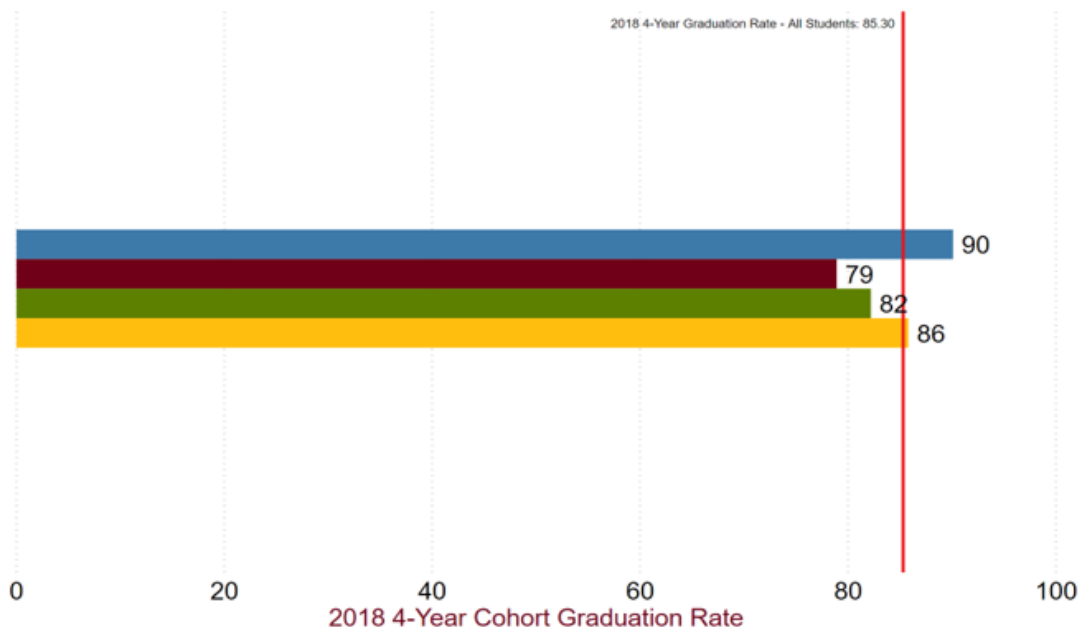
2018 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates in Low Poverty Districts

- White, Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Black, Non-Hispanic
- Multiracial



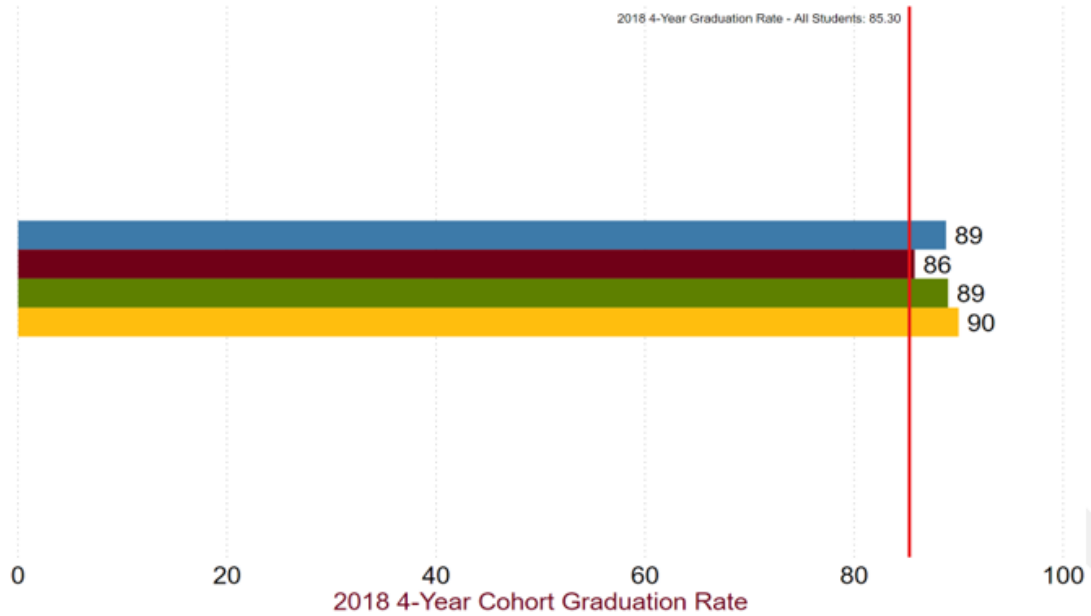
2018 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates in High Poverty Districts

- White, Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Black, Non-Hispanic
- Multiracial



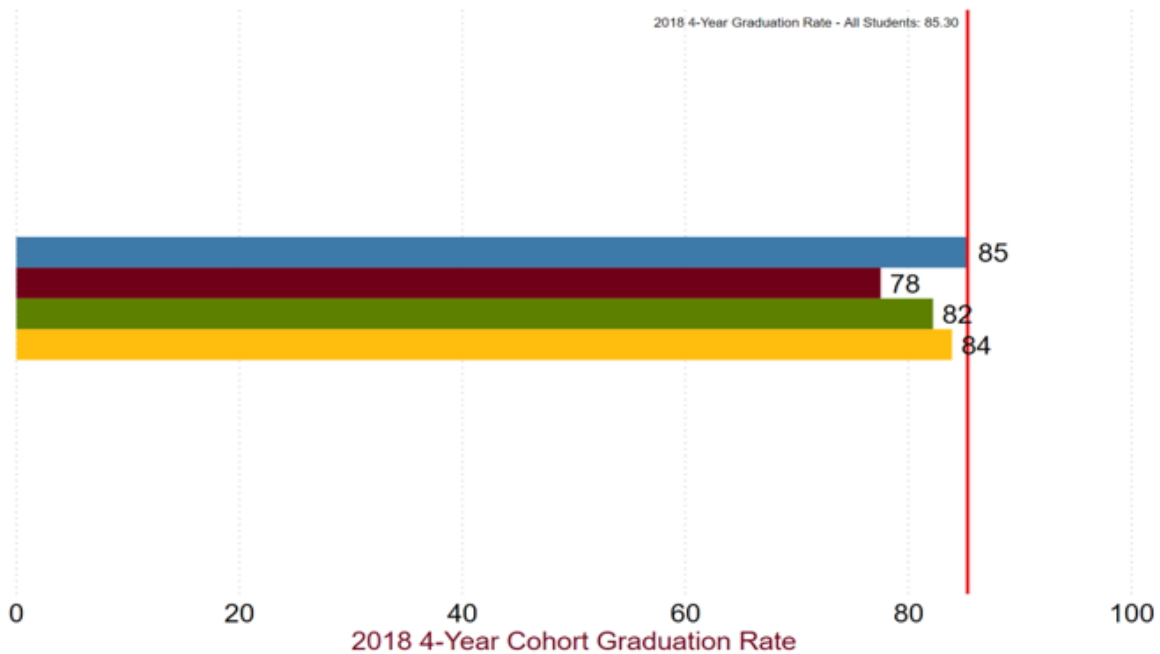
2018 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates in Low Poverty Districts

• White/Econ Dis • Hispanic/Econ Dis • Black/Econ Dis • Multiracial/Econ Dis



2018 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates in High Poverty Districts

• White/Econ Dis • Hispanic/Econ Dis • Black/Econ Dis • Multiracial/Econ Dis



The committee found the above data shows the following:

- In virtually every category relevant to graduation, on average, minority students graduate at lower

- percentages than their non-minority peers.
- Similarly, economically disadvantaged students graduate on average at lower percentages than their non-economically disadvantaged peers.
- Those who are both minority and economically disadvantaged students, on average, have the poorest outcomes.

Promising Practices

After reviewing the data, the committee examined national and local promising practices regarding high school completion. For a national perspective, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) helped the Ohio Department of Education identify nationwide practices related to supporting **over-age and under-credited youth** earn a high school diploma. Staff of AIR reviewed publications from websites explicitly supporting this population of students, which led to the following strategies the committee considered:

- Collect and use data to better understand this student population;
- Design curriculum that engages students;
- Provide wraparound services that address the factors contributing to students' over-age and under-credited status;
- Allow accountability systems to reward schools for progress.

The committee sought to identify local promising practices that corresponded with each of these strategies to better understand which to include in the final recommendations.

The committee's identification of local promising practices included a review of the models currently in place at **Vanguard-Sentinel Career & Technology Centers** and **Westerville City Schools**.

- **Westerville City Schools** in Franklin County was identified for its local promising practices because of the rate and scale at which it serves students attempting to graduate in their fifth year of high school. In the 2018 school year, the district graduated more than 50% of the 90 students who enrolled in their fifth year of high school. Through analysis and interview of key leaders, the team discovered that Westerville operates a program within the district that provides a separate, dedicated setting but does not require a student to enroll in a separate school. The program exists within one of the high school buildings but has a separate entrance, classroom space and common areas for students. Keys to the success of the program, according to their leaders, are the low student-to-teacher ratio, stable but flexible cohorts, flexible scheduling and school hours and access to a licensed social worker at all times while on the campus.
- **Vanguard-Sentinel Career & Technology Centers** in Sandusky County offers a program available to students from all the associate high schools served by the center. This program primarily addresses *preventing* students from reaching the point of completing their 12th-grade year without earning a diploma. Learning occurs in a model that blends online adaptive learning programs with project-based experiences tied to potential careers. Students completing the program earn industry-recognized credentials to help complete their pathway to graduation. Students have access to a career counselor and a mental health counselor at a manageable ratio of 50:1.

Currently Ohio students' access to programs like these is limited and inconsistent. The committee believes building more programs like those at Westerville and Vanguard-Sentinel could positively impact the success rate for students who are not graduating on time. The committee envisions creating the conditions so each Ohio student could have access to a program similar to one of these promising programs if needed.

Consider Existing Programs and Opportunities

The committee's first conclusion was that Ohio should promote existing programs and opportunities that can support 12th-graders in meeting the requirements of a diploma or support students who completed 12th grade but did not receive a diploma. These programs and options exist but likely are not being implemented as widely as necessary to meet the needs of students.

Using Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs

Ohio law allows a public school to develop and implement a dropout prevention and recovery program to address the needs of any student who is credit deficient or has suffered trauma that has prevented the student from progressing, resulting in the student being at least one grade level behind the student's cohort. Community schools in Ohio operating a dropout prevention and recovery program have additional requirements and may only enroll students age 16 or older; must provide student counseling and supports; and must work with the students to create post-graduation goals and success plans.

Many traditional school districts and community schools have developed dropout prevention and recovery programs to meet the needs of students who are not on track to graduate or who have become disengaged in school.

The recommendations outlined in this report often will align with the approaches commonly used by dropout prevention and recovery programs. Consideration should be given to leveraging such programs to meet the ideas reflected below. The recommendations in this report could expand access to such programs and provide more specific suggestions to ensure quality.

Early Warning Tool - Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant

As part of Ohio's Statewide Longitudinal Data System federal grant, the Department of Education is developing ways to track student progress toward graduation and identify students who are at risk of dropping out before graduating. With this early warning system, schools and districts will be able to identify students earlier and provide supports at a time when the impact will be greatest. The committee believes this early warning tool will be a key resource in identifying students at risk of completing their 12th-grade year without earning a diploma and could be useful in reducing the number of students in this category.

Ohio's Long-Term Graduation Requirements

Ohio's [long-term graduation requirements](#) (the requirements that can be used by upcoming graduating classes but which will be the only requirements for the classes of 2023 and beyond) provide students several pathways to earning a diploma. Many of these options are new for schools and districts. The committee believes students currently may not have access to the full range of options.

The best opportunities for students may be options or pathways that schools and districts are not currently offering. The committee recommends further analysis of current access to the long-term graduation requirements and how best to expand access. When each student has access to the full menu of these long-term requirements, it is likely that more students will be successful in completing graduation requirements.

Recommendations

Of course, the most promising strategy to address the issue of 12th-grade students without a diploma is to be more attentive and diligent in earlier grades to ensure students reach on-time graduation. That said, after reviewing data and promising practices, the committee identified five recommendations to assist high school students who completed their 12th-grade year but did not meet the graduation requirements to achieve a high school diploma. The recommendations, detailed below, are:

1. Establish diploma completion programs with specific traits and accountability measures;
2. Provide *all* cohort non-graduates access to these programs;

3. Adequately fund programs;
4. Collect additional data related to 12th-graders without a diploma; and
5. Continue study regarding 12th-graders without a diploma.

Recommendation 1: Establish Fifth-Year Diploma Completion Programs with Specific Attributes and Accountability Measures

After reviewing the promising practices, the committee outlined specific attributes it believed were necessary to ensure the success of diploma completion programs that target students completing their fifth year without a diploma. Though these programs will, and should, look different within the context of each school and district, the committee recommends high schools establish programs with the following attributes:

- **Student Success Plan**: Each student should have an in-depth Student Success Plan that specifies a path for the student to reach diploma attainment and aligns to a student's post-high school aspirations;
- **Flexible Scheduling**: Successful programs should offer part- or half-day schedules of course offerings that reflect each student's need for flexibility (for example, evening and/or weekend courses);
- **Dedicated and Separate Location**: Programs should operate in dedicated locations (separate buildings on the school campuses) where courses can be completed;
- **Wrap Around Services**: Programs should include wraparound services, including student access to social workers;
- **Credit Recovery**: Accelerated opportunities for credit recovery and completion should be a prominent element of successful programs;
- **Teacher-Student Ratio**: Programs should maintain a ratio of one educator to every 15 students, so each student has more dedicated time with caring adults;
- **Adult Mentor**: Programs should ensure positive, school- and student-identified adult mentors are available to help students achieve their post-high school aspirations;
- **Expanded Educational Options**: Schools should provide options to add college credit, technical training and/or industry-recognized credential attainment to students' education experiences;
- **Personalized Interventions**: Programs should ensure intensive, personalized interventions to all students. These interventions should align to students' Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) for students with disabilities.
- **Culturally Responsive**: Programs should equip teachers and support staff with the tools to deliver culturally responsive instruction and support to students. More information on culturally responsive practices is available on the [Department's webpage](#).
- **Student Progress Monitoring**: Programs should be held to accountability measures at the state level to ensure student progress. Potential accountability measures could be:
 - Improvement of the four- and five-year graduation rates of districts;
 - Increase in percentage of qualifying students served in these programs; and
 - Requirement of action plans for underperforming districts.

For fifth-year diploma completion programs to have maximum effect and shift the outcomes for students, these components should be implemented collectively. Recommendations should not be implemented as standalone strategies from a menu of services. Instead, programs should be established that have a comprehensive set of features and services to better ensure student success.

Recommendation 2: Provide Access to Quality Programs for All Cohort Non-Graduates Who are Continuing Students

The committee recommends the state strongly encourage schools and districts provide access to fifth-year diploma completion programs to all students completing their 12th-grade year without earning a diploma. The committee recommends districts collaborate to share resources regarding the implementation of quality programs. Consideration also should be given to how educational service centers, career-technical education centers and various consortia could work together to provide these programs.

Recommendation 3: Adequately Fund Programs

The committee recommends adequate funding be provided to support the work of each fifth-year diploma completion program. Schools already can receive funding support for these students since [Ohio law](#) allows schools and districts to count, for funding purposes, students under the age of 22.⁴ As a result, schools or districts also may generate funding for students based on student demographics, including supplemental funding for economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English learners and students participating in career-technical education programs. Additional funding for fifth-year diploma completion programs should be in addition to the amount of state funding already provided to support this student group.

The committee did not conduct detailed research into the cost of these programs and does not have a specific recommended dollar amount for each participating student. However, the committee offers three options for providing additional funding to programs:

1. *Supplemental per-pupil funding:* Additional funding could be provided on a per-pupil basis for any student who does not earn a diploma who continues to be enrolled past the 12th grade. This supplemental funding would be similar to the supplemental funding provided to schools who serve students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students and other special populations.
2. *Unit funding:* Under a unit funding approach, a fixed amount of funding is provided to schools and districts to serve 12th-grade students who do not earn a diploma based on a group of students (a “unit”). The value of each unit could be determined by the committee’s list of recommended services that each program should include. Any unit funding should be determined after taking into consideration the funding already generated for these students and should factor in a local match or share.
3. *Performance- or incentive-based funding:* The 22+ Adult Diploma Program is an existing program designed to help adults who are *age 22 or older* earn a high school diploma. Under the program, providers are only paid when students earn credits or high school diplomas. A similar model could be used to incentivize schools that operate fifth-year diploma completion programs.

Recommendation 4: Collect Additional Data Related to 12th-Graders Without a Diploma

Data presented to the committee showed that at least 25% of non-graduates from the class of 2018 cohort earned the required 18 points on end-of-course assessments. Based on this information, the committee requested data on the course credit attainment of those students but found the data requested is not collected by the Department in an easily usable manner. Without this data, the committee inferred that

⁴ Ohio Revised Code 3317.03 (E)

students who earned the required number of graduation points from end-of-course assessments did not earn enough course credits to earn a diploma.

Because of the lack of meaningful data, the committee recommends the Ohio Department of Education consider adding additional data collection in the following areas:

- Data regarding student credit attainment; and
- The graduation pathway a student uses to graduate.

The committee recognizes this additional reporting will create additional work for district Education Management Information System (EMIS) coordinators. However, the committee concluded this more detailed data will contribute to valuable further study into this and other topics.

Recommendation 5: Continue Study Regarding 12th-Graders Without a Diploma

The committee identified additional questions outside the scope of the legislative charge that need further study and action. In addition to the programs for students who do not earn a diploma in their 12th-grade year, the committee recommends further study into what factors contribute to this condition. Additional questions recommended for further consideration include:

- What makes students more likely not to graduate with their cohorts?
- What factors, beyond academic performance, cause students to become credit deficient?
- How can schools and districts identify and support students early in their academic careers who are at risk of completing the 12th grade but not earning a diploma?
- What targeted supports can schools and districts provide in the early high school years to increase the likelihood of diploma attainment?

To answer these questions, the committee recommends completing a **root cause analysis on a diverse group of non-graduates** to identify the contributing factors for not earning a diploma. By identifying the most common factors, more proactive actions can be taken. The committee believes proactive measures could potentially have an even greater effect than the reactive ones recommended as part of the charge of this committee.

Conclusion

Ohio's vision for education is that *each child* is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society. Imagining students who have completed the 12th-grade year without achieving a high school diploma, the committee believes the suggestions for diploma completion programs outlined in this report can significantly improve the outcomes for these students. Though the circumstances these students are in will not be changed by the implementation of these programs, the support and flexibility provided to them will increase greatly, giving them added opportunities to make the small changes that can result in earning their diplomas.

Data clearly show Ohio's high schools are not graduating *each child*, particularly non-white students, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. The emphasis on *each child* underscores the importance of providing supports for student success consistent with the needs of each student and with the goal of helping each student succeed. The recommendations offered in this report chart a course forward in best serving students who have completed the 12th grade but did not meet the graduation requirements to achieve a high school diploma.

Appendices

APPENDIX A – Acknowledgements

APPENDIX B – [Institute of Education Sciences – Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools Summary](#)

Appendix A – Acknowledgements

The Department extends a special thanks to members of the Twelfth Graders Without a Diploma Study Committee for the efforts and expertise they provided in creating these recommendations.

Mark Bowman	North Fork Local Schools
Greg Edinger	Vanguard Sentinel Career & Technology Centers
Heather Fairs	Ohio School Counselor Association
Todd Hoadley	Dublin City Schools
Mike McNicol	Career and Technology Centers of Licking County
Nancy Mulvey	Great Oaks Career Center
Renaldo O’Neal	Horizon Science Academy Dayton
Ben Pfeiffer	Oregon City Schools
Amy Schakat	South-Western City Schools
Robert Swartzentruber	Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools
Tom Walsh	Ohio Association of Community Colleges

The Department would also like to highlight the work of Ohio Excels, particularly staff member Kevin Duff, who contributed to steering the work of the committee. In addition, we extend a special thanks to staff of the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Department of Higher Education and Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation who contributed to the work of the committee and the development of this report.

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Donna Williams	Ohio Department of Education
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Krista Maxon	Ohio Department of Higher Education
Hank Harned	Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation
Samantha Fallucco	Ohio Department of Education
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[Appendix B - Institute of Education Sciences – Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools Summary](#)

Students who do not complete high school face economic and social challenges throughout their lifetimes. They are more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages, have poor health, engage in criminal activity, and require public assistance. The Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools practice guide from the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) aims to address these challenges. Developed by a panel of practitioners and researchers, the guide offers school and district administrators four evidence-based recommendations for helping students stay in school, progress through school, and graduate high school.

The summary linked above introduces the recommendations and supporting evidence described in the full practice guide. Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 complement one another and are most effective when implemented simultaneously in all types of schools, while Recommendation 4 should be implemented primarily in schools with high dropout rates to facilitate implementation of the other three recommen