



## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

A high school diploma is increasingly essential for success in the 21st century economy. Nearly 90% of the fastest-growing, highest-paying jobs require some sort of education beyond high school. To facilitate post-school success, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all students with disabilities have a transition plan that includes effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment or education. Even so, the graduation rate for students with disabilities remains both unacceptably low and slow to improve. In 2009-2010, just 68% of students with learning disabilities left high school with a regular diploma compared to 78.2% of students in the general population.

While existing regulations do provide some consistent reporting of graduation rates, current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) law does not require graduation rates to be calculated consistently, disaggregated, or improved over time. Since high schools receive only 10 percent of funds under ESEA Title I, graduation issues are given limited attention. NCLD feels that improving graduation rates for students with disabilities—almost half of whom have learning disabilities—is critical to improving the overall outcomes for these students. An updated ESEA must make improvement of graduation rates a top priority. To achieve this goal, NCLD offers the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Require the use of a uniform and accurate measure of high school graduation rates that is comparable across states, preferably the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, as stipulated in the current ESEA regulation.**
- 2. Require states to establish aggressive graduation rate goals and growth targets for all high schools.**
- 3. Provide incentives to improve the 4-year graduation rate.**
- 4. Require states to report a uniform graduation rate—disaggregated by subgroups—at the school, district, and state levels.**
- 5. Incorporate graduation rates and improvement goals by subgroup into overall school and district accountability systems with substantial weight.**
- 6. Do not allow special education students to be assigned to different cohorts; however, allow a very limited number of students with disabilities who graduate in more than four years to count as on-time graduates.**
- 7. Do not allow the setting of different graduation rate goals and -improvement targets for any type of alternative educational settings.**