

Graduation Promises Act (S. 1185) **Introduced by Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Richard Burr (R-NC), and Edward Kennedy (D-MA)**

What is the purpose of the Graduation Promises Act (GPA)?

The purpose of the GPA is to improve high schools and raise graduation rates while ensuring rigorous standards. Three types of grants will be provided to accomplish this goal:

- *Title I:* Grants to States to strengthen the capacity of State educational agencies (SEA) and local educational agencies (LEA) to turn around low-performing high schools (\$2.4 billion per year for five years).
- *Title II:* Grants to LEAs, nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education to develop, implement and evaluate effective secondary school models for struggling students and dropouts (\$40 million per year for five years).
- *Title III:* Grants to States to improve policies for raising graduation rates (\$60 million per year for five years).

Title I: High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund

What is the role of State Educational Agencies?

- *High School Improvement System:* SEAs will develop a system to improve high schools and provide subgrants to LEAs to implement strategies for school improvement. SEAs will develop School Performance Indicators that will be used by LEAs to analyze school performance and determine the amount and type of assistance schools will receive. In addition to the indicators used to determine adequate yearly progress, the indicators will include such measures as:
 - Student attendance rates
 - Earned on-time promotion rates
 - Percent of students who have on-time credit accumulation at the end of 10th grade
 - Percent of students taking rigorous courses
 - Teacher quality
 - Percent of students failing a core math, reading, language arts or science course; or failing 2 or more courses
 - College enrollment
- *Funding:* States will receive funds based on a formula that incorporates the number of students attending schools served by low-income LEAs, and the State's graduation rate. States are required to provide a 25 percent match (cash/in-kind) from non-federal funds, and may use up to 10 percent of their funds for State activities.

What is the role of Local Educational Agencies?

- *School Improvement Categories:* LEAs will place high schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years into one of three school improvement categories based on the indicators prescribed by the SEA. The three categories are:
 - schools needing targeted interventions
 - schools needing whole school reforms
 - schools needing replacement

Funding will be prioritized for schools needing whole school reforms and replacement.

- *School Improvement Teams:* LEAs will convene a school improvement team for each high school that does not make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years. The team will include school personnel, community representatives, and students. The school improvement teams will lead the development and implementation of a school improvement plan. The school improvement plans will identify performance benchmarks, define academic and nonacademic interventions, and provide for the involvement of business and community organizations.
- *Student Indicators:* LEAs will develop indicators that will be used by school improvement teams to determine what types of support each student needs to succeed. The indicators will include the number and percent of 9th grade students who, in the 8th grade, failed a core math, reading or language arts course (or 2 or more other courses), attended school less than 90 percent of the time, or received an out of school suspension. Other indicators will include the number and percent of 9th grade students who repeat the 9th grade or enter the 9th grade over the average age.
- *High School Capacity and Needs Assessment:* LEAs will conduct a capacity and needs assessment of each high school that does not make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years to help determine the level and uses of funds to assist the high schools. The analysis will include an assessment of the school's capacity to implement improvement activities, including an assessment of current staff capacity and a budget analysis.
- *Match:* LEAs must provide a 15 percent match (cash/in-kind), although the Secretary of Education may waive this requirement if the LEA is unable to provide the match.

What is the role of communities?

Members of the community will be included in the school improvement teams that will lead the implementation of the school improvement plans. Additionally, businesses, parents, community organizations and other entities are to be included in the activities funded through this Act.

What support will schools and students receive?

- *Targeted interventions:* research-based interventions to address specific problems identified by the school performance and student performance indicators.
- *Whole school reforms:* research-based reforms to address:
 - comprehensive needs (attendance, student engagement/behavior, teacher/administrator skill and collaboration)
 - resource allocation (student/teacher/staff support; materials; use of data)
 - ways to personalize the school experience
 - ways to improve curriculum and instruction
 - ways to strengthen student supports (school-family-community partnerships, wraparound social services, mentoring, tutoring, before and after school programs, additional counselors and mental health service providers)
- *School replacement:* LEAs will replace schools using data from the school performance indicators and capacity and needs assessments. Schools will be replaced with one or more small schools using effective models with evidence of success; or, they may be reopened after a new administrative team is assigned and research-based strategies are identified. Schools may also be closed and students may be reassigned to schools that have made adequate yearly progress for the past 2 years.

How will middle schools be impacted?

LEAs may use funds to improve middle schools whose students go on to attend high schools that need whole school reforms or replacement. Additionally, LEAs may use funds to establish an early warning system to identify struggling students who are not likely to graduate and provide them with support to get them back on track.

What accountability measures are included in GPA?

- *Evaluation:* 4 percent of the appropriation for this title is to be used for large scale randomized studies to determine and disseminate the most effective means of improving student achievement.
- *LEAs:* LEAs will monitor the implementation of school improvement plans. If schools are not on track toward meeting benchmarks, LEAs will develop a revised plan and/or redesignate the school into a new school improvement category. Further, on an annual basis, LEAs must report to SEAs and the public on the school performance indicators and progress toward achieving benchmarks, in addition to how the LEA used the funds it received.
- *SEAs:* On an annual basis, SEAs must report to the Secretary of Education and the public on the school performance indicators; progress made by each high school toward meeting benchmarks, and how LEAs used the funds they received. Additionally, every 5th years, SEAs must evaluate how their actions have improved achievement for the cohort of 9th graders that entered high school 4 years earlier.
- *Secretary of Education:* Every 2 years, the Secretary must report to Congress.

Title II: Development of Effective School Models

Funds made available through Title II will be used to provide competitive 3-year grants to LEAs, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, and partnerships among them, to develop and implement effective secondary school models for dropouts and struggling students (students not making sufficient progress toward graduation, students who have been retained a grade level, students who are under-credited, or students who have been identified as being limited English proficient).

Title III: Strengthening State Policies

Funds made available through Title III will be used to provide States with competitive 5-year grants to design and align state policies in order to act as laboratories of innovation. To receive a grant, the State must have in place or be in the process of implementing a statewide longitudinal data system. States must also ensure that they will align content standards and academic assessments with college and work readiness.

States may use funds for a variety of policy enhancement purposes, including the adjustment of policies around innovative finance models, data improvement, support systems for high need schools, and additional secondary school options including alternate models for struggling students and dropouts.

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