



July 2016

## **ESSA Graduation Rate Expectation and Arizona's Credit Recovery, Alternative High Schools**

### **Challenge:**

ESSA fails to establish differentiated graduation rate expectations for traditional in contrast with alternative - credit recovery high schools. Arizona's credit recovery, alternative high schools' missions are to educate a specific, targeted student population who are at risk of never graduating. These high schools provide instruction to over-aged and under-credited students. Therefore, applying the traditional high school graduation rate expectation, based on a four-year cohort, is inappropriate for these schools.

### **Opportunity:**

ESSA should consider an appropriate expectation for high schools designated as credit recovery high schools. In previous years, Arizona's alternative schools model considered graduation of older students when calculating academic accountability. An appropriate expectation for Arizona's credit recovery high schools would include graduation rates of fifth, sixth, seventh, even eighth year students and to refer to state policy regarding when a student ages out of public education. ESSA should appropriately differentiate its graduation expectation for credit recovery high schools, rather than penalizing the schools serving this highly at-risk student population.

### **Benefit:**

The lifetime cost in terms of social loss for each person who has dropped out of high school is \$421,280<sup>1</sup>. The contribution back to society of schools that graduate over-aged and under-credited students is obvious. Such schools re-engage youth who have not been successful in traditional education; they are not dropout factories. Arizona society benefits in economic gains from wage earnings, health care costs, tax revenues, less welfare and criminal activity, as well as the quality of life for the young people themselves. Arizona should ensure that any school accountability system does not wrongly burden Arizona citizens by inadvertently creating more high school dropouts, thus creating additional loss in economic gains.

*The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is a grass-roots member association of personnel and leaders from alternative schools and alternative education programs at accommodation schools, districts, charters, county education service agencies, non-profits, community organizations, dropout recovery programs, and other dedicated stakeholders who support alternative education in Arizona. Our membership represents 100 schools and other organizations. The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is the Arizona affiliate of the National Alternative Education Association.*

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<sup>1</sup> WestEd. (2014.) How Arizona's dropout crisis affects communities, Creates economic losses for the State of Arizona, retrieved from : [https://www.wested.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/1403888261AZMRT\\_FullReport.pdf](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/files_mf/1403888261AZMRT_FullReport.pdf)

Vision: College & career (post-secondary education & workplace) ready school completion through accountable alternative education