



StriveTogether®

Every child. Cradle to career.

Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Playbook: High School Graduation

High school graduation is a vital step toward economic stability, independence and opportunity. A diploma can open doors to college, career training, military service and jobs with benefits and upward mobility. Yet, persistent gaps in graduation rates — especially for Black, Latine and disabled students — reflect disparities in education access and quality.

Today's workforce increasingly demands postsecondary training, but many students

graduate unprepared. Only a minority are proficient in core academic subjects and many require remedial coursework in college. To ensure readiness, high schools must provide rigorous academics, career exploration, real-world learning and support for mental health and basic needs. These experiences are especially critical for students in under-resourced communities and can be life-changing when paired with strong community support.



What Does High School Graduation Mean?

Technically, graduating from high school means earning a diploma, verifying that students have taken and passed a set of requirements, including several years of math, English, science, history and electives. High school graduation also marks a major life transition and signals a student's readiness for the next phase of life, beyond the completion of course requirements. While a diploma verifies completion of subjects like math, English, science and history, it must also signal that students are equipped to navigate college, career or adult life with confidence.

For students, especially those from under-resourced communities, a meaningful high school experience includes both academic content and the development of skills and relationships that support long-term success: setting goals, managing time, communicating effectively and accessing supportive networks.

Graduation reflects more than the completion of minimum requirements — it signals true preparation. Every student should leave high school with the knowledge, confidence and tools to thrive. This kind of readiness is essential to expanding opportunity and strengthening communities.



How to use the StriveTogether Outcomes Playbook: High School Graduation Playbook

Mathematica's Education-to-Workforce Framework is the inspiration behind the high school graduation playbook's organization and content. The playbook provides research-based guidance to help community leaders:

- Identify priorities
- Track key indicators to measure community-level progress
- Design strategies with stakeholders
- Build collective support for investments in high school graduation outcomes



Essential Questions for High School Graduation

The playbook addresses 17 essential questions to guide planning, offering actionable practices, policies and indicators for tracking progress. The essential questions are grouped into five focus areas:

1. High School Graduation Progress

- Are all students graduating from high school on time, ready to successfully transition into further education, training or employment?
- Are students demonstrating satisfactory academic progress (including strong grade point averages), consistent attendance and positive behavior to be considered on track for high school graduation?
- Are students accessing, completing and succeeding in rigorous college- and career-ready coursework?
- Are students taking the necessary steps to have a post-high school plan (which may include applying to college, entering the workforce or other workforce training) and receiving sufficient counseling support along the way?

2. Leading a School System to Strong Graduation Requirements

- Does the Local Education Agency (LEA) and school monitor the progress of all students and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior or academic problems?
- Does the Local Education Agency (LEA) or school provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track?
- Does the Local Education Agency (LEA) or school engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college, career and life success?

3. Teaching , Learning and High School Coursework

- Do students have effective, representative teachers and leaders?
- Are teachers and schools making significant contributions to academic growth for students?
- Do students attend school in systems with adequate funding to prepare students to graduate with college- and career-ready high school degrees?
- Do students have access to high-quality, rigorous curricula and coursework?
- Do students have strong, supportive relationships with teachers/adults at school?

4. Experiences and Neighborhood Conditions

- Do families live in well-resourced neighborhoods?
- Do families with children have access to public support (i.e., health care access, nutrition programs, economic support, etc.)?

5. Positive School Environments

- Do students attend schools with safe, inclusive and supportive environments?
- Do students attend schools that prioritize their social, emotional and physical development and well-being?
- Are there students who disproportionately experience exclusionary discipline?