

conversations

Making progress toward secure future

The Indiana Department of Education's announcement on Jan. 8 of the state's four-year graduation rates includes some promising statistics regarding the progress being made in Marion County public schools.

Our four-year graduation rate from the 2008-2009 school year shows an increase of 4.72 percentage points over the previous year. We have improved 6 percentage points since the 2006-07 graduation rate of 67.69 percent. The momentum has begun and we must keep our eye on this trend line with a community-wide commitment to keep it moving upward.

This accomplishment is encouraging. It speaks to the collective hard work, dedication and perseverance of superintendents, educators, parents and students, and the dozens of community, educational and business organizations that play a vital role in improving the long-term success of our stu-



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dents.

The Indianapolis Chamber's Common Goal initiative's efforts are to work collectively to reach a four-year graduation rate of 80 percent by 2012. While the latest report shows progress and momentum, we are nowhere near finished. As a community, we must focus on helping our students graduate and become successful citizens who contribute to the economic wealth of this community.

An economic study released by the Alliance for Excellent Education in November demonstrates that when students drop out of high school, it not only has a lifelong effect on the student, it also has a rippling economic effect on the community. The report showed that if the number of 6,736 metropolitan Indianapolis students who dropped out of the 2007-08 school year was reduced by half, the additional high school graduates would together earn more than \$42 million in additional wages in an average year compared to their likely earnings without a diploma.

Common Goal identified best practices nationally and locally

for interventions and enhancements and developed a menu of these that could be funded and offered to schools. Then district-by-district, school-by-school and student-by-student, Common Goal has provided graduation coaches, reading remediation, credit recovery, mentors and more to students who could graduate on time with some additional assistance.

Students are selected through identification of performance indicators that signal a problem with on-time graduation: low credits, poor attendance, course failures, suspensions, mobility, grade point average, and more.

This year, the performance indicator system will be implemented in all of our Common Goal schools, providing an even better way to identify at-risk students and report these results to our sponsors and the community.

The needs are great and additional funds are needed to keep these programs running and to identify, match and provide even more students with the support they need to graduate on time.

The momentum has started. Let's keep it moving so even more students are helped. It is critical to the long-term success of our children and our community.

Bill Corley
 MY VIEW

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Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce