



Destination Diploma

Demanding - Dynamic - Diverse

A forum designed to increase high school completion rates.

What is Destination Diploma?

Rigor, relevance and relationships illustrate the key themes of the two-day high school forum **Destination Diploma: Demanding - Dynamic - Diverse**. Building upon recommendations and innovative ideas in *Breaking Ranks II for Creating Systems that Support Successful High Schools*, the forum highlights practical approaches for preparing today's students for the complex and ever-changing world they will enter upon graduation. Bill Gates, in his speech to the Governors' National Education Summit on High Schools, confirms these themes as the new three R's, the basic building blocks of better high schools:

- The first R is Rigor - making sure all students are given a challenging curriculum that prepares them for college or work;
- The second R is Relevance - making sure kids have courses and projects that clearly relate to their lives and their goals;
- The third R is Relationships - making sure kids have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve.

The high school forum is a kick-off event to a larger initiative of the New York State Board of Regents to improve high school completion rates across the State. A recent report prepared for the Board of Regents, *Assessment Review and Action on Student Performance Results for the 2000 Student Cohort: Intervention Strategies*, defines the critical need for implementation of intervention strategies focused on students in academic difficulty. The data showed that the vast majority of general education students who pass all five required Regents exams pass at 55. But it also showed that many students entered high school unprepared to do high school level work, do not pass their courses and earn fewer than the 22 local high school credits they need for graduation in four years. Data showed that these students are concentrated in 136 high schools in 12 school districts identified in the Regents report.

The goal of the forum is to bring educators and stakeholders together to examine effective strategies for improving graduation rates and performance on Regents exams in the identified schools and districts. The forum design over the two-day period provides maximum opportunity for dialogue and sharing of ideas among participants and focuses on research-based principles and emerging practices that offer promising approaches to addressing important issues facing educators regarding high school completion.

Key elements of the design include:

- A visionary presentation by Pedro Noguera of the Metro Center for Urban Education at NYU that shares his belief that building a better society for the future must be shared by everyone to ensure that the students of today are prepared to become the effective leaders of tomorrow.
- An emerging model outlined by a panel of experienced educators from San Diego that is improving achievement and supporting diverse students through rigorous and relevant teaching and learning.
- Study circles that bring educators together to share their experiences on issues affecting student success; to recognize where there is a commonality of issues across districts; and to identify concrete steps and strategies that could be taken to improve high school completion rates.
- Roundtable and rich-text protocol discussions that provide the opportunity for districts to share and exchange emerging practices and compelling research in a small group setting through dialogue.
- A discussion and presentation by a panel of students from Albany High School providing their personal perspectives on their high school experiences.

The forum concludes with participants reflecting on their forum experiences to create action steps designed to improve the educational opportunities and experiences for students in their districts.