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America's Promise Alliance, Pearson Award \$600,000 in Grants to Increase High School Graduation Rates

Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota Organizations Selected as Part of GradNation Initiative

Washington, D.C. (October 14, 2015) – [America's Promise Alliance](#), leader of the GradNation campaign, and [Pearson](#) today announced the recipients of \$600,000 in [GradNation State Activation](#) grants to bolster organizations with innovative approaches to increase U.S. graduation rates. The grantees demonstrated a commitment to preparing more young people with the skills necessary to graduate from high school and succeed in college, work and life.

Initiatives in Arizona, Massachusetts and Minnesota will each receive \$200,000 to fund a multi-year effort to raise statewide graduation rates. Each will facilitate cross-sector collaboration, leverage state assets, communicate progress and lessons learned, and develop programs that can be replicated and scaled.

“Despite gains in the national graduation rate, nearly all states are graduating significantly lower percentages of students from low-income families, students of color and students with disabilities,” said [John Gomperts](#), president & CEO of America's Promise. “We see an opportunity – through these grants – to support collaborative models at the state level that can unify communities and produce real results.”

“Pearson is proud to invest in states to identify and replicate the most innovative programs to help students graduate high school and prepare for real-world challenges,” said Shilpi Niyogi, Pearson's senior vice president of North America corporate affairs and global government relations. “This initiative allows grantees to showcase their local successes and provides a platform for all states to learn from each other.”

The organizations receiving grants are:

- [WestEd](#). The research, development, and service agency is the sponsor and project manager of the [Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable](#), and will engage mayors in 16 cities across Arizona to create targets and action plans for measurable improvement in high school graduation rates.

- **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.** Led by its Office of College and Career Readiness, the department will create a state-level coalition of up to 10 targeted school districts to improve high school graduation rates for students whose first language is not English. In the 2013-14 school year, English Language Learners represented 4.9 percent of the MA high school population but 15.5 percent of youth that left school before graduating in the state.
- **Minnesota Alliance With Youth.** The Alliance will support GradMinnesota, a statewide initiative to increase the overall graduation rate to 90 percent, with a focus on increasing graduation rates for students of color, low-income students, English Language learners and students with disabilities.

Grantees were selected from a diverse pool of 41 applicants in 26 states by an independent Blue Ribbon judging panel from the education and youth development sectors. Applicants included state education agencies, nonprofit organizations, statewide coalitions and collaborative groups.

All applicants – along with other organizations and communities working to increase statewide graduation rates – have been invited to join a new GradNation Activation online community network, a hub for sharing strategies and successful practices, and participating in virtual learning opportunities.

The GradNation campaign focuses on raising the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and increasing college enrollment and completion. For more information on graduation rates, including a state-by-state breakdown of graduation data, see the 2015 Building a Grad Nation report.

To learn more about the GradNation State Activation Initiative and grantees visit: <http://www.americaspromise.org/gradnation-state-activation-initiative>.

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America's Promise Alliance leads an alliance of organizations, communities and individuals dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. As its signature effort, the GradNation campaign mobilizes Americans to increase the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and prepare young people for postsecondary enrollment and the 21st century workforce. www.americaspromise.org

Pearson is the world's leading learning company, with 40,000 employees in more than 80 countries working to help people of all ages to make measurable progress in their lives through learning. www.pearson.com

More about the grant recipients:

In **Arizona**, [WestEd](#), a nonprofit research, development and service agency that works to promote excellence, equity and improved outcomes for children, youth and adults, will work with the Mayors Education Roundtable to increase graduation rates in 16 Arizona cities.

With the mayors' leadership, each of the 16 communities will create their own specific targets and strategies to increase high school graduation rates. WestEd will provide convening support, technical assistance, resources and strategic guidance for local planning and execution efforts.

“The Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable -- made up of a diverse group of mayors from big cities, small communities, rural, urban, Democrat and Republican -- was created to give a nonpartisan voice to mayors who are committed to improving education in their cities and ultimately the state,” said [Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton](#). “Everyone should have the opportunity to graduate from college, but far too few students are receiving the opportunity to pursue the American Dream. The responsibility to change this reality belongs to us and this grant will help achieve that change.”

In **Massachusetts**, the state [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) will specifically target the school districts with the largest numbers of students whose first language is not English. Despite large gains in the overall state graduation rate, students whose first language is not English—a group that includes English Language Learners—account for 30 percent of all young people who leave school without a diploma in the state. The target districts will become a learning community supported by a state-level coalition.

“We are grateful for this support as we work to increase graduation rates of English language learners,” said Keith Westrich, acting associate commissioner of the Center for Vocational, Workplace and College Readiness Programs at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Massachusetts has had success using data to target interventions and raise graduation rates, and it’s important that we extend that promise and opportunity to all of our students.”

In **Minnesota**, the [Minnesota Alliance With Youth](#) will support GradMinnesota, a statewide initiative in collaboration with the Governor’s Office and the state Department of Education to increase the overall graduation rate to 90 percent, raise the graduation rate to 80 percent or more in all schools, and increase graduation rates by at least 3 percent each year for students of color, low-income students, English Language learners and students with disabilities.

“While progress is being made, Minnesota continues to have large differences in high school graduation rates based on race, special needs and socio-economic factors,” said [Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton](#). “Clearly, there is more work to be done. With the support of America’s Promise and the Statewide Activation Grant, the work of GradMinnesota can move forward in replicating successful programs and strategies throughout the state that foster success for all children and young people.”

