

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma: The Impact of the Elimination of the Local Diploma on New York State

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*In 1996, the New York State Education Department set in motion the phase out of the local diploma in an effort to have all students fulfill the requirements for the more rigorous Regents diploma. After 15 years of gradually phasing out the local diploma, there is **no plan** for the students who will now fail to graduate because the local diploma will no longer be available to them. This will have dire consequences for many youth, their communities and the State.*

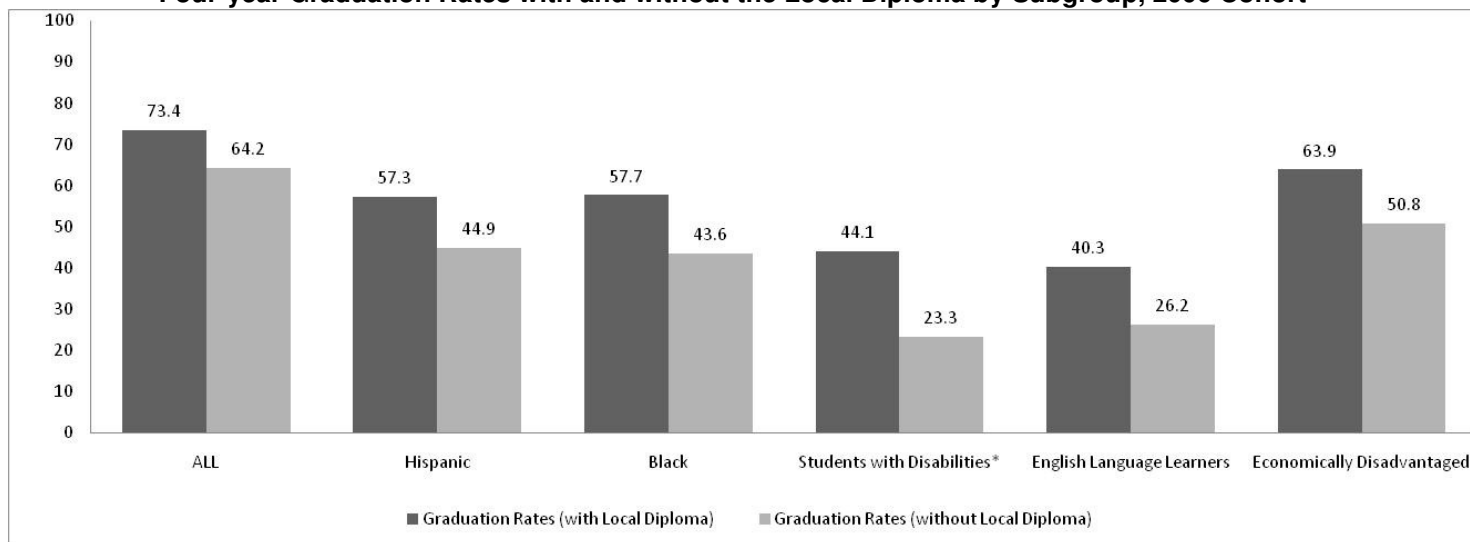
The first class of high school students who did not have the option of getting a local diploma, unless they received special education services, is set to graduate in June 2012. Without the local diploma in New York State, we estimate that as many as 14,000 general education students from the 2006 high school cohort and in each subsequent cohort are not likely to graduate from high school within four years.¹ An additional 7,000 students with disabilities are not likely to graduate within four years in 2015 when one of two local diploma pathways is eliminated for these students.²

This statement presents the full potential impact of these changes both now and in June 2015.

Students of Color, Students with Disabilities,³ and English Language Learners are Disproportionally Affected

Of the students at risk of not graduating because the local diploma will not be an option: 33% would be students with disabilities; 30% would be Black; 26% would be Hispanic; and 8% would be English Language Learners.

Four-year Graduation Rates with and without the Local Diploma by Subgroup, 2006 Cohort



Source: New York State Department of Education-2011, AFC Analysis.2012

Note: Data includes students with disabilities.*The effect for students with disabilities may not be observed until June 2015.

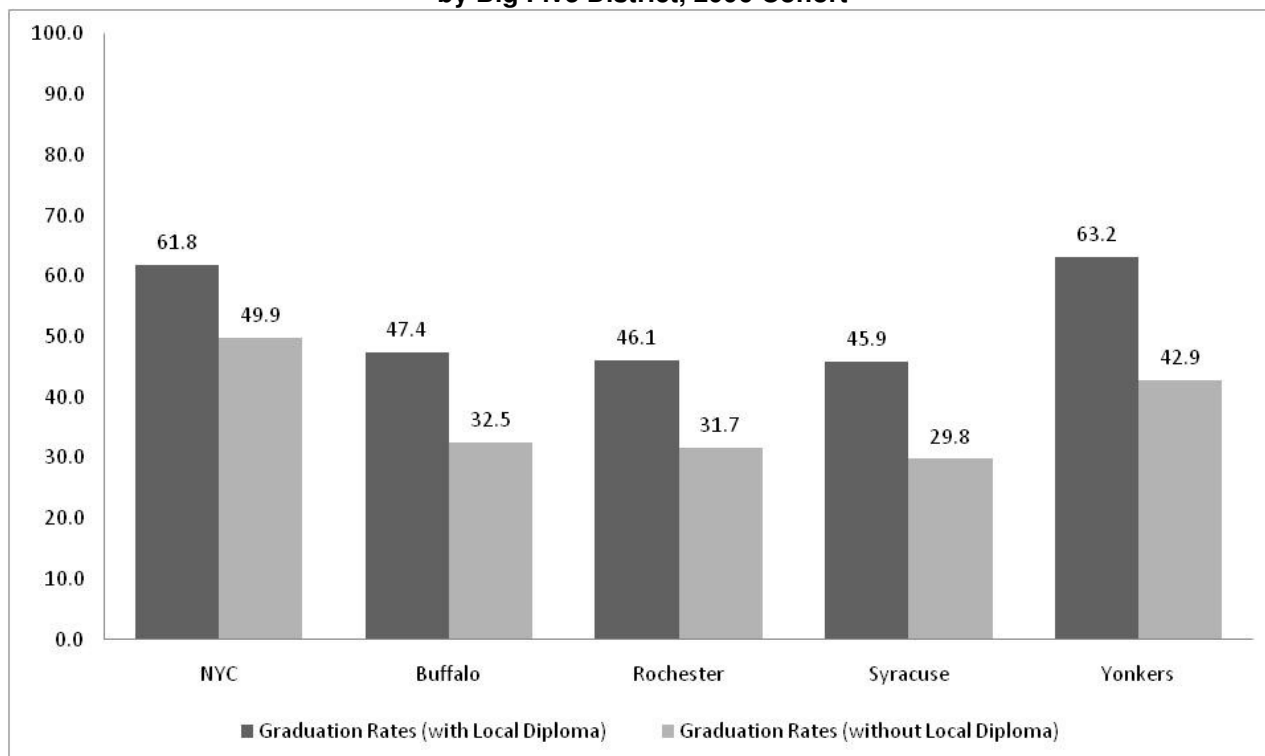
¹ Estimates are based on New York State data from the 2006 high school cohort.

² There are two ways for students with disabilities to currently earn a local diploma: 1) passing up to six Regents Competency Tests (RCTs) instead of the Regents exams and 2) passing up to five Regents exams with a score between 55 and 64. Beginning in 2011, the RCTs have been eliminated for all entering ninth graders and all subsequent classes. The effects of this change, however, will not be observed until June 2015. The latter pathway to a local diploma for students with disabilities will remain an option.

³ Although the local diploma currently exists for students with disabilities receiving special education services, a major route to a local diploma for these students will be eliminated, and it is unclear how many used this route to graduate. Furthermore, proposals within the last two years contemplated eliminating the local diploma for all students. The State Education Department is currently considering a number of proposals that would allow only students with disabilities who receive special education services to continue to receive a local diploma. **If New York retains the local diploma only for students receiving special education services, we believe this would be discriminatory and may result in an increase in special education referrals.**

In Big Cities Throughout the State, Graduation Rates will Fall

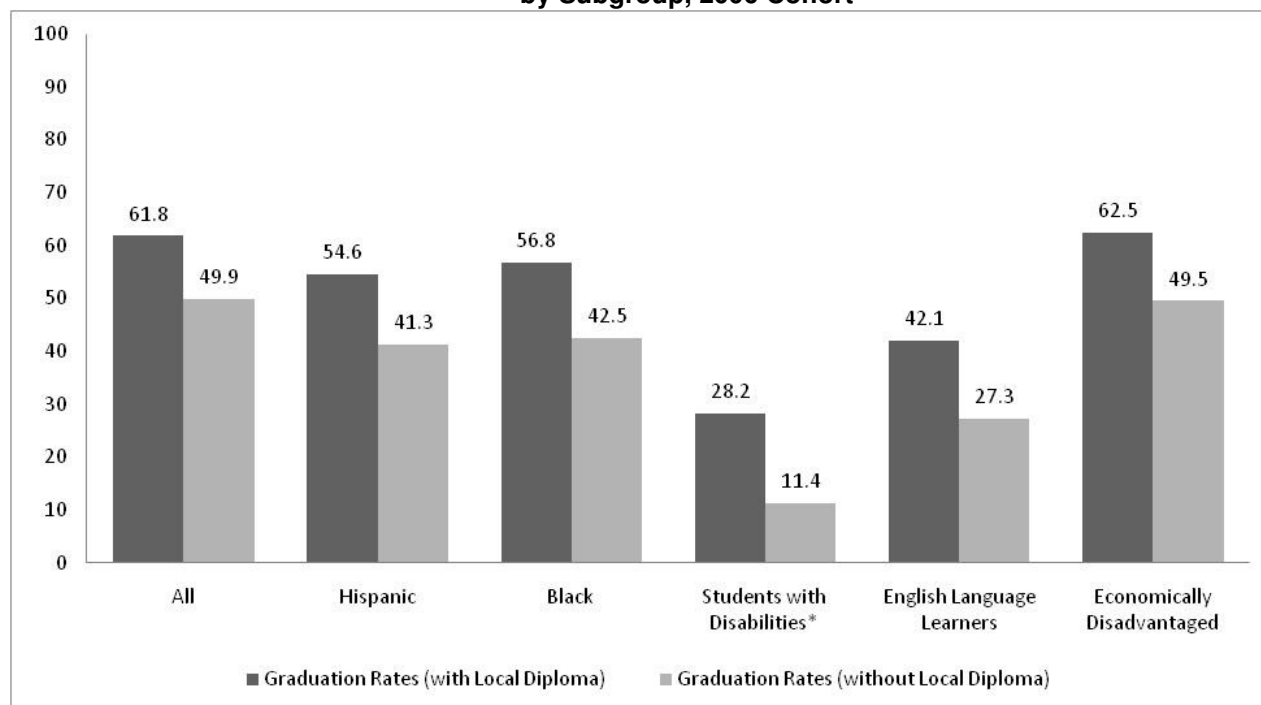
**Four-year Graduation Rates with and without the Local Diploma
by Big Five District, 2006 Cohort**



Source: New York State Department of Education-2011, AFC Analysis.2012

Note: Data includes students with disabilities. The effect for students with disabilities may not be observed until June 2015.

**New York City's Four-year Graduation Rates with and without the Local Diploma
by Subgroup, 2006 Cohort**



Source: New York State Department of Education-2011, AFC Analysis.2012

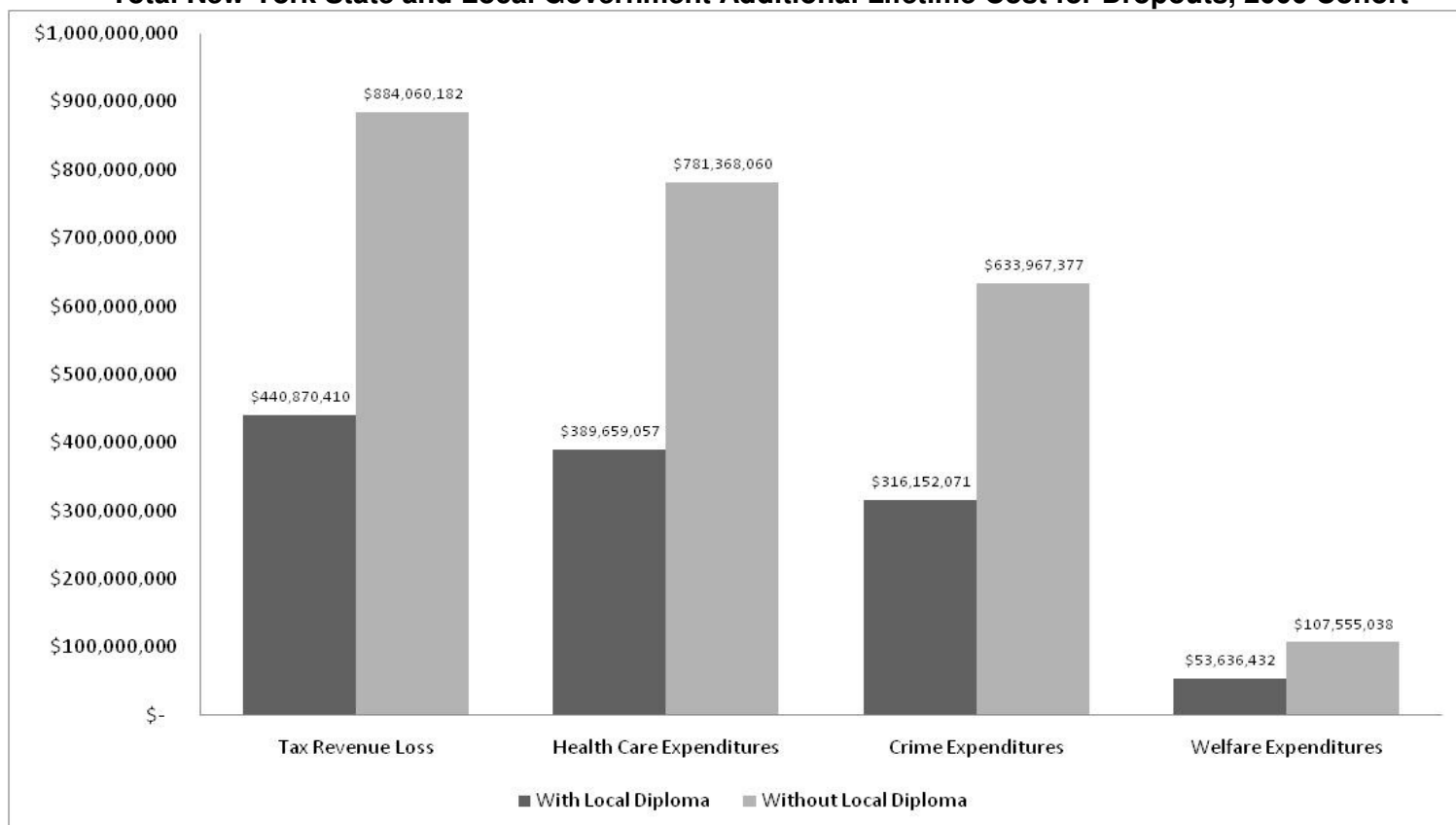
Note: Data includes students with disabilities. *The effect for students with disabilities may not be observed until June 2015.

The Decrease in High School Graduates Will Increase Government Social Service Costs

In addition to the cost of lost opportunities for individual young people, creating up to **21,000** additional drop-outs has a cost for communities.

- **This increase would drive up unemployment to even higher levels**, particularly in large urban areas, since the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma is 11.1% compared to 7.6% for those with a diploma/GED (*New York State Department of Labor, 2011*).
- The lost **lifetime earnings** in New York for the class of 2009 high school dropouts total nearly **\$21 billion** (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). The additional lost earnings resulting from the extra high school dropouts due to the elimination of the local diploma, both now for most students and later for students with disabilities, would be approximately **\$5.4 billion**.

Total New York State and Local Government Additional Lifetime Cost for Dropouts, 2006 Cohort



Source: NYLARNet, 2007; Muennig 2005; AFC Analysis 2012

Notes: Lifetime values based on a 3.5% discount rate and are in 2004 dollars.

Data includes students with disabilities. The effect for students with disabilities may not be observed until June 2015.

Take Action Now

Our Coalition supports efforts to better prepare our students for life after school. We have come together to urge New York State to create multiple pathways to a diploma, each of which holds students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction and academic and social support, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities. We believe that measuring college- and career-readiness requires valuing multiple and equally valid ways to provide and assess the skills needed for success in the workplace and higher education while supporting a diversity of learning styles and goals.⁴

Until New York develops multiple pathways to a diploma, however, we cannot eliminate current options that provide real opportunities for our young people.

We cannot afford to stand by and do nothing. A high school graduate has more opportunities than a drop-out. We need the State Education Department to start talking about alternatives that don't just raise the bar, but build on the strengths of our youth so that they can jump over the bar.

- **Ask the State Education Department what it is doing to prevent the elimination of the local diploma from stranding thousands of students who need it to graduate.**
- **If there is no plan, tell them to keep the local diploma until an alternative is developed; and**
- **Insist it is time to talk about multiple pathways to a diploma for all students.**

⁴ We have outlined proposals to the New York State Education Department that recommend keeping the local diploma while only giving partial credit to schools for local diploma graduates under accountability measures and that outline specific alternative pathways to a diploma that use performance-based assessment and expanded Career and Technical Education options. Letters outlining our proposals are available on Advocates for Children's website: http://advocatesforchildren.org/policy_and_initiatives/pathways_to_a_diploma.

Supporting Organizations⁵

Advocates for Children of New York
Alliance for Quality Education
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
ARISE Coalition
Bronx Independent Living Services
BronxWorks
Brooklyn Center for the Disabled
Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective
Business Teachers Association of New York State
Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Community Service Society of New York
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Good Shepherd Services
Lawyers for Children
Learning Disabilities Association of New York City
Learning Disabilities Association of New York State
Long Island Advocacy Center
Long Island Communities of Practice
Mental Health Association of New York City
Neighborhood Family Services Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
New York Performance Standards Consortium
New York State Coalition of 853 Schools
New York State Community of Practice on Family, School and Community Collaboration
New York State Disabilities Advocacy Association and Network
New York State Rehabilitation Association
Parent to Parent New York, Inc.
Resources for Children with Special Needs
United Federation of Teachers
United We Stand
Upward Bound, Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, New York University

⁵ This list is in formation and is not exhaustive as some organizations choose not to publicly disclose their participation.

⁶ Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.

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