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## Let's commit to success

A think tank's low assessment of Louisiana efforts to boost high school graduation rates ought to give school leaders and public officials some pause for concern at all levels.

The Education Trust did not single out Louisiana for what it suggests are its meager efforts to improve high school graduation rates, although our state ranked 39th in setting the bar high.

In its fall 2008 report, The Education Trust said the goal for high school graduation in this state was a mere 65 percent, just .1 percent higher than the 64.9 percent graduation rate in the previous year.

That, according to the experts, is not a robust enough benchmark for improvement, given our already low rate of graduation.

Some states, such as Arizona and Florida, are seeking a full percentage point a year in improvement — 10 times what we in Louisiana are aiming for, according to The Education Trust. Other states suggest any progress at all is good enough for an annual improvement target.

That's where The Education Trust notes that under No Child Left Behind, states must meet a graduate rate goal or show improvement. But the goals themselves are left to the state.

John Warner Smith, the CEO of Education's Next Horizon, said that the good news is that the problem is "solvable." In fact, he said, there are strategies that work.

The Education Trust suggests that first, states must expect meaningful success. The Trust says that by not setting high goals, states send the message — the wrong message — that the status quo is OK. The status quo is certainly not OK here.

The Trust also notes — rightly — that high dropout rates is not merely an abstract problem. The lack of a diploma often prevents individuals from finding or from keeping meaningful work. The lack of a diploma — and the real knowledge a diploma suggests — can keep people from appreciating fully meaningful lives.

High dropout rates on the whole send a concrete message to potential employers that the education system and the workforce it produces is flawed. That harms a state's competitive position in trying to lure new jobs.

We're confident Gov. Bobby Jindal and state Superintendent Paul Pastorek are determined to combat low graduation rates. We'd like to see school board members, school leaders and parents fully engaged in efforts to keep students in school.

The Trust suggests that states like Louisiana accurately account for all of its student outcomes, hold schools and districts accountable for meaningful standards and generate statewide focus on the improvement.

We suggest there's more that can be done. Communitywide efforts should engage volunteer help, business and civic group support and close accounting by the public. That means an unwavering commitment to the students that schools should serve.

Does that happen in our public school systems? If not, why not?

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