



Testimony before the  
**Senate Committee on Education**  
on  
**SB 169 – Kansas Read to Succeed Act**

by  
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 169**. KASB supports Governor Brownback's two "roadmap" goals for Kansas education: improving fourth grade reading skills and increasing the number of college and career-ready high school graduates. These two measures are embedded in KASB's measures of state achievement, which currently ranks Kansas seventh out of the 50 states. Our "First in Education, the Kansas Way" plan has the goal of making Kansas first in educational achievement, and sets out specific goals for increasing college and career-ready graduates.

The question for us, and this committee, is whether the policies contained in **SB 169** will move Kansas closer to those goals. The most significant part of this bill is a policy requiring that most students be retained in third grade until they pass a reading proficiency test.

**1. Research studies show mixed results on the long-term benefits of retention.**

We have attached two research reports on this issue. In general, the reports indicate that data on the real impact is inconclusive. There is evidence of short-term benefits in some circumstances, such as the Florida law passed in 2002, but the impact seems to fade and the long-term impact is unclear. Both reports stress the importance of early identification and interventions, which come with additional costs.

**2. The long-term impact of the Florida law is also unclear.**

The state of Florida has received considerable attention and is sometimes given as an example of a state getting better academic results than Kansas, especially given the state spending per pupil and number of low-income, at-risk students. The reality is considerably different. KASB believes it is important to look at a number of educational indicators, rather than a single test that can distort the total record.

**Kansas performed better than Florida on every major measure of achievement.**

*National reading and math scores:* An average nearly 80% of Kansas students scored at the basic level or higher on the four most recent National Assessment of Education Progress tests (4th and 8th grade reading and math); and 40% scored at the proficient level, ranking Kansas 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Florida's average scores were 74% and 32.5%, ranking 31<sup>st</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup>. For low income, at-risk students, Kansas also does better than Florida, with 69.5% at basic (7<sup>th</sup>) and 25.5% at proficient (6<sup>th</sup>). Florida's low income students were 65.4% at basic and 21.5% at proficient, ranking 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>.

*High school completion:* Kansas had an average high school completion rate of 81.9% on four national measures, ranking 11<sup>th</sup>, while Florida's rate was 72.9%, ranking 43<sup>rd</sup>.

*ACT scores:* The composite score for Kansas was 21.9% in 2012, ranking 5<sup>th</sup> among the 27 states where a majority of students take the ACT. Florida's average score was 19.8% - fourth from last.

*Adult Attainment:* Kansas ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation in adult education levels, using an average of high school completion, four-year college degrees and advanced degree completion. Florida ranks 35<sup>th</sup>.

**Kansas spends more per pupil, but Florida has increased spending at a faster rate.**

Between 2002 and 2010, Kansas current per pupil spending increased from \$7,052 to \$9,715, or 37.8%. Florida increased from \$6,050 to \$8,741, or 44.3%. Adjusting for inflation, Florida's increase was even larger: 23.1% compared to 16.6% increase. In other words, Florida increased its spending 40% more than Kansas, adjusted for inflation, since the reading retention policy went into effect.

**Florida improved more than Kansas in some areas, but not in others.**

*NAEP scores:* Between 2003 and 2011, the percent of all students scoring at basic or above increased 6.7% in Florida, compared to 3.8% in Kansas, and the percent of low income students scoring at basic increased 12.6% in Florida, compared to 6.8% in Kansas. Florida clearly made much more progress in moving students to basic, although it started at a much lower base.

However, Florida and Kansas had the same rate of increase for all students reaching the proficient level (4.3%). Florida low income students reaching the proficient level increased 6.3%, compared to 4.7% in Kansas.

KASB research shows the "basic" level strongly correlates to a state's graduation rate, and the "proficient" level correlates to "college ready," but not as closely.

It should also be noted that Florida's NAEP scores DROPPED in each category between 2009 and 2011. This may indicate the benefit of reading retention is fading, or it may be due to the fact that Florida's per pupil funding levels dropped between 2009 and 2010.

*High school completion:* Florida increased its average graduation rate from 61.8% (48<sup>th</sup> in the nation) to 72.9%, (43<sup>rd</sup>). Kansas increased from 76.1% (17<sup>th</sup>) to 81.9% (11<sup>th</sup>). These averages include four different national reports on high school completion, from 2009 through 2011.

*ACT scores:* We do have data on the class of 2012 for college readiness. At least 50% of seniors in both Kansas and Florida have taken the ACT college aptitude test since 2007. Florida's participation increased from 54% in 2007 to 79% in 2012, and the average composite score in Florida dropped from 19.9 to 19.5 in 2009 and 2010, and then increased to 19.8 in 2012. In Kansas, participation increased from 76% to 81%, and the average score has remained 21.9 to 22.0 every year.

**Florida lags far behind Kansas in high school completion and college/career readiness.**

However, the most recent four-year graduation rate report from the U.S. Department of Education shows that Florida lags substantially behind Kansas in every major student group.

| School Year 2010-11 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates |     |                  |          |       |                   |            |
|---|-----|------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|------------|
|   | All | African-American | Hispanic | White | Special Education | Low Income |
| Florida   | 71% | 59%              | 69%      | 76%   | 44%               | 60%        |
| Kansas  | 83% | 72%              | 73%      | 86%   | 73%               | 73%        |

We should note this information does not include the graduating class of 2012, which we estimate to be the first class fully affected by the third grade retention policy. However, these results include a decade of other reform measures in Florida, and suggest the impact of retention should be evaluated based on how it affects these statistics in future years.

However, the first Florida class included in the reading retention program remains far below Kansas in college readiness, even when looking at the different student populations.

| Percent of Students Meeting ACT College Ready Benchmarks, Class of 2012 |         |      |         |                           |                             |                                 |
|---|---------|------|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
|   | English | Math | Reading | Average of Three Subjects | Percent of Graduates Tested | Average % of Class at Benchmark |
| <b>Florida:</b>   |         |      |         |                           |                             |                                 |
| All Students  | 57%     | 37%  | 46%     | 46.7%                     | 70%                         | 32.7%                           |
| African-American  | 29%     | 13%  | 22%     | 21.3%                     |                             |                                 |
| Hispanic  | 50%     | 32%  | 40%     | 40.7%                     |                             |                                 |
| White   | 74%     | 52%  | 62%     | 62.7%                     |                             |                                 |
| <b>Kansas:</b>  |         |      |         |                           |                             |                                 |
| All Students  | 73%     | 52%  | 60%     | 61.7%                     | 81%                         | 50.0%                           |
| African-American  | 36%     | 19%  | 27%     | 27.3%                     |                             |                                 |
| Hispanic  | 53%     | 33%  | 42%     | 42.7%                     |                             |                                 |
| White   | 79%     | 58%  | 65%     | 67.3%                     |                             |                                 |

This data indicates that the first class of students affected by the Florida reading retention program were significantly less "college ready" than their peers in Kansas – even in the subject of reading, and even though Kansas tests a higher percentage of graduating students than Florida, which tends to lower scores (because more academically marginal students are tested).

**Overall, Florida's education performance is about where it would be expected, based on spending on student population, while Kansas performs better than expected.**

Nationally, higher spending states tend to have higher educational outcomes, lower spending states, and lower outcomes. In addition, states that rank high in family incomes (measured by percent of students eligible for free or reduced price meals) also rank high in achievement, and states ranking low in income rank low in achievement.

Using the four achievement measures (NAEP score, graduation rates, preparation for college and adult attainment), Florida ranks 40<sup>th</sup> in achievement (tied with Georgia), 42<sup>nd</sup> in current spending per pupil, 43<sup>rd</sup> in total revenue per pupil, and 39<sup>th</sup> in student/family income. Kansas ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in achievement, 27<sup>th</sup> in current spending per pupil, 25<sup>th</sup> in total revenue per pupil, and 30<sup>th</sup> in student/family income.

In other words, Florida's achievement is almost exactly in line with its rank in spending and student economic status, while Kansas achievement is far above its rank in spending and student status.

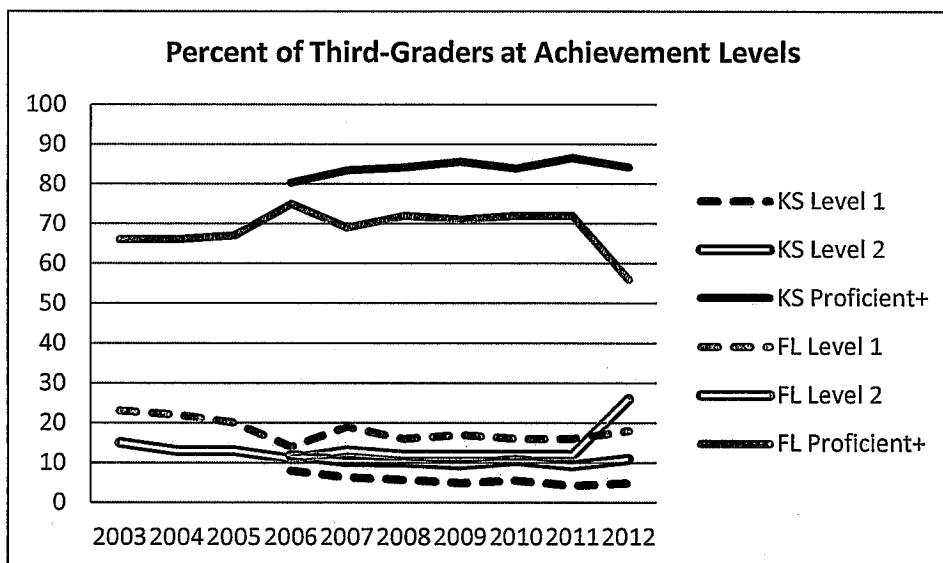
The percent of low income students in Kansas (45.7%) is actually closer to the percentage in Florida (53.5%, an 8.2% difference), than Kansas is to the only six states ranking above Kansas in achievement. All of those states have at least 10% percent students eligible for free lunch than Kansas.

**3. The change in Florida’s third grade reading levels on state assessments has not been significantly different than Kansas.**

As the following table shows, gains on Florida’s third grade reading achievement largely leveled off since 2006. The percentage of students at Level 1, the level where retention may be required, hit a low 14%, 2006 has remained between 16% and 19% ever since. The percent of Kansas students in the lowest level declined from 8% in 2006 (the first year Kansas tested third-graders) to 4% in 2011, before rising slightly to 5% this year.

The percent of students at the second level in both states has remained around 10% until this year. The percent of students scoring the “proficient” level or standard for third grade in Florida peaked at 75% in 2006, but stabilized around 71% until this year.

Florida’s proficiency rate dropped to 56% this year because the state adopted new, higher standards. It does not mean students were learning less, it means the expectations were raised. It is also obviously indicates that Florida kept the Level 1 standard largely unchanged, which would prevent a large increase in retained students. Kansas will face the same choice when it adopts new standards in the next few years: how will higher standards effect students under a retention policy?



Source: Kansas State Department of Education, Florida State Department of Education

**4. The evidence of reading retention on graduation rates and college and career-readiness is not strong enough to justify a state mandate.**

We believe there is simply not yet enough data to impose a new state mandate on school districts for a particular education strategy. The evidence is very clear that the educational results in Kansas have been improving and are among the best in the nation – and those states which exceed Kansas performance do not, to our knowledge, have a retention requirement.

KASB’s *First In Education* plan states that the state should focus on outcomes and only intervene if a school or district is not meeting state standards for improvement. We certainly share the Governor’s goal of improving reading levels. But why require specific policies if districts can achieve these goals on their own? Governor Brownback has often talked about doing things “the Kansas Way,” which we borrowed for our proposal. We suggest we can find an approach that reflects the unique strengths of our Kansas system that balance state standards of accountability with strong local control and flexibility.

**5. The grade retention aspect of SB 169 should be considered an intervention for school or districts that fail to demonstrate improvement.**

Rather than imposing this policy on all districts, the reading retention requirement could be used as a possible intervention for districts that fail to meet the Annual Measurable Objectives required in the state No Child Left Behind waiver being implemented by the State Board of Education. Under that system, each school and district will be required to demonstrate annual improvement on new state assessments. If school districts are showing acceptable improvement on reading (and math) performance from a new baseline, allow them to continue. If local efforts are not working, a reading retention policy could be required.

We believe this could easily be amended into the bill, based on its 2017 starting date. That would allow the State Board and school districts to implement the new system under the waiver and adopt their own plans for early literacy identification and interventions. Districts and educators concerned about this plan would be able to develop their own strategies – and be held accountable for their results. This would also allow time for a more careful study of the long-term impact of laws in Florida and other states.

**6. A reading retention policy requires adequate funding.**

We have evaluated SB 169 on two aspects of the *First in Education* plan: raising standards and local leadership. The final aspect is suitable finance. Research around this concept has stressed the importance of adequate early identification, intervention and remediation to be successful. Note that during the first eight years of the Florida law, when the gains were being observed, Florida increased its spending per pupil at a rate of 5.5% per year, compared to 4.7% in Kansas. The Governor's budget, page 40, projects the state aid to K-12 education, excluding KPERS contributions, will increase by just 2% per year through 2019. That table does not include further income tax cuts, or increased economic activity due to tax cuts.

We support the early literacy grant programs and incentives provided in this bill. However, this level of funding is far less than the additional dollars provided to Florida when it implemented its program. We believe if state aid is not even matching the rate of inflation, the ability to provide increased support for early learners will be difficult, if not impossible. We suggest this bill contain a trigger mechanism so that it would not take effect if state or district funding falls below at least an inflationary threshold. Students may benefit from being retained if they receive additional help. There is a much greater risk that students may be harmed if they are retained without that support.

Thank you for your consideration.



Provisional Data File: SY2010-11 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

| State                      | All Students | Major Racial and Ethnic Groups                          |  |  |                     |                               |   |   | Special Populations                             |   |       | Asian/Pacific Islander Detail                              |  |
|----------------------------|--------------|---|--|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------|--|--|
|                            |              | American Indian/<br>Alaska Native or<br>Native American | Asian/<br>Pacific<br>Islander <sup>1</sup> | Black (not<br>Hispanic) or<br>African American | Hispanic/<br>Latino | Multicultural/<br>Multiracial | White (not<br>Hispanic) or<br>Caucasian | Children with<br>disabilities<br>(IDEA) | Limited English<br>proficient (LEP)<br>Students | Economically<br>Disadvantaged<br>Students | Asian | Native Hawaiian/<br>Other Pacific<br>Islander <sup>2</sup> |  |
| ALABAMA                    | 72%          | 80%   | 77%  | 63%  | 66%                 | -                             | 78%                                     | 30%                                     | 36%   | 62%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| ALASKA                     | 68%          | 51%   | 74%  | 63%  | 62%                 | 63%                           | 75%                                     | 40%                                     | 41%   | 56%                                       | 79%   | 59%  |  |
| ARIZONA                    | 78%          | 62%   | 87%  | 74%  | 72%                 | -                             | 85%                                     | 67%                                     | 25%   | 73%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| ARKANSAS                   | 81%          | 82%   | 85%  | 73%  | 77%                 | 82%                           | 84%                                     | 75%                                     | 76%   | 75%                                       | 80%   | 51%  |  |
| BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION | 61%          | 61%   | 73%  | -  | -                   | -                             | 56%                                     | 56%                                     | 51%   | 61%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| CALIFORNIA                 | 76%          | 68%   | 89%  | 63%  | 70%                 | 65%                           | 85%                                     | 53%                                     | 60%   | 70%                                       | 90%   | 74%  |  |
| COLORADO                   | 74%          | 52%   | 89%  | 65%  | 80%                 | -                             | 81%                                     | 53%                                     | 53%   | 62%                                       | 81%   | -  |  |
| CONNECTICUT                | 83%          | 72%   | 92%  | 71%  | 64%                 | -                             | 89%                                     | 61%                                     | 59%   | 62%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| DELAWARE                   | 78%          | 78%   | 90%  | 73%  | 71%                 | 93%                           | 82%                                     | 56%                                     | 65%   | 71%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA       | 59%          | -   | 58%  | 58%  | 55%                 | -                             | 85%                                     | 39%                                     | 53%   | 58%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| FLORIDA                    | 71%          | 70%   | 86%  | 59%  | 69%                 | -                             | 76%                                     | 44%                                     | 53%   | 60%                                       | 86%   | -  |  |
| GEORGIA                    | 67%          | 68%   | 79%  | 60%  | 58%                 | 69%                           | 76%                                     | 30%                                     | 32%   | 59%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| HAWAII                     | 80%          | 60%   | 81%  | 77%  | 79%                 | -                             | 78%                                     | 59%                                     | 60%   | 75%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| IDAHIO                     | -            | -   | -  | -  | -                   | -                             | -                                       | -                                       | -   | -   | -     | -  |  |
| ILLINOIS                   | 84%          | 78%   | 92%  | 74%  | 77%                 | 81%                           | 89%                                     | 66%                                     | 68%   | 75%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| INDIANA                    | 86%          | 76%   | 89%  | 75%  | 81%                 | 80%                           | 88%                                     | 65%                                     | 73%   | 79%                                       | 92%   | 98%  |  |
| IOWA                       | 88%          | 79%   | 93%  | 73%  | 82%                 | 80%                           | 90%                                     | 70%                                     | 70%   | 78%                                       | 89%   | 80%  |  |
| KANSAS                     | 83%          | 72%   | 89%  | 72%  | 73%                 | 81%                           | 86%                                     | 73%                                     | 70%   | 73%                                       | 89%   | 82%  |  |
| KENTUCKY                   | -            | -   | -  | -  | -                   | -                             | -                                       | -                                       | -   | -   | -     | -  |  |
| LOUISIANA                  | 71%          | 71%   | 84%  | 64%  | 70%                 | 80%                           | 77%                                     | 29%                                     | 43%   | 64%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| MAINE                      | 84%          | 82%   | 90%  | 77%  | 81%                 | 86%                           | 84%                                     | 66%                                     | 78%   | 73%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| MARYLAND                   | 83%          | 74%   | 93%  | 76%  | 72%                 | 91%                           | 89%                                     | 57%                                     | 54%   | 74%                                       | 93%   | 88%  |  |
| MASACHUSETTS               | 83%          | 76%   | 88%  | 71%  | 81%                 | 81%                           | 89%                                     | 66%                                     | 56%   | 70%                                       | 88%   | 81%  |  |
| MICHIGAN                   | 74%          | 62%   | 85%  | 57%  | 63%                 | 69%                           | 80%                                     | 52%                                     | 62%   | 63%                                       | 87%   | 52%  |  |
| MINNESOTA                  | 77%          | 42%   | 72%  | 49%  | 51%                 | -                             | 84%                                     | 56%                                     | 52%   | 58%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| MISSISSIPPI                | 75%          | 78%   | 89%  | 68%  | 75%                 | -                             | 82%                                     | 23%                                     | 67%   | 69%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| MISSOURI                   | 81%          | 77%   | 87%  | 65%  | 75%                 | 92%                           | 85%                                     | 68%                                     | 62%   | 74%                                       | 89%   | 81%  |  |
| MONTANA                    | 82%          | 63%   | 89%  | 81%  | 78%                 | -                             | 85%                                     | 69%                                     | 52%   | 71%                                       | 87%   | 80%  |  |
| NEBRASKA                   | 86%          | 64%   | 83%  | 70%  | 74%                 | -                             | 90%                                     | 70%                                     | 29%   | 78%                                       | 93%   | 80%  |  |
| NEVADA                     | 62%          | 52%   | 74%  | 43%  | 53%                 | 80%                           | 71%                                     | 23%                                     | 73%   | 53%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE              | 86%          | 78%   | 87%  | 73%  | 73%                 | 88%                           | 87%                                     | 69%                                     | 73%   | 72%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NEW JERSEY                 | 83%          | 82%   | 93%  | 69%  | 73%                 | 84%                           | 90%                                     | 73%                                     | 69%   | 71%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NEW MEXICO                 | 63%          | 86%   | 78%  | 80%  | 80%                 | 87%                           | 73%                                     | 47%                                     | 56%   | 68%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NEW YORK                   | 77%          | 64%   | 86%  | 64%  | 69%                 | 79%                           | 86%                                     | 48%                                     | 45%   | 69%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NORTH CAROLINA             | 78%          | 70%   | 87%  | 72%  | 77%                 | -                             | 83%                                     | 57%                                     | 48%   | 71%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| NORTH DAKOTA               | 85%          | 62%   | 88%  | 74%  | 76%                 | -                             | 90%                                     | 67%                                     | 61%   | 76%                                       | 89%   | -  |  |
| OHIO                       | 80%          | 71%   | 89%  | 59%  | 68%                 | 71%                           | 85%                                     | 67%                                     | 53%   | 65%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| OKLAHOMA                   | -            | -   | -  | -  | -                   | -                             | -                                       | -                                       | -   | -   | -     | -  |  |
| OREGON                     | 68%          | 52%   | 78%  | 54%  | 59%                 | 73%                           | 70%                                     | 42%                                     | 52%   | 61%                                       | 79%   | 69%  |  |
| PENNSYLVANIA               | 83%          | 77%   | 89%  | 65%  | 65%                 | 75%                           | 88%                                     | 71%                                     | 63%   | 71%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| PUERTO RICO                | -            | -   | -  | -  | -                   | -                             | -                                       | -                                       | -   | -   | -     | -  |  |
| RHODE ISLAND               | 77%          | 66%   | 75%  | 67%  | 77%                 | -                             | 82%                                     | 58%                                     | 68%   | 66%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| SOUTH CAROLINA             | 74%          | 67%   | 84%  | 70%  | 69%                 | -                             | 77%                                     | 39%                                     | 62%   | 67%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| SOUTH DAKOTA               | 83%          | 49%   | 45%  | 73%  | 87%                 | 87%                           | 88%                                     | 84%                                     | 82%   | 89%                                       | 84%   | 63%  |  |
| TENNESSEE                  | 86%          | 89%   | 91%  | 78%  | 79%                 | -                             | 89%                                     | 67%                                     | 71%   | 80%                                       | 91%   | 63%  |  |
| TEXAS                      | 86%          | 87%   | 95%  | 81%  | 82%                 | 92%                           | 82%                                     | 77%                                     | 58%   | 84%                                       | 95%   | 88%  |  |
| UTAH                       | 76%          | 57%   | 72%  | 61%  | 57%                 | -                             | 80%                                     | 59%                                     | 45%   | 65%                                       | 72%   | 69%  |  |
| VERMONT                    | 87%          | -   | -  | -  | -                   | -                             | -                                       | -                                       | -   | -   | -     | -  |  |
| VIRGINIA                   | 82%          | 73%   | 82%  | 73%  | 71%                 | -                             | 86%                                     | 47%                                     | 55%   | 70%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| WASHINGTON                 | 76%          | 57%   | 81%  | 65%  | 63%                 | 73%                           | 79%                                     | 56%                                     | 51%   | 69%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| WEST VIRGINIA              | 76%          | 72%   | 91%  | 72%  | 71%                 | -                             | 77%                                     | 57%                                     | 79%   | 68%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| WISCONSIN                  | 87%          | 75%   | 89%  | 64%  | 72%                 | -                             | 91%                                     | 67%                                     | 66%   | 74%                                       | -     | -  |  |
| WYOMING                    | 80%          | 51%   | 87%  | 58%  | 74%                 | 77%                           | 82%                                     | 57%                                     | 62%   | 66%                                       | 91%   | 73%  |  |

<sup>1</sup> The Asian/Pacific Islander column represents either the value reported by the state to the Department of Education for the major racial and ethnic group "Asian/Pacific Islander" or an aggregation of values reported by the state for the major racial and ethnic groups "Asian," "Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander or Pacific Islander," and "Filipino." Values reported in the Asian/Pacific Islander column which represent the U.S. Department of Education aggregation of other values reported by the state have been presented in italic type. (California is the only state currently using the major racial and ethnic group "Filipino.")

<sup>2</sup> Disaggregated reporting for Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates is done according to the provisions outlined within each state's Accountability Workbook. Accordingly, not every state uses major racial and ethnic groups which enable further disaggregation of Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAP) populations.

Please refer to the enclosure, "Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, School Year 2010-11, Provisional Release: Data Notes" for an explanation of the symbols in this chart.

