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NYS Education Department (NYSED) released high school graduation rates for 2012

- Up 1.3 percentage points from 78.1 percent for 2011.
- Rate is more than 12% higher than it was a decade earlier (67.2 percent).
- Including graduates from August 2012 brings it to 81.4 percent
 - Surpasses the goal of 80% established for federal accountability in 2009 (have 80% of students graduate by August of their fourth year in high school).
- Rate improved in each of the state's Big 5 city school districts (Buffalo, Syracuse, New York City, Rochester, and Yonkers), black and Hispanic students, and students with disabilities.
- While improvement is evident, still much to do
 - Important for schools to offer multiple pathways to earn a high school diploma; career and technical programs.
 - Enable our struggling schools to improve outcomes for their students.

NYSED is participating in several awareness campaigns for the month of February. These campaigns include:

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month- Celebrates the value of CTE. NYSED will highlight the successes of the wonderful CTE programs across the state and provide other information about our programs, job skills, and famous CTE graduates from New York State. Keep current on Facebook and Twitter.
- National Children's Dental Health Month- During this month-long campaign, dental professionals, healthcare providers, and educators promote the benefits of **good oral health** to children & their caregivers.
- Teen Dating Violence Awareness & Prevention Month- NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence provides helpful resources and information for parents, advocates, and schools to raise awareness and help prevent teen dating violence.
www.ny.gov/programs/teen-dating-violence-awareness-and-prevention
- Black History Month- Biondi School in Yonkers inducted Regent Judith Johnson into its Black History Wall of Fame
 - The Honorable Regent Judith Johnson, member of New York State's Board of Regents serving the 9th District of New York State and a powerful force in improving quality and access to education for diverse populations.
 - The Biondi School serves special education students K-12 whose ability to learn is affected by an emotional, cognitive, or other disability.

- State Library displayed its replica of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation at the Black History Month Cultural Expo at the Empire State Plaza.
- Throughout the month on Facebook and Twitter, NYSED and the State Museum will highlight African American men and women in New York State history.

Deadline to submit your FAFSA application for the 2016-17 school year is June 30, 2017.

- New York State residents should also complete the online New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application. If you have other questions about financial aid, the SUNY.edu Smart Track financial literacy website has a lot of great resources that can help you plan for the costs of college.

NYSED urges schools, government agencies, nonprofit groups, Indian tribal territories, migrant programs, and camps to apply for Summer Food Service program

- The Summer Food Service Program was established to ensure low-income children, 18 and younger, get nutritious meals when schools are not in session. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service administers the Summer Food Service Program at the national level and the New York State Education Department (SED) administers it at the State level.
 - Recent changes allow greater flexibility. Focus is to reach and service more eligible children and encourage new organizations to become sponsors in their communities.
 - Summer program feeds about 400,000 and will run from June 12 through September 4, 2017.

Summer Food Service Program sponsors receive federal and State reimbursement for each meal served to a child, as per predetermined reimbursement rates. SED will hold training workshops in March, April and May for sponsors planning to participate in summer 2017. Sponsors must provide information on where they will serve the meals and how they will validate eligibility.

- New sponsors may obtain a paper application and additional information by contacting the NYSED.

New York State Governor Cuomo introduces tuition-free degree program.

- Higher education is a necessity to succeed in today's global economy.
- Plan will be phased in over three years, beginning for New Yorkers making up to \$100,000 annually in the fall of 2017, increasing to \$110,000 in 2018, and reaching \$125,000 in 2019.

- Making New York State's public universities tuition-free will alleviate the financial stresses of student loans and put more New Yorkers on a path to financial security.

Betsy DeVos' confirmation ends in tie. Unprecedented tie-breaking vote cast by Vice President Pence.

- Limited experience in public education
- Promoter of charter schools and vouchers (allows students to use taxpayer dollars to pay tuition at private, religious, and for-profit schools)
- Two Republicans broke party lines and voted against DeVos
 - Senators Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, said Ms. DeVos was unqualified because of a lack of familiarity with public schools and with laws meant to protect students. "I have serious concerns about a nominee to be secretary of education who has been so involved in one side of the equation, so immersed in the push for vouchers, that she may be unaware of what actually is successful within the public schools, and also what is broken and how to fix them," said Senator Murkowski.
- Ethics paperwork filed two days after her nomination hearing.
- Teachers' unions protested nomination across the country.
 - Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a union that protested the nomination, said the public would now have to "serve as a check and balance" to her policies and be "fierce fighters on behalf of children."
- Ms. DeVos indicated would dismantle pieces of the Obama administration's legacy, potentially including a rule that denies federal student aid money to for-profit colleges whose graduates struggle to get jobs, as well as an aggressive effort to investigate and adjudicate campus sexual assault claims.