



Putting aside debate over provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, we all can agree that schools need to do a better job of moving all students toward graduation.

Numbers out this week for graduation rates across West Alabama are disturbing. But even those don't tell the whole story.

Tracking students' progress is difficult because schools don't always know what happens to students who are no longer in class. Education Week recently reported that Alabama should expect a 2.3 percent gain in its graduation rate for 2008, but that still brings the state's projected rate to just 61.3 percent.

One tool that may help provide better data is part of a broader effort by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. ACHE sought state funding earlier this year, unsuccessfully, for its PK-20 Initiative. The effort is intended to draw together all the various educational endeavors across Alabama to focus on supporting students from pre-Kindergarten through high school and college. A piece of that is the creation of an electronic transcript.

The electronic transcript would track every student through their academic career. The identity of students would be protected by encryption, but the system would make it far easier to track students' progress and speed communication among academic institutions.

We think the ACHE's PK-20 Initiative provides a good framework for bridging the gaps in our education system. It may be a piece in the puzzle of keeping more students in school long enough to prepare for success in life.