

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

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with a foreword by

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Prepared for the Black Alliance for Educational Options

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report's main findings are the following:

- The national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 74%. For white students the rate was 78%, while it was 56% for African-American students and 54% for Latino students.
- Georgia had the lowest overall graduation rate in the nation with 57% of students graduating, followed by Tennessee, Mississippi and Washington, D.C.
- Iowa had the highest overall graduation rate with 93%, followed by Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Nebraska.
- Wisconsin had the lowest graduation rate among African-American students with 40%, followed by Minnesota, Georgia, and Tennessee. Georgia had the lowest graduation rate among Latino students with 32%, followed by Alabama, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Less than 50% of African-American students graduated in seven states and less than 50% of Latino students graduated in eight states for which data were available.
- The highest rate of graduation among African-American students was 71% in West Virginia, followed by Massachusetts, Arkansas, and New Jersey. The highest rate of graduation among Latino students was 82% in Montana, followed by Louisiana, Maryland, and Hawaii.
- Among the fifty largest school districts in the country, Cleveland City had the lowest overall graduation rate with 28%, followed by Memphis, Milwaukee, and Columbus.
- Fairfax County, VA had the highest overall graduation rate among the districts with 87%, followed by Montgomery County, MD, Albuquerque and Boston.
- Cleveland City had the lowest graduation rate among African-American students with 29%, followed by Jefferson County, KY, Milwaukee, and Memphis. Cleveland City also had the lowest graduation rate among Latino students, followed by Georgia's Dekalb, Gwinnett, and Cobb counties. Less than 50% of African-American students graduated in fifteen of forty-five districts for which there was sufficient data, and less than 50% of Latino students graduated in twenty-one of thirty-six districts for which there was sufficient data.
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) finds a national high school completion rate of 86% for the class of 1998. The discrepancy between the NCES' finding and this report's finding of a 74% rate is largely caused by NCES' counting of General Educational Development (GED) graduates and others with alternative credentials as high school graduates, and by its reliance on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay P. Greene is a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research where he conducts research and writes about education policy. He has conducted evaluations of school choice and accountability programs in Florida, Charlotte, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and San Antonio. He has also investigated the effects of school choice on civic values and integration. His publications include “An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Choice and Accountability Program” forthcoming in *Education Next*; “The Surprising Consensus on School Choice” in the Summer 2001 issue of *The Public Interest*; “Vouchers in Charlotte” in the Summer 2001 issue of *Education Matters*; the chapters, “Civic Values in Public and Private Schools” and “School Choice in Milwaukee: A Randomized Experiment” in the book, *Learning from School Choice*, published by the Brookings Institution in 1998; and “The Effect of Private Education on Political Participation, Social Capital, and Tolerance” in the Fall 1999 issue of *The Georgetown Public Policy Review*. Dr. Greene has been a professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Houston. He received his Ph.D. from the Government Department at Harvard University in 1995. He lives with his wife and three children in Weston, Florida.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Introduction	1
Figure 1: Earnings and the Importance of a High School Education	1
Calculating Graduation Rates	2
Figure 2: Calculating the National Graduation Rate for the Class of 1998	2
The Results: Ranking the States	3
Figure 3: National Graduation Rates for the Class of 1998	3
The Results: Ranking the Districts	4
Comparing Graduation Rates to Other Dropout/High School Completion Statistics	5
Advantages of Calculating Graduation Rates	7
Dropout Statistics Reported by Districts and States	8
Conclusion	9
Appendix	11
Table 1: Graduation Rate by State and Race	11
Table 2: Ranking of Graduation Rates by State	12
Table 3: Ranking of African-American Graduation Rates by State	12
Table 4: Ranking of Latino Graduation Rates by State	13
Table 5: Ranking of White Graduation Rates by State	13
Table 6: Graduation Rate by District and Race	14
Table 7: Ranking of Graduation Rates by District	16
Table 8: Ranking of African-American Graduation Rates by District	17
Table 9: Ranking of Latino Graduation Rates by District	18
Table 10: Ranking of White Graduation Rates by District	19
Endnotes	21

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FOREWORD

“Until many more...minority students...are very successful educationally, it will be virtually impossible to integrate our society’s institutions completely, especially at leadership levels. Without such progress, the United States also will continue to be unable to draw on the full range of talents in our population during an era when the value of an educated citizenry has never been greater.”

—“Reaching the Top,” The College Board (1999)

At a March 2001 education conference in Washington D.C., an audience member posed two questions to a representative of President George Bush:

- Why is so little attention paid to the high dropout rate among the nation’s African-American children?
- Why does the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) annually report incomplete and sometimes inaccurate dropout statistics to the general public?

The President’s aide responded: “The truth hurts, and few people want to share the truth about underperforming students these days.”

Six months earlier, I had asked authors of a DOE dropout study issued during the Clinton Administration why it overstated the number of African-American children receiving high school diplomas. They explained that, in addition to students who actually graduated from high school, their data included recipients of so-called high school “equivalency” diplomas. Then, referring to the controversial “wall chart” once displayed at DOE, they said the federal government stopped reporting on the number of ninth graders that completed high school in four years because it painted “too bad a picture of productivity of the nation’s public schools.”

Such anecdotes explain why the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) commissioned *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*.

Parents and other taxpayers must have accurate information about the educational status of our nation’s children. As the only national African-American organization trying to expand educational options for America’s children, BAEO is determined to examine honestly the effectiveness of our nation’s schools and the educational achievement of our children. BAEO knows that a high quality education is our children’s primary passport to achieving their life’s goals as adults.

This pioneering study by Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., sheds new light on an issue that adversely affects far too many American children. In particular, low graduation rates among students of color have devastating effects on their communities and thus on the nation as a whole. Children who do not graduate with a high school diploma stand little chance of sustaining themselves or a family in today’s economy.

BAEO wants all American children to complete K–12 education successfully. They will then be prepared for higher education and they will have the skills necessary to function effectively in today’s labor market.

Moreover, it is unacceptable to BAEO that Black America’s long-held goal of racial and ethnic diversity among our nation’s economic and political leadership is undermined by the massive failure of our young people to graduate from high school.

Reviewing the findings of this report—including the horrific graduation rates in such cities as Cleveland and Milwaukee—it is no wonder why parents there have led the fight for education vouchers and other new educational options for their children.

BAEO is determined that Dr. Greene’s previously unreported data will receive widespread attention. We hope that those who read this report will re-commit themselves to meeting the challenge of ensuring that all of our children truly receive a high quality education.

Kaleem Caire
President and CEO, Black Alliance for Educational Options

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

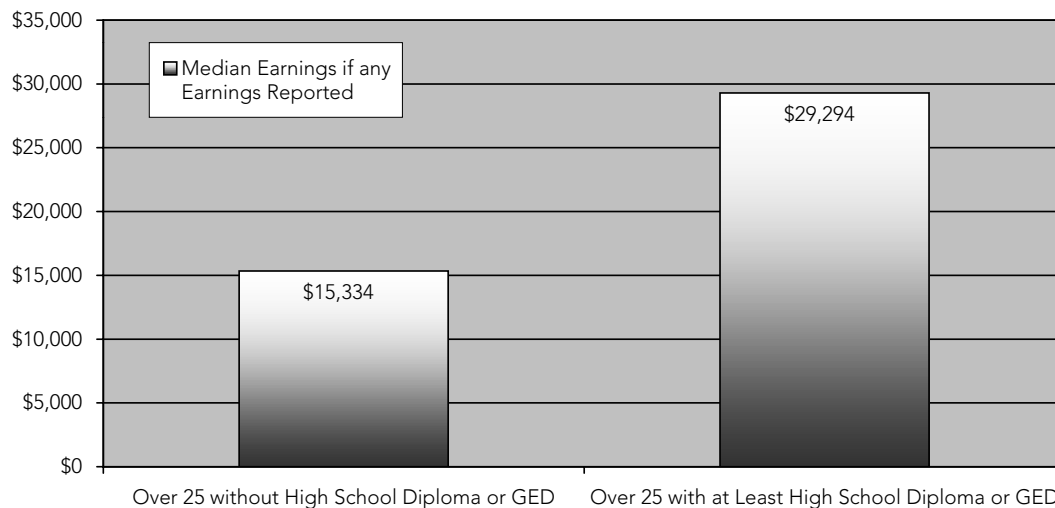
Students who fail to graduate from high school face a very bleak future. Because the basic skills conveyed in high school and higher education are essential for success in today's economy, students who do not receive these skills are likely to suffer with significantly reduced earnings and employment prospects. Among those over 25 years old who failed to complete high school or receive a GED, 55% report no earnings in the 1999 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census compared to 25% of those with at least a high school degree or GED. For people reporting any earnings the median income for those who left school without a high school diploma or GED is \$15,334 compared to \$29,294 for people with at least a high school degree or GED (see Figure 1).¹ Students who fail to graduate high school are also significantly more likely to become single parents and have children at young ages. And students who do not graduate high school are significantly more likely to rely upon public assistance or be in prison.² In short, high school graduation is a very important predictor of young people's life prospects.

High school graduation rates are therefore also an important measure of the performance of our public school system. The better able schools are to provide

students with the skills necessary to complete high school, the more successful the school system is.³ Given the strength of the relationship between high school graduation and students' life prospects, graduation rates are at least as important as test scores in assessing the performance of our school system. Yet graduation rates have not received nearly as much attention as national test scores.

The relative inattention devoted to graduation rates is at least partly explained by the confusing, inconsistent, and sometimes misleading way in which the rate of high school completion is measured. Local and state public school officials report dropout and completion statistics that are difficult to grasp and often implausibly positive. The way in which those statistics are calculated and how they should be interpreted is often opaque to the trained researcher, let alone the general public. Even the normally very helpful National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education has done little to improve the quality of statistics on high school completion. While the national government spends over \$40 million for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which the NCES uses to track performance on achievement tests, less than \$1 million is spent by the national government on dropout/high school completion statistics.⁴

Figure 1: Earnings and the Importance of a High School Education



The purpose of this report is to calculate and report reliable and straightforward public high school graduation rates. Rates are reported for all students as well as broken out for African-American, Latino, and white sub-groups.⁵ Rates are also reported for each state, for each of the 50 largest school districts, and for a few other districts of interest. The state and district numbers are also reported separately for African-American, Latino, and white sub-groups. By reporting reliable and straightforward graduation rates we will have better information about how well school systems are performing overall as well as for each ethnic/racial group.

Calculating Graduation Rates

The method used here to calculate graduation rates is remarkably simple but also likely to be quite accurate.⁶ I identified the 8th grade enrollment for each jurisdiction and for each sub-group from the fall of 1993.⁷ I then collected information on the number of regular high school diplomas awarded in the spring of 1998 when those 8th graders should have been graduating.⁸ To adjust for the possibility that students moving into or out of an area would distort the graduation rate, I adjusted the 1993 8th grader counts for the student population change in that jurisdiction and for each ethnic/racial sub-group between the 1993–94 and 1997–98 school years.

The formula used to calculate the graduation rate was:

$$\text{graduation rate} = \frac{\text{regular diplomas from 1998}}{\text{adjusted 8}^{\text{th}} \text{ grade enrollment from 1993}}$$

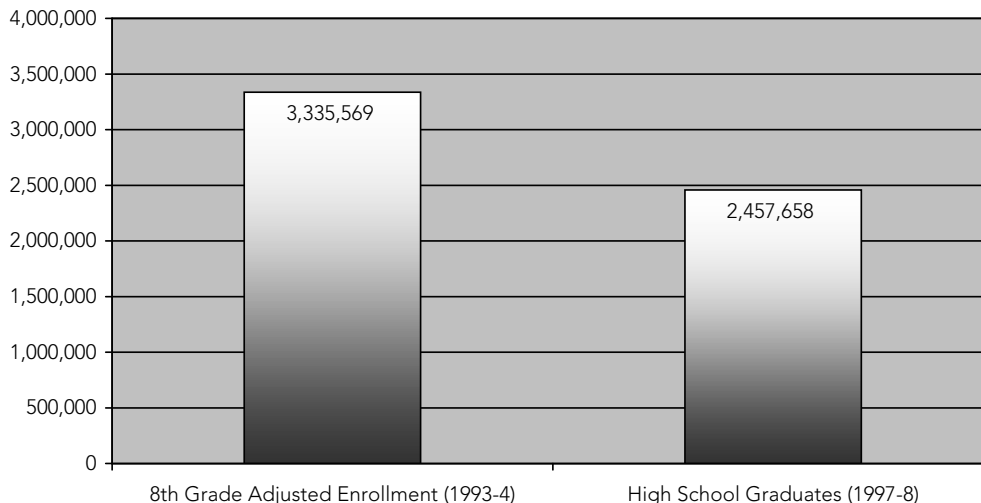
The formula used to adjust the 8th grade was:

$$\text{Adjusted 8}^{\text{th}} \text{ grade enrollment} = \text{actual 8}^{\text{th}} \text{ grade enrollment} + (\text{actual 8}^{\text{th}} \text{ grade enrollment} \times \text{percentage change in total or ethnic sub-group enrollment in the jurisdiction between 1993–4 and 1997–8})$$

The calculations can be illustrated by showing how the national graduation rate was computed. In the fall of 1993 there were 3,249,266 students enrolled in 8th grade. In 1998, when we would expect those students to be graduating, there were 2,457,658 regular diplomas awarded. Yet during these years the total student population in the United States increased by 2.7%, so we adjust the 8th grade population upward by 2.7% to 3,335,569 on the assumption that the 8th grade cohort received 2.7% additional students from immigration or from the private sector.⁹ Of the 3,335,569 students we would expect to graduate in 1998, only 2,457,658 students actually received diplomas, producing a graduation rate of 74% (see Figure 2).

Similar calculations were made for each state and for each ethnic sub-group. For example, to calculate the graduation rate for African-American students in the state of Wisconsin I began by identifying that there were 5,604 African-American students in 8th grade in the fall of 1993. Between the 1993-4 and 1997-8 school years, however, the total African-American school population in the state increased from 76,446 to 85,977 students, an increase of 12.5%. To reflect this total African-American student popu-

Figure 2: Calculating the National Graduation Rate for the Class of 1998



lation increase, the 8th grade African-American enrollment was adjusted up by 12.5% to 6,303 students. In 1998, when we would be expecting approximately 6,303 African-American students to be graduating, only 2,531 diplomas were awarded to African-American students in Wisconsin, yielding a graduation rate of 40%.

Even if we made no adjustment for the increasing African-American student population in Wisconsin, fewer than half of the African-American students enrolled in 8th grade in 1993 graduated from high school in 1998. If this is not a reasonable calculation of the graduation rate for African-American students in Wisconsin one has to be able to explain what happened to the over 3,000 African-American students who we expected to graduate but did not finish high school. One possible explanation is that students may take more than five years to go from 8th grade to graduation.¹⁰ This is true, but it must be remembered that the same must also be true for the cohort that was in the 8th grade in 1992 and so on, some of whom may be included in the 1998 graduate count. Students taking longer than normal to finish high school would only seriously distort the graduation rate if there were a large number of such students and if there were a dramatic increase or decrease in the proportion that took more time to graduate from one year to the next. Neither seems very likely, meaning that students taking more time to finish high school should not significantly distort the graduation rates calculated by the method employed here.

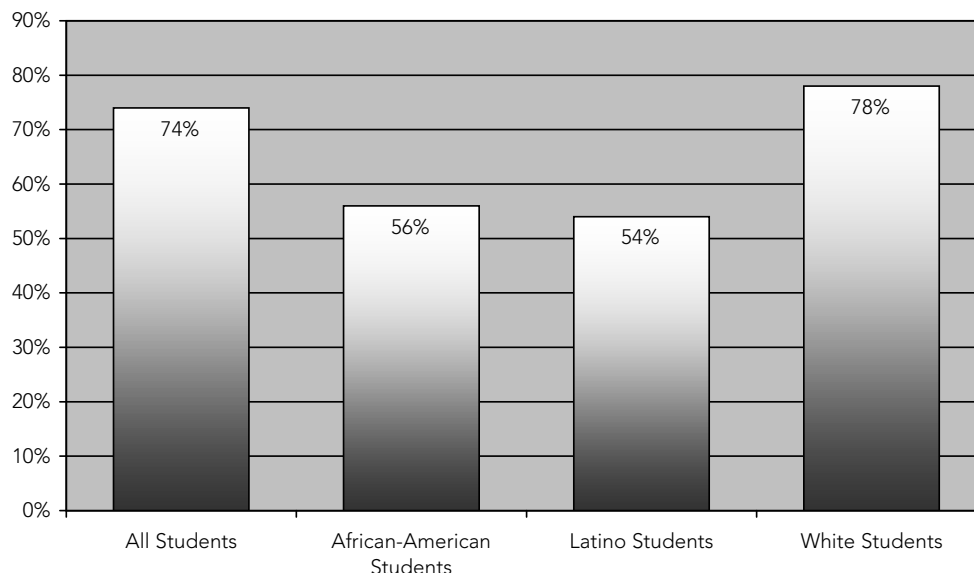
The Results: Ranking the States

As we have already seen, the national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 74% (see Figure 3). For white students the graduation rate was 78%. For African-American students nationwide the graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 56%. For Latino students nationwide the graduation rate was 54%.¹¹

At the state level there was considerable variation both in the overall graduation rate and in the rate for each sub-group. Table 1 (page 11) presents the results for the states in alphabetical order. Table 2 (page 12) presents the results for states ranked from the lowest overall graduation rate to the highest. Georgia has the lowest graduation rate of all of the states, with 57% of the class of 1998 graduating. Tennessee has the next lowest graduation rate with 59% of its students completing high school, followed by Mississippi and Washington D.C. each with 60% graduation rates. Iowa has the highest overall graduation rate with 93% of its students graduating. With an 87% graduation rate Wisconsin has the second best overall rate, followed by North Dakota and Nebraska with 87% and 85% overall graduation rates, respectively.

Some of the states with the best overall graduation rates, however, have some of the worst graduation rates for African-American students. As can be seen in Table 3 (page 12), Wisconsin has the worst graduation rate for African-American students at 40% even though it had the second best overall graduation rate. Similarly, Minnesota, which has the second worst

Figure 3: National Graduation Rates for the Class of 1998



African-American graduation rate at 43%, has one of the highest overall graduation rates. These states have an enormous disparity between the graduation rates for whites and for African-Americans, with white students more than twice as likely to graduate. Some states, however, have low overall graduation rates and low African-American graduation rates. Georgia for example, has the third worst African-American graduation rate (44%) and the worst overall graduation rate. Tennessee has the fourth worst African-American graduation rate (44%) and second worst overall graduation rate. Three other states, for a total of seven states, have fewer than half of their African-American students in the class of 1998 graduating: Nevada (49%), Ohio (49%), and Oregon (49%).

Other states do relatively better with African-American graduation rates. West Virginia has the highest graduation rate for African-American students (71%) followed by Massachusetts with 70%. Arkansas has the third highest graduation rate for African-American students (67%) and New Jersey has the fourth highest African-American graduation rate with 66%.

The lowest state Latino graduation rates are even lower than those for African-American students (see Table 4, page 13). In Georgia, which has made repeated appearances among the list of worst states, only 32% of Latinos in the class of 1998 graduated. Alabama had the second lowest graduation rate for Latino students (33%), followed by Tennessee (38%). Five additional states, making for a total of eight states, had less than half of their Latino students graduating in the class of 1998: North Carolina (38%), Nevada (40%), Oregon (43%), Colorado (47%), and Arkansas (48%).

Some states, however, had relatively high Latino graduation rates. For example, Montana has the highest Latino graduation rate, with 82% of Latino students completing high school. Maryland and Louisiana have the second and third best Latino graduation rates, each with 70% of Latino students graduating. Hawaii has the fourth highest Latino graduation rate (66%). The Latino graduation rates in Montana and Hawaii have to be taken with a grain of salt, however, because there are relatively few Latinos in those states.

The graduation rates for whites follow fairly closely the graduation rates for all students because whites are the large majority in most states (see Table 5, page 13). Georgia has a graduation rate of 61% for its white

students, followed by Florida with 63%. Tennessee has the third worst white graduation rate at 64% and Nevada has the fourth worst rate for white students at 64%. All four of these states are among those with the lowest overall graduation rates. On the positive end of the scale, Iowa (95%), Wisconsin (93%), and Nebraska (90%) have the highest graduation rates for white students and are also among the highest ranking states for the overall graduation rates.

The gap between white and minority graduation rates is alarmingly large. Indeed, the lowest state graduation rates for white students are close to the highest rates for African-American and Latino students. In some of the states the disparity between white and minority graduation rates is exceptionally high. For example, Wisconsin has the largest difference between its graduation rates for white and African-American students, with 93% of whites graduating compared to 40% of African-Americans. The gap between white and Latino graduation rates in Wisconsin is also among the largest differences in rates (93% vs. 56%). Minnesota also has a very large disparity between its white and minority graduation rates, with 87% of white students graduating compared to 43% of African-American and 53% of Latino students. Nebraska and Iowa also have some of the greatest disparities between white and minority graduation rates. Interestingly, all four of these states are predominantly rural, white states with concentrated, smaller minority and urban populations. This may reveal that the problem of low graduation rates is really an urban problem. An examination of graduation rates in large, mostly urban school districts is in the following section.

The Results: Ranking the Districts

The 50 largest districts in 1993 vary widely in their graduation rates (see Table 6, page 14). The district with the lowest graduation rate is Cleveland City, where only 28% of students complete high school. The district with the highest graduation rate is Fairfax County, Virginia, with 87% of students graduating (see Table 7, page 16). Altogether, five districts among the 50 largest districts in the U.S. have overall graduation rates below 50%: Cleveland (28%), Memphis (42%), Milwaukee (43%), Columbus (45%), and Chicago (47%). On the other hand, six districts of the 50 largest districts have overall graduation rates at or above 80%: Fairfax County, Virginia (87%), Montgomery County, Maryland (85%), Albuquerque, New Mexico (83%), Boston, Massachusetts (82%), Jordan, Utah (80%), and Virginia Beach, Virginia (80%).

Focusing upon the district results for African-American students reveals a more strongly negative picture (see Table 8, page 17). Sixteen of the 50 largest school districts failed to graduate more than half of their African-American students. Cleveland has the lowest graduation rate for African-American students (29%), followed by Milwaukee (34%), Jefferson County, Kentucky (34%), Memphis (39%), Gwinnett County, Georgia (40%), Pinellas County, Florida (41%), New York City (42%), Hillsborough County, Florida (42%), Columbus, Ohio (45%), Chicago (45%), Duval County, Florida (45%), Orange County, Florida (45%), Dekalb County, Georgia (47%), Cobb County, Georgia (48%), Clarke County, Nevada (49%), and Mobile, Alabama (50%). Only four districts are able to graduate 75% or more of their African-American students: Boston (85%), Fairfax County, Virginia (77%), Prince Georges County, Maryland (76%), and Montgomery County, Maryland (75%).

The picture is even bleaker for Latino graduation rates in the 50 largest school districts (see Table 9, page 18). All but 15 of the districts for which rates can be computed have Latino graduation rates below 50%. Six districts have Latino graduation rates below 40%: Cleveland (26%), Dekalb County, Georgia (29%), Gwinnett County, Georgia (33%), Cobb County, Georgia (34%), Clarke County, Nevada, and Dallas, Texas (39%). Only five districts have more than two-thirds of their Latino students completing high school: Montgomery County, Maryland (73%), Albuquerque, New Mexico (71%), Prince Georges County, Maryland (70%), Boston (68%), and El Paso, Texas (67%).

Only five districts are unable to graduate more than half of their white students: Cleveland (23%), Detroit (43%), Columbus, Ohio (46%), Baltimore City, Maryland (48%), and Memphis, Tennessee (50%) (see Table 10, page 19). Yet twelve districts have white graduation rates of at least 80%: Albuquerque (99%), Fairfax (92%), Philadelphia (91%), Prince Georges County, Maryland (90%), Montgomery County, Maryland (88%), Boston (87%), El Paso, Texas (86%), Virginia Beach (86%), Houston, Texas (84%), Baltimore County, Maryland (84%), Los Angeles (81%), and New York City (80%).

For the most part, districts with low African-American and Latino graduation rates also had relatively low white graduation rates. A few districts, however, have large disparities between their white and minority graduation rates. For example, New York City graduates 80% of its white students but only

42% of its African-American and 45% of its Latino students. Dekalb County, Georgia has a 79% graduation rate for white students but only 47% of African-Americans and 29% of Latinos complete high school. Gwinnett and Cobb Counties in Georgia have similar large disparities between white and minority graduation rates. Milwaukee has a 74% graduation rate for whites while African-American and Latino students have graduation rates of 34% and 42%, respectively.

In these districts with a large gap between the white and minority graduation rates, it is clear that there are shortcomings in the education system that are particular to minority students. In most of the districts, however, where the white and minority graduation rates are both low, the failure of the education system to produce graduates is a problem that transcends race and ethnicity.

Comparing Graduation Rates to Other Dropout/High School Completion Statistics

Given that local, state, and national governments as well as non-governmental researchers report various statistics on the rate at which students drop out of school or complete high school, it is necessary to describe how the graduation rates reported here compare with some of those other statistics and to explain the differences between them. There are generally four different types of statistics that are reported: event dropout rates, status dropout rates, high school completion rates, and promoting power rates. Let us consider what each of these statistics means and how each is calculated.

An event dropout rate is the percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year. It is not the percentage of students who will eventually become dropouts, it is simply the percentage of enrolled students who leave in a one-year period. Since students tend to drop out between 8th and 12th grade, the event dropout rate only captures one year of what is usually a five or six year span in which students leave school. It is like calculating a credit card interest rate as a monthly percentage instead of an annual percentage: The rate feels low but in truth it compounds over a longer period of time.

A status dropout rate is the percentage of young people (usually 16 through 24 years old) who are not currently enrolled in school and who have not received a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) credential. The status

dropout rate more closely reflects what most people imagine when they hear “dropout rate” than does the event dropout rate. The status dropout rate is supposed to capture the proportion of students who leave school and never receive a degree.

The high school completion rate is almost exactly the complement of the status dropout rate (that is, 1 minus status dropout rate). The only difference is that the completion rate is based on surveys of a slightly older population, 18 to 24, instead of the 16 to 24 year olds included in the status dropout rate. If a student dropped out of school when he was 16, he would have an impact on the status dropout rate but not the high school completion rate until he were two years older.

Promoting power resembles in some ways the graduation rate reported in this study. It is the ratio of the number of students in a certain grade to the number that graduate when those students would be expected to graduate.¹² Promoting power differs from the graduation rates reported here in that it does not usually make adjustments for aggregate changes in student population to account for the inflow or outflow of students from a given jurisdiction. It also differs in that it usually compares the number of 9th or 10th graders to the number of graduates, rather than 8th graders as in the calculation of graduation rates. Since students may dropout of school in 8th or 9th grades, promoting power may be higher than graduation rates. Yet because 9th grade is a common grade in which to retain students for an extra year, creating an artificially large 9th grade population, promoting power rates that compare 9th graders to graduates may be lower than graduation rates that use 8th graders.

In broad terms, graduation rates should be roughly similar to high school completion rates, promoting power rates, or the complement of status dropout rates. According to a recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics, the national high school completion rate is 86%.¹³ The national graduation rate calculated in this report is 74%. What accounts for the difference? The bulk of the difference between these two numbers can be explained by the fact that only 77% of students in the NCES report completed high school by receiving a regular diploma. The other 9% counted as having completed high school received an “equivalent” credential, such as a GED.

People who received GEDs or other alternative credentials were not counted in the graduation rates

calculated in this report for a number of reasons. First, the purpose of computing graduation rates here was to develop a measure of the success of high schools at graduating students. Recipients of GEDs are not, properly speaking, “graduates” of any high school. The fact that some students leave high school and later receive a credential from a community college, while in prison, or from some other organization cannot be credited to the high school. Similarly, a doctor cannot claim as “cures” patients who have transferred to other doctors for treatment.

Second, the GED is simply not equivalent to a regular high school diploma. Similar effort and knowledge are not necessary to achieve a GED as are necessary to receive a typical high school diploma. Most importantly, the future prospects for recipients of GEDs are significantly worse than the future prospects for recipients of regular high school diplomas. In fact an analysis of national data by Stephen Cameron and Nobel prize winning economist, James Heckman, concludes that: “Exam-certified high school equivalents are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts.”¹⁴ Other researchers find moderate benefits of receiving a GED for certain groups, but no research supports the claim that the GED is equivalent to a regular high school diploma.¹⁵ Counting GEDs in the same group as those awarded regular diplomas masks the true graduation rate.

If we exclude GEDs from the high school completion rate reported by NCES we have a number that is similar to the national graduation rate reported here. Breaking out the results by racial/ethnic groups also reveals similar number for whites and Latinos once GEDs are removed. I report a national graduation rate for white students of 78% compared to a high school completion rate reported by the NCES of 82%. For Latinos I calculate that 54% graduate from high school compared to 55% according to the NCES, once GEDs are excluded.

For African-American students, however, my graduation rates and the NCES high school completion rates remain very different even after GEDs are excluded. I find a graduation rate of 56% for African-American students compared to a 73% high school completion rate according to the NCES. What could account for the difference between these rates for African-American students? The difference may largely be explained by “coverage bias” in the Current Population Survey (CPS) from which the NCES high school completion rates are calculated. The CPS is a very well-conducted sur-

vey but like all surveys it has difficulty reaching certain groups of people, particularly low-income minorities, who are not easy to find and interview. Dropouts are disproportionately likely to be among those groups that are difficult for the CPS to find and interview. According to Phillip Kaufman (who was also the primary author of the NCES report on dropouts), if 50% of African-Americans who are not properly covered by the CPS sample are dropouts, then the true high school completion rate for African-Americans would drop by 9%.¹⁶ If 100% of those African-Americans not covered were dropouts (a figure that is an upper-bound rather than a realistic assumption), then the true high school completion rate for African-Americans should be adjusted down by 18%. The 17% gap between my African-American graduation rate and the NCES African-American high school completion rate could largely be explained by this CPS coverage bias that could distort results by as much as 18% (but more realistically around 12%).

Other factors may explain the modest differences between my graduation rates and the NCES high school completion rates after excluding GEDs and adjusting for African-American “coverage bias” in the CPS. CPS relies upon self-reported educational status for NCES to compute high school completion rates. That is, people have to describe honestly to the survey researchers whether they received a high school diploma. While most people are likely to be honest, some people deceive themselves or others to hide the embarrassment of dropping out of high school. The self-deception that people have a high school diploma when they really do not may be reinforced by the frequency with which people may falsify resumes to claim that they graduated from high school when they are in fact dropouts. This self-reporting bias may be small, but it may account for much or all of the remaining difference between the graduation rates I computed and the high school completion rates reported by NCES. Duncan Chaplin of the Urban Institute has suggested that self-reporting biases may be more severe among African-Americans “if they felt a greater need to use education as a ‘signal’ to overcome potential discrimination.”¹⁷ Because the graduation rates calculated here rely upon enrollment and diploma counts, which are unlikely to be distorted by self-reporting or other biases, they are likely to be slightly more accurate in identifying the percentage of students who complete high school with regular diplomas than a phone survey.

Advantages of Calculating Graduation Rates

If the graduation rates reported here and the national high school completion rates reported by NCES are similar (after excluding GEDs and adjusting for African-American coverage bias), why calculate graduation rates at all? These graduation rates have several advantages. First, they can be calculated with relative precision for states and districts. The CPS simply does not have large enough sub-samples to compute high school completion rates for districts or for ethnic/racial sub-groups in states, so those statistics are not reported by NCES. Having information on the graduation rate for school districts as well as for those districts broken out by race is an important benefit of calculating graduation rates. Even at the state level, high school completion rates are based on small survey populations and have very large confidence intervals around each estimate.¹⁸

Second, dropout statistics derived from the Current Population Survey are based on young people who live in an area but who may not have gone to high school in that area. This fact may create a fairly large bias in areas with fast growing populations related to higher-skilled economic development. The graduation rates reported in this study more directly measure the success of schools in each jurisdiction to produce graduates.

Third, the Current Population Survey does not include in its sample people who are incarcerated. Since dropouts are disproportionately represented among people in prison, this is likely to overstate the graduation rate. This bias is more severe for ethnic or racial groups that have a disproportionate number of young people in prison.

Fourth, the self-reporting bias in CPS is especially severe when it comes to distinguishing GED recipients from regular high school graduates. As Duncan Chaplin of the Urban Institute put it: “The major problem with the CPS data is that information on GED status appears to be very inaccurate.”¹⁹ Chaplin reports that more than 60% of people initially described as GED recipients in the first survey are later described as regular high school graduates when re-surveyed the next year. As Chaplin explains: “it appears that there is a very large amount of random misreporting of GED status in the CPS, perhaps because respondents are rushing to answer questions quickly and/or because they are not aware of the GED status of teenagers living in their households.” Chaplin also

reports that the number of new GED recipients according to the CPS is less than half the actual number of GEDs awarded according to the GED Testing Service. In short, the lack of quality results on the number of GED recipients in the CPS undermines the reliability of its estimate of high school graduates.

The advantage of the calculation of graduation rates reported here is that it relies on enrollment and diploma numbers as collected by NCES. Those enrollment and diploma numbers do not suffer from sample coverage biases because there is no sampling involved. Diploma and enrollment numbers are not biased by excluding prison populations. Diploma and enrollment numbers more directly measure the performance of school systems in an area than surveys of young adults in the area who may not have attended school locally. And diploma and enrollment numbers do not suffer from confusion about who has a GED or a regular diploma or other self-reporting biases.

Dropout Statistics Reported by Districts and States

The NCES report also contains state event dropout rates that have been collected from the states rather than from the CPS. Essentially, they survey the states and ask them for event dropout rate statistics. In addition to the fact that these rates have to be compounded over several years to produce something equivalent to a status dropout rate, which is what most people have in mind when they discuss dropout rates, there are serious reporting problems with event dropout rates. Only 37 states report event dropout statistics to NCES and of those only “26 said that they adhered exactly to the standard definition and collection procedures” outlined by NCES.²⁰ The frequency of missing and incomparable data make these event dropout rates unhelpful for trying to compare the effectiveness of different states at graduating their students.

Event dropout rates reported directly by states and districts are subject to severe self-reporting problems and are often implausibly low. Rather than relying on a survey, like CPS, districts and states calculate their own event dropout rates by asking school officials to track individual students and report the percentage of students in certain grades who drop out during the year. The self-reporting bias stems from the fact that we are depending upon school officials to track the status of individual students. Because school systems and their officials are under strong pressure not to have high dropout rates, they

have incentives to assume that students moved out of town or fell into some other category that exempted them from being called dropouts. In Austin, TX the mis-reporting of dropout and other accountability statistics was so severe that the entire district was criminally indicted. As a result of an agreement to settle the case the event dropout rate was recalculated and the district’s rate more than doubled.²¹

Even when event dropout rates are not willfully or negligently under-reported, school officials usually do not have the resources or skills to attempt to track individual students and compute an event dropout rate. Ironically, the attempt by school officials to compute dropout statistics by tracking individual students is supported by the claim that it is more “precise.” The truth is that it is far more precise to examine cohorts of students by comparing enrollments to graduation counts (with adjustments for population changes), as I have done with graduation rates. Computing dropout rates by trying to track individual students is like trying to measure how much rice you have eaten in a month by summing the weight of every grain that was cooked. There is measurement error when each grain is weighed and some grains are “lost” by sticking to the side of the pot. It is much more accurate and cost-efficient just to weigh the bag at the beginning and end of the month. It sounds more precise to track the individual grains but it ends up being much less precise.

Using a method that involves trying to track individual students the Dallas Independent School District in Texas reports an annual dropout rate of 1.3%.²² This number is implausibly low. Consider that according to my calculations Dallas has a graduation rate of only 52%. Even if 1.3% compounded over several years it does not come close to matching the picture drawn by my graduation rate. If only 1.3% of students dropout each year, how is it that Dallas had 9,924 students in 8th grade in 1993 but only 5,659 graduates in 1998 while the total student population in the district went up by 10.5%? It cannot be that several thousand students moved out of town while the whole city and school district population was increasing. It cannot be that thousands of students were held back a grade and that no students were held back a grade in the cohort from the year before. Frankly there is no reasonable explanation for what happened to those several thousand students in Dallas other than that they dropped out, making the 1.3% event dropout rate simply unbelievable.

This example illustrates another reason why the graduation rates in this study are beneficial to compute and report. They are easy to calculate, they are consistent with the common sense notion that thousands of missing students are probably dropouts, and they are a nice reality check on implausible official numbers.

The reporting of implausible dropout rates is not confined to Dallas. The state of Texas reports a 1.6% annual dropout rate while I calculate a graduation rate for the state of 68%.²³ If it is true that only 1.6% of students in Texas drop out of school each year, what explains the fact that there were 274,208 8th graders in Texas in 1993 and only 197,186 graduates in 1998 while the state's student population increased by 5.9%? The state of California reports an annual or event dropout rate of 2.8% while I calculate a graduation rate of 73%. If the 2.8% figure is correct, then how did California go from having 380,223 8th graders in 1993 to 282,897 graduates in 1998 while the state's total student population increased by 2.1%?

New York City claims that only 19.3% of the class of 2000 dropped out of high school. I found a graduation rate for the class of 1998 of 54%. What explains the difference? The New York City report admits that only 50% of the class of 2000 actually graduated, while 31% continued to work toward a degree.²⁴ The truth is that very few of those 31% receive regular high school diplomas, yet the city's method of calculating results generously excludes all of them from the dropout category.²⁵ This would be like an accounting system that excluded from the delinquent accounts category everyone who said that they were working on paying their invoice. Not counting those who say "the check is in the mail" among the delinquent accounts presents a grossly distorted financial picture. In New York City, 31% of all high school students have the check in the mail.

Some districts, however, appear to be willing to be brutally honest in reporting their dropout/graduation situation. For example, the Charlotte/Mecklenburg district in North Carolina reports that only 47% of their African-American students in the class of 1999 graduated high school. I calculated the graduation rate as 53% for African-American students in Charlotte. The district places their total graduation rate at 54% compared to my calculation of a total graduation rate of 63%.²⁶ The district's numbers may be too harsh (it is not clear whether they adjusted for the population increase in the district), but at least Charlotte is willing to face its problems and discuss them openly.

Conclusion

The lack of candor about the rate at which public school students graduate high school is a fundamental problem in education. The rates at which students graduate high school provide us with information about the effectiveness of those schools. Unless we have reliable information about graduation rates we cannot begin to consider the severity of problems or make comparisons about the effectiveness of schools in different areas or for different groups of students. The graduation rates provided here provide simple, straightforward, and accurate information about schools nationally, in each state, and in the 50 largest school districts, as well as for racial/ethnic sub-groups, facilitating discussions about the severity of problems as well as comparisons about those problems.

The results are consistent with high school completion rates reported by the NCES (after GEDs are excluded and African-American coverage biases are adjusted), but this report expands upon the NCES report by providing graduation rates for states, districts, and ethnic/racial sub-groups that are not provided by the NCES. This report also improves upon state and district reported dropout rates, which unfortunately often implausibly understate problems.

The graduation rates reported here have to be seen as part of the beginning of a discussion and not the final word. This report does not consider why graduation rates are what they are. It does not attempt to explain why rates are lower for some areas or for some populations. And it does not attempt to compute whether these rates are lower or higher than they were in the past.²⁷

The graduation rates reported in this study, however, convey strongly that far fewer students are graduating high school than we may have believed and far fewer than we would wish. The graduation rates are shockingly low for African-American and Latino students nationwide. We also see far too many states and school districts with remarkably low graduation rates. But there is also hope in these numbers. Some districts appear able to graduate a relatively high percentage of African-American, Latino, and white students. We should begin to examine those districts to see if there are formulas for success that can be imitated elsewhere. And where we see severe problems we should be more open to new ideas for how to revitalize our schools and improve those situations.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Graduation Rate by State and Race

State	Graduation Rate	African-American Graduation Rate	Latino Graduation Rate	White Graduation Rate
Alabama	62%	52%	33%	69%
Alaska	70%	58%	58%	74%
Arizona	60%	NA	NA	NA
Arkansas	71%	67%	48%	74%
California	73%	59%	55%	78%
Colorado	70%	55%	47%	75%
Connecticut	81%	64%	53%	79%
Delaware	75%	64%	57%	78%
District of Columbia	60%	55%	59%	INS
Florida	63%	51%	52%	63%
Georgia	57%	44%	32%	61%
Hawaii	72%	53%	66%	67%
Idaho	75%	NA	NA	NA
Illinois	82%	57%	55%	89%
Indiana	74%	55%	55%	77%
Iowa	93%	57%	60%	95%
Kansas	76%	54%	51%	80%
Kentucky	71%	NA	NA	NA
Louisiana	66%	62%	70%	76%
Maine	77%	INS	INS	76%
Maryland	79%	66%	70%	80%
Massachusetts	80%	70%	51%	78%
New Mexico	63%	58%	58%	74%
Michigan	77%	53%	55%	79%
Minnesota	84%	43%	53%	87%
Mississippi	60%	58%	INS	66%
Missouri	77%	58%	63%	78%
Montana	80%	INS	82%	88%
Nebraska	85%	53%	50%	90%
Nevada	63%	49%	40%	65%
New Hampshire	74%	NA	NA	NA
New Jersey	80%	66%	60%	86%
New York	74%	51%	53%	82%
North Carolina	66%	55%	38%	68%
North Dakota	87%	NA	NA	NA
Ohio	78%	49%	63%	82%
Oklahoma	75%	64%	57%	78%
Oregon	67%	49%	43%	70%
Pennsylvania	85%	63%	56%	86%
Rhode Island	77%	61%	51%	77%
South Carolina	72%	NA	NA	NA
South Dakota	78%	INS	INS	89%
Tennessee	59%	44%	38%	64%
Texas	68%	59%	56%	76%
Utah	77%	NA	NA	NA
Vermont	85%	NA	NA	NA
Virginia	76%	64%	62%	78%
Washington	72%	NA	NA	NA
West Virginia	78%	71%	INS	82%
Wisconsin	87%	40%	56%	92%
Wyoming	76%	INS	59%	84%

INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 2: Ranking of Graduation Rates by State

State	Ranking	Graduation Rate
Georgia	51	57%
Tennessee	50	59%
Mississippi	49	60%
District of Columbia	48	60%
Arizona	47	60%
Alabama	46	62%
New Mexico	45	63%
Florida	44	63%
Nevada	43	63%
North Carolina	42	66%
Louisiana	41	66%
Oregon	40	67%
Texas	39	68%
Alaska	38	70%
Colorado	37	70%
Kentucky	36	71%
Arkansas	35	71%
Hawaii	34	72%
South Carolina	33	72%
Washington	32	72%
California	31	73%
New York	30	74%
Indiana	29	74%
New Hampshire	28	74%
Oklahoma	27	75%
Idaho	26	75%
Delaware	25	75%
Wyoming	24	76%
Kansas	23	76%
Virginia	22	76%
Utah	21	77%
Missouri	20	77%
Rhode Island	19	77%
Maine	18	77%
Michigan	17	77%
South Dakota	16	78%
Ohio	15	78%
West Virginia	14	78%
Maryland	13	79%
Montana	12	80%
Massachusetts	11	80%
New Jersey	10	80%
Connecticut	9	81%
Illinois	8	82%
Minnesota	7	84%
Vermont	6	85%
Pennsylvania	5	85%
Nebraska	4	85%
North Dakota	3	87%
Wisconsin	2	87%
Iowa	1	93%

Table 3: Ranking of African-American Graduation Rates by State

State	Ranking	African-American Graduation Rate
Wisconsin	38	40%
Minnesota	37	43%
Georgia	36	44%
Tennessee	35	44%
Nevada	34	49%
Ohio	33	49%
Oregon	32	49%
New York	31	51%
Florida	30	51%
Alabama	29	52%
Hawaii	28	53%
Michigan	27	53%
Nebraska	26	53%
Kansas	25	54%
District of Columbia	24	55%
Indiana	23	55%
Colorado	22	55%
North Carolina	21	55%
Illinois	20	57%
Iowa	19	57%
Mississippi	18	58%
New Mexico	17	58%
Alaska	16	58%
Missouri	15	58%
California	14	59%
Texas	13	59%
Rhode Island	12	61%
Louisiana	11	62%
Pennsylvania	10	63%
Oklahoma	9	64%
Connecticut	8	64%
Virginia	7	64%
Delaware	6	64%
Maryland	5	66%
New Jersey	4	66%
Arkansas	3	67%
Massachusetts	2	70%
West Virginia	1	71%
Maine	NR	INS
Montana	NR	INS
South Dakota	NR	INS
Wyoming	NR	INS
Arizona	NR	NA
Idaho	NR	NA
Kentucky	NR	NA
New Hampshire	NR	NA
North Dakota	NR	NA
South Carolina	NR	NA
Utah	NR	NA
Vermont	NR	NA
Washington	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 4: Ranking of Latino Graduation Rates by State

State	Ranking	Latino Graduation Rate
Georgia	38	32%
Alabama	37	33%
Tennessee	36	38%
North Carolina	35	38%
Nevada	34	40%
Oregon	33	43%
Colorado	32	47%
Arkansas	31	48%
Nebraska	30	50%
Rhode Island	29	51%
Kansas	28	51%
Massachusetts	27	51%
Florida	26	52%
Minnesota	25	53%
Connecticut	24	53%
New York	23	53%
California	22	55%
Michigan	21	55%
Illinois	20	55%
Indiana	19	55%
Pennsylvania	18	56%
Wisconsin	17	56%
Texas	16	56%
Oklahoma	15	57%
Delaware	14	57%
New Mexico	13	58%
Alaska	12	58%
District of Columbia	11	59%
Wyoming	10	59%
Iowa	9	60%
New Jersey	8	60%
Virginia	7	62%
Ohio	6	63%
Missouri	5	63%
Hawaii	4	66%
Maryland	3	70%
Louisiana	2	70%
Montana	1	82%
Maine	NR	INS
Mississippi	NR	INS
South Dakota	NR	INS
West Virginia	NR	INS
Arizona	NR	NA
Idaho	NR	NA
Kentucky	NR	NA
New Hampshire	NR	NA
North Dakota	NR	NA
South Carolina	NR	NA
Utah	NR	NA
Vermont	NR	NA
Washington	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

Table 5: Ranking of White Graduation Rates by State

State	Ranking	White Graduation Rate
Georgia	41	61%
Florida	40	63%
Tennessee	39	64%
Nevada	38	65%
Mississippi	37	66%
Hawaii	36	67%
North Carolina	35	68%
Alabama	34	69%
Oregon	33	70%
Alaska	32	74%
Arkansas	31	74%
New Mexico	30	74%
Colorado	29	75%
Louisiana	28	76%
Maine	27	76%
Texas	26	76%
Rhode Island	25	77%
Indiana	24	77%
Missouri	23	78%
Oklahoma	22	78%
California	21	78%
Massachusetts	20	78%
Virginia	19	78%
Delaware	18	78%
Connecticut	17	79%
Michigan	16	79%
Maryland	15	80%
Kansas	14	80%
West Virginia	13	82%
Ohio	12	82%
New York	11	82%
Wyoming	10	84%
Pennsylvania	9	86%
New Jersey	8	86%
Minnesota	7	87%
Montana	6	88%
South Dakota	5	89%
Illinois	4	89%
Nebraska	3	90%
Wisconsin	2	92%
Iowa	1	95%
District of Columbia	NR	INS
Arizona	NR	NA
Idaho	NR	NA
Kentucky	NR	NA
New Hampshire	NR	NA
North Dakota	NR	NA
South Carolina	NR	NA
Utah	NR	NA
Vermont	NR	NA
Washington	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 6: Graduation Rate by District and Race

District	Graduation Rate	African-American Graduation Rate	Latino Graduation Rate	White Graduation Rate	Ranking of District by 1993 Population
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM	83%	66%	71%	99%	26
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD	71%	56%	INS	75%	45
Austin Independent School District, TX	59%	53%	42%	79%	42
Baltimore City Public School System, MD	54%	55%	INS	48%	20
Baltimore County Public Schools, MD	79%	67%	INS	84%	23
Boston School District, MA	82%	85%	68%	87%	50
Broward County School District, FL	60%	57%	54%	63%	7
Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Schools, NC	63%	53%	INS	72%	28
City of Chicago School District 299, IL	47%	45%	43%	59%	3
Clarke County School District, NV	54%	49%	34%	61%	10
Cleveland City School District, OH	28%	29%	26%	23%	38
Cobb County School District, GA	69%	48%	34%	76%	33
Columbus City School District, OH	45%	45%	INS	46%	49
Dade County School District, FL	57%	55%	55%	70%	4
Dallas Independent School District, TX	52%	60%	39%	72%	11
Dekalb County School District, GA	51%	47%	29%	79%	30
Detroit City School District, MI	57%	57%	49%	43%	9
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	59%	55%	58%	INS	31
Duval County School District, FL	53%	45%	48%	57%	16
El Paso Independent School District, TX	70%	57%	67%	86%	48
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA	87%	77%	66%	92%	12
Fort Worth Independent School District, TX	53%	56%	40%	66%	41
Fresno Unified, CA	58%	51%	41%	78%	36
Granite School District, UT	77%	NA	NA	NA	32
Gwinnett County School District, GA	65%	40%	33%	72%	35
Hawaii Department of Education, HI	69%	52%	65%	67%	8
Hillsborough County School District, FL	55%	42%	47%	62%	13
Houston Independent School District, TX	52%	55%	42%	84%	6
Jefferson County R-1, CO	70%	INS	52%	72%	29
Jefferson County School District, KY	58%	34%	INS	75%	25
Jordan School District, UT	80%	NA	NA	NA	43
Long Beach Unified, CA	64%	62%	52%	78%	34
Los Angeles Unified, CA	56%	56%	48%	81%	2
Memphis City School District, TN	42%	39%	INS	50%	21
Mesa Unified School District, AZ	70%	INS	44%	79%	46
Milwaukee School District, WI	43%	34%	42%	74%	24
Mobile County School District, AL	60%	50%	INS	72%	47
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	85%	75%	73%	88%	19
Nashville-Davidson County School District, TN	55%	53%	INS	55%	40
New York City School District, NY	54%	42%	45%	80%	1

cont'd on next page

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 6: Graduation Rate by District and Race, cont'd

District	Graduation Rate	African-American Graduation Rate	Latino Graduation Rate	White Graduation Rate	Ranking of District by 1993 Population
Orange County School District, FL	57%	45%	51%	63%	18
Orleans Parish School Board, LA	70%	NA	NA	NA	27
Palm Beach County School District, FL	58%	51%	46%	64%	15
Philadelphia City School District, PA	70%	65%	53%	91%	5
Pinellas County School District, FL	56%	41%	54%	59%	22
Polk County School District, FL	57%	51%	44%	61%	44
Prince Georges County School District, MD	79%	76%	70%	90%	17
San Diego City Unified, CA	62%	54%	43%	79%	14
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA	80%	59%	INS	86%	37
Wake County Schools, NC	67%	57%	INS	72%	39
Other Districts of Interest					
Ann Arbor Public Schools, MI	91%	55%	INS	96%	411
Brevard County School District, FL	62%	49%	INS	63%	54
Colorado Springs 11, CO	71%	52%	48%	72%	144
Denver County, CO	53%	55%	36%	79%	53
Indianapolis Public Schools, IN	39%	44%	INS	NA	85
Leon County School District, FL	63%	47%	INS	67%	164
Newark City School District, NJ	51%	48%	38%	51%	84
Oakland Unified, CA	43%	39%	34%	34%	68
Saint Paul School District, MN	49%	27%	27%	50%	109

INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 7: Ranking of Graduation Rates by District

District	Ranking	Graduation Rate
Cleveland City School District, OH	50	28%
Memphis City School District, TN	49	42%
Milwaukee School District, WI	48	43%
Columbus City School District, OH	47	45%
City of Chicago School District 299, IL	46	47%
Dekalb County School District, GA	45	51%
Dallas Independent School District, TX	44	52%
Houston Independent School District, TX	43	52%
Duval County School District, FL	42	53%
Fort Worth Independent School District, TX	41	53%
Clarke County School District, NV	40	54%
New York City School District, NY	39	54%
Baltimore City Public School System, MD	38	54%
Nashville-Davidson County School District, TN	37	55%
Hillsborough County School District, FL	36	55%
Pinellas County School District, FL	35	56%
Los Angeles Unified, CA	34	56%
Orange County School District, FL	33	57%
Detroit City School District, MI	32	57%
Polk County School District, FL	31	57%
Dade County School District, FL	30	57%
Fresno Unified, CA	29	58%
Palm Beach County School District, FL	28	58%
Jefferson County School District, KY	27	58%
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	26	59%
Austin Independent School District, TX	25	59%
Mobile County School District, AL	24	60%
Broward County School District, FL	23	60%
San Diego City Unified, CA	22	62%
Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Schools, NC	21	63%
Long Beach Unified, CA	20	64%
Gwinnett County School District, GA	19	65%
Wake County Schools, NC	18	67%
Cobb County School District, GA	17	69%
Hawaii Department of Education, HI	16	69%
El Paso Independent School District, TX	15	70%
Philadelphia City School District, PA	14	70%
Jefferson County R-1, CO	13	70%
Orleans Parish School Board, LA	12	70%
Mesa Unified School District, AZ	11	70%
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD	10	71%
Granite School District, UT	9	77%
Prince Georges County School District, MD	8	79%
Baltimore County Public Schools, MD	7	79%
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA	6	80%
Jordan School District, UT	5	80%
Boston School District, MA	4	82%
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM	3	83%
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	2	85%
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA	1	87%

INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

Table 8: Ranking of African-American Graduation Rates by District

District	Ranking	African-American Graduation Rate
Cleveland City School District, OH	45	29%
Jefferson County School District, KY	44	34%
Milwaukee School District, WI	43	34%
Memphis City School District, TN	42	39%
Gwinnett County School District, GA	41	40%
Pinellas County School District, FL	40	41%
Hillsborough County School District, FL	39	42%
New York City School District, NY	38	42%
Columbus City School District, OH	37	45%
Orange County School District, FL	36	45%
Duval County School District, FL	35	45%
City of Chicago School District 299, IL	34	45%
Dekalb County School District, GA	33	47%
Cobb County School District, GA	32	48%
Clarke County School District, NV	31	49%
Mobile County School District, AL	30	50%
Polk County School District, FL	29	51%
Fresno Unified, CA	28	51%
Palm Beach County School District, FL	27	51%
Hawaii Department of Education, HI	26	52%
Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Schools, NC	25	53%
Nashville-Davidson County School District, TN	24	53%
Austin Independent School District, TX	23	53%
San Diego City Unified, CA	22	54%
Baltimore City Public School System, MD	21	55%
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	20	55%
Dade County School District, FL	19	55%
Houston Independent School District, TX	18	55%
Los Angeles Unified, CA	17	56%
Fort Worth Independent School District, TX	16	56%
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD	15	56%
Wake County Schools, NC	14	57%
Broward County School District, FL	13	57%
Detroit City School District, MI	12	57%
El Paso Independent School District, TX	11	57%
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA	10	59%
Dallas Independent School District, TX	9	60%
Long Beach Unified, CA	8	62%
Philadelphia City School District, PA	7	65%
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM	6	66%
Baltimore County Public Schools, MD	5	67%
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	4	75%
Prince Georges County School District, MD	3	76%
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA	2	77%
Boston School District, MA	1	85%
Jefferson County R-1, CO	NR	INS
Mesa Unified School District, AZ	NR	INS
Granite School District, UT	NR	NA
Jordan School District, UT	NR	NA
Orleans Parish School Board, LA	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

High School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 9: Ranking of Latino Graduation Rates by District

District	Ranking	Latino Graduation Rate
Cleveland City School District, OH	36	26%
Dekalb County School District, GA	35	29%
Gwinnett County School District, GA	34	33%
Cobb County School District, GA	33	34%
Clarke County School District, NV	32	34%
Dallas Independent School District, TX	31	39%
Fort Worth Independent School District, TX	30	40%
Fresno Unified, CA	29	41%
Houston Independent School District, TX	28	42%
Milwaukee School District, WI	27	42%
Austin Independent School District, TX	26	42%
City of Chicago School District 299, IL	25	43%
San Diego City Unified, CA	24	43%
Polk County School District, FL	23	44%
Mesa Unified School District, AZ	22	44%
New York City School District, NY	21	45%
Palm Beach County School District, FL	20	46%
Hillsborough County School District, FL	19	47%
Duval County School District, FL	18	48%
Los Angeles Unified, CA	17	48%
Detroit City School District, MI	16	49%
Orange County School District, FL	15	51%
Jefferson County R-1, CO	14	52%
Long Beach Unified, CA	13	52%
Philadelphia City School District, PA	12	53%
Pinellas County School District, FL	11	54%
Broward County School District, FL	10	54%
Dade County School District, FL	9	55%
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	8	58%
Hawaii Department of Education, HI	7	65%
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA	6	66%
El Paso Independent School District, TX	5	67%
Boston School District, MA	4	68%
Prince Georges County School District, MD	3	70%
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM	2	71%
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	1	73%
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD	NR	INS
Baltimore City Public School System, MD	NR	INS
Baltimore County Public Schools, MD	NR	INS
Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Schools, NC	NR	INS
Columbus City School District, OH	NR	INS
Jefferson County School District, KY	NR	INS
Memphis City School District, TN	NR	INS
Mobile County School District, AL	NR	INS
Nashville-Davidson County School District, TN	NR	INS
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA	NR	INS
Wake County Schools, NC	NR	INS
Granite School District, UT	NR	NA
Jordan School District, UT	NR	NA
Orleans Parish School Board, LA	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

Table 10: Ranking of White Graduation Rates by District

District	Ranking	White Graduation Rate
Cleveland City School District, OH	46	23%
Detroit City School District, MI	45	43%
Columbus City School District, OH	44	46%
Baltimore City Public School System, MD	43	48%
Memphis City School District, TN	42	50%
Nashville-Davidson County School District, TN	41	55%
Duval County School District, FL	40	57%
City of Chicago School District 299, IL	39	59%
Pinellas County School District, FL	38	59%
Polk County School District, FL	37	61%
Clarke County School District, NV	36	61%
Hillsborough County School District, FL	35	62%
Broward County School District, FL	34	63%
Orange County School District, FL	33	63%
Palm Beach County School District, FL	32	64%
Fort Worth Independent School District, TX	31	66%
Hawaii Department of Education, HI	30	67%
Dade County School District, FL	29	70%
Mobile County School District, AL	28	72%
Wake County Schools, NC	27	72%
Gwinnett County School District, GA	26	72%
Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Schools, NC	25	72%
Dallas Independent School District, TX	24	72%
Jefferson County R-1, CO	23	72%
Milwaukee School District, WI	22	74%
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD	21	75%
Jefferson County School District, KY	20	75%
Cobb County School District, GA	19	76%
Long Beach Unified, CA	18	78%
Fresno Unified, CA	17	78%
Mesa Unified School District, AZ	16	79%
Dekalb County School District, GA	15	79%
San Diego City Unified, CA	14	79%
Austin Independent School District, TX	13	79%
New York City School District, NY	12	80%
Los Angeles Unified, CA	11	81%
Houston Independent School District, TX	10	84%
Baltimore County Public Schools, MD	9	84%
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA	8	86%
El Paso Independent School District, TX	7	86%
Boston School District, MA	6	87%
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD	5	88%
Prince Georges County School District, MD	4	90%
Philadelphia City School District, PA	3	91%
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA	2	92%
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM	1	99%
District of Columbia Public Schools, DC	NR	INS
Granite School District, UT	NR	NA
Jordan School District, UT	NR	NA
Orleans Parish School Board, LA	NR	NA

NR=Not ranked; INS=Insufficient student count for calculating graduation rate; NA=Data not available

NOTES

1. See http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032000/perinc/new03_001.htm
2. Phillip Kaufman, Jin Y. Kwon, and Steve Klein, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999," National Center For Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, November 2000, p. 1.
3. Of course, some school systems may increase their graduation rates by having lax standards for receiving a high school diploma while other school systems may experience lower graduation rates by having more rigorous standards for receiving a diploma. This report makes the simplifying assumption that the standards for high school graduation are relatively consistent throughout the United States. It would be interesting in future research to relax this assumption and examine the potential inter-action between the rigor of school standards and graduation rates.
4. Phillip Kaufman, "The National Dropout Data Collection System: Assessing Consistency," Harvard Civil Rights Project, January 13, 2001. Available on the web at: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/dropout/kaufman.html>
5. For simplicity of language I use the terms "white" for non-Hispanic whites and "African-American" for non-Hispanic African-Americans. I use "Latino" to refer to Hispanics of any racial group.
6. Most enrollment and diploma numbers were obtained from the Common Core Data (CCD) from the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. If the data were not available from CCD, the information was requested from the state or school district.
7. I chose to use 8th grade enrollments because some students drop out of school before 9th grade. In addition, 9th grade is a common grade in which students repeat the grade, which can artificially inflate 9th grade enrollments and understate the true graduation rate.
8. I decided that the results were not sufficiently reliable if there were fewer than 150 students in 8th grade because the results would be too sensitive to population inflow and outflow in ways that would be difficult to detect and adjust.
9. Some of the total population change is from changes in birth rates or population inflow at younger grades, but adjusting the 8th grade enrollment by the total student population change is the most parsimonious assumption for an adjustment and it is still likely to be reasonably accurate. If the total population changes more in the younger grades, then the graduation rate will be slightly underestimated. However, the total student population change can also be influenced by a high rate of dropouts that could cause the graduation rate to be overestimated. In sum, there is little reason to expect systematic bias from this adjustment and it is likely that any errors are small.
10. The reviewers of an earlier draft of this report suggested other alternative explanations for enrollment changes. For example, some of the reviewers worried that urban enrollments in particular might decline after 8th grade if families switched to private or suburban schools in large numbers. In fact, far fewer students are enrolled in private high schools than are enrolled in private elementary and middle schools. (See <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/digest/dt060.html>) So, the net flow of students is into public schools after 8th grade, meaning that the most likely bias here is that I have overstated public high school graduation rates. Similarly, there is no evidence of a large shift of students from urban to suburban schools after 8th grade because suburban districts do not show an increase in high school enrollments relative to their primary grade enrollments. See for example that Montgomery and Prince Georges counties do not experience an increase in student enrollment for high schools: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/100largest/table5.html>
11. The results broken out by ethnicity are based on 41 states for which data were available in the Common Core Data or were provided by the states. Data were requested from all states but Arizona, Idaho, Kentucky, North Dakota, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Washington either did not have the data available or refused to respond. Fortunately, most of these states have relatively small minority populations, making it unlikely that their exclusion distorts the national graduation figures for African-Americans, Latinos, and whites.
12. For an example of research using promoting power see: Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, "How Many Central City High Schools Have A Severe Dropout Problem, Where Are They Located, and Who Attends Them? Initial Estimates Using the Common Core of Data," Harvard Civil Rights Project, January

13, 2001. Available on the web at <http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/dropout/kaufman.html>

13. Phillip Kaufman, Jin Y. Kwon, and Steve Klein, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999," National Center For Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, November 2000, Table 4, p. 19.

14. Stephen Cameron and James Heckman, "The Nonequivalence of High School Equivalents," *Journal of Labor Economics*, volume 11, number 1, 1993, p. 1.

15. See for example, Richard J. Murnane, John B. Willett, and Kathryn Parker Boudett "Do High School Dropouts Benefit from Obtaining a GED?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 17(2), 1995, pp. 133-147.

16. Phillip Kaufman, "The National Dropout Data Collection System: Assessing Consistency," Harvard Civil Rights Project, January 13, 2001, Table 1. Available on the web at <http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/dropout/kaufman.html>

17. From Duncan Chaplin's review of an earlier draft of this report, September 20, 2001.

18. Phillip Kaufman, "The National Dropout Data Collection System: Assessing Consistency," Harvard Civil Rights Project, January 13, 2001, Figure 5. Available on the web at <http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/dropout/kaufman.html>

19. Duncan Chaplin, "GEDs for Teenagers: Are There Unintended Consequences?" Urban Institute, November 26, 1999. Available on the web at: <http://www.urbaninstitute.org/education/ged.html>

20. Phillip Kaufman, Jin Y. Kwon, and Steve Klein, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999," National Center For Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, November 2000, Table 2, p. 10.

21. For a statement from the Austin Independent School District on the criminal indictment of the district see: <http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/newsmedia/releases/oldarchive/response.html>

22. See: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas8/broker?_service=alamo&_program=perfreport.perfmast.sas&prgopt=2000/aeis/district.sas&year4=2000&search=distback&year2=00&topic=aeis&gifname=g_aeis2000district&title=AEIS+Report&level=District&distback=057905

23. See: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2000/state.html>

24. See: <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/reports/index.html>

25. It is true that some of these students receive GEDs. According to a New York City report on the class of 1997 who were tracked until the year 2000, 69.7% received a degree of some kinds, but 14.9% of those degrees were equivalency degrees. If we exclude those GEDs, then New York City is reporting a 59% graduation rate for the class of 1997 compared to my graduation rate of 54% for the class of 1998. See "The Class of 1997, Final Longitudinal Report, A Three-Year Follow-up Study" Table 1, p. 5. Available at: <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/reports/index.html>

26. See: <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/inside/general/profile/links.htm>

27. An interesting and reliable way of viewing graduation trends over time is to consider a statistic reported in the Digest of Education Statistics, 2000, Table 101. It reports the ratio of regular high school graduates (excluding GEDs) to the total 17 year-old population in the United States going back as far as 1870. This ratio is a reasonable approximation of a national graduation rate and can be consistently calculated for more than a century. The table shows that graduation rates steadily climbed to a peak of 77.1% in 1969 and have since fallen back to 70.6% in 2000, a level that was first achieved in 1963. Available on the web at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/digest/dt101.html>

High School Graduation Rates in the United States



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