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NCES 2006-601

The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for Public High Schools From the Common Core of Data

School Years 2001-02 and 2002-03

E.D. TAB



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October 2005

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Summary of Findings

Introduction

This report presents the averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR) for public school students for two school years—2001-02 and 2002-03. The data for this collection were reported to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by state education agencies (SEAs) and represent high school graduates between October 1, 2001, and September 30, 2002, and between October 1, 2002, and September 30, 2003.

The averaged freshman graduation rate provides an estimate of the percentage of high school students who graduate on time. The rate uses aggregate student enrollment data to estimate the size of an incoming freshman class and aggregate counts of the number of diplomas awarded 4 years later. The incoming freshman class size is estimated by summing the enrollment in eighth grade in one year, ninth grade for the next year, and tenth grade for the year after and then dividing by three. The averaging is intended to account for higher grade retentions in the ninth grade. Although not as accurate as an on-time graduation rate computed from a cohort of students using student record data, this estimate of an on-time graduation rate can be computed with currently available data. The averaged freshman graduation rate was selected from a number of alternative estimates that can be calculated using cross-sectional data based on a technical review and analysis of a set of alternative estimates (Seastrom et al. forthcoming).

The counts of enrollments by grade and graduates are from the Common Core of Data (CCD) “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education.” Graduates include those students who are reported as diploma recipients. These are individuals who are awarded, in a given year, a regular high school diploma or a diploma that recognizes some higher level of academic achievement. They can be thought of as students who meet or exceed the coursework and performance standards for high school completion established by the state or other relevant authorities. Other high school completers who were awarded alternate credentials such as a certificate of completion and equivalency recipients (e.g., individuals receiving credentials based on the General Educational Development, or GED, test) are not included because they are not regular graduates.

Although enrollments are reported by grade, some states report ungraded students. To adjust for this, the allocation procedure used in the Common Core of Data, “Local Education Agency Universe Survey Dropout and Completion Data File,” was applied to enrollment data from the “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education.” Through this process, the data for ungraded enrollment counts were redistributed across grades in proportion to the graded enrollment of the state. These redistributed counts of ungraded enrollments were added to the reported enrollment counts for the eighth, ninth, and tenth grades.¹

Averaged freshman graduation rates for the nation and for each state in 2001-02 and 2002-03 are reported in table 1. The 2001-02 rates are repeated in table 2 along with the counts of graduates and eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-grade enrollments that were used for each population. Table 3 includes the same six columns of

¹ In this procedure, the ungraded enrollment is subtracted from the total enrollment to get the total graded enrollment; the reported enrollment in each grade is used to compute the proportion of graded students in each grade; these proportions are multiplied by the count of ungraded students to allocate the ungraded students across the individual grades; and the counts of ungraded students allocated to each grade are added to the reported enrollments by grade. Ungraded enrollments account for approximately 1 percent of enrollments each year.

data for 2002-03 graduation rates. Finally, an Excel spreadsheet that includes these estimates is available for download with the web version of this report.

For the 2001-02 school year, the averaged freshman graduation rate for public schools in the nation is based on the 2,621,534 public school diploma recipients reported for school year 2001-02 divided by the average of the 3,463,520 eighth-grade public school enrollment reported for October 1997-98, the 3,911,292 ninth-grade public school enrollment reported for October 1998-99, and the 3,461,168 tenth-grade public school enrollment reported for October 1999-2000. The 2,621,534 diploma recipients divided by the 3,611,994 averaged number of freshmen, multiplied by 100, results in a 2001-02 public school graduation rate for the United States of 72.6 percent. The same formula was applied to compute the 2001-02 averaged freshman graduation rate for public school students in each state.

For the 2002-03 school year, the averaged freshman graduation rate for public schools in the United States is based on the 2,719,947 diploma recipients reported for school year 2002-03 divided by the average of the 3,529,963 eighth-grade student enrollment reported for October 1998-99, the 3,986,992 ninth-grade student enrollment reported for October 1999-2000, and the 3,529,652 tenth-grade student enrollment reported for October 2000-01. The 2,719,947 public school diploma recipients divided by the 3,682,202 averaged number of public school freshmen, multiplied by 100, results in a 2002-03 public school graduation rate for the United States of 73.9 percent. The same formula is applied to compute the 2002-03 averaged freshman graduation rate for public school students in each state.

Highlights

- The averaged freshman graduation rate yields a 2001-02 graduation rate for public school students in the United States of 72.6 percent (tables 1 and 2). The 2002-03 national rate is 73.9 percent. In summary, close to three quarters of freshmen nationwide graduated from high school on time in these 2 years (tables 1 and 3).
- For the class of 2001-02, the averaged freshman graduation rate for public schools ranged from a low of 57.9 percent in South Carolina to a high of 85.8 percent in New Jersey (tables 1 and 2). Nine states had rates of 80.0 percent or higher—Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Thirteen states and the District of Columbia had rates below 70.0 percent—Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.
- For the class of 2002-03, the averaged freshman graduation rate for public schools ranged from 59.6 percent in the District of Columbia to 87.0 percent in New Jersey (tables 1 and 3). Fourteen states had rates of 80.0 percent or higher—Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Ten states and the District of Columbia had rates below 70.0 percent—Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, and Tennessee.
- Comparing the averaged freshman graduation rate among public school students in the class of 2001-02 to that of 2002-03, the rate increased from 72.6 percent to 73.9 percent (table 1). Thirty-nine states experienced increases in the rate, 1 state experienced no change, and 11 states experienced declines in the rate over this 2-year period.

Data Limitations

Data quality

There is variation in the degree of rigor with which the state or school districts verify their data. Those states that collect graduation data through student-level records systems are better able to verify students' enrollment status than are those agencies that collect aggregate data from schools and districts. For example, if a state using aggregate reports did not include summer and fall graduates in their total count of graduates, the estimated graduation rate for that state would be artificially lower than the actual rate.

Differences in definitions

State and local policies and data collection administration can have profound effects on the numbers of graduates reported by a state. There are differences in what a high school diploma represents in different states. Some states award regular diplomas to all students who meet completion requirements, regardless of the extent to which these requirements address the state or district's academic standards. For example, some states have in-school GED programs that require fewer credit hours than a regular high school track, but lead to the award of regular diplomas.

Other states award some form of alternative credential to students who meet some, but not all, requirements. For example, special education students who complete their individual education programs or regular education students in some alternative program may receive a certificate of completion. As a result, special education students may receive a certificate of completion in one state and a regular diploma in another.

Cautions in interpreting the averaged freshman graduation rate

Although the averaged freshman graduation rate was selected as the best of the available alternatives, several factors make it fall short of a true on-time graduation rate. First, the averaged freshman graduation rate does not take into account any imbalances in the number of students moving in and out of the nation or individual states over the high school years. Second, by including all graduates in a specific year, the graduates may include students who repeated a grade in high school or completed high school early and thus are not on-time graduates in that year. Third, the averaged freshman class is at best an approximation of the actual number of freshmen, where differences in the rates of transfers, retention, and dropping out in the three grades affect the average.

While the averaged freshman graduation rate is a reasonable proxy at the aggregate national or state level, the potential effects of these three factors should be taken into account when interpreting the results for individual states. First, if more high school students moved out of a population than transferred in during the high school years, the number of graduates in the numerator would be smaller and the estimated graduation rate would be smaller than the actual on-time rate for that group of freshmen. On the other hand, if more high school students moved into a population than moved out during this 4-year period, the number of graduates in the numerator would be increased and the estimated on-time graduation rate would be larger than the actual rate for that group of freshmen.

Second, the inclusion of 2001-02 graduates who spent more or less than 4 years in high school increases the number of graduates in the numerator and yields a higher estimated rate than would be the case if only on-time graduates were included in the numerator.

Third, including the estimate of eighth-graders from the previous year to remove the effect of freshmen who were retained and thus are not first-time freshmen ignores the fact that in some populations there is real change in the number of eighth-graders relative to counts of ninth-graders due to transfers between

public and private schools. If more students transfer in to public schools at this point, using a count of eighth-graders that does not include those students would serve to artificially decrease the estimated number of ninth-graders and, as a result, increase the graduation rate for that class. Conversely, if more students were to transfer out of public schools between the eighth and ninth grades, using the eighth-grade count that includes students leaving the population would artificially increase the estimated number of ninth-graders and in turn, decrease the graduation rate. There may also be a tradeoff between the adjustment for retentions and grade-specific differences in the number of dropouts. The use of the tenth-grade enrollment count also helps to dampen the effect of ninth-grade retentions, but ignores the fact that ninth-grade dropouts result in a smaller tenth-grade population. Excluding these ninth-grade dropouts lowers the estimate of freshmen and, as a result, increases the graduation rate.

Each of these factors is likely to have a larger effect on state rates than the national rate, because the impact of counterbalancing behaviors at the national level is dampened by the more homogenous experiences of an individual state. For example, individual states may have relatively large numbers of high school students transferring in or out of public schools in a specific year, but when the data are aggregated to the national level these state level changes are not relevant. Similarly, these factors could have an even larger impact if this rate were computed at the district or school level; as a result, even more care would be needed in interpreting averaged freshman graduation rates at those levels.

For More Information

This report used information from the Common Core of Data “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 1997-98–2002-03. For more information about this data set, contact Lee Hoffman, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20006-5651; or call 202-502-7356; fax 202-502-7475; or e-mail lee.hoffman@ed.gov. Visit the Common Core of Data website for downloading files and documentation at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd>.

Table 1. Averaged freshman graduation rates, by state: School years 2001-02 and 2002-03

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	
	2001-02	2002-03
United States	72.6	73.9
Alabama	62.1	64.7
Alaska	65.9	68.0
Arizona	74.7	75.9
Arkansas	74.8	76.6
California	72.7	74.1
Colorado	74.7	76.4
Connecticut	79.7	80.9
Delaware	69.5	73.0
District of Columbia	68.4	59.6
Florida	63.4	66.7
Georgia	61.1	60.8
Hawaii	72.1	71.3
Idaho	79.3	81.4
Illinois	77.1	75.9
Indiana	73.1	75.5
Iowa	84.1	85.3
Kansas	77.1	76.9
Kentucky	69.8	71.7
Louisiana	64.4	64.1
Maine	75.6	76.3
Maryland	79.7	79.2
Massachusetts	77.6	75.7
Michigan	72.9	74.0
Minnesota	83.9	84.8
Mississippi	61.2	62.7
Missouri	76.8	78.3
Montana	79.8	81.0
Nebraska	83.9	85.2
Nevada	71.9	72.3
New Hampshire	77.8	78.2
New Jersey	85.8	87.0
New Mexico	67.4	63.1
New York	60.5	60.9
North Carolina	68.2	70.1
North Dakota	85.0	86.4
Ohio	77.5	79.0
Oklahoma	76.0	76.0
Oregon	71.0	73.7
Pennsylvania	80.2	81.7
Rhode Island	75.7	77.7
South Carolina	57.9	59.7
South Dakota	79.0	83.0
Tennessee	59.6	63.4
Texas	73.5	75.5
Utah	80.5	80.2
Vermont	82.0	83.6
Virginia	76.7	80.6
Washington	72.2	74.2
West Virginia	74.2	75.7
Wisconsin	84.8	85.8
Wyoming	74.4	73.9

See notes at end of table.

Table 1. Averaged freshman graduation rates, by state: School years 2001-02 and 2002-03—Continued

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	
	2001-02	2002-03
Department of Defense (DoD) dependents schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other jurisdictions		
DoDDS: DoD overseas schools	64.4	61.9
DDESS: DoD domestic schools	—	—
Bureau of Indian Affairs	—	—
American Samoa	82.9	81.0
Guam	—	56.3
Northern Marianas	65.2	65.2
Puerto Rico	66.2	67.8
Virgin Islands	48.7	53.5

— Not available.

NOTE: Enrollments for school years 1997-98 through 2000-01 and diploma recipients for school years 2001-02 and 2002-03 were used.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), State Nonfiscal Data Files: 1997-98 Version 1b, 1998-99 Version 1c, 1999-2000 Version 1c, 2000-01 Version 1b, 2002-03 Version 1b, and 2003-04 Version 0c.

Table 2. Averaged freshman graduation rate and components, by state: School year 2001-02

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	Regular diplomas, school year 2001-02	Estimated first-time 9th- graders in 1998-99 ¹	Grade 10 membership, school year 1999-2000	Grade 9 membership, school year 1998-99	Grade 8 membership, school year 1997-98
United States (51 states)	72.6	2,621,534	3,611,994	3,461,168	3,911,292	3,463,520
Alabama	62.1	35,887	57,746	52,304	62,724	58,210
Alaska	65.9	6,945	10,538	10,217	11,442	9,954
Arizona	74.7	47,175	63,160	60,728	68,216	60,537
Arkansas	74.8	26,984	36,051	35,191	36,517	36,445
California	72.7	325,895	448,379	450,279	475,487	419,371
Colorado	74.7	40,760	54,574	52,642	58,369	52,710
Connecticut	79.7	32,327	40,542	39,273	43,140	39,213
Delaware	69.5	6,482	9,325	8,618	10,453	8,905
District of Columbia	68.4	3,090	4,518	4,339	4,624	4,591
Florida	63.4	119,537	188,535	177,234	214,459	173,913
Georgia	61.1	65,983	108,060	98,019	123,055	103,107
Hawaii	72.1	10,452	14,501	13,533	16,134	13,837
Idaho	79.3	15,874	20,017	19,792	20,562	19,696
Illinois	77.1	116,657	151,263	145,805	161,781	146,202
Indiana	73.1	56,722	77,628	73,888	83,068	75,926
Iowa	84.1	33,789	40,174	40,105	41,691	38,724
Kansas	77.1	29,541	38,296	37,665	40,119	37,104
Kentucky	69.8	36,337	52,087	48,259	56,868	51,135
Louisiana	64.4	37,905	58,864	53,742	65,532	57,318
Maine	75.6	12,593	16,667	15,745	16,854	17,402
Maryland	79.7	50,881	63,801	61,123	69,262	61,019
Massachusetts	77.6	55,272	71,211	68,867	75,023	69,742
Michigan	72.9	95,001	130,257	124,193	140,457	126,120
Minnesota	83.9	57,440	68,457	69,030	69,813	66,529
Mississippi	61.2	23,740	38,764	35,127	41,441	39,725
Missouri	76.8	54,487	70,991	69,232	74,799	68,943
Montana	79.8	10,554	13,218	12,906	13,686	13,063
Nebraska	83.9	19,910	23,718	23,064	24,901	23,190
Nevada	71.9	16,270	22,634	22,710	23,235	21,958
New Hampshire	77.8	12,452	15,999	15,344	16,624	16,029
New Jersey	85.8	77,664	90,484	86,975	93,858	90,618
New Mexico	67.4	18,094	26,847	25,601	29,414	25,525
New York	60.5	140,139	231,735	224,575	262,172	208,459
North Carolina	68.2	65,955	96,754	88,457	108,756	93,048
North Dakota	85.0	8,114	9,549	9,395	9,696	9,555
Ohio	77.5	110,608	142,808	135,463	153,735	139,226
Oklahoma	76.0	36,852	48,516	46,675	50,586	48,287
Oregon	71.0	31,153	43,864	43,436	45,493	42,663
Pennsylvania	80.2	114,943	143,256	139,982	151,651	138,134
Rhode Island	75.7	9,006	11,892	11,350	12,801	11,525
South Carolina	57.9	31,302	54,017	47,592	63,683	50,775
South Dakota	79.0	8,796	11,137	10,662	11,320	11,429
Tennessee	59.6	40,894	68,639	66,924	73,380	65,613
Texas	73.5	225,167	306,219	275,265	350,743	292,648
Utah	80.5	30,183	37,501	37,836	37,460	37,206
Vermont	82.0	7,083	8,641	8,386	9,045	8,492
Virginia	76.7	66,519	86,699	82,135	92,857	85,104
Washington	72.2	58,311	80,763	80,493	85,131	76,664
West Virginia	74.2	17,128	23,091	22,097	24,110	23,067
Wisconsin	84.8	60,575	71,398	70,934	76,660	66,601
Wyoming	74.4	6,106	8,209	7,962	8,403	8,261

See notes at end of table.

Table 2. Averaged freshman graduation rate and components, by state: School year 2001-02—Continued

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	Regular diplomas, school year 2001-02	Estimated first-time 9th- graders in 1998-99 ¹	Grade 10 membership, school year 1999-2000	Grade 9 membership, school year 1998-99	Grade 8 membership, school year 1997-98
Department of Defense (DoD) dependents schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other jurisdictions						
DoDDS: DoD overseas schools	64.4	3,119	4,840	4,649	4,731	5,140
DDESS: DoD domestic schools	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bureau of Indian Affairs	—	—	—	3,238	4,132	—
American Samoa	82.9	823	992	929	1,037	1,011
Guam	—	—	2,470	2,234	3,002	2,173
Northern Marianas	65.2	416	638	569	761	585
Puerto Rico	66.2	30,278	45,729	45,324	44,758	47,104
Virgin Islands	48.7	883	1,814	1,593	2,196	1,654

— Not available.

¹ First-time 9th-graders were estimated as the average of student membership in grades 8, 9, and 10 in 3 consecutive years.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Ungraded students were allocated to individual grades.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), State Nonfiscal Data Files: 1997-98 Version 1b, 1998-99 Version 1c, 1999-2000 Version 1c, and 2002-03 Version 1b.

Table 3. Averaged freshman graduation rate and components, by state: School year 2002-03

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	Regular diplomas, school year 2002-03	Estimated first-time 9th-graders in 1999-2000 ¹	Grade 10 membership, school year 2000-01	Grade 9 membership, school year 1999-2000	Grade 8 membership, school year 1998-99
United States	73.9	2,719,947	3,682,202	3,529,652	3,986,992	3,529,963
Alabama	64.7	36,741	56,749	51,991	61,150	57,105
Alaska	68.0	7,297	10,725	10,110	11,568	10,497
Arizona	75.9	49,986	65,842	63,966	68,917	64,644
Arkansas	76.6	27,555	35,971	35,068	36,772	36,073
California	74.1	341,097	460,481	461,030	488,999	431,414
Colorado	76.4	42,379	55,491	54,006	58,815	53,652
Connecticut	80.9	33,667	41,613	40,608	43,977	40,254
Delaware	73.0	6,817	9,334	8,887	10,150	8,964
District of Columbia	59.6	2,725	4,574	3,838	5,580	4,303
Florida	66.7	127,484	191,065	170,385	223,743	179,066
Georgia	60.8	66,890	110,062	99,934	125,388	104,863
Hawaii	71.3	10,013	14,046	13,154	15,637	13,346
Idaho	81.4	15,858	19,490	19,359	20,039	19,073
Illinois	75.9	117,507	154,816	150,781	164,858	148,810
Indiana	75.5	57,897	76,718	73,565	81,442	75,147
Iowa	85.3	34,860	40,871	40,951	42,394	39,269
Kansas	76.9	29,963	38,952	38,231	40,650	37,974
Kentucky	71.7	37,654	52,488	49,708	57,405	50,350
Louisiana	64.1	37,610	58,715	53,307	64,855	57,982
Maine	76.3	12,947	16,967	16,001	17,233	17,668
Maryland	79.2	51,864	65,468	62,843	70,854	62,708
Massachusetts	75.7	55,987	73,979	71,430	78,062	72,444
Michigan	74.0	100,301	135,558	132,342	143,740	130,592
Minnesota	84.8	59,432	70,062	71,064	71,222	67,899
Mississippi	62.7	23,810	37,971	34,755	40,654	38,504
Missouri	78.3	56,925	72,657	70,666	76,575	70,731
Montana	81.0	10,657	13,157	12,885	13,562	13,024
Nebraska	85.2	20,161	23,655	23,378	24,861	22,725
Nevada	72.3	16,378	22,644	20,040	24,672	23,220
New Hampshire	78.2	13,210	16,902	16,225	17,573	16,907
New Jersey	87.0	81,391	93,573	91,086	96,228	93,404
New Mexico	63.1	16,923	26,833	25,476	29,307	25,716
New York	60.9	143,818	236,030	229,516	266,971	211,602
North Carolina	70.1	69,696	99,491	91,449	111,495	95,528
North Dakota	86.4	8,169	9,457	9,374	9,677	9,321
Ohio	79.0	115,762	146,553	139,870	157,337	142,451
Oklahoma	76.0	36,694	48,288	46,163	50,523	48,178
Oregon	73.7	32,587	44,244	43,821	45,867	43,045
Pennsylvania	81.7	119,933	146,725	143,159	155,929	141,086
Rhode Island	77.7	9,318	12,000	11,525	12,832	11,642
South Carolina	59.7	32,482	54,404	48,628	62,883	51,700
South Dakota	83.0	8,999	10,840	10,402	11,261	10,859
Tennessee	63.4	44,113	69,621	65,388	75,890	67,583
Texas	75.5	238,111	315,494	287,355	359,368	299,760
Utah	80.2	29,527	36,838	37,335	36,783	36,396
Vermont	83.6	6,970	8,337	8,006	8,779	8,227
Virginia	80.6	72,943	90,504	86,731	96,959	87,822
Washington	74.2	60,435	81,465	80,453	86,602	77,340
West Virginia	75.7	17,287	22,826	21,882	23,928	22,669
Wisconsin	85.8	63,272	73,746	73,796	78,961	68,481
Wyoming	73.9	5,845	7,911	7,726	8,063	7,944

See notes at end of table.

Table 3. Averaged freshman graduation rate and components, by state: School year 2002-03—Continued

State or jurisdiction	Averaged freshman graduation rate	Regular diplomas, school year 2002-03	Estimated first-time 9th- graders in 1999-2000 ¹	Grade 10 membership, school year 2000-01	Grade 9 membership, school year 1999-2000	Grade 8 membership, school year 1998-99
Department of Defense (DoD) dependents schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other jurisdictions						
DoDDS: DoD overseas schools	61.9	3,231	5,217	4,799	5,682	5,171
DDESS: DoD domestic schools	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bureau of Indian Affairs	—	—	3,595	3,024	4,001	3,759
American Samoa	81.0	832	1,027	1,011	1,062	1,007
Guam	56.3	1,502	2,669	2,279	3,457	2,270
Northern Marianas	65.2	422	648	544	749	650
Puerto Rico	67.8	31,408	46,321	46,542	44,862	47,560
Virgin Islands	53.5	886	1,656	1,354	2,083	1,533

— Not available.

¹First-time 9th-graders were estimated as the average of student membership in grades 8, 9, and 10 in 3 consecutive years.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Ungraded students were allocated to individual grades.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), State Nonfiscal Data Files: 1998-99 Version 1c, 1999-2000 Version 1c, 2000-01 Version 1b, and 2003-04 Version 0c.

Reference

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