



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



LEAVING BOYS BEHIND: New Report Finds Higher High School Graduation Rates for Females Across Every Racial Subgroup

Females graduate from high school at a higher rate than their male classmates, according to the latest analysis from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. The report, *Leaving Boys Behind: Public High School Graduation Rates*, continues a series that the Manhattan Institute has published on high school graduation rates that began with the class of 2001. It is the first of these reports to include data broken down by gender. It also examines graduation rates for the 100 largest school districts in the United States. Overall, the report pegged the graduation rate for the class of 2003 at 70%, a 1% decrease from the class of 2002's graduation rate. As it has done in the past, the Manhattan Institute reports on the large gap between the graduation rates of white (78%) and Asian students (72%) and those of African-American (55%) and Hispanic students (53%).

In 41 out of the 42 states for which data was available, females graduated from high school at higher rates than their male classmates. Nationwide, females graduated at a rate 7% higher than males. The largest differences were in Delaware (71% for females versus 59% for males), Louisiana (69% vs. 58%), and Georgia (61% vs. 51%). North Dakota is the only state where females did not graduate at a higher rate than males: both females and males graduated at 86%. Among male minorities, graduation rates for the class of 2003 were especially dismal. For example, African-American males graduated at a rate 11 percentage points below their female classmates, as the chart below demonstrates.

	Females	Males	Difference
African American	59%	48%	11%
Asian	73%	70%	3%
Hispanic	58%	49%	9%
White	79%	74%	5%
Overall	72%	65%	7%

“It’s a fairly large difference, particularly when you consider that unlike differences across racial and ethnic groups, boys and girls are raised in the same households, so it’s not so easy to explain the differences by their community, or their income level,” said co-author **Jay P. Greene, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and endowed chair and head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas.**

As in the past, the report ranks states according to their graduation rates. Once again, New Jersey had the highest graduation rate in the country, at 88%. It was followed by Iowa, Wisconsin, and

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North Dakota, each at 85%. The states with the lowest graduation rates were South Carolina (54%), Georgia (56%), and New York (58%). The report also finds that, although some states performed well overall, they performed poorly when it came to graduating certain subgroups of students. For example, Wisconsin had the third-highest graduation rate in the country but only graduated 46% of its African-American students, ranking it 32 out of 33 states for which information was available. On the other hand, Texas, which ranked 36th overall, had the fifth-highest graduation rate for African-American students (67%).

In another new feature, the report provides graduation rates for the 100 largest school districts in the United States and breaks data down by student subgroup. Not surprisingly, the report finds that low graduation rates are a particular problem in the nation's most populated school districts. "None of the nation's ten largest school systems, which over 8% of U.S. public school children attend, graduates more than 60% of its students," it reads.

The Ten Largest School Districts in the U.S.

State	School District	Enrollment	Graduation Rate
NY	New York City Public Schools	1,077,381	43%
CA	Los Angeles Unified	746,852	51%
IL	City of Chicago School District 299	436,048	50%
FL	Dade County School District	373,395	55%
NV	Clark County School District	256,574	56%
TX	Houston Independent School District	212,099	56%
PA	Philadelphia City School District	192,683	58%
FL	Hillsborough County School District	175,454	59%
MI	Detroit City School District	173,742	42%
FL	Palm Beach County School District	164,896	60%

The complete report is available at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_48.htm.



IN THIS CORNER...: Greene and Mishel Tangle in a Debate About Graduation Rate Calculations

In *Leaving Boys Behind: Public High School Graduation Rates*, Jay Greene and **co-author Marcus Winters** not only present updated and expanded information about graduation rates, but they also devote a portion of the report to defending their research against attacks by **Lawrence Mishel, president of the Economic Policy Institute (EPI)**, and **economist Joydeep Roy**. In an EPI report, *Rethinking High School Graduation Rates and Trends*, Mishel and Roy question the accuracy of graduation rate calculations such as Greene's that are based on enrollment data.

"The very low graduation rates that are being cited are out of sync with what the most reliable data sources tell us," said Mishel. "We hope this report will clear the fog, create a better understanding of the true challenges we face and the progress we've made, and help lead the way to better targeted solutions for continuing to close the remaining gaps. Understanding where we are and how far we've come can help identify what has been working in American public education."

On April 27, the Center for Education Policy brought Greene and Mishel together to debate their respective methodologies, which produce graduation rates that differ by about 500,000 students.

Mishel, a labor-market economist, first came to the graduation rate debate when he observed that the ratio of high school graduates' wages to dropouts' wages has not changed for 30 years. Using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, Mishel concluded that the share of high school graduates in the workforce has grown while the share of dropouts has fallen. In fact, Mishel pegged the national high school graduation rate for white students at 95% versus 78% reported by Greene. Mishel said that Greene had exaggerated the African-American dropout rate by nearly 25%. According to Mishel's estimates, 73% of African Americans receive regular high school diplomas, versus the 55% that Greene calculates.

Mishel's main argument against Greene and Winters' work is that it relies on enrollment and diploma counts from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD). In their report, Greene and Winters offer the following rebuttal: "It should not be difficult for states to track enrollment and diplomas. Enrollment counts are based on schools taking attendance, which ... are the basis for school funding by state and federal governments. ... Similarly, diploma counts are likely to be accurate because it is easy for schools to count diplomas and it is easy to verify the numbers. At the very least, schools have to know how many diplomas should be printed and distributed."

At the debate, Greene argued that while the CPS is a reputable survey for certain purposes, it, like any other survey, suffers from certain statistical biases, one of which is its failure to survey prisoners and marginalized and disadvantaged people not attached to households—groups that are likely to be dropouts.

During the question-and-answer portion of the debate, a Census official in the audience (speaking in a personal capacity) noted that because Mishel and Greene are calculating fundamentally different things they are bound to disagree. He noted that Mishel's analysis was estimating the educational attainment of the population versus Greene's assessment of the success of public schools in graduating students with a regular diploma in 4 years.

The debate over methodology is likely to continue. However, there is one thing that most researchers who have weighed in on the controversy do agree on: *regardless of the methods used to count them, far too many young people are dropping out of high school, and they and the country are the poorer for it.*

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, said in response to the controversy, "I appreciate the attention that the Mishel-Greene debate has generated around high school graduation rates, but I worry that we are losing focus on the real issue. Whatever the calculation, far too many students fail to graduate high school with the skills needed for postsecondary education or the modern workforce. Without that discussion, this debate is like going to the Saturday night professional wrestling matches. The graduation rate debate might make for an interesting first match, but it is not the main event, which is the quality of the education behind the high school diploma."

Rethinking High School Graduation Rates and Trends is available at http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/book_grad_rates.



RAISING THE BAR IN MICHIGAN: Under New Law, Class of 2011 Must Meet New Graduation Requirements

Several months ago, Ford and General Motors announced that they will cut tens of thousands of jobs over the next few years. In her state of the state address on January 25, **Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm** discussed the unique impact the layoffs will have in Michigan, “Wherever we live in Michigan, we know that as our auto industry struggles in this global economy, our people feel that pain more than in any other state in the country.” During that speech, the governor laid out a bold agenda that focused on education and on job creation. A key part of her plan was a more rigorous core curriculum for all Michigan high school students. On April 20, her vision came to fruition when she signed a law mandating that, beginning with the class of 2011, all Michigan high school students fulfill tougher graduation requirements.

“Some kids are going to think that these standards are tough. You better believe they are,” Granholm said at a signing ceremony that included a group of middle school students. “Competition is tough. Times are tough, and you’re going to have to be tough, too. We are not messing around.” She also said that the change is necessary to improve Michigan’s workforce and to adequately prepare for an economy that is losing its traditional manufacturing base.

Under the new requirements, high school students in the class of 2011 will have to pass 4 credits of math and English, 3 credits of science and social studies, 1 credit of physical education and health, 1 credit of visual, performing, or applied arts, and 1 online course. Beginning with the class of 2016, 2 years of foreign language, which can be fulfilled in elementary, middle school, or high school, will also be required. Previously, 1 semester of civics was Michigan’s only statewide graduation requirement.

In the state legislature, concerns about some students’ ability to pass Algebra II almost killed the bill’s chances for passage. However, a compromise was reached that will allow struggling students to opt out of a half-credit of Algebra II, but only with parent and counselor consent. The opt-out would also allow students to substitute other core courses for some of the requirements in social studies, arts, and physical education and health.

More information is available in Governor Granholm’s press release at <http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168--141369--,00.html>.

Quotable: Reading is the Key

“All the talk about science and engineering and math matters nothing if the children cannot read. The first step toward making sure our children have the skills of the 21st century is to insist upon a solid reading program that works.”

--President George W. Bush, April 19, 2006 at Tuskegee University

Read the entire speech at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060419-5.html>.

Eight States Join State Scholars Initiative

The U.S. Department of Education has selected eight new states to participate in the State Scholars Initiative (SSI), a national business/education partnership effort that works to increase the number of students who take a rigorous curriculum in high school. The new states are Colorado, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Carolina, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia.

“Rigorous academic coursework in high school is the critical foundation students need whether they plan to attend college or enter the workforce,” said U.S. **Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**. “In today’s global economy, we must encourage students to pursue more challenging courses of study in high school to better prepare them and put them on a path towards future success.”

Each state will receive up to \$300,000 over a 2-year period to implement SSI programs in at least four school districts that will help motivate students to complete rigorous high school courses that prepare them for college and the workforce. Under the program, business volunteers make classroom presentations to eighth-grade students before they select their high school course loads. Presentations focus on the career options and monetary benefits that students can enjoy as a result of taking challenging courses. The program also provides students with academic support, incentives, and special recognition that can help ensure their success.

The SSI’s recommended curriculum includes 4 years of English, 3 years of math (Algebra I, Algebra II, and geometry), 3 years of lab science (biology, chemistry, and physics), 3½ years of social studies (chosen from U.S. and world history, geography, economics, and government), and 2 years of a foreign language. The 8 new states join 14 others previously chosen for participation: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington. President Bush’s budget request for fiscal year 2007 includes \$8 million to expand the program to additional states.

More information on the SSI is available at <http://www.wiche.edu/statescholars/>.



***FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE FUTURE: Chicago Longitudinal Study Tracks* High School Graduates Through College**

Only about 6 out of every 100 ninth graders who walk in the door of a Chicago public high school will earn a 4-year college degree by the time they are in their mid-20’s, according to a new report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago. The report, which tracks the graduating classes of 1998, 1999, 2002, and 2003, is the first in the country to follow individual graduates of a major urban school system and to evaluate what kind of colleges they attend and how many persevere until graduation.

The report, *From High School to the Future*, also finds that the educational aspirations of Chicago’s high school students have risen over the last decade, but the gap between student aspirations and actual college enrollment and degree attainment remains large. Although nearly 80% of high school seniors in Chicago public schools said that they expected to graduate from a 4-year college, only about one third enrolled in a 4-year college within a year of high school graduation, and only about 35% of those who enrolled in college received a bachelor’s degree within 6 years.¹ These numbers are only slightly lower than students of similar race/ethnicity in the rest of the nation; however, the report finds that Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students are concentrated in 2-year and less selective 4-year colleges, and that they graduate from college at

¹ Keep in mind that this report only considers high school graduates. According to the Manhattan Institute report covered on page 1, the graduation rate for students in the class of 2003 who hailed from Chicago was 50%. Any student who drops out of high school is not reflected in the report’s calculations.

much lower rates than their peers of the same race/ethnic backgrounds in other parts of the country.

“We find that Chicago Public Schools graduates’ low grades and low test scores are creating significant barriers to four-year and particularly selective four-year colleges . . . and that low high school grades are undermining chances for graduation among those who enroll,” said **Melissa Roderick, professor in the School of Social Service Administration and principal investigator of the Chicago Postsecondary Transition Project**. “Improving students’ qualification is the single most important strategy that CPS can use to give students access to colleges that match their aspirations. This will require as much a focus on grades as high schools are currently placing on test scores.”

The report points out that males are especially likely to suffer from low grade-point-averages in Chicago public high schools. It states that even male students who manage to graduate appear to be disengaged from and struggling in CPS high schools—and it’s not because they enter high schools less prepared than their female classmates.

According to the report, male and female high school graduates had comparable ACT scores and eighth-grade preparation for high school, but males were more likely to graduate high school with low GPAs. In fact, 56% of African-American and 48% of Hispanic male graduates from Chicago public high schools graduated with less than a 2.0 GPA, compared to less than 30% of African-American and Latino females. Such low grades meant that minority males had few college options available to them upon graduation from high school. As a remedy to this situation, the report encourages Chicago public high schools to seriously consider “the extent to which high school and classroom environments are working to engage young men in their schooling and their learning.”

The report also finds an undercurrent of “haves” and “have nots” in its analysis of Chicago public high schools. For example, although research has found that a rigorous high school course load can play a key role in shaping access to selective colleges, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs were not evenly distributed across all high schools. As a result, students at “have” schools such as Morgan Park and Lincoln Park have excelled, whereas students at “have not” schools were largely denied access to rigorous course work and left behind.

The study further indicates that elite high schools are raising the average for the entire system even though students at other schools continue to struggle. In fact, half of the students who leave high school with the GPAs and ACT scores they will need to attend selective colleges come from five Chicago high schools. “Thus,” it reads, “if students are not lucky [enough] to attend one of the top schools in the city, they appear to have little chance of graduating with access to a selective college or with the GPAs, test scores, and coursework that would predict that they will be successful in college once enrolled.”

However, just because students graduate with the proper credentials, does not mean that they are necessarily well prepared for college, nor that they will attend a selective college. Overall, the report finds that CPS graduates—both those who are well qualified and those who struggled in high school—tend to enroll in a small number of local postsecondary institutions with lower-

than-average graduation rates. To help steer well-qualified graduates to more selective colleges, as well as to increase the number of students who go to college, the report calls for more guidance and support at the high school level. Increased guidance and support is especially important for Hispanic students, who are much less likely to attend college even if they have the proper credentials.

The authors note that the high aspirations of Chicago public high school students are creating a new set of demands on high schools and educators—demands that have, up until this point, been reserved for only the most selective high schools. According to the report, the first step toward improved college performance is getting educators and high school communities to see postsecondary preparation and participation as a critical goal while students are still in high school. The second step, and single most important factor, is increasing student qualifications (GPA, ACT scores, etc.). “Unfortunately,” the report reads, “in Chicago, the gap between the qualifications students need and their current levels of performance is wide and must be the central focus of reform.”

The complete report is available at <http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/p82.html>.

Remediation Rates on the Rise Among Indiana College Freshmen

Although enrollment figures for college freshmen in the state of Indiana have remained relatively constant since 2000, the percentage of incoming students who need remediation has grown by over 30% over the same period, according to a new issue brief from Indiana University’s Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP). At IU Bloomington, the state’s largest university campus, and also one of its most competitive, 1 in 7 freshmen require remedial classes.

“We basically double pay for these students because we pay for them with public dollars in the secondary institutions and then they go and take remedial courses in college,” said **David Holt, vice president for workforce development policy at the Indiana Chamber of Commerce**. “We’ve got to stem that tide.”

In addition to rising rates among freshmen, the brief found rising remediation rates among the rest of the student population. From the 2000–01 school year to the 2003–04 school year, the percentage of all undergraduates taking remedial math courses at Indiana postsecondary institutions grew from 9% to 12.1%, while the percentage that needed remediation in English grew from 4.3% to 5%. African-American students were most likely to participate in remedial courses, with 24.8% taking remedial math, and 13.8% taking at least one remedial English course.

In an effort to decrease the number of college students needing remediation, Indiana has joined the American Diploma Project, a 22-state effort to raise the expectations and achievement of high school students. As part of these efforts, the state has aligned academic standards in high school with the expectations that students will face in college and in the workforce. The state has also upgraded its high school curriculum. Beginning in the 2007–08 school year, Indiana will require all incoming high school freshmen to complete Core 40, a “college- and work-ready curriculum,” before they can earn their high school diplomas. By 2011, students wishing to attend one of Indiana’s 4-year universities must complete Core 40 before they can be considered for admission.

The complete brief is available at http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V4N5_Spring_2006_college_remediation.pdf.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC, and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s secondary school students to achieve high standards.



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