



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN K–12 EDUCATION: Twenty Percent Drop in Out-of-School Suspensions Represents Sign of Progress, But Much More Work Is Required

Data released last month from the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office for Civil Rights shows a dramatic decrease in out-of-school suspensions but continuing racial disparities in the nation's elementary and secondary schools.

According to the new Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2.8 million kindergarten through grade twelve students received one or more out-of-school suspensions during School Year (SY) 2013–14—a 20 percent decrease in the last two years and a significant sign of progress for the many organizations, including the Alliance for Excellent Education, that have [urged schools to consider school discipline policies that keep students in school and engaged](#).

Still, much more progress is necessary, as reflected in the large disparities in school suspensions. Black students are nearly four times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white students. Black students also are nearly two times more likely to be expelled from school without educational services as white students. Black boys, who represent 8 percent of all students, account for 19 percent of the students who are expelled without educational services. Black girls make up 8 percent of enrolled students, but they represent 14 percent of students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions. Black students also are 2.3 times as likely to receive a referral to law enforcement or be subject to a school-related arrest as white students.

Disparities in school suspensions begin as early as preschool. According to the CRDC, black preschool children are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white preschool children. While black children represent only 19 percent of preschool enrollment, they account for nearly half of preschool children receiving out-of-school suspensions. Black girls, who represent 20 percent of female preschool enrollment, account for 54 percent of out-of-school suspensions.

Black and Latino Students Likely to Lack Access to Advanced Courses in High School

Many of the same students who are disproportionately removed from school because of discipline issues also attend schools that are less likely to provide the advanced course work necessary to prepare them for college and a career. According to the CRDC, only 48 percent of high schools with high black and Latino student enrollment offer physics, compared to 67 percent of high schools with low black and Latino student enrollment. Similar disparities exist for Algebra II, calculus, and chemistry. Additionally, black and Latino students are underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs and Advanced Placement courses.

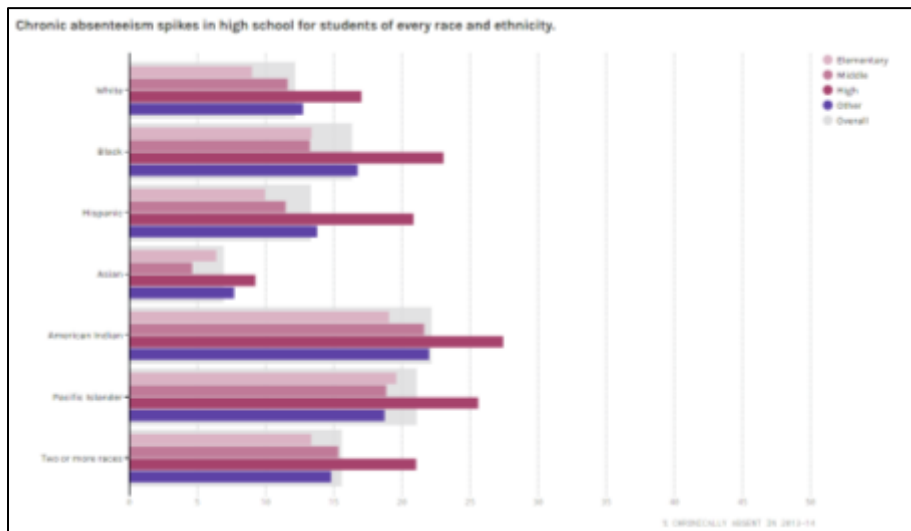
“When we deny some students an access to a high-quality education, we all lose out in multiple ways,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education John King** in a [conference call with reporters](#). “We lose out economically because people who are poorly educated earn less, pay less in taxes and need more services. They also are more likely to end up in prison. In fact, two-thirds of state prison inmates are high school dropouts.”

Nearly One in Five High School Students “Chronically Absent”

For the first time, the CRDC reported data on student absenteeism, finding that 6.5 million students, or 13 percent of all students, were “chronically absent,” meaning they missed fifteen or more school days during SY 2013–14. Among high school students, more than 3 million, or 18 percent of all high school students, were chronically absent—an especially troubling finding given that chronic absenteeism is one of the strongest predictors that a student will drop out of school.

“Chronic absenteeism is a national problem,” [King said](#). “Frequent absences from school can be devastating to a child’s education. Missing school leads to low academic achievement and triggers drop outs. Millions of young people are missing opportunities in postsecondary education, good careers and a chance to experience the American dream.”

Chronic absenteeism is a serious problem among all races and all grades but especially in high school. As shown in the graph below, 27.5 percent of American Indian high school students were chronically absent during SY 2013–14, as were 25.6 percent of Pacific Islander students, 23.1 percent of black students, and 20.9 percent of Hispanic students.



ED created a [new interactive website](#) that demonstrates the extent of chronic absenteeism problems in terms of geography, ethnicity, disability status, and school level.

Education Secretary: Civil Rights Data Justifies Aggressive Approach to ESSA Rules

King, who has [faced criticism from Republicans on Capitol Hill](#) for certain proposals he made related to the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), said data from the CRDC justified his push for strong civil rights safeguards in the nation’s new education law.

“This data makes it clear that the work ahead of us with the Every Student Succeeds Act is critical,” King said. “[ESSA] is focused on addressing some of the critical inequities the CRDC shows us. ... Some have suggested the Department of Education is pushing too hard or asking too much of states as they implement the law. But to be clear, we will not compromise away the civil rights of all students to an excellent education. ... If there was any question about whether we have further to go to make good on the promise of a quality education for every child, these data should serve as a sobering reality check.”

The CRDC also includes data on educational equity and opportunity for students, including incidents of discipline, restraint, and seclusion; access to courses and programs that lead to college and career readiness; teacher equity; rates of retention; and access to early learning.

Additional findings from the CRDC is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.



FUTURE READY IN WISCONSIN AND TEXAS: School District Superintendents Meet at Future Ready Schools Summits to Transform Teaching and Learning

Nearly seventy-five school leadership teams from districts across the Midwest gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, on June 14–15 and Austin, Texas, on July 18–19 for summits on how technology can be an effective tool to improve teaching and student learning outcomes. Organized by the Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance) and the U.S. Department of Education, Future Ready Schools (FRS) national summits assist school district leaders in developing student-centered personalized learning environments that are tailored to students’ unique strengths and needs.

“There’s a movement happening across the country to personalize learning for each student’s needs,” said **Alliance President Bob Wise**. “Major efforts to improve student outcomes are being led by local superintendents and are happening at the school and district levels around the country. School district leaders can look to Future Ready Schools for guidance and support in planning how to create personalized learning environments in their schools, in part by leveraging the effective use of technology.”

Under a personalized learning approach, teachers are able to understand each student’s background, strengths, interests, and needs, and provide individual students with targeted instruction and support in areas where they are struggling. Students have more learning opportunities inside and outside of the classroom, connecting work to their community through real-world experiences. This approach helps all students develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them for college, a career, and life. Personalized learning is at the center of FRS, which provides district leaders with a systematic approach to change that infuses high-quality teaching with the dynamic use of technology, resulting in more student engagement and better learning outcomes.

“Wisconsin schools make great efforts to reach kids, meet their needs, and provide a learning environment that prepares students for college and career,” said **Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers**. “As I visit classrooms and talk with educators, I am consistently impressed with how technology is being leveraged to personalize learning for students.”

At the summits, FRS district leadership teams began establishing a shared, student-centered vision for teaching and learning; created action plans for digital learning transformation; and learned how to create a culture of innovation in their schools. To solve specific issues facing individual district teams, participants had access to national experts, regional colleagues, and successful implementation examples. The district teams engaged in facilitated conversations, networking activities, and team planning opportunities.

“Future Ready Schools is about empowering teachers and leaders, helping students take charge of their own learning, and keeping parents engaged and informed,” said Wise. “It’s about a more personalized approach to teaching and learning that ensures that all students, including students from low-income families and students of color who have been traditionally underserved, have the skills they need to succeed in college and a career.”

The Madison and Austin events are two of several national FRS [summits](#) featuring leadership teams from districts where the superintendent has signed the [Future Ready District Pledge](#), joining more than 2,200 district superintendents committed to the FRS initiative.

Districts can also access free, online tools, including the FRS interactive planning dashboard and the FRS Hub, a one-stop shop of digital learning planning materials, tools, and activities, at www.FutureReady.org. FRS also offers free, one-day workshops across the country that provide hands-on training to participants about the [dashboard’s five-step planning process](#).



TOP OF THE CLASS: New Report Examines Reasons Behind Chicago’s Rising High School Graduation Rates

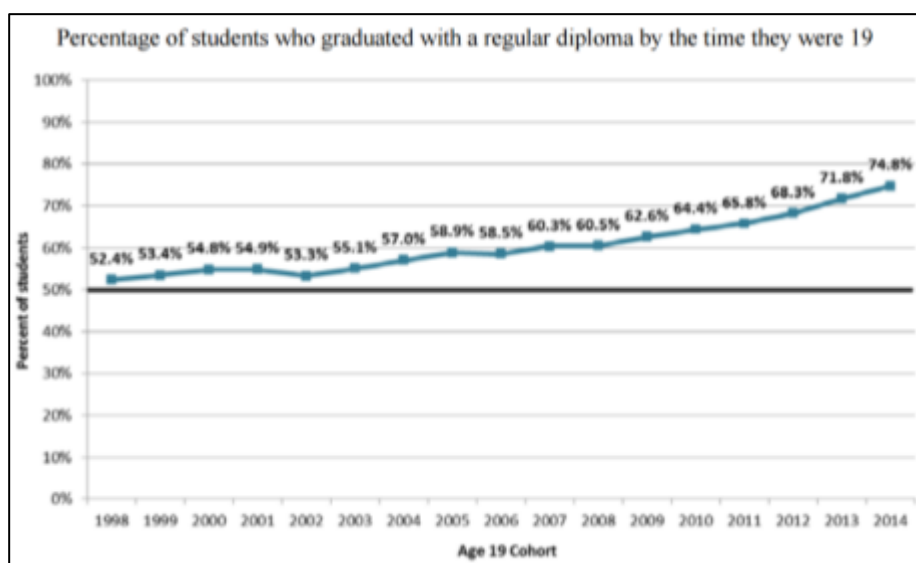
During the past sixteen years, the high school graduation rate for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has increased 22 percentage points and today, students are three times more likely to graduate as they are to drop out of high school. Although changes in student demographics account for some of that increase, most of the graduation rate increase is a result of students’ improved academic achievement before and during their high school years, according to a report from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium).

The report, *High School Graduation Rates Through Two Decades of District Change*, examines how various factors, e.g., changes in the characteristics of students entering CPS, a new student record data system, on-track and credit recovery data reports, and other changes within CPS high schools themselves, influence high school graduation rates. However, it does not credit one change over another for helping Chicago high schools to improve. “These policies were often overlapping with each other and went through different stages and forms across the years, making it very difficult to discern exactly how each policy influenced graduation rates in combination with the others,” the report notes. Instead, the report focuses on “the degree to which the graduation rates represent real improvements.”

“What we found was that improvements in graduation rates can largely be attributed to the fact that students were doing better in their classes in high school,” explains **Julia Gwynne, managing director and senior research scientist at the UChicago Consortium and coauthor of the report**, in a [podcast](#). “It appears that high schools were actually doing a better job of supporting their students in their classes from 2006 onward and this had a dramatic impact on overall graduation rates.”

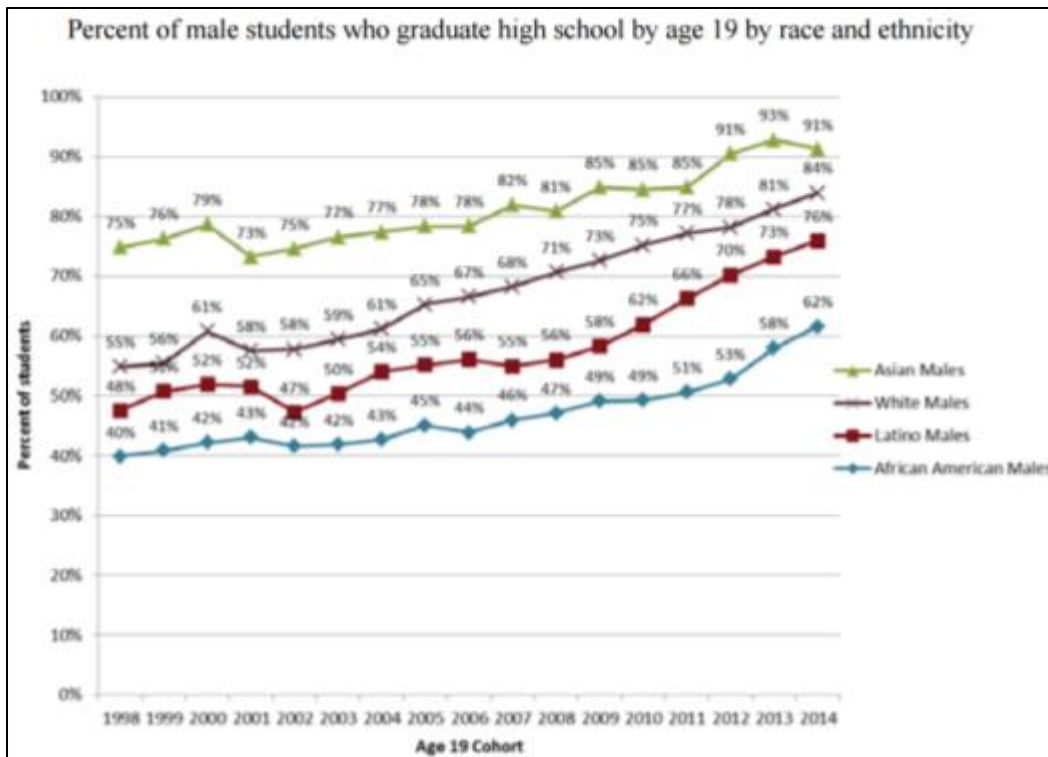
Students from All Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Backgrounds Post High Graduation Rates

From 1998 to 2014, the percentage of nineteen-year-old students who graduated with a regular diploma increased from 52.4 percent to 74.8 percent.¹ And while high school graduation rates increased for students from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, they did so at different rates. As a result, achievement gaps narrowed in some cases but expanded in others.



Among racial groups, white and Latino students experienced the greatest improvements. From 1998 to 2014, the high school graduation rate for white male students increased from 55 percent to 84 percent and the rate for white female students increased from 66 percent to 90 percent. Among Latino students, the high school graduation rate for male students increased from 48 percent to 76 percent, while the rate for female students increased from 59 percent to 83 percent. High school graduation rates for African American students increased the least—from 40 percent to 62 percent for male students and from 56 percent to 72 percent for female students. High school graduation rates for students from low-income families and students with disabilities also improved, increasing from 40 percent to 67 percent and from 37 percent to 68 percent respectively.

¹ Instead of following cohorts of students who entered ninth grade in the same year—the typical approach for calculating high school graduation rates—the report groups students by age, tracking those who turned fourteen in the same year until they turned nineteen. Such an approach was necessary because CPS changed its grade promotion requirements through the years, making ninth-grade cohorts of students not comparable over time. “This causes some cohorts to have higher graduation rates simply because many low-achieving students did not move on to ninth grade with their age peers, while other cohorts have lower graduation rates for the opposite reason,” the report explains. Consequently, the high school graduation rates highlighted in the report differ slightly from those calculated and reported by CPS.



Mixed Impact on Graduation Rate Gaps Between Different Groups of Students

While the gap in high school graduation rates between white and Latino students remained relatively unchanged, with Latino students lagging behind white students by 7 or 8 percentage points over time, the gap between African American males and white males increased from 15 percentage points in 1998 to 22 percentage points in 2014. Among female students, the gap between African Americans and white students jumped from 10 percentage points to 18 percentage points. By contrast, the high school graduation rate gap between students from low-income families and affluent students *declined* from 24 percentage points to 15 percentage points, while the gap between students with and without disabilities also declined from 17 percentage points to 9 percentage points.

“Increase in Graduation Rates Is Not Due to Lowered Expectations”

According to the report, the average ACT score for CPS graduates increased from 16.7 in 2003 to 18.6 in 2014. Meanwhile, between School Years 1999–2000 and 2012–13, the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes increased fourfold and the proportion scoring 3 or better increased from 32 percent to 37 percent, the report adds. “Thus, not only are more students graduating, but graduates also have stronger academic qualifications than in the past, suggesting that the increase in graduation rates is not due to lowered expectations for student performance,” the report says.

Instead, the researchers attribute the higher graduation rates to improvements in students’ academic achievement, both before and during high school. Standardized test scores for rising ninth-grade students increased until 2006; the researchers determined that this accounts for the increases in high school graduation rates they observed during that same time period. After 2006, though, student test

scores declined, but high school graduation rates continued to increase. The researchers determined that “improvements in ninth-grade course performance seem to account for the improvements in graduation rates in recent years,” the report says. Students in the most recent cohorts took more classes, completed more credits, earned higher grades, and attended school more regularly during their ninth-grade year than students with similar achievement levels in the past. Combined, these factors kept more students on track toward graduation and explains the subsequent improvements in the high school graduation rates for the later cohorts of students, the report says.

“The improvements in Chicago’s graduation rates suggest that sustained efforts can make a considerable difference for improving high schools, even when they serve the most disadvantaged communities,” the report says. “However, this means working against the many forces that make it difficult to show strong outcomes in low-income schools. It takes substantial and coordinated work to make this happen.”

High School Graduation Rates Through Two Decades of District Change is available at <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/high-school-graduation-rates-through-two-decades-district-change-influence-policies>.



**A Summer Postcard from
the Alliance for Excellent Education**

Dear *Straight A's* Reader:

With schools around the country out for summer and the U.S. Congress in its August recess, the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—will be taking a brief summer vacation.

The next issue of *Straight A's* will be on September 13. In the meantime, please follow the Alliance on Twitter at www.twitter.com/all4ed and visit the Alliance’s “[High School Soup](#)” blog for the latest education news. Also, keep an eye on the Alliance’s website for upcoming webinars at <http://all4ed.org/webinars>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events 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. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Kristen Loschert; Caroline Waldman; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).