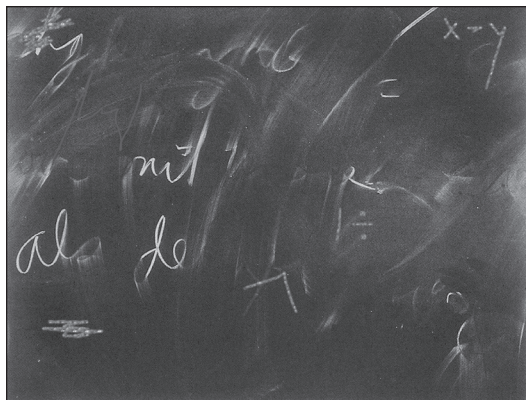


Report Highlights



Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago:

A look at cohorts of students from 1991 through 2004

January 2005

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January 2005

Elaine Allensworth

with Foreword by Duncan Chaplin

 Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago © 2005

Elaine Allensworth

Forward by Duncan Chaplin

What is the likelihood that a student will graduate from or drop out of a Chicago public school?

Graduation and dropout rates are important pieces of information about the performance of high schools and school systems. But determining how many students graduate from or drop out of high school is far more complicated than it might seem. There are numerous methods for calculating these rates. Depending on how the terms “graduate,” “transfer,” and “drop out” are defined, and depending on who is included in the base population of potential graduates, graduation and dropout rates can vary considerably.

Commonly used methods of calculating these rates leave much to be desired, especially when applied to Chicago’s public schools. For example, the method used by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) overestimates the graduation rate when large numbers of students transfer between schools, as is the case in Chicago. In recent years, many journalists, community groups, and social scientists have questioned the accuracy of the official graduation and dropout rates in Chicago public schools and raised concerns about the extent of racial or ethnic differences in rates of school completion. *Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago* was written to disseminate accurate and detailed information on student outcomes in Chicago’s public schools.



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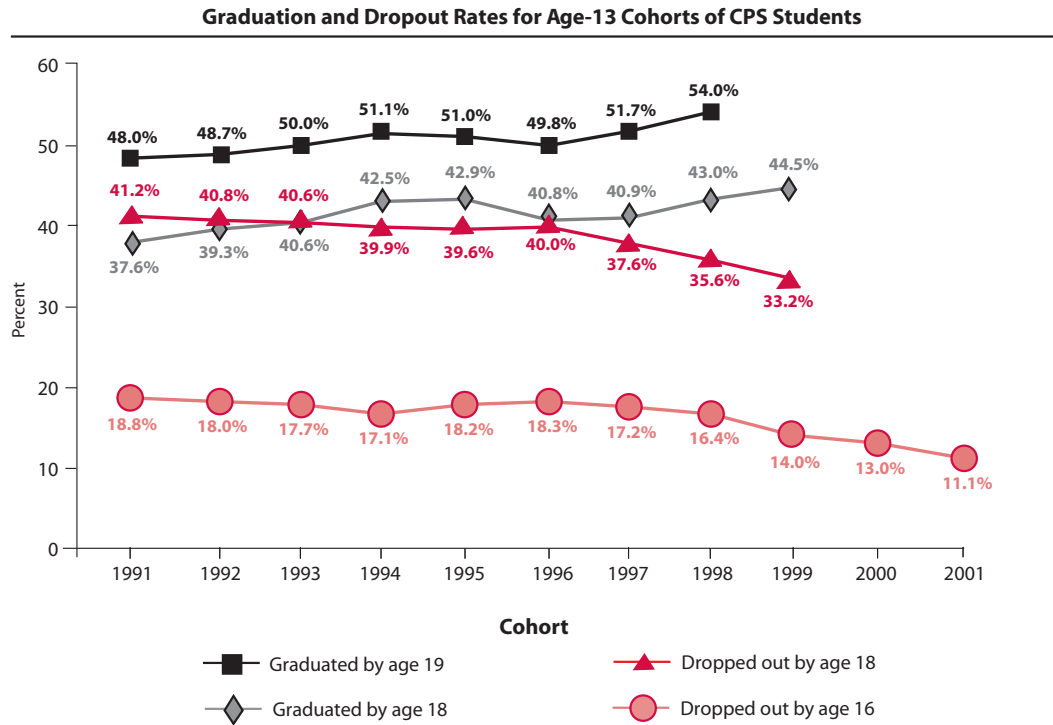
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HOW OUR RATES WERE CALCULATED

The methods used to create graduation and dropout rates in this report are very similar to methods recently recommended by the National Center on Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education.¹ We based our decisions about defining terms on a number of considerations, such as the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the specific characteristics of Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The report includes detailed definitions of the terms and information about the rationale behind these decisions.



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The Consortium on Chicago School Research aims to conduct research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. By broadly engaging local leadership in our work, and presenting our findings to diverse audiences, we seek to expand communication between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. The Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we believe that good policy is most likely to result from a genuine competition of ideas informed by the best evidence that can be obtained.

Founded in 1990, the Consortium is located at the University of Chicago.

The graduation and dropout rates are calculated by following cohorts of students over a number of years, to ascertain how many graduate or drop out. Two types of cohorts are used in this report. Freshman cohorts track first-time ninth graders to determine the percentage that graduated, dropped out, left CPS, or were still enrolled four years later. This method allows for the comparison of different high schools, and it produces the actual graduation rate that the ISBE method is intended to estimate. However, the implementation of an eighth-grade promotion standard in CPS resulted in considerable shifting of students among different freshman cohorts, making it difficult to evaluate trends over time by comparing freshman cohorts. Therefore, this report also follows cohorts of 13-year-old students until age 19 to determine how many graduated or dropped out. This method is not affected by changes in grade progression, and thus provides a consistent comparison over time.

¹ National Institute of Statistical Sciences and Education Statistics Services Institute Task Force on Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Indicators. 2004. *Final report* (NCES 2005-105). Online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005105/pdf>.