



Graduation Rates and Dropout Data

According to a recent report by the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education approximately 20-25% of students in Maine do not graduate on time.¹

Major changes have occurred in the past several years in the ways that states, the federal government, and education analysts estimate high school graduation rates and numbers of students who have dropped out of high school. Building on work by the National Governors' Association beginning in 2005, Maine and other states agreed to revise their graduation rate formulas to better reflect the number of students who graduated on time (within 4 years) with a regular diploma. Until School Year (SY) 2009-2010, Maine used a "leaver rate" formula, counting all students who graduated in a particular year, regardless of when they started high school, thus showing an inflated rate of graduation.²

New Federal Requirement for Graduation Rate

In 2010 the US Department of Education announced that all states would be required by SY 2010-2011 to use a standard formula, the federal Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). Students who enter 9th grade in a given year are the base cohort, and the formula calculates what percentage graduate in 4 years with a regular diploma. The cohort is adjusted by documented transfers in and out, plus early graduates.

The Maine Department of Education (DOE) now has sufficient longitudinal data to calculate this new graduation rate, and has published revised data for SY 2008/2009 on its website.³ A chart on the website shows a high school graduation rate of 80.40% for all 133 high schools (122 public and 11 public/private academies). According to this chart, there were 16,901 students in the adjusted cohort, of whom 13,588 graduated within 4 years, and 3,313 did not graduate on time in 2009. (<http://www.maine.gov/education/gradrates/gradrates.html>)

Maine's DOE has a useful explanation on its website, "Maine High School Graduation Rates", which makes clear that the federal ACGR does not include students who take 5 or 6 years to graduate, earn an alternative diploma, or a GED.⁴ (<http://www.maine.gov/education/gradrates/index.html>)

Definition of "Dropout Rate"

A related question concerns the definition of a "dropout" and how those numbers are calculated. In Maine, students are counted as dropouts who: 1) have left high school, from all grades, in any given year, and 2) have not enrolled in another program. If they leave because of expulsion, death, or they state that they are temporarily deferring their education, they are not counted as "dropouts".

The chart referenced above also shows for 2008/2009 the number of students high schools reported dropped out: 2,162 out of 63,258 total high school students enrolled, a 3.42% dropout rate.

The number of graduates and the number of dropouts are not related arithmetically: in 2009, 3,313 students who were enrolled as 9th graders 4 years earlier did not graduate. In 2008/2009, 2,162 students dropped out of high school from all four grades.

Data Quality

Maine and other states have had to develop new longitudinal data systems in order to track the movement of individual students, which is often difficult when families move frequently. Administrators have had to learn new codes for identifying the educational path and eventual achievement of each student. A lot of work still needs to be done to improve the accuracy of the underlying data.

MACS, Prepare Maine, and the Alliance for Excellent Education

MACS has been using a dropout statistic of 3,800 students dropping out in 2009-2010 (the number actually refers to the number of students “who did not graduate on time”). We obtained the number from a publication of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education (MCEE). MCEE’s source for the number was the Alliance for Excellent Education, a national organization that focuses on helping states improve their high school achievement and graduation rates and publishes information on each state. It is a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy group headed by Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia.⁵

Notes:

1. “Prepare Maine”, Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education, 2010, www.preparemaine.org
2. “High School Graduation Rates Inflated,” Victoria Wallack, July 6, 2006, www.villagesoup.com.
3. “Graduation & Dropout Rates 2008/2009,” Maine DOE, www.maine.gov/education, Data Center, Graduation Rates for all Public High Schools and 60% Publicly Funded Private High Schools. Retrieved 3/10/11.
4. “Maine High School Graduation Rates,” Maine DOE, www.maine.gov/education, Data Center. Retrieved 3/10/11.
5. “Maine High Schools, Dropouts and poorly prepared students negatively affect the economy;” “Federal High School Graduation Rate Policies and the Impact on Maine,” “Understanding High School Graduation Rates in Maine,” www.all4ed.org/files/MAINE_seb.pdf. Retrieved 3/15/11.