

Issue Brief | Santa Clara County Children's Agenda

Volume 2 – Number 6 | December 2009

Improving the High School Graduation Rate

Overview: High School Graduation Rates are an important indicator of overall child well-being as well as a predictor of how youth will fare as they enter adulthood. In Santa Clara County, the overall graduation rate is 81.9%, with Latino, African-American and Native American youth graduating at much lower rates than Caucasian and Asian youth. There is no single reason why students get off track for graduating from high school and it will take a community-wide effort to improve Santa Clara County's graduation rates and address the disparity in graduation rates for Latino, African American and Native American youth.

**Every child safe, healthy,
successful in learning,
successful in life.**

The Santa Clara County Children's Agenda is a focused, integrated initiative that **utilizes data and research to inform decision-making, guide program improvement, and drive results.** The Children's Agenda has identified community goals for our children and thirteen data outcomes to track our progress in achieving those goals. The Children's Agenda provides basis for action, and allows our stakeholders to develop powerful strategies for change. It provides a framework to build meaningful and deep partnerships, provides a common language that helps us to align public and private investments, assess and improve quality, seek and allocate resources, and increase reach and impact across sectors. The thirteen indicators of the Children's Agenda are:

- Routine Access to Health Care
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Early Social Emotional Health
- Developmental Assets
- Readiness for Kindergarten
- Third Grade Reading Scores
- Eighth Grade Math Scores
- High School Graduation Rates
- Children Fluent in at Least Two Languages
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Childhood Hunger
- Juvenile Arrests
- Youth Feel Valued by the Community

For more information on the Children's Agenda and to read previous Issue Briefs go to: www.kidsincommon.org

The High School Graduation Rate and Why It Matters

The Children's Agenda Vision Council views the High School Graduation Rate as a bell-weather indicator. Graduating from high school doesn't happen in a vacuum. Other "success in learning" indicators such as kindergarten readiness, reading at grade level in third grade and being successful in algebra in eighth grade are associated with whether or not a youth will graduate from high school. Not being on track for graduation can be the result of several risk factors such as child abuse, substance abuse, family disorganization, health issues, teen pregnancy, learning issues that have not been addressed, poverty or homelessness.

Youth who leave high school prior to graduation are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system, be homeless and experience lower earnings and higher rates of unemployment. In fact, students who do not graduate from high school earn \$400,000 to \$500,000 less over a working lifetime than those who graduate.¹ Those who do not complete high school also have poorer health, higher rates of mortality, higher rates of criminal behavior and incarceration and increased dependence on public assistance.²

How We Measure the High School Graduation Rate

For the purposes of this Issue Brief we will be looking at the following data points when considering high school graduation rates:

- o **California Department of Education (CDE) Data on Graduation Rates.** The Graduation Rate Formula is based on the NCES definition: "Number of Graduates (yr 4) divided by: Number of Graduates (yr 4) + Gr. 9 Dropouts (yr 1) + Gr 10 Dropouts (yr 2) + Gr.11 Dropouts (yr 3) + Gr 12 Dropouts (yr 4)".
- o **CDE Data on Dropout Rates.** We use the Adjusted 4-Year Derived Drop-out rate which is the "Reported Grade 9-12 Dropout Total minus Reenrolled Grade 9-12 Dropouts plus Grade 9-12 Lost Transfers".
- o **Students Completing UC/CSU Requirements.** This document also examines data that reports the percentage of students graduating who have completed the course requirements to attend the Cal State University system as well as the University of California system. Many local education leaders feel it is important for all students to complete this course work - even if the student is not intending to attend college - in order to be successful in life.

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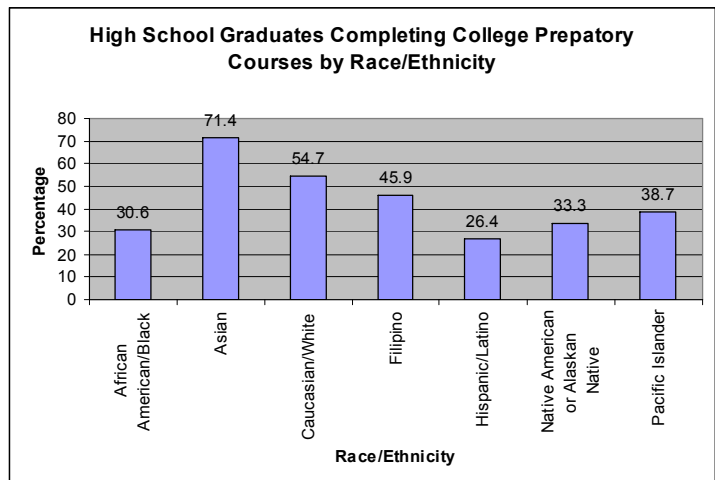
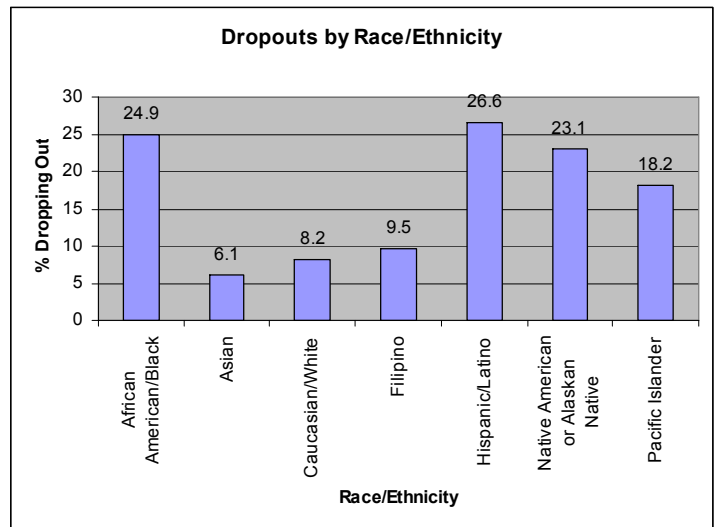
What the Data Tell Us:

In the 2007-08 school year, the overall graduation rate was 81.9% and the "Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Rate" was 14.4%. (These numbers do not add up to 100% because different formulas are used to calculate these rates.) During the 2007-08 school year, 2,980 9th-12th grade students dropped out of school. This number is comparable to the population of two mid-size Santa Clara County high schools.

There are differences by ethnicity/race in the rates of youth dropping out. African American and Latino youth had the highest rates of dropping out, with 24.9% of the African American 9th-12th graders dropping out and 26.6% of the Latino students doing the same. Only 6.1% of Asian youth dropped out and 8.2% of Caucasian youth dropped out.

A similar disparity can be seen in the data reflecting students who took the A- G requirements needed to enter the University of California or California State University systems. 71.4% of Asian and 54.7% of Caucasian graduates completed these requirements while only 30.6% of African American and 26.4% of Latino graduates did so. The A-G requirements are widely accepted as the minimum needed by graduates to be successful not only in college, but in work and in life.

A Note on Data: The California graduation tracking systems are inadequate tools for informing decision-making and systems change. In 2010, California will begin the implementation of a data system that will assign a unique identifier to each student (ideally starting in Pre-K) and will follow them throughout their education. Such a system will greatly improve our tracking and understanding of high school graduation rates.



The table on the next page shows the data on individual districts and high schools on a variety of indicators that may or may not have a correlation with high school graduation rates. Some interesting data points to note:

- The difference in per student revenues vary greatly from district to district with a high of \$13,510 in the Palo Alto Unified School District (a K-12 district) to a low of \$8,290 in the Morgan Hill Unified School District (also a K-12 District). These revenue figures include Revenue Limit Sources, Federal Revenue, Others State Revenue and Local Revenue (i.e., parcel tax) and does not include local fundraising efforts by PTA and education foundations.
- The ratio of "Total Suspensions" to "Suspensions for Violence/Drugs" vary a lot from school to school. It is unclear if this is because of different policies/approaches to suspensions or if it is because of differences in data entry. This data point may be interesting to investigate more to better understand suspension practices and their impact on graduation rates. Students who are not in school are not learning and perhaps there approaches other than suspension that can create a positive learning environment where all students can succeed.
- Less than a quarter of the schools graduate 70% or more of students who are ready for college by completing UC/CSU requirements.

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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
	Grade 9-12 Enrollment	Avg. Total Revenues Per Student	% Free & Reduced Lunch	% English Learners	% Teachers College Prep Credential	Suspensions for Violence/ Drugs	Total Suspensions	Ratio of Total Suspensions to Suspensions for Violence	Adjusted 9-12th 4-yr Derived Drop Out Rate	Graduation Rate	% complete UC/CSU Requr.
Campbell Union		\$9,345								78.1	36.22
Branham High	1,497		10%	0%	100%	65	210	3.23	13.4%	87.1%	40.2%
Del Mar High	1,251		39%	12%	91%	65	205	3.15	23.6%	71.7%	30.4%
Leigh High	1,738		2%	*	88%	80	137	1.71	6.8%	92.6%	46.8%
Prospect High	1,360		26%	8%	92%	102	172	1.69	29.3%	65.5%	29.2%
Westmont High	1,651		12%	6%	93%	114	204	1.79	15.2%	81.5%	39.0%
Eastside Union High		\$8,966								72.3%	38.5%
Andrew P. Hill High	2,194		50%	29%	83%	123	903	7.34	16.2%	72.5%	33.6%
Evergreen Valley High	2,609		11%	9%	90%	85	312	3.67	7.6%	91.0%	60.3%
Independence High	3,587		33%	24%	92%	173	880	5.09	16.3%	71.6%	39.7%
James Lick High	1,283		42%	34%	89%	26	550	21.15	16.2%	64.3%	18.5%
Latino College Preparatory Academy	341		*	75%	30%	2	22	11.00	10.3%	78.7%	0.0%
Mt. Pleasant High	1,927		34%	21%	94%	114	624	5.47	12.6%	84.5%	35.0%
Oak Grove High	2,554		36%	16%	91%	236	1631	6.91	23.3%	73.1%	28.7%
Piedmont Hills High	2,211		17%	11%	92%	91	448	4.92	9.0%	85.3%	54.4%
Santa Teresa High	2,395		13%	7%	90%	79	535	6.77	9.7%	84.6%	41.4%
Silver Creek High	2,403		32%	16%	87%	83	340	4.10	10.9%	83.0%	31.7%
William C. Overfelt High	1,668		56%	36%	76%	88	697	7.92	14.2%	78.6%	25.0%
Yerba Buena High	1,702		44%	39%	90%	178	914	5.13	19.3%	70.9%	24.0%
Fremont Union HSD		\$9,256								95.3%	69.1%
Cupertino High	1,604		4%	10%	94%	93	99	1.06	5.5%	94.5%	58.8%
Fremont High	1,949		17%	22%	95%	122	145	1.19	12.8%	87.7%	48.9%
Homestead High	2,271		5%	9%	91%	60	64	1.07	4.9%	95.2%	67.5%
Lynbrook High	1,949		2%	4%	94%	68	68	1.00	1.2%	99.0%	80.4%
Monta Vista High	2,523		1%	4%	95%	41	41	1.00	1.5%	98.8%	78.0%
Gilroy Unified		\$8,491								86.8%	26.8%
Gilroy High	2,649		40%	17%	90%	247	740	3.00	8.9%	89.5%	30.9%
Los Gatos-Saratoga Joint		\$11,264								99.5%	75.9%
Los Gatos High	1,817		1%	0%	89%	58	75	1.29	0.9%	99.5%	72.9%
Saratoga High	1,344		0%	1%	92%	27	56	2.07	0.9%	99.4%	80.3%
Milpitas Unified		\$8,458								96.2%	40.5%
Milpitas High School	2,875		20%	14%	97%	39	39	1.00	3.2%	97.8%	46.3%
Morgan Hill Unified		\$8,290								88.8%	38.0%
Live Oak High School	1,296		17%	16%	93%	120	120	1.00	8.8%	86.0%	34.0%
Ann Sobrato High	1,564					100	101	1.01	3.8%	95.5%	47.5%
MV-LA Unified School District		\$12,699								94.2%	67.5%
Los Altos High	1,697		13%	8%	88%	25	31	1.24	6.4%	94.2%	70.1%
Mountain View High	1,762		8%	4%	97%	35	56	1.60	2.4%	97.5%	71.7%
Palo Alto Unified		\$13,510								96.8%	74.8%
Gunn High School	1,897		4%	7%	97%	28	34	1.21	3.1%	98.1%	79.0%
Palo Alto High School	1,701		4%	2%	90%	48	68	1.42	4.4%	95.3%	70.3%
San Jose Unified		\$9,817								86.1%	41.3%
Downtown College Prep	422		64%	31%	82%	0	0	0.00	2.9%	98.1%	92.2%
Gunderson High	1,052		44%	19%	92%	128	199	1.55	12.1%	82.5%	30.8%
Leland High	1,789		5%	3%	93%	52	114	2.19	1.0%	98.7%	68.3%
Lincoln High School	1,671		33%	15%	89%	115	214	1.86	10.1%	87.5%	87.5%
Pioneer High	1,520		18%	8%	87%	71	125	1.76	3.2%	96.3%	44.8%
San Jose High Academy	974		58%	31%	78%	144	308	2.14	9.4%	85.2%	33.3%
Willow Glen High	1,407		37%	23%	80%	118	190	1.61	8.1%	84.9%	36.9%
Santa Clara Unified		\$8,864								87.1%	37.4%
Santa Clara High	1,827		35%	15%	99%	138	636	4.61	8.5%	91.5%	44.5%
Wilcox High	1,879		35%	16%	99%	160	505	3.16	5.4%	93.6%	42.3%
* Data Not Available											
Data in Columns B,G,H,I, K L comes from DataQuest (www.cde.ca.gov)											
Data in Column C comes from Ed-Data (www.cde.ca.gov)											
Data in Columns D,E,F is from IDEA UCLA -Education Opportunity Report (www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu)											

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America's Promise 10-Point Plan*

America's Promise brought together more than 100 organizations that represent a full range of educator and community stakeholders of disparate political orientations to agree upon and support these 10 action steps to get more kids back on track for graduation.

1. Support Accurate Graduation and Drop Out Data: California needs a better data and tracking system in order to understand how many youth are not graduating from high school and to identify the "who, what, when and why" youth get off track for graduation. A better understanding of the graduation rates will lead us to better solutions.

2. Establish Early Warning Systems to Support Struggling Students: Research shows you can predict with 66% accuracy a student in elementary school who will later get off track for graduation. Disengaging from school is a slow process for most students and if we learn to identify the students who are in need of academic or other supports early, we can ensure students get the help they need to stay in school.

3. Provide Adult Advocates and Student Supports: Students need adult advocates who can identify academic and personal challenges early and get students the support they need. Working with community and governmental organizations, schools can offer a wide range of supplemental services and intensive assistance strategies for struggling students – attendance monitoring, school and peer counseling, mentoring, tutoring, double class periods, internships, service learning, summer and after school programs. The help of strong adult advocates can help to identify academic and personal crises early and get students the supports they need.

4. Support Parent Engagement and Individualized Graduation Plans: Parental involvement has benefits to the students and the schools such as improved school attendance and educational performance, classroom behavior, emotional well-being, support of the school's mission, a better understanding among parents of their roles and more overall support for schools among parents. Schools and parents need to improve their interactions around student performance. Schools should also develop an individualized graduation plan for each student and regularly communicate with parents about their student's progress towards completing the plan.

5. Establish a Rigorous College and Work Preparatory Curriculum for High School Graduation: Students taking a rigorous core curriculum in high school are better prepared to succeed in college and in the workforce than students taking less challenging coursework. High standards are needed for all students and all students need to be encouraged to complete California's A-G standards to prepare them for college and work.

6. Provide Supportive Options for Struggling Students to Meet Rigorous Expectations: Because student learning needs and styles differ widely, options should be developed that allow all students to graduate from high school prepared for college and the workplace. This includes 9th grade academies to support the transition to high school, second chance schools where students who are off track for school can continue earning course credit, and new school models that combine personalized learning environments with high expectations.

7. Raise Compulsory School Age Requirements under State Laws: Many states have raised their compulsory school age from 16 to 18, recognizing that a high school education is the minimum required to compete in today's global economy. (This is not a critical issue in California where the compulsory school age is 6 – 18.)

8. Expand College Learning Opportunities in High School: Dual enrollment, early college programs and Advanced Placement (AP) programs allow high school students to earn credit toward high school and college simultaneously.

9. Focus the Research and Disseminate Best Practices: The Government Accountability Office noted that while states and school districts have implemented numerous interventions to increase high school graduation rates, there has been little focus at the national level to evaluate and disseminate best practices and existing research. Clearing houses should be established to assist districts and schools working to improve their graduation rates.

10. Make Increasing High School Graduation and College and Workforce Readiness a National and Local Priority. With a focus on improving graduation and college/workforce readiness rates, we can improve graduation rates and make every student successful in learning and successful in life.

*Adapted from America's Promise Alliance – 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success. Retrieved 3/21/2008 at <http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id+9176>

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Other Actions that Will Impact High School Graduation Rates:

1. Institute **School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS)** in schools throughout the County. SWPBS improves school climate, decreases office referrals and suspensions by teaching behavioral expectations in the same manner as any core curriculum subject. Rather than assuming all students enter school with the knowledge and skills needed to function appropriately in the classroom, educators teach these directly and positively acknowledge the behavioral expectations that lead to school success. Read the Issue Brief on School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports at www.kidsincommon.org.
2. Support programs that reach out to special populations of youth who have gone off track for graduation (or are at risk for doing so). Programs such as Planned Parenthood's **Teen Success** (with the goal of keeping pregnant and parenting teenagers in school) and **Connected by 25**, (targeting youth in the foster care system) demonstrate that when the specific issues impacting vulnerable youth are addressed, school success and college attendance can result.
3. Pay attention to the "non-academic" issues that impact high school graduation rates. Achieving success in school is more challenging for children who are not healthy or who do not live in safe and stable families and communities. Support school environments to have resources for children, youth and their families in order to remove some of the barriers to learning.

SJ 2020

This partnership between the City of San Jose, the Santa Clara County Office of Education, businesses and community organizations has committed to eliminate the achievement gap in San Jose by 2020. Their standard is that "All students will test proficient or advanced on grade-level state assessments." Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- High quality preschool programs to prepare all children to be successful in kindergarten.
- A culture of success that includes high standards for all students.
- Engaging students in reflection and provide feedback to inform them of what they know and what they need to work on.
- Effective systems to recruit, develop and retain high quality teachers and effective leaders.
- Regular assessments to inform instruction.
- Extended learning time strategies (i.e., longer days, longer school year, and preschool attendance.)
- A multidisciplinary approach and curriculum that is relevant to the real world beyond high school.
- Uniting the community to support students and families holistically.

If successful, San Jose will see increases in graduation rates and increases in college retention and the elimination of the achievement gap.

Perspectives of Students Who get off Track for Graduation from High School

In an effort to better understand the lives and circumstances of students who get off track for graduation, the stories and reflections of former students were collected through a series of focus groups and surveys in 25 different locations throughout the U.S. While some students dropout because of significant academic challenges, most dropouts are students who could have, and believed they could have, succeeded in school. There is no single reason why students drop out, but the results below provide some clues to how we can keep students on track in school:

- 47% said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting.
- 69% said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard and 80% did one hour or less of homework each day. Two thirds said they would have worked harder if more was demanded and 70% were confident they could have graduated if they tried.
- Many students had personal reasons for leaving school: 32% said they had to get a job and make money, 26% said they became a parent and 22% said they had to care for a family member.
- 35% said that "failing in school" was a major factor in leaving school and 55% said they started high school poorly prepared by earlier schooling. Many students fell behind in elementary and middle school and never caught up.
- 32% were required to repeat a grade before dropping out and 29% expressed that they didn't think they could have met the requirements for graduation even if they put in additional effort.
- 55-65% of respondents reported they missed class often in the year before dropping out.

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Sources:

1. ***Left Behind in America: The Nation's Drop-out Crisis.***

Retrieved 11/30/09 at

http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/CLMS_2009_Dropout_Report.pdf

2. Belfield, C.R., Levin, H.M, ***The Economic Losses from High School Dropouts in California.*** Retrieved 11/30/09 at http://cdrp.ucsb.edu/dropouts/pubs_reports.htm

3. Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., Morison, K.B., ***The Silent Epidemic Perspectives of High School Dropouts.*** A report for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. March 2006.

The Children's Agenda is being led by Kids in Common, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Kids in Common advocates for policies, partnerships and investments that improve children's lives in Santa Clara County.

Children need a strong public voice – a voice that promotes and protects their best interests. Kids in Common is that voice and challenges leaders and decision-makers in our community to act on behalf of children.

Every day, our elected officials make policy and fiscal decisions that impact the more than 450,000 children who live in Santa Clara County. Kids in Common is the only organization that focuses on systemic change to improve children's lives in Santa Clara County. We advocate for effective investment and policies for children and support the mobilization of public and private resources to meet children's needs. We inform decision makers on best practices and champion local implementation. We convene agencies that care about children's well-being to address systems issues and speak out for needed change. Kids in Common is steadfast in speaking and acting on behalf of children and brings a uniquely qualified perspective that is grounded in research and data. Because we don't receive government funding, we do not have to worry about being perceived as acting in our own self-interest. **Policymakers know our only agenda is children.**



For the most current data on how Santa Clara County children are faring, go to:

www.kidsdata.org