

Dropouts: National Center for Education Statistics
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Types of Dropout Rates:

(1) Event, (2) Status, and (3) Cohort Dropout Rates

Event: A measure of recent dropout experiences-proportion of students who leave high school each year without completing high school.

Status: A cumulative rate-- cumulative data on dropouts among all young adults within a specific age group-- higher than event dropout rate because it includes all dropouts regardless of when they last attended high school. The status rate reveals the extent of the dropout problem in the population--the magnitude of the challenge for further training and education needed if dropouts are to participate fully in the economy and life of the nation. (Example-the number of 16-24 year-olds in the U.S. who have not completed high school among all of the 16-24 year olds)

Cohort: Measures of what happens to a single group, or cohort, of students over a period of time--consists of repeated measures of a group of students with shared experiences. The measure reveals how many students starting in a specific grade dropout over time. Also, cohort rates from longitudinal studies provide more background and contextual data on the students who dropout than are available through Current population surveys (CPS) or Common Core of Data (CCD) studies used to report State estimates of dropout rates.

High School Completion Rates:

High School Completion: The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18 through 24 year olds who have completed a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, including a General Educational Diploma (GED) credential. The measure combines recipients of alternative certificates (GED) along with students graduating with regular high school diplomas to provide a measure of the young adults who have completed a high school program and are ready to pursue post-secondary education or the workforce. (An event graduation rate compares the number of students who graduate at the end of the school year to the number of students potentially eligible to graduate at the start of the year)

Studies and Data Sources with Varying Dropout Definitions:

NELS (National Education Longitudinal Study)-survey comprised of a national probability sample of all regular public and private 8th -grade schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

HS&B (High School and Beyond Study)-A Calculation of Cohort Dropout Rates on a National Level
CPS (Current Population Survey)-NCES- A nationally representative sample survey of all households not including members of the armed forces, inmates of correctional institutions, and patients in long-term medical or custodial facilities.

CCD (Common Core of Data)-NCES-An annual survey of 50 State-level education agencies in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and outlying areas. Statistical information is collected on public schools, staff, students, and finance.

For Detailed Information contact the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) identified above.

NCES conclusions regarding data collected in the 90's:

In October 1999, 5 out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October 1998 had left high school without successfully completing a high school program. In total, these dropouts accounted for approximately one-half million of the 10 million 15- through 24-year-olds enrolled in high school in the previous October. These numbers have not changed appreciably in recent years.

The cumulative effect of hundreds of thousands of young adults leaving school each year short of finishing a high school program translates into several million young adults who are out of school, yet lacking a high school credential. In 1999, there were 3.8 million 16- through 24-year-olds who, although not enrolled in school, had not yet completed a high school program. Overall, 11.2 percent of the 34 million 16- through 24-year-olds in the United States were dropouts. Although there have been a number of year-to-year fluctuations in this rate, over the past 28 years, there has been a gradual pattern of decline that amounts to an average annual percentage change of 0.1 percentage points per year.

The goal of reducing the dropout rate is to increase the percentage of young adults who complete a high school education. Despite the increased importance of a high school education, the high school completion rate has shown limited gains over the last quarter of a century and has been stable throughout most of the 1990s. In 1999, approximately three-quarters of the 18- through 24-year-olds who were not still in high school held regular diplomas (76.8 percent); another 9.2 percent of these youths were reported as having completed by an alternative route such as the GED.

Over the last 10 years, the percentage of young adults completing high school has been relatively stable for whites and blacks. During the same period, the percentage completing high school through an alternative to a regular diploma has increased, with 1999 alternative completion rates of about 9 to 11 percent for white, black, and Hispanic young adults.

The net effect of these recent changes has been stable dropout and high school completion rates for young adults in the 1990s. These findings suggest that the emphasis in recent years on decreasing dropout rates as well as revising standards and high school graduation requirements may have translated into increased use of alternative methods of high school completion, rather than an overall decrease in dropout rates and an increase in the proportion of young adults holding a high school credential.

NCES- The importance of high school completion:

High School Completion Rates>The relative importance of a high school education has changed dramatically over the last half century in the United States. When the grandparents of today's high school students entered adulthood, a high school education was an asset in the labor force, held by about half of the population ages 25 through 29 in 1950. By the early 1970s, when the parents of today's high school students entered the work force, about 83 to 84 percent of the population ages 18 through 24 who were not enrolled in high school had completed a high school education (figure 3 and table A13). At that time, a high school education still served as an entryway to a number of promising career paths. Now, a quarter of a century later, technological advances in the workplace have increased the demand for a skilled labor force to the point where a high school education serves more as a minimum requirement for entry into the labor force. Completing a high school education is now even more essential in order to access additional education and training for the labor force.

19 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*, NCES 2000-031, by T. Snyder and C. Hoffman (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000).

NCES-Recent interest in alternatives for high school completion:

The pressures placed on the education system to turn out increasingly larger numbers of qualified lifelong learners have generated increased interest in alternative methods of high school completion. At this point, most students pursuing an alternative to a regular diploma take the GED tests, with the goal of earning a high school equivalency credential.

From 1972 to 1999, approximately 21 million adults took the GED tests, and about 12 million, or 60 percent, received a high school equivalency credential based on these tests²³. A minimum passing score is set nationally by the test administrator at the American Council on Education, and individual states set their own passing scores at or above the minimum requirement. In January of 1997, this minimum passing score was raised to a new standard requiring all GED graduates to exceed the performance of at least 33 percent of traditional graduating high school seniors. In 1999, about 526,000 of the 751,000 adults (70.1 percent) worldwide who took the GED test earned a high school equivalency credential²⁴.

Anyone age 16 or older who is out of school and does not hold a high school diploma can register and take the GED test. Historically, the GED was established as a means of offering a high school credential to World War II veterans who might have interrupted their schooling to go to war. Since that time, the GED has been viewed as a second-chance program for people who failed to graduate from a regular high school program. Data on GED test-takers show that while the average age of GED test-takers is about 26, over the last quarter of a century, approximately 30 to 40 percent of the test-takers have been ages 16 through 19²⁵.

In recent years, research on the adult outcomes for GED credential holders, as compared with dropouts on the one hand, and regular diploma recipients on the other, has fueled a debate over the value of the GED credential. There is conflicting evidence in the research literature concerning the effects of having a GED credential on labor force participation, employment, earnings, wage rates, postsecondary program participation, and persistence in postsecondary programs²⁶.

These conflicting findings have led some to question the efficacy of promoting GED programs for youths who are still young enough to participate in regular high school programs. This debate highlights the need to monitor the characteristics and the relative size of the groups of dropouts, high school graduates, and alternative completers.

In October 1999, 85.9 percent of 18- through 24-year-olds had completed high school either by earning a traditional diploma or by alternate means such as an equivalency test (table 6). Approximately 76.8 percent of the 18- through 24-year-olds who were not still enrolled in high school held regular diplomas, which represented the high school graduation rate (as opposed to the high school completion rate). An additional 9.2 percent had completed high school by taking a high school equivalency test such as the GED. This represents about 1.9 million young adults.

CPS data indicating whether high school credentials were obtained through a regular diploma or through an alternative route were first collected in 1988²⁷. Between 1988 and 1999, the diploma rate declined by 3.5 percentage points, falling from 80.3 percent in 1988 to 76.8 percent in 1999. In comparison, the alternative credential rate increased by 5.0 percentage points, climbing from 4.2 percent to 9.2 percent over the same period. As noted in appendix C, the rate increase from 1993 to 1994 coincided with the CPS implementation of computer-assisted interviewing procedures. However, the rate also increased between 1994 and 1998.

Among young adults in the four racial/ethnic groups under study, Asians were most likely to have earned a high school diploma (87.8 percent), followed by whites (82.0 percent), blacks (72.9 percent), and then Hispanics (54.9 percent) (table 4). Although Hispanic youths were the least likely of the four racial/ethnic groups to have earned a high school diploma, they were as likely as white, black, and Asian young adults (approximately 6 to 11 percent of each group) to complete high school with an alternative diploma.

23 American Council on Education, *Who Took the GED? GED 1999 Statistical Report* (Washington DC, GED Testing Service, 1999). These numbers represent totals for adults worldwide who took the GED tests and earned high school equivalency credentials. For U.S. totals and more detailed GED trend data, see appendix C, figure C1 and table C3.

24 *IBID.*

25 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*, NCES 2000-031 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), table 107.

26 See, for example, R.J. Murnane, J.B. Willet, and K.P. Boudett, 1995, "Do High School Dropouts Benefit from Obtaining a GED?" *Education and Policy Analysis* 17 (2): 133-47; Iowa Department of Education, *What Has Happened to Iowa's GED Graduates? A Two-, Five-, and Ten-Year Follow-Up Study*, ED 344-047 (Des Moines: State of Iowa Department of Education, 1992); J. Baldwin, I.S. Hirsch, D. Rock, and K. Yamamoto, *The Literacy Proficiencies of GED Examinees: Results from the GED-NALS Comparison Study* (Washington, DC and Princeton, NJ: The American Council on Education and the Educational Testing Service, 1995). Also, for a detailed review of the literature, see U.S. Department of Education, National Library of Education, *Educational and Labor Market Performance of GED Recipients*, by D. Boesel, N. Alsalam, and T. Smith (Washington DC: 1996).

27 In the CPS data there may be some ambiguity concerning students who complete high school with a certificate of attendance. While they should be counted as noncompleters, some respondents may report them as completers when asked about educational attainment.

