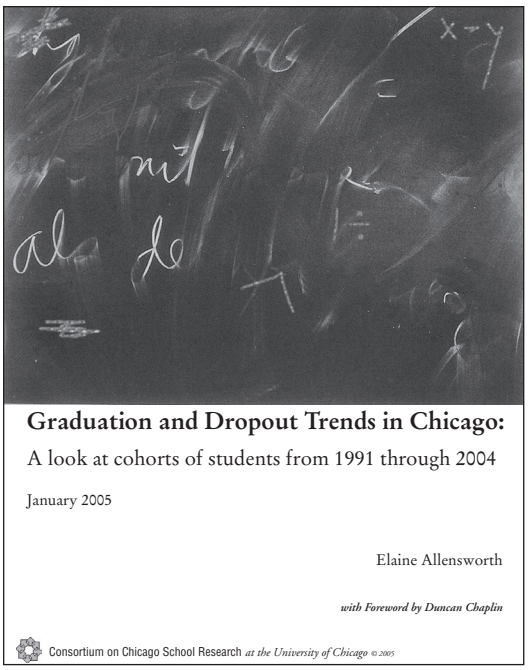
Report Highlights



Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago:

A look at cohorts of students from 1991 through 2004

January 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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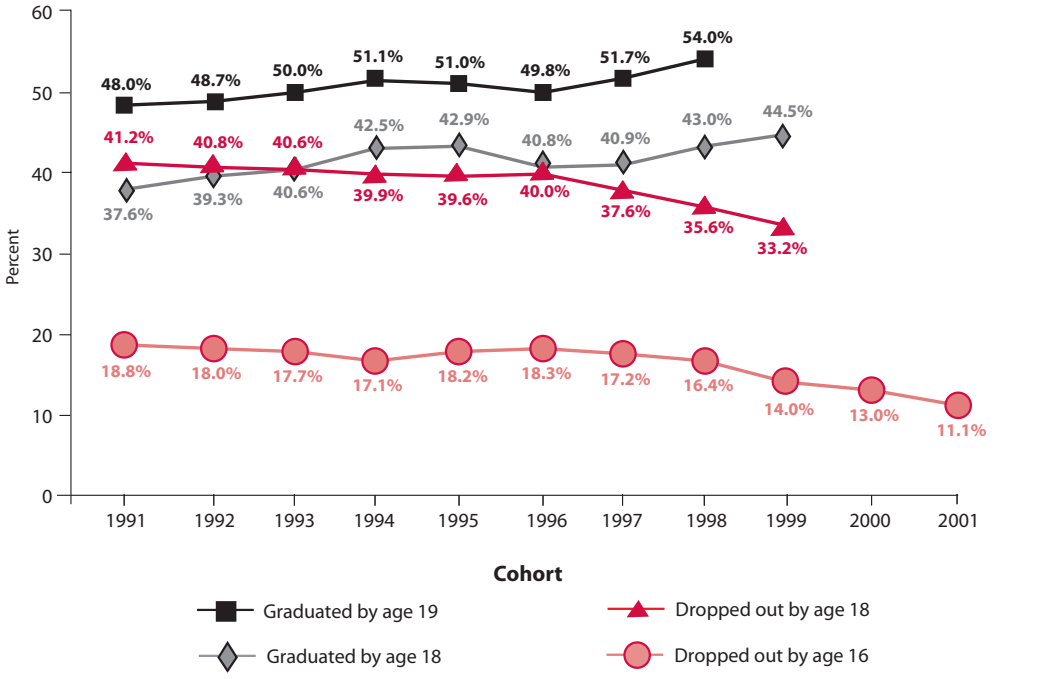
How Our Rates Were Calculated

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.

Graduation and Dropout Rates for Age-13 Cohorts of CPS Students



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.

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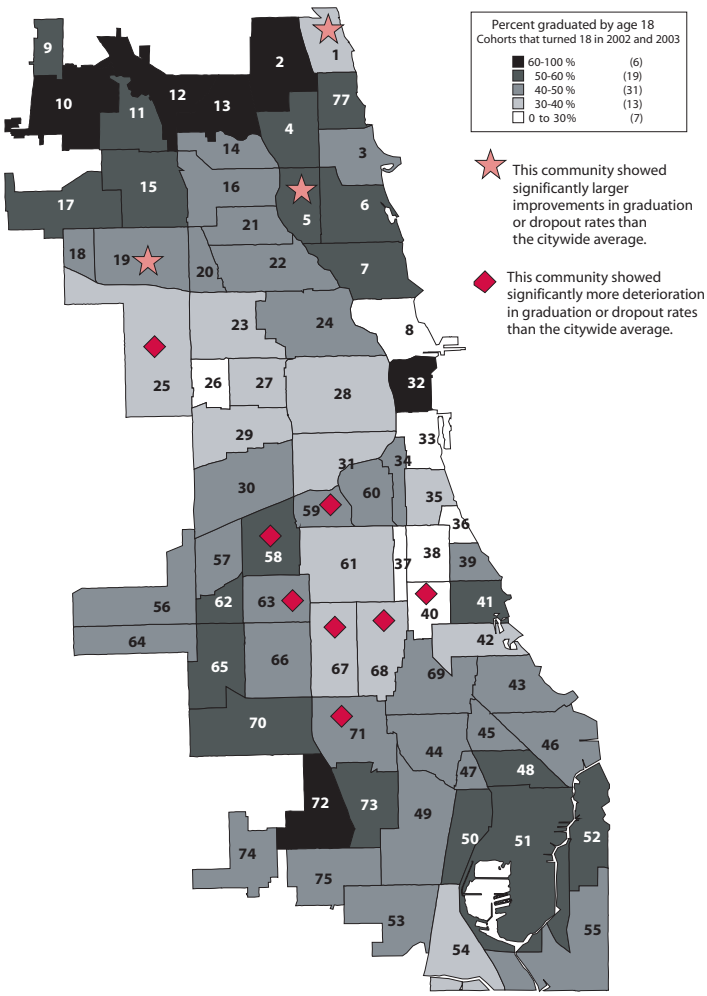
The Consortium on Chicago School Research aims to conduct research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. By broadly engaging local leadership in our work, and presenting our findings to diverse audiences, we seek to expand communication 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.

[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.

Graduation Rates by Community Area



Community Area					
1	Rogers Park	27	East Garfield	53	West Pullman
2	West Ridge	28	Near West Side	54	Riverdale
3	Uptown	29	North Lawndale	55	Hegewisch
4	Lincoln Square	30	South Lawndale	56	Garfield Ridge
5	North Center	31	Lower West Side	57	Archer Heights
6	Lake View	32	Loop	58	Brighton Park
7	Lincoln Park	33	Near South Side	59	McKinley Park
8	Near North Side	34	Armour Square	60	Bridgeport
9	Edison Park	35	Douglas	61	New City
10	Norwood Park	36	Oakland	62	West Elsdon
11	Jefferson Park	37	Fuller Park	63	Gage Park
12	Forest Glen	38	Grand Boulevard	64	Clearing
13	North Park	39	Kenwood	65	West Lawn
14	Albany Park	40	Washington Park	66	Chicago Lawn
15	Portage Park	41	Hyde Park	67	West Englewood
16	Irving Park	42	Woodlawn	68	Englewood
17	Dunning	43	South Shore	69	Greater Grand Crossing
18	Montclare	44	Chatham	70	Ashburn
19	Belmont Cragin	45	Avalon Park	71	Auburn Gresham
20	Hermosa	46	South Chicago	72	Beverly
21	Avondale	47	Burnside	73	Washington Heights
22	Logan Square	48	Calumet Heights	74	Mount Greenwood
23	Humboldt Park	49	Roseland	75	Morgan Park
24	West Town	50	Pullman	76	O'Hare
25	Austin	51	South Deering	77	Edgewater
26	West Garfield	52	East Side		

Selected Findings

Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago looks at graduation and dropout rates in a number of ways. The full-length report includes tables that break down these rates according to race/ethnicity and gender, community area, and high school. Some of the most important trends to note are these:

- Graduation rates have been improving steadily since the early 1990s, with the exception of the first two cohorts of students subject to the eighth-grade promotion standards. For the last five years, dropout rates at age 16 have been declining, which suggests that graduation rates will continue to improve for the next several years.

- Of CPS students who were 13 years old in 1998, 54 percent graduated from CPS by age 19 in 2004. Similarly, of CPS students who were freshmen in 1999, 54 percent graduated four years later in 2003.

- Among boys, only 39 percent of African-Americans graduated by age 19, compared to 51 percent of Latinos, 58 percent of whites, and 76 percent of Asians. Graduation rates among girls were much higher: 57 percent of African-Americans graduated by age 19, 65 percent of Latinas, 71 percent of whites, and 85 percent of Asians.

- Over the past seven years, African-American students showed less improvement in graduation and dropout rates than other groups of students. Consistent with Chicago's racially segregated neighborhoods, the report finds that communities on Chicago's mostly African-American South Side saw less improvement in graduation and dropout rates than did North Side communities.

- There are large differences in graduation rates across schools in Chicago. Many of the new charter and magnet schools, as well as several neighborhood high schools, show exceptionally high graduation rates, beyond what would be expected based on the characteristics of their incoming freshman.

Contents of the full report include:

- Methodological Issues in Calculating Graduation and Dropout Rates
- Systemwide Graduation and Dropout Trends
- Graduation and Dropout Rates Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity and Gender
- Community Differences in Graduation and Dropout Rates
- School-by-School Comparisons of Graduation and Dropout Rates

This research brief is based on the findings of a full-length report, *Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago: A look at cohorts of students from 1991 through 2004*. It is available for download or purchase from the Consortium's web site at:

www.consortium-chicago.org

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