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](http://www.consortium-chicago.org)

---

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.
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. 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.

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.


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 Latins, 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.


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.

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 among different freshman cohorts, making it difficult to evaluate trends over time by comparing freshman cohorts. In contrast, the ISBE method is intended to estimate the actual graduation rate that is based on the eighth-grade promotion standards. For the last five years, dropout rates in CPS have improved in graduation or dropout rates than did North Side students among different freshman cohorts, making it possible to note are these: specialties 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: 65 percent of African-Americans graduated by age 19, compared to 51 percent of Latinos, 58 percent of whites, and 76 percent of Asians. Consistent with 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 freshmen.

---


---

![Graduation and Dropout Rates for Aged 13 Cohorts of CPS Students](image)

- **Graduated by age 19**
- **Dropped out by age 19**
- **Graduated by age 18**
- **Dropped out by age 18**
- **Graduated by age 17**
- **Dropped out by age 17**
- **Graduated by age 16**
- **Dropped out by age 16**

**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.

**Community Area**

- **Rogers Park**
- **27 East Garfield**
- **23 Forest Park**
- **66 New City**
- **77 Edgewater**
- **22 Logan Square**
- **29 South Shore**
- **20 Morgan Park**
- **67 West Englewood**
- **12 Woodlawn**
- **59 McKinley Park**
- **37 Englewood**
- **60 Washington Park**
- **34 Chatham**
- **61 New Buffalo**
- **36 Chalmers**
- **58 Roseland**
- **30 Pullman**
- **47 South Side**
- **99 Healthy Start**
- **24 South Shore**
- **46 West Garfield Park**
- **11 South Chicago**
- **41 South Side**
- **26 West Garfield Park**
- **56 Lakeview**
- **43 Roseland**
- **25 South Shore**
- **48 South Side**
- **19 North Lawndale**
- **73 North Lawndale**
- **21 North Lawndale**
- **71 Auburn Gresham**
- **49 Roseland**
- **20 South Side**
- **33 Englewood**
- **39 Pullman**
- **28 South Side**
- **38 Gage Park**
- **42 Lawndale**
- **32 Lawndale**
- **44 Chatham**
- **35 West Garfield Park**
- **31 South Side**
- **45 Pullman**
- **51 Pullman**
- **57 Archer Heights**
- **40 Garfield Heights**
- **52 Lawndale**
- **46 Woodlawn**
- **55 Healthy Start**
- **47 Lawndale**
- **50 Pilsen**
- **53 West Pullman**
- **59 Morgan Park**
- **64 East Side**
- **65 West Pullman**
- **62 West Englewood**
- **68 Englewood**
- **72 Beverly**
- **71 Auburn Gresham**
- **69 Garfield Heights**
- **73 West Garfield Park**
- **70 Austin**
- **74 Washington Heights**
- **74 Crawford Community Area**
- **75 Aragon School City**
- **76 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **77 Evanston**
- **78 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **79 East Garfield Park**
- **80 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **81 Englewood**
- **82 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **83 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **84 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **85 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **86 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **87 Roosevelt Community Area**

**Graduation Rates by Community Area**

- **Rogers Park**
- **66 New City**
- **77 Edgewater**
- **22 Logan Square**
- **29 South Shore**
- **20 Morgan Park**
- **67 West Englewood**
- **12 Woodlawn**
- **59 McKinley Park**
- **37 Englewood**
- **60 Washington Park**
- **34 Chatham**
- **61 New Buffalo**
- **36 Chalmers**
- **58 Roseland**
- **30 Pullman**
- **47 South Side**
- **99 Healthy Start**
- **24 South Shore**
- **46 West Garfield Park**
- **11 South Chicago**
- **41 South Side**
- **26 West Garfield Park**
- **56 Lakeview**
- **43 Roseland**
- **25 South Shore**
- **48 South Side**
- **19 North Lawndale**
- **73 North Lawndale**
- **21 North Lawndale**
- **71 Auburn Gresham**
- **49 Roseland**
- **20 South Side**
- **33 Englewood**
- **39 Pullman**
- **28 South Side**
- **38 Gage Park**
- **42 Lawndale**
- **32 Lawndale**
- **44 Chatham**
- **35 West Garfield Park**
- **31 South Side**
- **45 Pullman**
- **51 Pullman**
- **57 Archer Heights**
- **40 Garfield Heights**
- **52 Lawndale**
- **46 Woodlawn**
- **55 Healthy Start**
- **47 Lawndale**
- **50 Pilsen**
- **53 West Pullman**
- **59 Morgan Park**
- **64 East Side**
- **65 West Pullman**
- **62 West Englewood**
- **68 Englewood**
- **72 Beverly**
- **71 Auburn Gresham**
- **69 Garfield Heights**
- **73 West Garfield Park**
- **70 Austin**
- **74 Washington Heights**
- **78 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **79 East Garfield Park**
- **80 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **81 Englewood**
- **82 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **83 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **84 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **85 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **86 Roosevelt Community Area**
- **87 Roosevelt Community Area**
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

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.