



Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2009-10

More than 3 Million Students Have Been Lost from Texas High Schools Since 1986

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

For the first time in the 25-year history of reporting trends in dropout and attrition rates in Texas public schools, IDRA's latest study shows that less than 30 percent of students were lost from public enrollment prior to graduation with a high school diploma. IDRA found that 29 percent of the freshman class of 2006-07 left school before graduating from a Texas public high school in the 2009-10 school year. The current statewide attrition rate in Texas is four percentage points lower than the initial rate of 33 percent found in IDRA's landmark 1985-86 study.

This latest finding suggests that the ability of Texas public high schools to keep students in school until they graduate has improved somewhat for students overall in recent years. The current attrition rate for each racial and ethnic group was lower than the rate found in the 1985-86 study. However, the gaps between the attrition rates of White students and rates of Hispanic students and Black students are dramatically higher than 25 years ago.

A supplemental analysis indicates that, based on one statistical scenario of Texas attrition rate history, the state will not reach an attrition rate of zero until 2040. At this pace, the state will lose an additional 1.9 million to 3.5 million students. (Montes, 2010)

This 2009-10 attrition study is the 25th study conducted by IDRA and the latest in a series of reports that began in the 1985-86 school year. In 1986, IDRA conducted Texas' first comprehensive statewide study of high school dropouts using a high school attrition formula to estimate the number and percent of students who leave school prior to graduation.

The study in 1986 was the state's first major effort to assess the holding power of Texas public schools. This inaugural study, entitled *Texas School Dropout Survey Project*, was conducted under contract with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the then Texas Department of Community Affairs.

“While offering a glimmer of hope that Texas is moving in the right direction, the results of this study and the prospect of losing another 2 to 3 million students leave no doubt that we must take immediate, comprehensive action.”

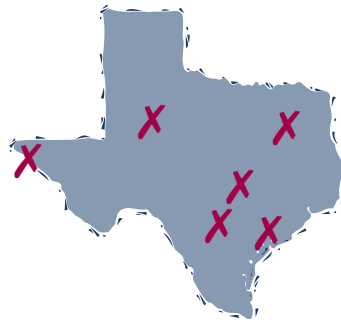
— Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

Since 1986, Texas high schools have lost **3 million students.**

This is the equivalent of losing **Houston and Austin** over the course of two and half decades.

At the current pace, we could be looking at losing as many as

3.5 million more students – or the entire populations of **San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso and Lubbock** over the next three decades.



2006-07 and 2009-10 Enrollment, 2009-10 Attrition in Texas

Race-Ethnicity and Gender	2006-07 9th Grade Enrollment	2009-10 12th Grade Enrollment	2006-07 9-12th Grade Enrollment	2009-10 9-12th Grade Enrollment	2009-10 Expected 12th Grade Enrollment	Students Lost to Attrition	Attrition Rate
Native American	1,315	1,064	4,307	4,866	1,491	427	28
Male	705	535	2,168	2,577	838	303	36
Female	610	529	2,139	2,289	653	124	19
Asian/Pacific Islander	11,339	11,150	41,908	48,428	13,101	1,951	15
Male	5,999	5,767	21,767	25,016	6,894	1,127	16
Female	5,340	5,383	20,141	23,412	6,207	824	13
Black	58,528	40,101	181,873	186,825	60,152	20,051	33
Male	30,765	19,519	91,382	94,862	31,937	12,418	39
Female	27,763	20,582	90,491	91,963	28,215	7,633	27
White	139,662	112,256	503,476	478,248	132,672	20,416	15
Male	72,906	57,774	258,577	246,454	69,488	11,714	17
Female	66,756	54,482	244,899	231,794	63,184	8,702	14
Hispanic	176,345	119,534	515,536	574,443	196,525	76,991	39
Male	92,768	58,782	262,440	293,724	103,826	45,044	43
Female	83,577	60,752	253,096	280,719	92,699	31,947	34
All Groups	387,189	284,105	1,247,100	1,292,810	403,941	119,836	29
Male	203,143	142,377	636,334	662,633	212,983	70,606	33
Female	184,046	141,728	610,766	630,177	190,958	49,230	25

Figures calculated by IDRA from Texas Education Agency Fall Membership Survey data. IDRA's 2009-10 attrition study involved the analysis of enrollment figures for public high school students in the ninth grade during 2006-07 school year and enrollment figures for 12th grade students in 2009-10. This period represents the time span when ninth grade students would be enrolled in school prior to graduation. The enrollment data for special school districts (military schools, state schools and charter schools) were excluded from the analyses since they are likely to have unstable enrollments and/or lack a tax base to support school programs.

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

That first study found that 86,276 students had not graduated from Texas public high schools, costing the state \$17 billion in forgone income, lost tax revenues, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs (Cárdenas, Robledo & Supik, 1986).

Since then, Texas schools have lost a cumulative total of more than 3 million students.

Methods

Spanning a period from 1985-86 through 2009-10, the IDRA attrition studies have provided time series data, using a consistent methodology, on the number and percent of Texas public school

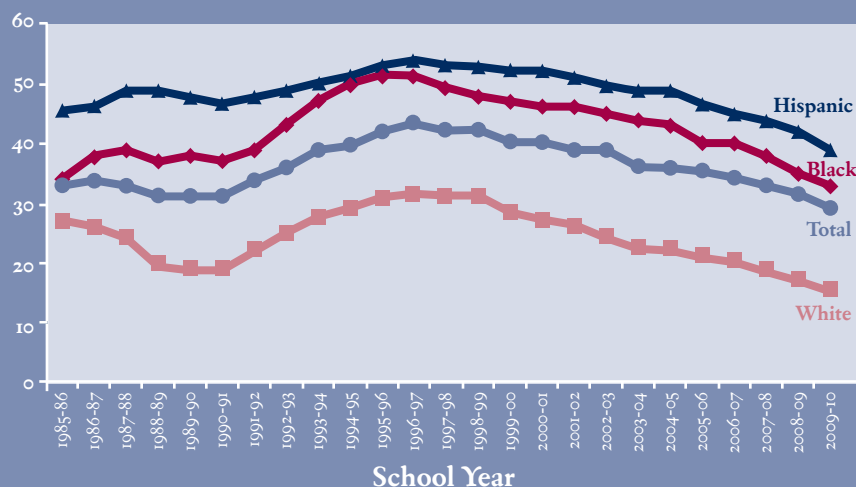
students who leave school prior to graduation. These studies are the only source for examining the magnitude of the dropout problem in Texas across more than two decades using consistent methods. They provide information on the effectiveness and success of Texas public high schools in keeping students engaged in school until they graduate with a high school diploma.

The attrition calculations were derived from public school enrollment data in the Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). During the fall of each year, school districts are required to report information to TEA via the PEIMS for all public school students

and grade levels. IDRA's attrition studies involve an analysis of ninth-grade enrollment figures and 12th-grade enrollment figures three years later. This period represents the time span during which a student would be enrolled in high school.

IDRA collects and uses high school enrollment data from the TEA Fall Membership Survey to compute countywide and statewide attrition rates by race-ethnicity and gender. Enrollment data from special school districts (military schools, state schools and charter schools) are excluded from the analyses because they are likely to have unstable enrollments or lack a tax base for school programs.

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools by Year 1985-86 to 2009-10



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Attrition rates are an indicator of a school's holding power or ability to keep students enrolled in school and learning until they graduate. Along with other dropout measures, attrition rates are useful in studying the magnitude of the dropout problem and the success of schools in keeping students in school (see Page 10). Attrition, in its simplest form, is the rate of shrinkage in size or number. Therefore, an attrition rate is the percent change in grade level enrollment between a base year and an end year.

Latest Study Results

About three of every 10 students (29 percent) from the freshman class of 2006-07 left school prior to graduating with a high school diploma. For the class of 2009-10, 119,836 students were lost from public school enrollment between the 2006-07 and 2009-10 school years. (See box at left.)

The overall attrition rate declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 29 percent in 2009-10. Over the past two and a half decades, attrition rates have fluctuated between a low of 29 percent in 2009-10 to a high of 43 percent in 1996-97.

The overall attrition rate was less than 30 percent for the first time in 25 years. After 24 consecutive years of overall statewide attrition rates of 31 percent or higher, the overall statewide attrition rate of 29 percent in 2009-10 is the lowest since the previous low of 31 percent in 1988-89,

1989-90, 1990-91 and 2008-09. (See box at right.)

The attrition rates of Hispanic students and Black students are much higher than those of White students. From 1985-86 to 2009-10, attrition rates of Hispanic students declined by 13 percent (from 45 percent to 39 percent). During this same period, the attrition rates of Black students declined by 3 percent (from 34 percent to 33 percent). Attrition rates of White students declined by 44 percent (from 27 percent to 15 percent).

Native American students had a decline of 38 percent in their attrition rates (from 45 percent to 28 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islander students had a decline of 55 percent (from 33 percent to 15 percent). Hispanic students have higher attrition rates than either White students or Black students. The attrition rate of Asian/Pacific Islander students was the lowest among the racial/ethnic groups, while the rate for Hispanic students was the highest. (See box on Page 4.)

For the class of 2009-10, Black students and Hispanic students are about two times more likely to leave school without graduating with a diploma than White students.

The gap between the attrition rates of White students and of Black students and Hispanic students is higher than 25 years ago. The gap between the attrition rates of White students and

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools by Year 1985-86 to 2009-10

Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
1985-86	34	27	45	33
1986-87	38	26	46	34
1987-88	39	24	49	33
1988-89	37	20	48	31
1989-90	38	19	48	31
1990-91	37	19	47	31
1991-92	39	22	48	34
1992-93	43	25	49	36
1993-94	47	28	50	39
1994-95	50	30	51	40
1995-96	51	31	53	42
1996-97	51	32	54	43
1997-98	49	31	53	42
1998-99	48	31	53	42
1999-00	47	28	52	40
2000-01	46	27	52	40
2001-02	46	26	51	39
2002-03	45	24	50	38
2003-04	44	22	49	36
2004-05	43	22	48	36
2005-06	40	21	47	35
2006-07	40	20	45	34
2007-08	38	18	44	33
2008-09	35	17	42	31
2009-10	33	15	39	29

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Longitudinal Attrition Rates in Texas Public High Schools, 1985-86 to 2009-10

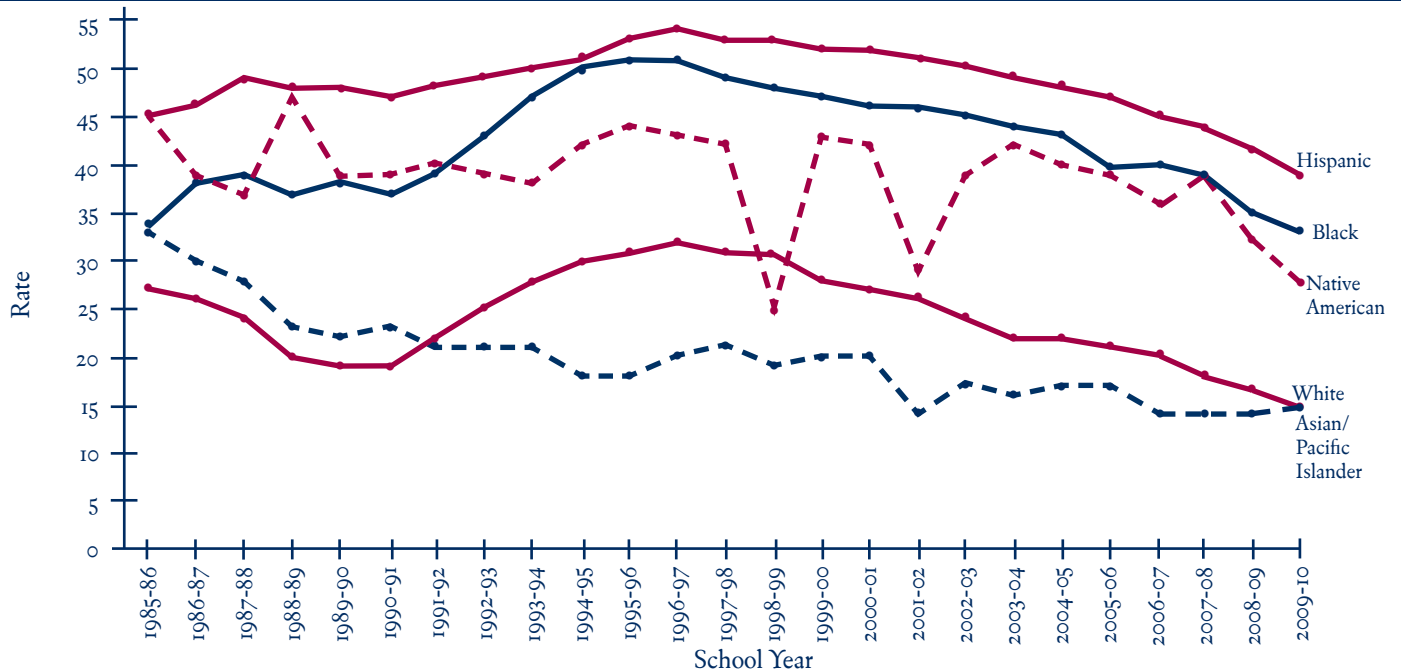
Group	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Percent Change* From 1985-86 to 2009-10	
Race-Ethnicity																											
Native American	45	39	37	47	39	39	40	39	38	42	44	43	42	25	43	42	29	39	42	40	39	36	38	32	28	-38	
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	30	28	23	22	23	21	21	21	18	18	20	21	19	20	20	14	17	16	17	17	14	14	14	15	-55	
Black	34	38	39	37	38	37	39	43	47	50	51	51	49	48	47	46	46	45	44	43	40	40	38	35	33	-3	
White	27	26	24	20	19	19	22	25	28	30	31	32	31	31	28	27	26	24	22	22	21	20	18	17	15	-44	
Hispanic	45	46	49	48	48	47	48	49	50	51	53	54	53	53	52	52	51	50	49	48	47	45	44	42	39	-13	
Gender																											
Male	35	35	35	34	34	34	37	39	41	43	45	46	45	45	44	43	43	41	40	39	38	37	36	35	33	-6	
Female	32	32	31	29	29	28	30	33	36	37	39	40	38	38	36	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	27	25	-22	
Total	33	34	33	31	31	31	34	36	39	40	42	43	42	42	40	40	39	38	36	36	35	34	33	31	29	-12	

* Rounded to nearest whole number.

Figures calculated by IDRA from Texas Education Agency Fall Membership Survey data.

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Longitudinal Attrition Rates by Race-Ethnicity in Texas Public Schools, 1985-86 to 2009-10



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Numbers of Students Lost to Attrition in Texas, School Years 1985-86 to 2009-10

School Year	Total	Race-Ethnicity					Gender	
		Native American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	White	Hispanic	Male	Female
1985-86	86,276	185	1,523	12,268	38,717	33,583	46,603	39,673
1986-87	90,317	152	1,406	14,416	38,848	35,495	48,912	41,405
1987-88	92,213	159	1,447	15,273	34,889	40,435	50,595	41,618
1988-89	88,538	252	1,189	15,474	28,309	43,314	49,049	39,489
1989-90	86,160	196	1,214	15,423	24,510	44,817	48,665	37,495
1990-91	83,718	207	1,324	14,133	23,229	44,825	47,723	35,995
1991-92	91,424	215	1,196	15,016	27,055	47,942	51,937	39,487
1992-93	101,358	248	1,307	17,032	32,611	50,160	57,332	44,026
1993-94	113,061	245	1,472	19,735	37,377	54,232	63,557	49,504
1994-95	123,200	296	1,226	22,856	41,648	57,174	68,725	54,475
1995-96	135,438	350	1,303	25,078	45,302	63,405	75,854	59,584
1996-97	147,313	327	1,486	27,004	48,586	69,910	82,442	64,871
1997-98	150,965	352	1,730	26,938	49,135	72,810	85,585	65,380
1998-99	151,779	299	1,680	25,526	48,178	76,096	86,438	65,341
1999-00	146,714	406	1,771	25,097	44,275	75,165	83,976	62,738
2000-01	144,241	413	1,794	24,515	41,734	75,785	82,845	61,396
2001-02	143,175	237	1,244	25,017	39,953	76,724	82,762	60,413
2002-03	143,280	436	1,611	25,066	36,948	79,219	82,621	60,659
2003-04	139,413	495	1,575	24,728	33,104	79,511	80,485	58,928
2004-05	137,424	490	1,789	24,373	31,378	79,394	78,858	58,566
2005-06	137,162	512	1,876	24,366	29,903	80,505	78,298	58,864
2006-07	134,676	500	1,547	23,845	28,339	80,445	76,965	57,711
2007-08	132,815	581	1,635	23,036	25,923	81,640	76,532	56,283
2008-09	125,508	450	1,685	21,019	22,476	79,878	73,572	51,936
2009-10	119,836	427	1,951	20,051	20,416	76,991	70,606	49,230
All Years	3,046,004	8,430	37,981	527,285	872,853	1,599,455	1,730,937	1,315,067

Figures calculated by IDRA from Texas Education Agency Fall Membership Survey data.
Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Black students has increased from 7 percentage points in 1985-86 to 18 percentage points in 2009-10. Similarly, the gap between the attrition rates of White students and Hispanic students has increased from 18 percentage points in 1985-86 to 24 percentage points in 2009-10.

The gap between the attrition rates of White students and Native American students has declined from 18 percentage points in 1985-86 to 13 percentage points in 2009-10.

Asian/Pacific Islander students exhibited the greatest positive trend in the reduction of the gap in attrition rates compared to White students. In

fact, rates for Asian/Pacific Islander students were 6 percentage points higher than those of White students but now are equal to the percentage of White students lost to attrition.

Historically, Hispanic students and Black students have comprised a large proportion of students lost by schools. For the period of 1985-86 to 2009-10, students from ethnic minority groups account for nearly three-fourths (71.3 percent) of the estimated 3 million students lost from public high school enrollment.

Hispanic students account for 52.5 percent of the students lost to attrition. Black students

account for 16.7 percent of all students lost from enrollment due to attrition over the years. White students account for 17.3 percent of students lost from high school enrollment over time. Attrition rates for White students and Asian/Pacific Islander students have been typically lower than the overall attrition rates.

The attrition rates for males have been higher than those of females. From 1985-86 to 2009-10, attrition rates of male students declined by 6 percent (from 35 percent to 33 percent). Attrition rates for females declined by 22 percent from 32 percent in 1985-86 to 25 percent in 2009-10. Longitudinally, males have accounted for 56.8

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools By Race-Ethnicity, 2009-10

COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES ¹				COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES ¹			
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL		BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL
ANDERSON	26	17	42	23	DEWITT	23	**	42	17
ANDREWS	37	1	20	13	DICKENS	100	16	8	16
ANGELINA	13	18	33	21	DIMITT	100	**	33	29
ARANSAS	10	25	25	23	DONLEY	13	15	41	19
ARCHER	•	5	9	7	DUVAL	100	23	27	27
ARMSTRONG	•	14	60	20	EASTLAND	20	11	21	14
ATASCOSA	52	6	25	20	ECTOR	33	12	29	24
AUSTIN	24	3	36	17	EDWARDS	60	28	**	12
BAILEY	**	**	37	20	ELLIS	17	18	38	24
BANDERA	**	19	35	22	EL PASO	30	18	33	32
BASTROP	29	16	32	24	ERATH	**	19	36	23
BAYLOR	**	**	28	**	FALLS	7	**	21	5
BEE	30	30	39	36	FANNIN	2	1	20	4
BELL	40	27	39	34	FAYETTE	3	8	45	19
BEXAR	41	22	42	37	FISHER	14	37	34	34
BLANCO	**	13	46	19	FLOYD	18	**	30	20
BORDEN	•	**	**	**	FOARD	•	21	**	14
BOSQUE	49	13	17	15	FORT BEND	24	7	38	21
BOWIE	25	14	33	18	FRANKLIN	38	12	34	18
BRAZORIA	26	19	40	28	FREESTONE	8	13	52	18
BRAZOS	41	12	39	28	FRIO	•	28	24	24
BREWSTER	•	**	30	17	GAINES	**	2	3	2
BRISCOE	•	30	**	**	GALVESTON	29	19	35	24
BROOKS	•	15	28	28	GARZA	57	15	51	39
BROWN	**	18	29	20	GILLESPIE	**	7	28	14
BURLESON	28	16	23	19	GLASSCOCK	•	**	7	**
BURNET	31	19	28	22	GOLIAD	17	2	28	13
CALDWELL	**	9	15	10	GONZALES	**	6	28	17
CALHOUN	**	17	36	28	GRAY	17	8	35	17
CALLAHAN	100	12	**	11	GRAYSON	15	12	29	15
CAMERON	55	17	44	42	GREGG	29	10	51	23
CAMP	39	33	42	38	GRIMES	18	18	48	27
CARSON	•	4	**	1	GUADALUPE	12	17	44	28
CASS	8	13	47	13	HALE	0	**	31	21
CASTRO	•	**	25	14	HALL	9	**	11	**
CHAMBERS	32	17	40	22	HAMILTON	**	9	26	9
CHEROKEE	23	22	44	29	HANSFORD	•	0	8	5
CHILDRESS	39	13	**	9	HARDEMAN	0	4	10	7
CLAY	•	15	16	15	HARDIN	7	18	9	16
COCHRAN	**	**	29	1	HARRIS	38	10	42	32
COKE	•	31	39	36	HARRISON	9	15	29	15
COLEMAN	**	10	**	3	HARTLEY	•	23	**	13
COLLIN	32	16	39	23	HASKELL	•	**	7	**
COLLINGSWORTH	**	4	13	3	HAYS	36	22	38	30
COLORADO	20	4	42	19	HEMPHILL	•	8	37	19
COMAL	14	18	42	26	HENDERSON	12	17	28	19
COMANCHE	•	20	21	21	HIDALGO	17	10	40	39
CONCHO	•	**	**	**	HILL	10	16	29	19
COOKE	6	7	40	15	HOCKLEY	**	5	14	10
CORYELL	42	25	22	28	HOOD	**	21	14	20
COTTLE	39	**	**	**	HOPKINS	44	18	33	24
CRANE	9	12	21	18	HOUSTON	12	15	39	17
CROCKETT	0	**	26	2	HOWARD	39	21	40	31
CROSBY	**	13	6	7	HUDSPETH	•	31	38	37
CULBERSON	•	**	1	**	HUNT	26	15	46	22
DALLAM	50	16	37	24	HUTCHINSON	13	10	10	11
DALLAS	35	7	47	35	IRION	•	25	24	25
DAWSON	**	0	37	21	JACK	38	15	21	16
DEAF SMITH	38	5	22	19	JACKSON	51	**	19	9
DELTA	2	13	**	9	JASPER	18	21	41	21
DENTON	35	25	48	32	JEFF DAVIS	•	**	**	**

¹Calculated by: (1) dividing the high school enrollment in the end year by the high school enrollment in the base year; (2) multiplying the results from Calculation 1 by the ninth grade enrollment in the base year; (3) subtracting the results from Calculation 2 from the 12th grade enrollment in the end year; and (4) dividing the results of Calculation 3 by the result of Calculation 2. The attrition rate results (percentages) were rounded to the nearest whole number.

** = Attrition rate is less than zero (o).

*** = No high school.

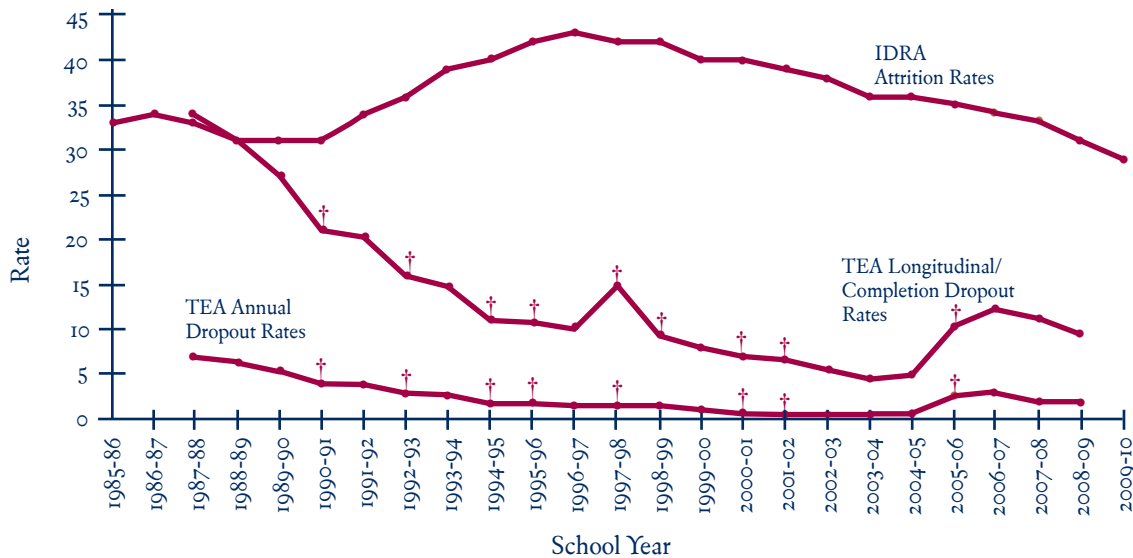
• = The necessary data are unavailable to calculate the attrition rate.

Attrition Rates in Texas Public Schools By Race-Ethnicity, 2009-10 (continued)

COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES				COUNTY NAME	ATTRITION RATES			
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL		BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL
JEFFERSON	29	17	42	27	RAINS	44	**	24	6
JIM HOGG	•	4	22	21	RANDALL	48	12	25	15
JIM WELLS	**	7	35	31	REAGAN	**	**	16	7
JOHNSON	38	23	40	27	REAL	•	39	46	43
JONES	**	1	19	6	RED RIVER	4	7	24	8
KARNES	54	13	0	6	REEVES	**	32	32	32
KAUFMAN	39	29	47	34	REFUGIO	14	**	32	18
KENDALL	26	12	29	17	ROBERTS	•	29	50	28
KENEDY	***	***	***	***	ROBERTSON	18	17	30	20
KENT	•	**	55	13	ROCKWALL	26	18	37	22
KERR	52	20	33	26	RUNNELS	**	8	11	8
KIMBLE	•	13	15	13	RUSK	17	16	36	20
KING	•	**	100	**	SABINE	**	26	55	21
KINNEY	•	**	31	10	SAN AUGUSTINE	35	29	**	29
KLEBERG	11	10	38	33	SAN JACINTO	13	37	30	33
KNOX	**	**	**	**	SAN PATRICIO	28	19	20	19
LAMAR	39	14	52	22	SAN SABA	•	6	**	4
LAMB	27	1	32	22	SCHLEICHER	0	**	7	0
LAMPASAS	29	16	28	20	SCURRY	18	12	33	22
LA SALLE	•	**	24	20	SHACKELFORD	52	6	**	6
LAVACA	28	2	40	10	SHELBY	9	15	48	20
LEE	31	4	38	18	SHERMAN	•	3	19	13
LEON	31	2	30	10	SMITH	36	19	48	31
LIBERTY	15	34	42	33	SOMERVELL	•	11	27	17
LIMESTONE	16	3	52	18	STARR	•	**	37	37
LIPSCOMB	•	6	22	12	STEPHENS	**	29	47	35
LIVE OAK	0	2	16	7	STERLING	•	**	**	**
LLANO	100	20	39	22	STONEWALL	**	**	38	0
LOVING	***	***	***	***	SUTTON	•	**	14	6
LUBBOCK	24	10	30	20	SWISHER	**	**	3	**
LYNN	20	6	7	8	TARRANT	36	16	42	29
MADISON	27	9	35	18	TAYLOR	46	17	48	30
MARION	36	28	58	32	TERRELL	•	14	**	**
MARTIN	•	6	18	8	TERRY	**	**	16	5
MASON	•	**	20	**	THROCKMORTON	•	**	63	**
MATAGORDA	1	10	34	21	TITUS	5	11	32	22
MAVERICK	•	32	31	32	TOM GREEN	**	**	17	7
MCCOLLUCH	**	3	12	3	TRAVIS	33	8	45	30
MCLENNAN	31	13	37	24	TRINITY	**	28	37	24
McMULLEN	•	41	**	16	TYLER	11	21	23	20
MEDINA	42	11	30	22	UPSHUR	4	22	28	20
MENARD	**	42	**	8	UPTON	•	**	**	**
MIDLAND	25	6	40	25	UVALDE	40	13	18	17
MILAM	34	11	43	25	VAL VERDE	4	8	27	24
MILLS	100	13	32	21	VAN ZANDT	**	17	31	18
MITCHELL	**	34	23	27	VICTORIA	56	26	59	49
MONTAGUE	56	9	6	10	WALKER	34	24	38	30
MONTGOMERY	35	23	44	29	WALLER	23	22	44	31
MOORE	83	**	28	24	WARD	1	**	33	15
MORRIS	22	31	29	27	WASHINGTON	34	**	46	14
MOTLEY	•	38	**	19	WEBB	**	**	33	33
NACOGDOCHES	28	17	50	28	WHARTON	14	0	19	11
NAVARRO	38	22	40	30	WHEELER	**	**	19	3
NEWTON	28	26	33	29	WICHITA	18	8	31	14
NOLAN	35	41	33	37	WILBARGER	36	24	33	27
NUECES	33	12	32	27	WILLACY	•	5	19	18
OCHILTREE	100	**	42	27	WILLIAMSON	33	17	40	25
OLDHAM	50	18	0	16	WILSON	14	14	20	16
ORANGE	45	24	36	28	WINKLER	•	10	14	14
PALO PINTO	11	15	37	21	WISE	27	13	27	17
PANOLA	13	28	49	28	WOOD	**	15	29	17
PARKER	10	19	30	20	YOAKUM	**	17	17	16
PARMER	20	**	15	7	YOUNG	21	10	35	16
PECOS	25	**	32	24	ZAPATA	•	7	12	12
POLK	11	31	25	26	ZAVALA	•	**	22	22
POTTER	28	15	30	23					
PRESIDIO	•	45	32	31	TOTAL	33	15	39	29

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

Attrition and Dropout Rates in Texas Over Time



† Change in TEA dropout definition or data processing procedures

Sources: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010. Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09.*

Attrition and Dropout Rates in Texas Over Time

School Year	IDRA Attrition Rates	TEA Long. Dropout Rates	TEA Annual Dropout Rates
1985-86	33	--	--
1986-87	34	--	--
1987-88	33	34.0	6.7
1988-89	31	31.3	6.1
1989-90	31	27.2	5.1
1990-91	31	21.4	3.9
1991-92	34	20.7	3.8
1992-93	36	15.8	2.8
1993-94	39	14.4	2.6
1994-95	40	10.6	1.8
1995-96	42	10.1	1.8
1996-97	43	9.1	1.6
1997-98	42	14.7	1.6
1998-99	42	9.0*	1.6
1999-00	40	7.7*	1.3
2000-01	40	6.8*	1.0
2001-02	39	5.6*	0.9
2002-03	38	4.9*	0.9
2003-04	36	4.2*	0.9
2004-05	36	4.6*	0.9
2005-06	35	9.1***	2.6**
2006-07	34	11.6***	2.7**
2007-08	33	10.7***	2.2**
2008-09	31	9.5***	2.0**
2009-10	29		

* Longitudinal completion rate (Grades 7-12)
 ** Annual dropout rate using NCES definition (Grades 7-12)
 *** Longitudinal dropout rate using NCES definition (Grades 7-12)

Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

percent of students lost from school enrollment, while females have accounted for 43.2 percent. In the class of 2009-10, males were 1.3 times more likely to leave school without graduating with a diploma than females. (See box on Page 4.)

County-level data are provided on the map (at right) and on an attrition rate table on Pages 6-7. In addition, trend data by county are available on IDRA's website at www.idra.org (see box on Page 12). School district and high school-level data are available online as well through IDRA's OurSchool data portal, where the attrition figures provided are from TEA databases (see box on Page 13).

The graph and table on this page show attrition and dropout rates in Texas over time as reported in IDRA's attrition studies and TEA dropout reports. Descriptions of different dropout counting and reporting methodologies are outlined on Page 10.

Conclusions

Texas public schools are failing to graduate three out of every 10 students. Attrition rates as an indicator in a school holding power index show that the rate was 29 percent overall and near 40 percent for Black students and Hispanic students. The overall attrition rate has declined from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 29 percent in 2009-10, but the gap or disparity in attrition rates has not improved between racial-ethnic groups. The

disparity in dropout rates must garner additional attention and resources in order to achieve equity and excellence in our schools.

Since 1986, Texas high schools have lost 3 million students. This is the equivalent of losing Houston and Austin over the course of two and half decades. And, at the current pace, we could be looking at losing as many as 3.5 million more students – or the entire populations of San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso and Lubbock over the next three decades. But dropouts do not disappear or evaporate into thin air. They struggle with their lives, trying to earn a living without a high school diploma. This lack of school holding power affects every one of us.

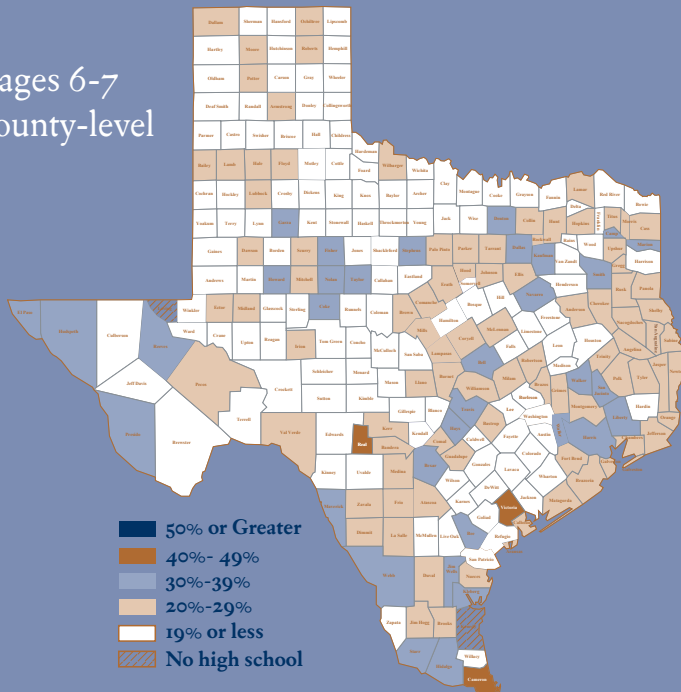
Resources

Cárdenas, J.A., M. Robledo Montecel, & J. Supik. *Texas Dropout Survey Project* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1986).
 Montes, F. *Sluggish Attrition Rate Descent Means 1.9 Million to 3.5 Million More Texas Students May be Lost* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010). Available online.

Roy L. Johnson, M.S., is director of IDRA Support Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Attrition Rates by Texas County, 2009-10

See Pages 6-7
for County-level
Rates



Source: Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010.

“Investment in change must clearly reflect our full commitment to quality public schools in all neighborhoods for children of all backgrounds.”

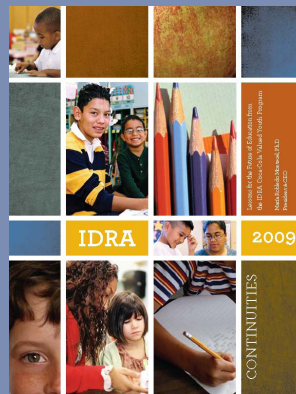
– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

This publication vividly captures seven key lessons for improving the quality of education for all students. It presents the voices of youth, teachers, family members and program leaders and the reasons valuing youth is at the heart of school transformation. It was released on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and in celebration of its success in keeping tens of thousands of students in school and positively impacting more than half a million children, families and educators on three continents.

Available from IDRA for \$7.00, plus shipping, or free online at www.idra.org.



Types of Dropout Data Defined

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the principal federal agency responsible for the collection, analysis and reporting of data on the condition of education in the United States. Dropout data from NCES examines rates within racial and ethnic groups, across gender groups, and across states and geographical regions. NCES defines the various types of dropout rates as follows.

- **Averaged freshman graduation rates** describe the proportion of high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma four years after starting ninth grade. This rate measures the extent to which schools are graduating students on time. The first school year for which NCES provides averaged freshman graduation rates is 2001-02.
- **Event dropout rates** describe the percentage of private and public high school students who left high school in a particular year (between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next) without earning a high school diploma or its equivalent. This rate is also referred to as an "annual dropout rate." The Texas Education Agency reports the event rate (in addition to other rates). Definitions for TEA rates can be found on the TEA website.
- **Status dropout rates** provide cumulative data on dropouts among young adults within a specified age range (usually: 15 to 24 years of age, 16 to 24 years of age, or 18 to 24 years of age). They measure the percentage of individuals who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency, irrespective of when they dropped out. These rates, which are higher than event rates because they include all dropouts, reveal the extent of the dropout problem in the population. (This rate focuses on an overall age group or cohort rather than on individuals.)

- **High school status completion rates** describe the proportion of individuals in a given age range who are not in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential (namely the GED certificate), irrespective of when the credential was earned. (This rate also is referred to as the "school completion rate" as the positive way of expressing the status dropout rate.)

Other types of measures include the following.

- **Attrition rates** measure the number of students lost from enrollment between two points in time (e.g., ninth grade and 12th grade enrollment four years later). Attrition data are similar to cohort data. IDRA releases adjusted attrition rates each year for the state of Texas.
- **Cohort rates** measure what happens to a cohort of students over a period of time. These rates provide repeated measures of a group of students starting at a specific grade level over time. These measures provide longitudinal data on a specific group of students, including background and contextual data.

The four NCES rates (the averaged freshman graduation rate, the event dropout rate, the status dropout rate, and the status school completion rate) and along with other traditional measures, such as the attrition rate and cohort dropout rates, provide unique information about high school dropouts, completers and graduates.

Though each rate has different meaning and calculation methods, each provides unique information that is important for assessing schools' quality of education and school holding power.

Additional Resources Online

- Supplemental Analysis – "Sluggish Attrition Rate Descent Means 1.9 Million to 3.5 Million More Texas Students May be Lost"
- Look Up Your County – See attrition rates and numbers over the last 10 years
- Tool – Quality School Holding Power Checklist
- OurSchool data portal – see district- and high school-level data
- Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework
- Overview of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, which keeps 98 percent of students in school

- Ideas and Strategies for Action
- Set of principles for policymakers and school leaders
- Classnotes Podcast: "Counting Dropouts"
- Graduation for All E-letter (English/Spanish)
- Frequently Asked Questions

www.idra.org

Also see www.delicious.com/IDRA for related articles and studies (keyword: dropouts)

Texas State Reported School Completion and Dropout Data, 2008-09

by Roy L. Johnson, M.S.

In July 2010, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released its latest dropout and school completion report entitled, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools 2008-09*. This report, as well as the three previous ones, use the dropout definition and calculation methods mandated by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

This latest report shows a 2.0 percent annual dropout rate for grades seven through 12 and

a rate of 2.9 percent for grades nine through 12. According to TEA, the reported number of school dropouts for grades seven through 12 declined from 45,796 in 2007-08 to 40,923 in 2008-09, a decrease of 10.6 percent (see table). The annual dropout rate declined from 2.2 percent in 2007-08 to 2.0 in 2008-09, a decrease of 9.1 percent.

The attrition rate for the class of 2009 (grades nine through 12) was 28.6 percent – the same

as for the class of 2008.

The NCES definition mandated by the 78th Texas Legislature's passage of Senate Bill 186 in 2003 has had a dramatic impact on the dropout counts and dropout rates reported by TEA. Since the use of the NCES dropout definition, the total number of dropouts reported by TEA (for grades seven through 12) increased from 18,290 in 2004-05 to 51,841 in 2005-06 and to 55,306 in 2006-07, but declined to 45,796

Texas Annual Dropout Rates – High School, Reported by the Texas Education Agency

School Year	Dropouts	Students	Annual Dropout Rate (%) By Group, Grades 9-12				
			African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Total
1994-95	26,499	1,058,191	3.3	3.6	1.6	1.5	2.5
1995-96	24,574	1,085,859	2.8	3.2	1.4	1.2	2.2
1996-97	24,414	1,124,991	2.9	3.1	1.3	1.4	2.2
1997-98	24,886	1,145,910	3.3	3.1	1.2	1.2	2.2
1998-99	27,592	1,773,117	2.3	2.3	0.8	0.9	1.6
1999-00	21,439	1,163,883	2.6	2.7	1.0	1.0	1.8
2000-01	16,003	1,180,252	1.8	2.0	0.8	0.7	1.4
2001-02	15,117	1,202,108	1.8	1.9	0.6	0.7	1.3
2002-03	15,665	1,230,483	1.7	1.9	0.6	0.6	1.3
2003-04	15,160	1,252,016	1.4	1.9	0.6	0.6	1.2
2004-05	17,056	1,273,950	1.7	2.0	0.7	0.6	1.3
2005-06*	48,803	1,317,993	5.4	5.2	1.8	1.5	3.7
2006-07*	52,418	1,333,837	5.8	5.4	1.9	1.5	3.9
2007-08*	43,808	1,350,921	5.0	4.4	1.5	1.2	3.2
2008-09	38,720	1,356,249	4.4	3.8	1.3	1.1	2.9

*The 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 dropout rate was calculated using the National Center for Education Statistics dropout definition. Using the NCES definition, a dropout is defined as "a student who is enrolled in public school in grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a General Education Development (GED) certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die." In order to implement the legislative requirements for the computation of dropout rates, TEA had to make changes in some dates affecting dropout status and some changes in groups of students who had not been considered dropouts previously.

Source: Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2008-09*, July 2010.

Texas Annual Dropout Rates – Middle and High School, Reported by the Texas Education Agency

School Year	Dropouts	Students	Annual Dropout Rate (%) By Group, Grades 7-12				
			African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Total
1987-88	91,307	1,363,198	8.4	8.8	5.1	6.1	6.7
1988-89	82,325	1,360,115	7.5	8.1	4.5	4.9	6.1
1989-90	70,040	1,361,494	6.7	7.2	3.5	4.3	5.1
1990-91	53,965	1,372,738	4.8	5.6	2.7	3.1	3.9
1991-92	53,420	1,406,838	4.8	5.5	2.5	2.9	3.8
1992-93	43,402	1,533,197	3.6	4.2	1.7	2.0	2.8
1993-94	40,211	1,576,015	3.2	3.9	1.5	1.7	2.6
1994-95	29,918	1,617,522	2.3	2.7	1.2	1.1	1.8
1995-96	29,207	1,662,578	2.3	2.5	1.1	1.1	1.8
1996-97	26,901	1,705,972	2.0	2.3	1.0	0.9	1.6
1997-98	27,550	1,743,139	2.1	2.3	0.9	1.1	1.6
1998-99	27,592	1,773,117	2.3	2.3	0.8	0.9	1.6
1999-00	23,457	1,794,521	1.8	1.9	0.7	0.7	1.3
2000-01	17,563	1,818,940	1.3	1.4	0.5	0.5	1.0
2001-02	16,622	1,849,680	1.3	1.3	0.4	0.5	0.9
2002-03	17,151	1,891,361	1.2	1.4	0.4	0.4	0.9
2003-04	16,434	1,924,717	1.0	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.9
2004-05	18,290	1,954,752	1.2	1.4	0.5	0.4	0.9
2005-06*	51,841	2,016,470	3.8	3.5	1.3	1.1	2.6
2006-07*	55,306	2,023,570	4.1	3.7	1.3	1.1	2.7
2007-08*	45,796	2,042,203	3.5	3.0	1.1	0.9	2.2
2008-09	40,923	2,060,701	3.1	2.6	0.9	0.8	2.0

*The 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 dropout rate was calculated using the National Center for Education Statistics dropout definition. Using the NCES definition, a dropout is defined as “a student who is enrolled in public school in grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, received a General Education Development (GED) certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die.” In order to implement the legislative requirements for the computation of dropout rates, TEA had to make changes in some dates affecting dropout status and some changes in groups of students who had not been considered dropouts previously.

Source: Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2008-09*, July 2010.

in 2007-08 and 40,923 in 2008-09. From 2004-05 to 2008-09, the number of dropouts increased by 22,633 students or by 123 percent. The dropout count was 2.24 times higher in 2008-09 than in 2004-05.

Of the 40,923 dropouts in the latest report, 2,203 were in grades seven and eight, and

38,720 were in grades nine through 12. The reported seventh through eighth grade dropout rate was 0.3 percent, while the ninth through 12th grade dropout rate was 2.9 percent.

The annual dropout rates for African American students and Hispanic students in grades nine through 12 were three times higher than the

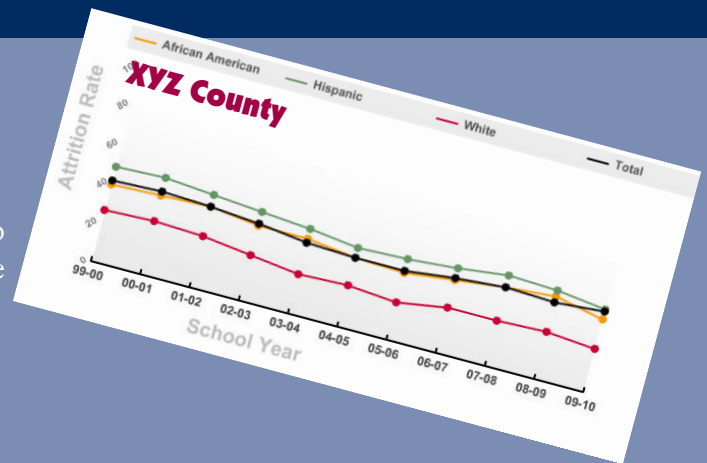
rates for White students. The reported 2008-09 dropout rate for African American students was 3.38 times higher than that of White students, and the rate for Hispanic students was 2.92 times higher than the rate for White students.

Look Up Your Texas County

IDRA is providing dropout trend data at your fingertips.

Go to the IDRA website to see a graph of high school attrition in your county over the last 10 years. You'll also see the numbers of students by race-ethnicity who have been lost from enrollment in your county.

www.idra.org/Research/Attrition/



Though TEA indicates that the dropout and school completion rates reported prior to 2005-06 are not comparable to the present, it is clearly apparent that the use of the national dropout definition exposes the fallacies of dropout counting and reporting in Texas. Schools and our communities at large must be provided accurate and understandable information to improve school holding power in Texas and our nation.

Resources

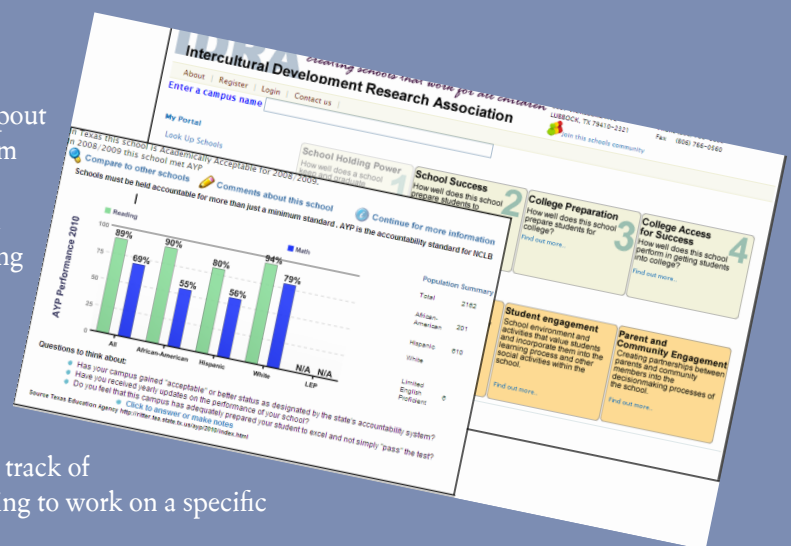
Texas Education Agency. *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2008-09* (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, July 2010).

Get District- and High School-Level Data

Designed to help educators and community members find out how well their high school campus is preparing and graduating students, what factors may be weakening school holding power, and what they can do together to address them.

What's Included...

- Key data to help you determine whether high dropout rates and weak school holding power are a problem for your school.
- Actionable knowledge and key questions to spark conversations and action planning around: teaching quality, curriculum quality, attrition, college readiness, college access and college sending.
- Real-time data collection features via surveys (e.g., to measure parent engagement).
- Social networking features you can use to share data with others and attach charts or graphs, keep track of your own notes, or call a community-school meeting to work on a specific issue.
- Bilingual (Spanish/English) content.



www.idra.org/OurSchool

Graduates, Dropouts and Leaver Codes in Texas

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

As IDRA releases its latest Texas attrition study, we thought it would be useful to re-visit a set of issues that we first raised in 1999. At issue was the Texas Education Agency's creation of a new "leaver" coding system that had the potential of providing much improved state reports on the number of students either graduating from or leaving school before obtaining a high school diploma. "Leavers" are students who leave school for certain reasons, and the codes place those reasons into categories. Some categories of students who leave school are not counted as dropouts.

More than a decade later, we conclude that the promise of obtaining much more accurate and credible high school dropout reports has not yet been realized. And some of the concerns expressed about the potential for misuse of those leaver codes to mask and under-state dropout rates proved to be well-founded.

Concerns Raised in 1999

IDRA presented testimony before the Texas Senate Education Committee on October 12, 1999, stating that the new leaver codes and their related completer and leaver categories had potential for improving reporting of students' status (Cortez, 1999). But if the leaver coding system incorporated and continued flaws that were in the state's earlier dropout reporting process, the new approach would exacerbate rather than improve state practices in this critical area.

IDRA staff outlined a listing of eight "questionable" leaver categories out of a total of 36 that, in our assessment, reduced the accuracy of state and local dropout reports. The testimony also included the related rationale for our objections to some of these new leaver codes and their use.

Simplified Leaver Code System

Based on IDRA's concerns (and those later by other critics), TEA eventually "simplified" the leaver code system and soon after did so again in order to comply as mandated with the NCES

dropout definition. The number of categories was reduced from the high of 36 codes to the 14 used to calculate completion and dropout rates in 2009, the latest year for which state rates were calculated (TEA, 2010).

While the reduction of the number of leaver codes suggests that the state seems to be closing the number of loopholes available to artificially reduce dropout rates, what has actually happened is the collapsing or combining of old sub-categories into single larger categories. This essentially is like taking a number of small baskets and putting them all into one larger basket.

An example of this was the collapsing of distinct leaver codes ("Enroll in a Texas public school," "Enroll in a private school in Texas," "Enroll in school outside of Texas," "No intent, but documented enrollment in a Texas public school," "No intent, but documented enrollment in a Texas private school," "No intent, but documented enrollment in a school outside of Texas") into a smaller number of re-labeled leaver codes ("Withdrew from/left to enroll in a Texas public school," "Withdrew from/left to enroll in a Texas private school," "Withdrew from/left to enroll in a school outside of Texas"). Aggregating the numbers in the various older categories revealed leaver numbers that were very similar to the totals reflected in the new collapsed leaver codes.

Lack of Verification

In addition, IDRA remains concerned about the continued use of codes that *make implications* but are not based on hard evidence that students are actually re-enrolled in another school.

The agency leaver label for students believed to have re-enrolled in some other school initially read, "Intent to enroll..." Persistent criticism of that label led to a change in wording that now reads, "Withdrew from/left school to enroll." Unfortunately, the new label changes nothing about the fact that confirmation of actual re-

enrollment (in the form of written verification by the receiving school) still is not required.

Review of TEA's leaver documentation guidelines indicates that if school officials are told by parents or guardians (or students themselves who are over 18) or receive an e-mail communication indicating that the student is withdrawing "to enroll" in another school, that information is considered sufficient to place the student in that leaver category, though actual re-enrollment may never occur. This is analogous to a school official being assured that the school's money is being deposited in another bank without requiring any official bank deposit information to confirm that the action actually took place.

In the case of students identified as "returned to home country," the requirements simply state: "Use for students who are leaving the United States to return to their home country. A student may be leaving with or without family members to live with his or her family, immediate, or extended, in the home country. The student's citizenship is not relevant in assigning this code. This code can also be used for foreign exchange students."

Note that nothing in that wording requires any verification of actual re-enrollment of such students in the so-called home country.

IDRA has long insisted that lack of credible evidence on student enrollment permitted in the Texas dropout reporting and counting system facilitates – and even encourages – the "playing" of the leaver code system by both the state and local systems, who share concerns about how high dropout statistics look and how they impact school accountability ratings.

Other states use different approaches that require more specific documentation, as IDRA discovered in its analysis of Arizona dropout reporting. There, any student whose re-enrollment cannot be verified in writing is placed in a category called "status unknown," and those

students are counted as dropouts unless their re-enrollment in another school is verified. (IDRA, 2002)

Rise in High School Home Schooling

More recently, critics of the Texas leaver code system have noted a disturbing increase in the number of high school leavers reported as “home schooled.” In 1998, according to TEA reports, a total of 8,632 students “withdrew for home schooling.” That number increased to 11,086 students in 1999 – a 28.4 percent increase in a single year. The large increase in home schooled students did not trigger any reported inquiry into the issue on the part of the state agency.

In 2000, the number of students reported as home schooled had increased to 12,721. A similar dramatic increase in home school leavers was noted for the span between the 2005 and 2007 school years, when home school leavers increased from 14,138 to more than 20,000 – a 45 percent increase in that category over a two-year span.

In its most recent secondary school completion and dropout report released in July 2010, TEA listed a total of 20,948 students as home schooled – an increase of 142 percent from 1997. It also is revealing that the reported number of home school leavers account for 23.3 percent of all leavers reported in this last state summary. (TEA, 2010)

Documentation requirements for home school leavers as specified by TEA are divided between those who have been out of school for more than 10 days and those that fall within the 10-day window. In its definition and use segment relating to home schooling in the system requirements, the agency states: “Student was withdrawn from school or left school, and parent or guardian or qualified student indicates that at the time of the withdrawal that the student will be home schooled or, when contacted by the district, that the student is being home schooled. *The district is not required to obtain evidence that the program being provided meets educational standards*” (italics added).

In its statement related to documentation requirements for this leaver code TEA specifies:

“A district can document either that at

TEA Leaver Data from Secondary School Completion and Dropout Reports, 1997-98 through 2007-08

School Year	Leavers Reported	Change From Prior Year	Percent Change
1997-98	8,632		
1998-99	11,086	2,454	28.4%
1999-00	12,271	1,185	10.7%
2000-01	13,676	1,405	11.4%
2001-02	13,345	-331	-2.4%
2002-03	12,884	-461	-3.5%
2003-04	13,528	644	5.0%
2004-05	14,138	610	4.5%
2005-06	16,811	2,673	18.9%
2006-07	22,622	5,811	34.6%
2007-08	20,948	-1,674	-7.4%

Data Sources: Texas Education Agency – *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools: 2008-09* (July 2010); *2007-08* (July 2009); *2004-05* (July 2006); *2003-04* (August 2005); *2001-02* (August 2003).

the time of withdrawal the student will be home schooled (“intent to enroll in home schooling”) or that the student is actually being home schooled. Therefore, documentation requirements for Code 60 are divided into specifications for documentation obtained within 10 days after a student stops attending, and documentation obtained more than 10 days after a student stops attending.

“If documentation is obtained within 10 days of the last day the student attended school:

“Acceptable documentation of intent to be home schooled can consist of a written, signed statement from a parent/guardian or qualified student that the student will be home schooled. For example, acceptable documentation of intent to enroll is a copy of the withdrawal form, completed at the time the student quits attending school, and signed and dated by the parent/guardian or qualified student and an authorized representative of the school district. The withdrawal form should indicate that the student will be home schooled. The original signature of the parent/guardian or qualified student must appear on the same page of the withdrawal

form as the destination.

“Other acceptable documentation of intent to enroll is written documentation of an oral statement by the parent/guardian or qualified student made within 10 days of the time the student quits attending school in the district, signed and dated by an authorized representative of the district.” (TEA, 2010)

In its requirements describing “Completeness of Documentation” TEA states: “Withdrawal of documentation shall be considered incomplete without a date, signatures and destination. Documentation will not be deemed insufficient when information is missing because the parent or parents refused to provide the information requested by the district. The district should document at the time of the conversation that the information was requested, and the parent refused to provide it.”

A glaring omission is any requirement that actual verification that a student is enrolled somewhere and that the student is being provided some kind of acceptable instruction.

The ease of excluding students classified as home school leavers, including instructions that the district need not verify what kind of educational program is being offered to such

Exit Reasons for District Leavers, Texas Public Schools, 2008-09

Code ^a	Leaver reason	Other leavers		All leavers	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Graduated or received an out-of-state GED ^b					
01*	Graduated from a campus in the district or charter	— ^c	—	264,275	66.8
85*	Graduated outside Texas before entering Texas public school, then left Texas public school	42	0.1	42	<0.1
86*	Completed GED outside Texas	104	0.1	104	<0.1
Moved to other educational setting					
24*	Entered college early to pursue associate's or bachelor's degree	763	0.9	763	0.2
60*	Withdrew for home schooling	20,948	23.3	20,948	5.3
66*	Removed from the district by Child Protective Services	194	0.2	194	0.1
81*	Withdrew from/left school to enroll in Texas private school	12,516	13.9	12,516	3.2
82*	Withdrew from/left school to enroll in school outside Texas	37,718	41.9	37,718	9.5
87*	Withdrew from/left school to enroll in a university high school diploma program authorized by the State Board of Education	214	0.2	214	0.1
Withdrawn by district					
78*	Expelled for criminal behavior under TEC ^d §37.007 and cannot return	526	0.6	526	0.1
83*	Withdrawn for nonresidence at the time of enrollment, falsification of enrollment, or failure to provide proof of identification or immunization records	1,161	1.3	1,161	0.3
Other reasons					
03*	Deceased	611	0.7	611	0.2
16*	Returned to home country	15,319	17.0	15,319	3.9
98	Other (reason unknown or not listed above)	—	—	40,972	10.4
All leaver reasons		90,116	100	395,363	100

Note. The numbers of graduates, dropouts, and other leavers reflect all records received from districts and loaded into agency databases. The numbers do not match figures at the state level shown elsewhere in this report. Parts may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

^aCodes with an asterisk (*) are not included in the calculation of the dropout rate used for accountability purposes. ^bGeneral Educational Development certificate. ^cGraduates (Code 01) and dropouts (Code 98) are not counted as other leavers. ^dTexas Education Code.

Sources: Texas Education Agency, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2008-09*.

students placed in that category invites abuse of that classification.

The *Houston Chronicle* reports that some schools are reporting students as home schooled to reduce dropout counts (Radcliffe, 2010a). Others have observed that parents have been

advised that problems associated with truancy and related court fines could be avoided if the students were designated as being home schooled.

In the face of such allegations, TEA stated in September that it is conducting an audit by

contacting a “random sampling of students to validate that they intended to home-school when they left middle or high school” (Radcliffe, 2010b).

Continuing over-utilization of leaver categories like “withdrew to enroll out of state,” “returned to home country” and “home school” contrib-

utes to reported state dropout rates that greatly differ from most non-state sources and create credibility issues for both the state agency and local school systems on this issue.

Conclusion

IDRA latest attrition study does suggest however, that the ongoing focus on the dropout/graduation issue has seemed to contribute to a slow decline in Texas attrition rates, particularly over the last few years. No doubt public scrutiny and growing concerns with high dropout rates, coupled with IDRA's and other studies that have tracked data, have helped spur local efforts to keep more students enrolled.

While an improvement over prior rates, the number of Texas students lost by schools remains unacceptably high and, at current rates of improvement, will require almost a quarter of a century to resolve (Montes, 2010).

Research has established that there are a number of strategies that schools can implement to improve persistence and graduation rates. What has been missing has been leadership and public will needed to implement those effective strategies on a larger scale.

Specific recommendations for addressing the latest leaver related concerns include the following.

- Require that for all students who are classified as leavers in categories that suggest that they have re-enrolled in another school (be it private, in state, or out of state), the school must have proof of re-enrollment – in writing – from the receiving school.
- Require that for students whose status cannot be confirmed, the state should create a “status unknown” leaver code with those students counted as dropouts until re-enrollment can be established.
- Follow through with the TEA investigation into the home school leaver coding issue and assess: (a) whether or not home schooled students are being provided some form of acceptable instruction that prepares them for college and career, and (b) what happened



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during those years when any specific leaver code reflects a disproportionate increase over a one- or two-year span.

The state's school leaver system is an opportunity to have more precise student-, district- and state-level reporting on high school graduation and – more importantly – to account for the array of students who do not earn a regular diploma for a number of different reasons. But it will only work if all students are accounted for.

IDRA President, Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel presented testimony before the Texas State Board of Education in 2002 on this same subject, stating: “It is critical that the state upgrade its own dropout reporting process. Whether referred to as ‘leavers’ or ‘dropouts,’ far too many Texas students are leaving our schools without ever earning their high school diplomas. This state can continue to delude itself by resorting to tricks, like cumbersome definitions and unwieldy reporting and counting systems, or we can simplify the process so that it is both understandable and believable.

Texas needs diplomas, not delusions.”

Resources

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IDRA is an independent, private non-profit organization, directed by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., dedicated to creating schools that work for all children. As a vanguard leadership development and research team for more than three decades, IDRA has worked with people to create self-renewing schools that value and empower all children, families and communities. IDRA conducts research and development activities, creates, implements and administers innovative education programs and provides teacher, administrator, and parent training and technical assistance.

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