



Colorado Department of Education – Communications Office
201 East Colfax Ave.
Room 103
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-866-3898
Fax: 303-866-6938

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Graduation Rate Increases, Dropout Rate Declines

Data released today by the Colorado Department of Education showed the statewide graduation rate for the class of 2009 increased 0.7 percentage points to 74.6 percent.

The graduation rate stood at 73.9 percent in 2008, 75 percent in 2007 and at 74.1 percent in 2006.

“It is heartening to know schools in Colorado produced over a thousand more graduates last year than the year before. That is a reflection of the hard work by students, teachers and administrators and it is commendable,” said Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones. “But we know we must redouble our efforts to ensure more students are graduating with a high school diploma that is their ticket to success in the workforce or in college.”

Commissioner Jones urged school districts to tap the services available through the department’s Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement, created by House Bill 09-1243.

“We are seeing increased concern for this issue at the local level,” said Judith Martinez, principal consultant with the Colorado Department of Education, who leads the dropout prevention office. “There is greater awareness of the high cost of dropping out—both the cost to the students in terms of reduced wages and unemployment and the cost to the community.”

A study by the National Center for School Engagement reports that one high school dropout can be expected to cost in excess of \$200,000 in additional public support over the course of his or her life, said Martinez.

Commissioner Jones noted in particular strong graduation rate increases posted by several large school districts, notably Greeley-Evans School District 6 (up 4.3 percentage points to 70 percent); Jefferson County Schools (up 4.2 percent to 81.3 percent); Denver Public Schools (up 4.1 percent), Mesa County Valley School District 51 (up 3.3 percent) and Colorado Springs School District 11 (up 3.2 percent).

Individual district data is available on CDE's SchoolView site: www.schoolview.org. You may also access SchoolView from CDE's main page at www.cde.state.co.us.

Statewide, there were 63,585 students in the membership base of the 2008-2009 graduating class. These are the students who entered ninth grade in the 2005-2006 school year or transferred into this class during tenth, eleventh or twelfth grade and could have graduated as part of the class of 2009.

From that group, 47,459 graduated. While the raw total of students graduating increased by more than nearly 1,200 additional students over 2008, the membership base also was larger by 974 students. For complete graduation and dropout statistics visit http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_stats.htm

About the Graduation Rate

The graduation rate formula begins with each school and district's entering ninth-grade class. This cohort of students is tracked and adjusted for verified transfers in and out of the district through the end of the 12th grade year to determine the final membership base for the graduating class. The graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who receive a diploma by the adjusted membership base.

Legislation approved in 2005 changed the way the statewide graduation rate is calculated. Changes were made in the way the state counts students who leave a Colorado school district to pursue a GED (General Educational Development) certificate and to the process of verifying transfers out of a district.

Previously, students bound for a GED program outside their district were treated as transfers and were removed from both the numerator and denominator of the graduation rate calculation. Under the new formula (used for the first time with 2006-2007 data), students who

opt for a GED program remain in the membership base (or graduation rate denominator). While students who receive a GED certificate are counted as completers, and they are not considered graduates and thereby reduce the graduation rate for their graduating class.

Racial/Ethnic Groups

Among ethnic groups, the graduation rate for the 2008-2009 school year was 55.9 percent for Native Americans (down from 57.5 percent in the previous year); 85.7 percent for Asian students (up from 82.8 percent); 64.3 percent for black students (up from 64.1 percent); 57.8 percent for Hispanic students (up from 55.6 percent); and 82.3 percent for white students (up from 81.6 percent).

The “graduation gap” between minority and white students improved slightly in the 2008-2009 school year. The overall graduation rate for all minority students was 61.3 percent for the class of 2009 compared to 79.2 percent for white students—a difference of 17.9 percentage points. In the 2007-2008 school year, this gap was 19.1 percentage points.

Note:

Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, data that tracks racial breakdowns will be reported following new federal race and ethnicity categories. Please see accompanying a related news release from 2009:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/download/PDF/20090528raceandethnicity.pdf>

Male/Female

Statewide, the female student graduation rate for 2008-2009 school year was 78.0 percent, up from 77.4 percent, and the male graduation rate was 71.4 percent, up from 70.7 percent the previous year.

Dropout Rate

The 2008-2009 annual dropout rate improved to 3.6 percent, .2 percentage points better than the 3.8 percent rate posted in 2007-2008. In 2006-2007, the statewide dropout rate stood at 4.4 percent.

The dropout rate reflects the percentage of all students enrolled in grades 7-12 who leave school during a single school year. It is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts by a membership base, which includes all students who were in membership any time during the year. Between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, the number of students counted as dropouts declined from 15,524 to 14,975.

Completer Rate

The completer rate increased to 79.2 percent from 78.8 percent, up .4 percentage points. Completers are all graduates plus those students who are not considered graduates but who receive a certificate, a designation of high school completion or a GED certificate.

More About the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement:

The work of the Office of Dropout Prevention is to provide support to local education providers to enhance and strengthen efforts to prevent students from dropping out and re-engaging out of school youth.

The office is in the process of identifying priority schools and districts that could benefit from additional services and support from CDE. The priority schools and districts will be identified by June 2010.

In addition, the office is working in partnership with the governor's office and community-based efforts, such as the Colorado Graduates Initiative to address barriers to graduation and advance best practices and strategies across the state. One of the first steps the office is taking is an analysis of state data to gain a better picture of how districts re-engage students who have dropped out. This information is scheduled to be release in March 2010.

Progress to Date

In November 2008, CDE released a review of the statutes that address the needs of dropout students. This review includes analyses of the effectiveness of current programs created under statute, the state agency or agencies charged with oversight of the programs and the funds appropriated for these programs.

- Since 2008, CDE has worked collaboratively with the Colorado Graduates Initiative, which is being coordinated by the Colorado Children's Campaign and aims to strengthen existing dropout prevention efforts, obtain a deeper understanding of the challenges in this area, and develop systemic solutions.
- In October 2009, CDE received State Fiscal Stabilization Funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to launch the office of dropout prevention and student re-engagement as part of the Prevention Initiatives unit.

For more information, contact Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

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