

**Three-Year Follow-up of a
Texas Public High School Cohort**

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Most students finish high school within four years, so many high school completion rates are designed to show the number who graduate within that period. Some believe that, in addition to graduates, students who earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate can be considered high school completers. Further, some methods for calculating completion rates also consider students who are still continuing their high school education at the end of four years to be completers; continuing students have not dropped out and may eventually earn their diplomas (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 1996).

Since 2000, TEA has reported all three of these groups of students-graduates, GED recipients, and continuing students-in the longitudinal completion/student status rate for the district and state Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports. Beginning in 2004, a longitudinal completion rate will be an indicator used to rate Texas public school and district performance. In addition, the 77th legislature in 2001 required the TEA to begin reporting the completion rate of students who take more than four years to complete high school (Senate Bill 702).

This report is intended to provide information about students who are still continuing high school after their expected graduation year and to inform the decision whether to include this student group in the definition of "high school completion" for Texas public school accountability purposes. After giving a brief overview of the concept and method of computing a longitudinal completion rate, this paper presents the longitudinal rates of two cohorts of students three years after their expected graduation years. For further information about dropout and completion rates, please see *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 1999-00* (TEA, 2001b).

What is a longitudinal completion rate and why compute one?

A longitudinal completion rate is the percentage of students from a class of ninth graders or seventh graders who complete their high school education by their anticipated graduation date. A longitudinal dropout rate is the percentage of students from the same class who drop out before completing their high school education.

A longitudinal rate can give a more complete picture than an annual rate of what happens during a student's high school career. For example, an annual dropout rate is useful for providing a snapshot view of the dropout problem because it measures what happens over a one-year period of time, whereas the longitudinal completion and dropout rates follow students as they progress through high school.

Calculating longitudinal rates requires tracking a class, or cohort, of students over a period of years, typically from the time they enter Grade 9 or Grade 7, until the fall following their anticipated graduation date. The longitudinal completion rate is the number of students who "complete" divided by the total number of students in the cohort. As mentioned above, "completion" can be defined in any number of ways. The number of graduates could be used to represent those who complete, or the combined number of graduates and students who have earned GEDs could be used. The rate may also include students who remain in high school after the class graduates.

Longitudinal rates reported by different organizations may differ because they use: (1) different starting grades in the calculation; (2) different definitions of a school completer or dropout; (3) different definitions of a cohort or class of students; or (4) different underlying methods to calculate the rates. Few organizations have the data and computer capacity to track individual students over a number of years, so longitudinal rates are often estimated based on state-level data or sample data from surveys.

What is a 4-year completion rate?

A four-year completion rate follows a cohort of first-time ninth graders through their expected graduation year four years later. Again, completion can mean graduating, earning a GED, and/or continuing in high school.

Why follow students 3 years beyond their expected high school graduation date?

Some students take longer than four years to finish high school. According to the Census Bureau, in 2000, 21 percent of 18 and 19 year olds were still enrolled in high school (Census Bureau, 2002). One reason some students take longer to finish is because they have been retained. In 1999-00, 17.7 percent of Texas ninth grade students were retained in grade (TEA, 2001a). While some of these students accumulate the credits to catch up to their peers, many remain a year behind throughout high school and graduate later than students who were not retained.

Extending a completion rate three years beyond the expected graduation date also allows students who drop out time to reconsider their decisions and return to school to earn high school diplomas or alternative credentials such as GEDs. For example, more than half of dropouts from a 1990 sophomore cohort had either completed or re-enrolled in school within two years of their scheduled graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). One national study found that 44 percent of dropouts later earned a high school diploma or GED (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Methods

Cohort

Student attendance data from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) are used to build each cohort of students for the longitudinal student status rate in Texas. Each cohort is identified by the starting grade and anticipated year of graduation. For this paper, two cohorts of students were examined. Members of the class of 1996 Grade 9 cohort were identified as students who attended Grade 9 for the first time in the 1992-93 school year. Members of the class of 1997 Grade 9 cohort were identified as students who attended Grade 9 for the first time in the 1993-94 school year. Members who transferred out of the Texas public school system during the time period covered were removed from the cohort. Students who transferred into the system on grade level were added to the cohort.

Each student can belong to one and only one Grade 9 cohort. That is, cohort membership does not transfer from one cohort to another over time. Students who are retained in grade or who skip a grade remain members of the cohort they first joined.

Any student for whom one of the designated outcomes could be determined was counted in the class. This included students who began Grade 9 together, as well as students who transferred into Texas public schools and joined the Grade 9 cohort. A student whose final status could not be determined was removed from the status counts.

TEA Reporting. The longitudinal student status rate calculated by TEA contains four components that add to 100 percent. The four components are graduates, GED recipients, continuing students, and dropouts. Students who transfer out of the Texas public school system are removed from the rate.

Student Status

To determine the statuses of students in the class of 1996 and 1997 Grade 9 cohorts, cohort members were tracked through the fall semester following their anticipated graduation date. This made it possible to identify those who continued in school after their class graduated. The cohort members who were not graduates were then tracked three additional years to determine each student's status in the fall of 1999 and 2000, respectively.

The longitudinal student status rate focuses on selected long-term student outcomes over a period of years. Each member of the cohort was assigned a status by the fall after anticipated graduation.

Graduates. A student is classified as a graduate in the year in which he or she is reported in PEIMS as a graduate.

GED recipients. GED tests are given at over 200 centers throughout the state in school districts, colleges and universities, and education service centers. Tests are given year-round and results transmitted electronically to TEA. Receipt of a GED certificate is reported as soon as all tests are scored as passing.

Continuing high school. A student is classified as continuing if he or she is reported as enrolled in a Texas public school in the fall after his or her anticipated graduation.

Dropouts. A student is classified as a dropout if this is the final status recorded for the student in the PEIMS database. Neither dropping out nor leaving necessarily determines the final status of a student. The status of a student who drops out or leaves will change if he or she returns and graduates, obtains a GED, or continues in school.

Calculating the longitudinal student status rate

To determine longitudinal student status rates, the number of students in each status category (graduation, GED, school continuation, and dropout) is divided by the total number of students in the class. Because the total number of students in the class is used to calculate each rate, the sum of the rates is always 100 percent.

Calculating a follow-up to the 4-year longitudinal student status rate

The follow-up to the 4-year longitudinal student status rate has been calculated for two cohorts of students: first-time ninth graders who began high school in 1992-93 and first-time ninth graders who began high school in 1993-94. Those in the 1992-93 cohort were expected to graduate in

1996; the three-year follow-up tracked them an additional three years until 1999. The 1993-94 cohort was followed four years until their expected graduation in 1997 and three additional years until 2000.

Results for the 1992-93 Cohort

The group of students who began ninth grade for the first time in 1992-93 was followed through their expected graduation year in 1996. At that time, 74.5 percent of the class of 1996 had graduated, 6.1 percent had received a GED, and 12.1 percent had dropped out (Table 1). More than seven percent or 15,330 students were still in high school.

Table 1
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 1996 for the Class of 1996

<u>Class</u>		<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
212,523	100.0	158,426	74.5	13,059	6.1	15,330	7.2	25,708	12.1

In 1999, three years later and seven years after the students began Grade 9 in 1992-93, most had graduated or received GEDs (Table 2). Because some of those who were continuing high school in 1996 had transferred out of the Texas public school system by 1999, the total number with final statuses decreased from 212,523 in 1996 to 210,019 in 1999.

Table 2
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 1999 for
Students Who Began Grade 9 in 1992-93

<u>Class</u>		<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
210,019	100.0	167,846	79.9	14,176	6.7	304	0.1	27,693	13.2

The following table shows the changes in final status for all students and student groups between 1996 and 1999.

Table 3
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 1996 and Fall 1999 for
Students Who Began Grade 9 in 1992-93, All Students and Student Groups

	Year	Class	<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
			Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
African American	1996	27,200	18,849	69.3	1,443	5.3	2,738	10.1	4,170	15.3
	1999	26,485	20,138	76.0	1,649	6.2	55	0.2	4,643	17.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	1996	5,836	5,014	85.9	139	2.4	294	5.0	389	6.7
	1999	5,763	5,189	90.0	151	2.6	5	0.1	418	7.3
Hispanic	1996	68,532	43,926	64.1	4,165	6.1	8,242	12.0	12,199	17.8
	1999	67,065	48,974	73.0	4,678	7.0	128	0.2	13,285	19.8
Native American	1996	506	360	71.1	41	8.1	36	7.1	69	13.6
	1999	502	383	76.3	43	8.6	0	0.0	76	15.1
White	1996	108,807	90,275	83.0	7,093	6.5	4,020	3.7	7,419	6.8
	1999	108,576	93,160	85.8	7,482	6.9	116	0.1	7,818	7.2
Economically disadvantaged	1996	55,302	35,463	64.1	3,351	6.1	5,978	10.8	10,510	19.0
	1999	54,275	39,208	72.2	3,656	6.7	163	0.3	11,248	20.7
All students	1996	212,523	158,426	74.5	13,059	6.1	15,330	7.2	25,708	12.1
	1999	210,019	167,846	79.9	14,176	6.7	304	0.1	27,693	13.2

Results for the 1993-94 Cohort

Results for the 1993-94 cohort were similar to those for the 1992-93 cohort. The group of students who began ninth grade for the first time in 1993-94 was followed through their expected graduation year in 1997. At that time, 77.1 percent of the class of 1997 had graduated, 5.8 percent had received a GED, and 9.9 percent had dropped out (Table 4). More than seven percent or 15,648 students were still in high school.

Table 4
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 1997 for the Class of 1997

<u>Class</u>		<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
218,293	100.0	168,304	77.1	12,763	5.8	15,648	7.2	21,578	9.9

In 2000, three years later and seven years after the students began Grade 9 in 1993-94, most had graduated or received a GED (Table 5). Because some of those who were continuing high school in 1997 had transferred out of the Texas public school system 2000, the total number with a final status decreased from 218,293 in 1997 to 216,775 in 2000.

Table 5
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 2000 for
Students Who Began Grade 9 in 1993-94

<u>Class</u>		<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
216,775	100.0	178,562	82.4	13,831	6.4	320	0.1	24,062	11.1

The following table shows the changes in final status for all students and student groups between 1997 and 2000.

Table 6
Longitudinal Student Status Rates as of Fall 1997 and Fall 2000 for
Students Who Began Grade 9 in 1993-94, All Students and Student Groups

	Year	Class	<u>Graduated</u>		<u>Received GED</u>		<u>Continued high school</u>		<u>Dropped out</u>	
			Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
African American	1997	28,913	20,787	71.9	1,471	5.1	2,873	9.9	3,782	13.1
	2000	28,464	22,296	78.3	1,669	5.9	62	0.2	4,437	15.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	1997	6,009	5,262	87.6	142	2.4	330	5.5	275	4.6
	2000	5,968	5,482	91.9	161	2.7	5	0.1	320	5.4
Hispanic	1997	70,793	47,623	67.3	3,987	5.6	8,373	11.8	10,810	15.3
	2000	69,798	53,060	76.0	4,458	6.4	151	0.2	12,129	17.4
Native American	1997	500	374	74.8	35	7.0	42	8.4	49	9.8
	2000	495	401	81.0	38	7.7	2	0.4	54	10.9
White	1997	112,078	94,258	84.1	7,128	6.4	4,030	3.6	6,662	5.9
	2000	112,050	97,323	86.9	7,505	6.7	100	0.1	7,122	6.4
Economically disadvantaged	1997	58,481	39,801	68.1	3,459	5.9	6,219	10.6	9,002	15.4
	2000	57,853	44,040	76.1	3,762	6.5	146	0.3	9,905	17.1
All students	1997	218,293	168,304	77.1	12,763	5.8	15,648	7.2	21,578	9.9
	2000	216,775	178,562	82.4	13,831	6.4	320	0.1	24,062	11.1

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