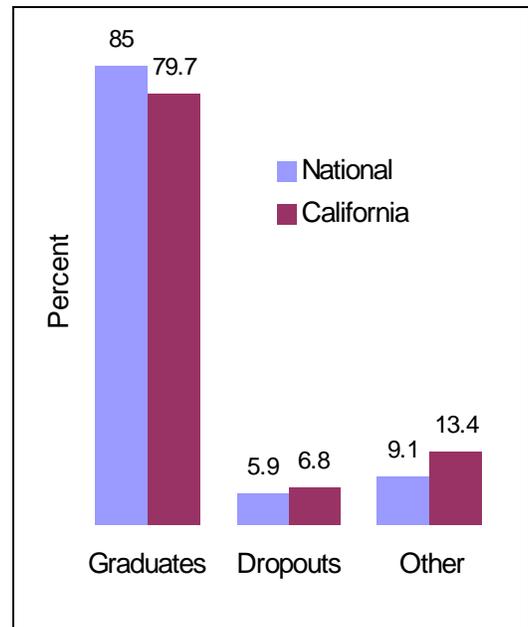


Graduation and Dropout Rates for 2002 High School Sophomores

By Susan Rotermund

Two of the most important indicators of educational performance at the high school level are the dropout rate and the graduation rate; yet there is a great deal of controversy about how best to measure these rates.¹

This brief compares California's estimated graduation and dropout rates with those of the nation as a whole. The estimates are based on data from the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), a study of 16,373 high school sophomores who were enrolled in a national sample of public and private U.S. high schools in 2002.² The present analysis is based on a sub-sample of 14,189 students who were in the sophomore cohort in the base-year of the study and for whom transcript data were available. Graduation and dropout rates cited here are based on transcript data collected in 2005, the year after most students graduated.³



The data show that 85 percent of U.S. students enrolled in the tenth grade in 2002 had graduated within one year of their expected graduation rate in 2004. The data also show that 5.9 percent of the students had dropped out and another 9.1 percent had either transferred, left for health reasons, received a GED certificate, withdrew, were dismissed, or were incarcerated.

The data show that California had a lower graduation rate and higher dropout rate compared to the nation as a whole. In California 79.7 percent of the sophomore cohort graduated, 6.8 percent had dropped out and 13.4 percent had another outcome. It should be kept in mind that these graduation and dropout rates only cover the last two years of high school—some students drop out before the spring of 10th grade—so these figures understate the dropout rate and overstate the graduation rate for an entering 9th grade cohort.

¹ See, for example: Pinkus, L. (2006) *Who's counted? Who's counting? Understanding high school graduation rates*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education; Mishel, L. & Roy, J. (2006) *Rethinking high school graduation rates and trends*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

² See: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/els2002/>

³ The rates were based on the transcript indicated outcome variable (FITROUT) and weighted with the transcript cohort weight (FITRSCWT). Students who died and whose status could not be determined were excluded from the analysis.