

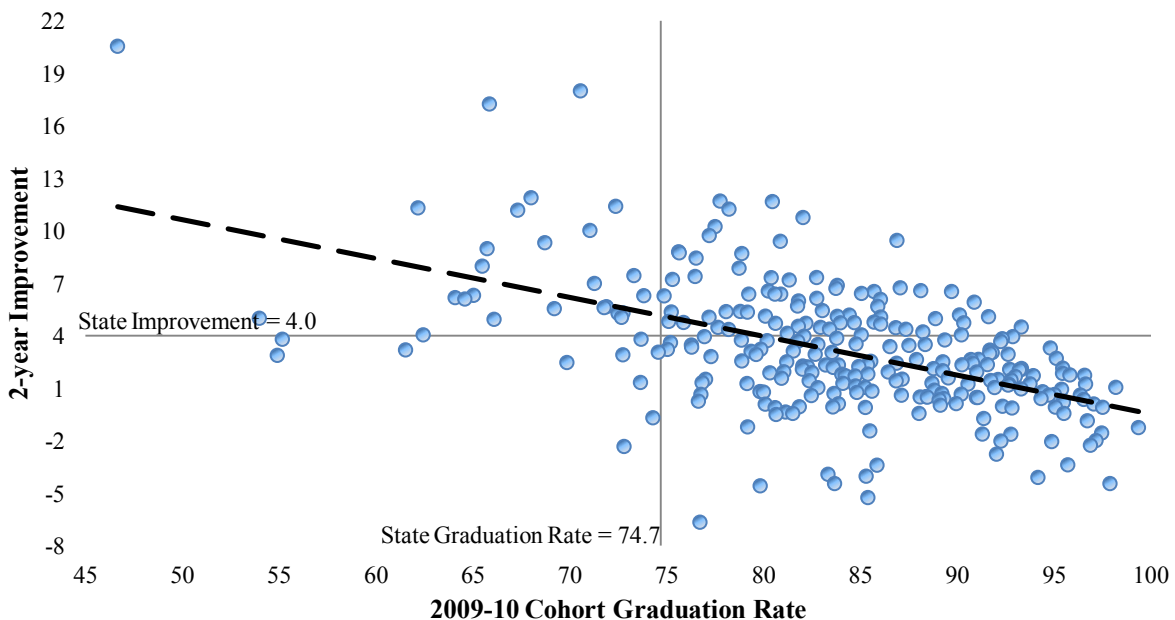
California School Districts with Improving Graduation Rates

By Lauren Taylor

Between the 2009-10 and 2011-12 school years, California’s official (4-year cohort) graduation rate increased by four percentage points, from 74.7 to 78.7 percent.¹ But how widespread was this increase among California school districts? Which districts showed the greatest/least improvement? To address these questions, this brief compares the 2-year improvement of graduation rates among 271 of the largest high school and unified school districts in the state.

Figure 1 shows each district’s two-year improvement rate against their starting graduation rate in 2009-10. The axes are labeled with the state’s two-year improvement rate (4 percentage points) and 2009-10 cohort graduation rate (74.7%). The trend line indicates the correlation between the districts’ initial graduation rates and the amount of improvement made over the next two years. The correlation is -0.54, which indicates that districts with lower initial graduation rates made the greatest improvement in their rates, while districts with higher graduation rates made less improvement since they had less improvement to make.

Figure 1. 2-year Improvement Value with 2009-10 Cohort Graduation Rate²



¹ See CDRP Statistical Brief 16 (August 2013) for a detailed explanation of California’s 4-year cohort graduation rate: http://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu/pubs_statbriefs.htm

² An interactive version of this graph can be found at: http://public.tableausoftware.com/views/StatBrief17/Dashboard1?:embed=y&:display_count=no (values may be different than those displayed in this brief due to continual updates to the state database)

Among the 271 districts, more than 50% of the districts had improved their graduation rate by at least 2 percentage points, with 13 of the districts improving their rate by 10 or more percentage points. Only 14% of the districts had a decline in their rate. Table 1 displays the top 13 improving districts along with three other indicators of improvement: (1) the 2-year graduation rate improvement among ELL students; (2) the difference (residual) between the actual graduation rate in 2011-12 and the predicted graduation rate based on the districts' demographics;³ (3) the 5-year improvement in API scores.

Table 1. Top 13 School Districts with 2-year Graduation Rates, plus Additional Statistics

District	Number of Schools within District 2011-12	9th - 12th Grade Enrollment 2011-12	Grad Rate 2009-10	Grad Rate 2011-12	2-year Grad Change	2-year ELL Grad Change	Residual	5-year API Change*
STATE		1,984,774	74.7	78.70	4.00	5.50		63
Barstow Unified	3	1,752	46.65	67.20	20.55	31.13	-10.03	85
Fullerton Joint Union High	8	14,782	71.00	88.55	18.00	44.56	2.30	51
Victor Valley Union High	6	11,887	65.85	83.10	17.25	22.31	12.76	46
Sacramento City Unified	14	13,735	68.00	79.89	11.89	11.75	4.43	51
Hacienda la Puente Unified	8	6,876	77.76	89.46	11.70	11.64	-2.22	76
Azusa Unified	3	3,110	80.46	92.13	11.67	10.45	6.93	79
Tulare Joint Union High	6	5,237	72.37	83.77	11.40	19.51	-1.34	82
San Bernardino City Unified	15	16,141	62.16	73.47	11.31	7.02	-0.77	84
Val Verde Unified	5	6,030	78.22	89.46	11.24	10.15	9.85	94
Rialto Unified	6	8,326	67.31	78.49	11.18	16.68	-0.62	82
Merced Union High	7	10,292	82.04	92.80	10.76	14.95	6.87	106
Woodland Joint Unified	3	3,129	77.50	87.74	10.24	13.29	-0.96	58
Lodi Unified	10	9,363	71.04	81.06	10.02	15.58	-0.30	53

Of the top 13 improving districts, eight—Barstow, Fullerton, Victor Valley, Tulare, Rialto, Merced, Woodland, and Lodi—showed greater improvement in their English Learner graduation rate than their overall improvement. Only six of the top improving districts—Fullerton, Victor Valley, Sacramento City, Azusa, Val Verde, and Merced—had graduation rates in 2011-12 that were better than expected (indicated by a positive residual) given their demographics. Finally, eight of the top improving districts—Barstow, Hacienda la Puente, Azusa, Tulare, San Bernardino, Val Verde, Rialto, and Merced—showed greater improvement in their API over 5 years than the overall state average. The variation in these indicators of improvement demonstrates that districts should not be judged on a single metric, but rather multiple metrics should be used to evaluate how well and in what areas a district is improving.

³ For an explanation, see CDRP Statistical Brief 15 (January 2012): http://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu/pubs_statbriefs.htm and updated figures at: <http://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu/graphics.htm>