

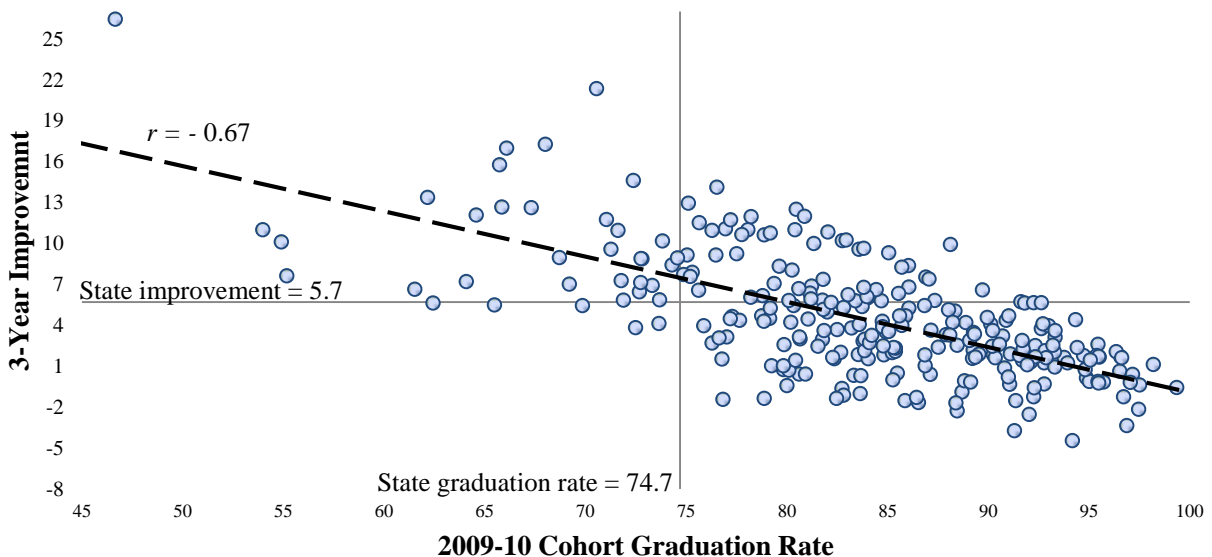
An Updated Analysis of California School Districts with Improving Graduation Rates

By Cameron Sublett

Over the last four years, California's 4-year cohort graduation rate has improved from 74.7 percent to 80.4 percent, an increase of 5.7 percentage points.¹ A previous California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) statistical brief² provided a detailed analysis of the 2-year improvement in cohort graduation rates by school district from 2009-10 to 2011-12. The current brief updates this analysis by examining the 3-year improvement in cohort graduations rates among 264 of the largest high school and unified school districts in the state.

Figure 1 shows each district's 3-year improvement in its graduation rate against its initial graduation rate of 74.7 percent in 2009-10, along with the statewide 3-year improvement of 5.7 percentage points from 2009-10 to 2012-13. The figure reveals wide variation among districts in both their initial graduation rate and their improvement over the last three years. It further reveals that districts with lower initial graduation rates tended to show the greatest improvement over the last three years, as evidenced by a negative correlation of -0.67.³

Figure 1. 3-Year Improvement Value with 2009-10 Cohort Graduation Rates⁴



¹ The rate was 80.2 percent when the California Department of Education first released the data on April 28, 2014. The data are continually updated as districts report corrected figures.

² See CDRP Statistical Brief 17 (December 2013): <http://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu/statisticalbrief-17>

³ A negative correlation was also found in the 2-year improvement rate reported in the earlier brief.

⁴ An interactive version of this graph can be found at:

https://public.tableausoftware.com/views/CDRPStatBrief19/Dashboard1?:embed=y&:display_count=no

Roughly 33% of the 264 districts in the sample experienced improvement rates greater than or equal to the state’s overall improvement rate of 5.7 percent, with 32 districts showing 3-year improvement rates of 10 percentage points or higher. Table 1 shows the 10 California school districts with the greatest 3-year improvement in high school graduation rates in the state. Barstow Unified and Fullerton Joint Union High topped the list, with graduation improvement rates of 26.5 and 21.4 percentage points, respectively. Sacramento City Unified, Stockton Unified, Moreno Valley Unified, Tulare Joint Union, Washington Unified, San Bernardino City Unified, Hanford Joint Union, and Victor Valley Union High were also top performing districts.

Table 1. Top 10 School Districts with Greatest Improvement in 3-year Graduation Rates

District	Number of Schools within District 2012-13	9th - 12th Grade Enrollment 2012-13	Graduation Rate 2009-10 (%)	Graduation Rate 2012-13 (%)	3-year Change in Graduation Rate
STATE		1,964,759	74.7	80.4	5.7
Barstow Unified	2	1,718	46.6	73.1	26.5
Fullerton Joint Union High	8	14,607	70.5	91.9	21.4
Sacramento City Unified	13	13,283	68.0	85.3	17.3
Stockton Unified	4	10,010	66.1	83.1	17.0
Moreno Valley Unified	5	10,401	65.7	81.5	15.8
Tulare Joint Union High	6	5,306	72.4	87.0	14.6
Washington Unified (Yolo)	1	2,272	76.5	90.7	14.1
San Bernardino City Unified	9	15,860	62.2	75.5	13.4
Hanford Joint Union High	6	3,892	75.1	88.1	13.0
Victor Valley Union High	8	11,521	65.9	78.5	12.7

On the other hand, fourteen percent of districts included in the present analysis ($n = 33$) experienced declines in their 3-year graduation rate. These declines ranged from as little as -0.1 percentage points to as great as -4.5 percentage points, with 82% of declining districts having declines of less than two percentage points. Not surprisingly, the districts with the greatest declines in 3-year graduation rates experienced a comparatively high 2009-10 graduation rate (i.e., $> 90\%$), which further illustrates the relationship between a district’s initial graduation rate and their 3-year improvement results. The CDRP is currently conducting a study of the top performing districts to determine what contributed to their improvement in graduation rates.