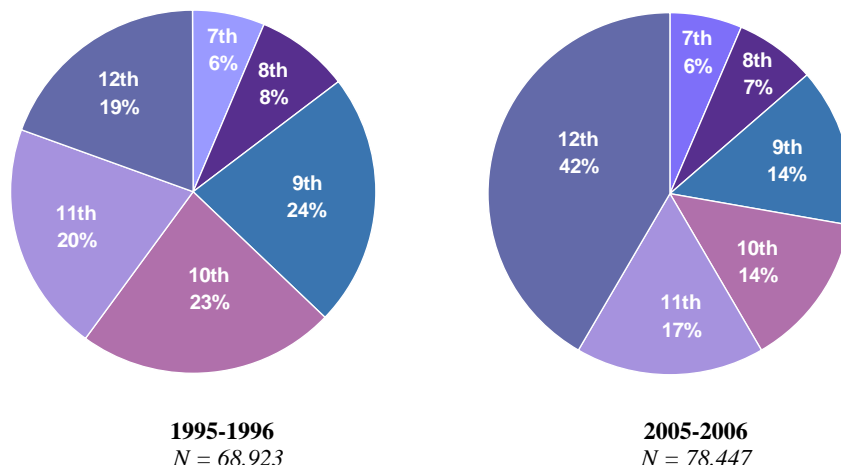


When Do California Students Drop Out of School?

By Susan Rotermund

As policymakers and educators consider possible solutions to the dropout crisis in California, it is important to know *when* students are dropping out of school so that interventions and resources can be targeted effectively. An examination of dropout trends over the past decade reveals that the proportion of students dropping out in grades 9-11 has declined, while the proportion of students dropping out in 12th grade has increased (see Figure 1). Twelfth graders accounted for 19% of all dropouts in 1995-96, compared to 42% of all dropouts in 2005-06. The proportion of students dropping out in middle school has remained steady, with 7th and 8th graders accounting for 14% of all dropouts in 1995-96, and 13% in 2005-06. The fact that more than one-in-eight dropouts come from middle schools suggests that dropout prevention efforts should focus on both middle and high schools.

Figure 1
Percent of California Dropouts by Grade, 1995-96 and 2005-06



Source: DataQuest, California Department of Education. Retrieved April 24, 2008 from <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Twelfth-Grade Dropout Rates Rise, Others Decline

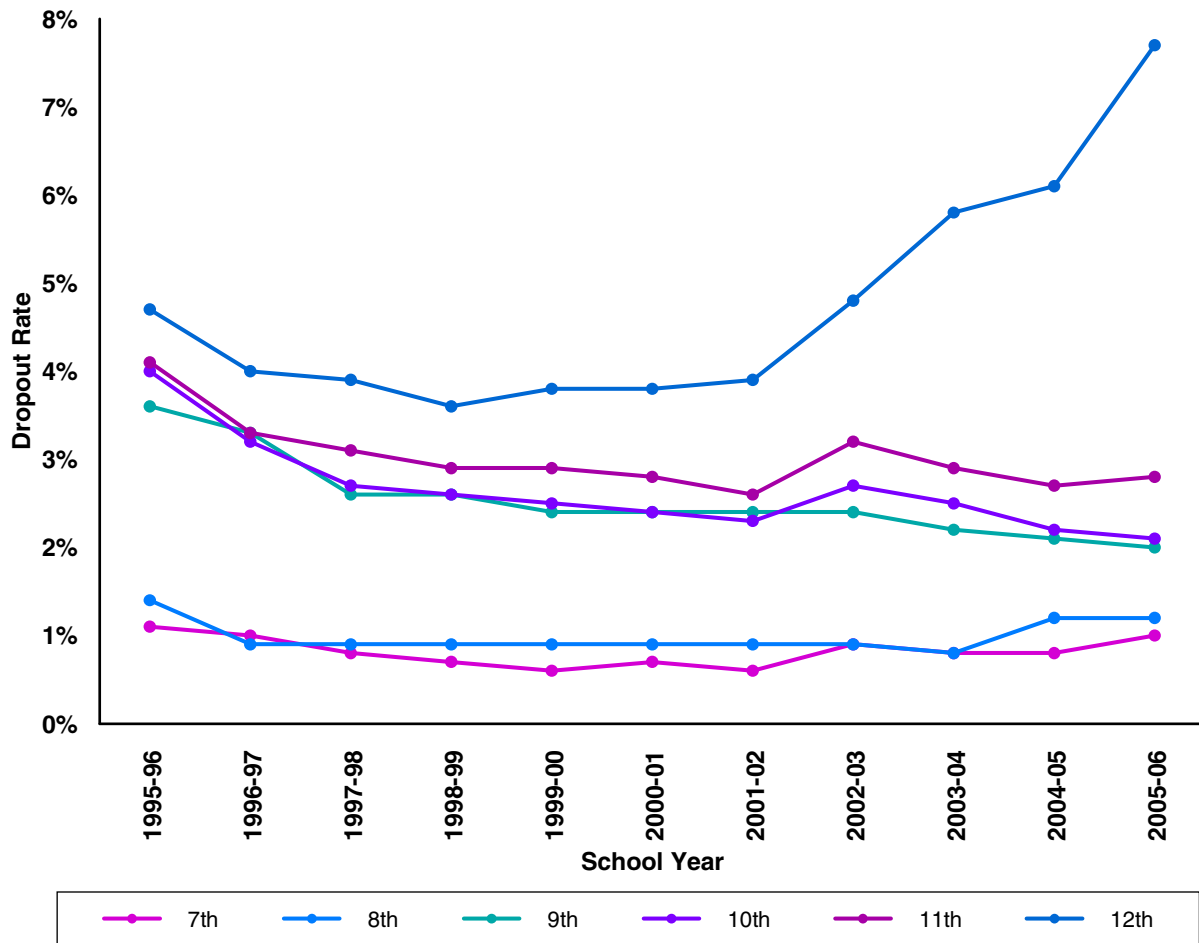
Dropout rates¹ by grade level over the past decade in California show similar trends. Since 1995, dropout rates for 7th and 8th graders have remained steady at about 1%; rates for 9th-11th graders have declined from about 4% to around 3%; and rates for 12th graders have increased dramatically (see Figure 2). The 12th-grade dropout rate in California has increased nearly 40% in the past ten years, rising from 4.7% in 1995-96 to 7.7% in 2005-06. Twelfth-grade dropout

¹ The California Department of Education calculates the dropout rate for each grade by dividing the number of dropouts in a grade by the number of students enrolled in that grade on the first Wednesday of October, .

rates remained relatively stable until the 2001-02 school year, after which rates grew by approximately 1% each year².

The largest change occurred between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, when the rate rose from 6.1% to 7.7%. In 2005-06 students were required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in order to graduate, but it's unclear whether the rise in 12th-grade dropout rates is related.

Figure 2
California Dropout Rates for 7th-12th Grades
1995-96 to 2005-06



² Rates did rise by about 1% each year during this period, with the exception of the change between 2003-04 and 2004-05, when the rate grew only .3%.