West Contra Costa Graduation, Dropout Rates Worse Than State Average
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About three-quarters of West Contra Costa students graduated high school on time last year while almost a quarter dropped out, according to data released last week.

The report from the California Department of Education showed 72.4 percent of local public high school students graduated in the 2009-10 school year while 24.5 percent dropped out. The district's graduation rate is lower than the statewide average of 74.4 percent, and its dropout rate is higher than the state's 18.2 percent.

West Contra Costa school district officials could not be reached for comment Friday. Within the district, Richmond and Kennedy high schools had the worst graduation and dropout rates. Middle College High School in San Pablo and El Cerrito High School performed best.

Broken down by race, the data showed black, Pacific Islander and Native American students in West Contra Costa had the lowest graduation rates and the highest dropout rates, performing worse than both the state and district wide averages. Their Filipino, Asian and white peers had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates, rating better than the district and state averages. Latino students in West Contra Costa performed fairly close to the averages.

Data for special-education students, English learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students showed those populations aren't doing as well as the district and state averages.

This year, the Department of Education used a new system to calculate the graduation and dropout rates after collecting information about individual students for four years. Because of the new calculation system, state officials said it is not possible to compare the 2010 rates to previous years, but that last year's data would be used for comparison in years to come.

Beyond the graduation and dropout rate totals, the remaining students are either still enrolled in school, are non-diploma special-education students, or have passed the GED test. These students are considered neither graduates nor dropouts in this calculation.

Rates of nearby districts were all over the map. The John Swett district had a 77.6 percent graduation rate, while 17 percent of students dropped out. Oakland fared much worse, with 53.4 percent of students graduating, and 37 percent dropping out. The Mt. Diablo district performed better with 79.2 percent of students graduating and a 16 percent dropout rate.

The full data is available online at http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest.