



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEWS RELEASE

TOM TORLAKSON
 State Superintendent
 of Public Instruction

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CALPADS Finds Statewide Graduation Rate of 74.4 Percent

Data System Provides Most Accurate Measure of Student Success

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson announced today that nearly three out of four California students who started high school in 2006 graduated with their class in 2010, with slightly more than 18 percent dropping out rather than completing their K–12 educations.

The graduation and dropout rates continue to show a significant achievement gap between students who are Hispanic, African American, or English learners and their peers. The 74.4 percent statewide graduation rate and 18.2 percent statewide dropout rate—as well as rates calculated for counties, districts, and schools across California—were for the first time based on four-year cohort information collected about individual students using the state's California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS).

"For far too long, the discussion about graduation and dropout rates has revolved around how the results were obtained. Now, we can focus on the much more important issue of how to raise the number of graduates and lower the number of dropouts," Torlakson said.

To download state, county, district, and school graduation and dropout rates, please visit the CDE DataQuest Web site at [DataQuest](#).

Beyond the 74.4 percent graduation rate and the 18.2 percent dropout rate, the remaining 7.4 percent of this cohort are students who are neither graduates nor dropouts. Some are still enrolled in school (6.6 percent); others are non-diploma special education students (0.5 percent), and those who passed the General Educational Development Test® (0.4 percent).

The new cohort graduation rate will now serve as a baseline in 2011. In 2012, it will also replace the previous formula to determine graduation rates as required by U.S. law. The previous formula, called the "National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) completer rate" is used to determine whether schools have met their targets for increasing the graduation rate for Adequate Yearly Progress reporting under the federal accountability system. The NCES completer rate was needed until California had four years of longitudinal student data to calculate a cohort rate.

The new cohort graduation rate of 74.4 percent for the class of 2010 should not be compared to any rates from previous years because it is based on a different method of calculation. For example, the NCES completer rate did not account for students who transferred into or out of schools over four years and overestimated the graduation rate. The new cohort rate takes student mobility into account. Also because the new cohort graduation rate is based on a different method of calculation, it is not possible to calculate the exact percentage of change from the graduating class of 2009, though the data clearly indicate an increase in the graduation rate and a decrease in dropout rate.

The new cohort dropout rate also will serve as a baseline in 2011. It is calculated with the same four-year cohort as the graduation rate. The new cohort dropout rate of 18.2 percent for the class of 2010 should not be compared to any rates from previous years because it is based on a different method of calculation. Also, it is not possible to calculate the exact percentage of change from the class of 2009.

Dropout rates for traditional high schools will tend to be lower than the state rate and graduation rates will tend to be higher because many students at risk of dropping out are often transferred to county-run dropout recovery or educational option programs. If students drop out after they transfer, then these students would be attributed to the county-run or educational option program, rather than to the traditional high school.

People must use caution when analyzing dropout rates for schools with high mobility, such as alternative schools or dropout recovery high schools. In many cases, these schools serve only those students who are already at the greatest risk of dropping out of school because of their prior academic challenges. So it is also inappropriate to compare dropout rates for these schools to local comprehensive high schools.

The new cohort dropout rate is calculated for high school students, grades nine through twelve. However, there are significant numbers of students who drop out of school during the middle school years. California *Education Code* Section 52052.1 requires the inclusion of grade eight and grade nine dropout rates in a school's Academic Performance Index (API), the state accountability system. Grade eight and grade nine dropouts from the 2009–10 school year are planned for inclusion beginning

with the 2011 Base API in the spring of 2012, pending approval of the State Board of Education. The baseline data indicate that more than 17,000 grade eight students in 2008-09 dropped out of school before entering grade nine. This report can be accessed on the API Reports on the California Department of Education Web site at: [2010 Base API State Report](#).

"The new cohort data collection system shines a light on the middle school dropout problem," added Torlakson. "Our research shows that chronic absence from school, even as early as kindergarten, is a strong indicator of whether a child will drop out of school later. Clearly, we need to invest more in programs designed to keep elementary and middle school students in school."

The new cohort rates indicate that there is still a significant gap that persists between Hispanic and African American students and their peers. While there remains a significant graduation rate gap for Hispanic students at 67.7 percent, it is encouraging that about 4,700 more Hispanics graduated in 2010, by far the largest increase by any other subgroup of students. Most troubling are the 59.0 percent graduation rate among African American students and the 56.3 percent graduation rate among English learners.

Consistent with the graduation rates, the dropout rates also illustrate that African American students (30.1 percent) and English learners (31.1 percent) are more likely to drop out than their peers.

"Sadly, the graduation rates of these subgroups of students are too low and their dropout rates are too high," added Torlakson. "As I mentioned during my presentation of *A Blueprint for Great Schools* last Tuesday, our job is to provide every child the best chance to succeed—whether they speak English, come from a family in poverty, have health issues, or special needs. The *Blueprint* offers a vision about how to get there.

"These new cohort rates are only the first glimpse of the data-rich information that will come from CALPADS. It is a wise investment for the state to have accurate information from which to make good policy decisions. I am grateful for the continued support of CALPADS from the Governor and the Legislature.

"I also want to thank school staff throughout California for their hard work in submitting data to CALPADS. Their work is helping to provide valuable information to keep students in school and learning so they'll have a better future."

For more information on Torlakson's *A Blueprint for Great Schools*, please visit [A Blueprint For Great Schools Report - A Blueprint for Great Schools](#).

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