



MARCH 2013

Focus: *Dropout Rates*

This edition of the WSSDA Research Blast covers Dropout Rates. Below is a summary of what several school districts around the state have done to successfully raise graduation rates, followed by five articles dealing with dropout and graduation rates both in Washington, and nationally.

What are you doing to boost graduation rates?

Some school directors were recently asked what their districts are currently doing to boost graduation rates. Below are some brief responses from Sunnyside, Monroe, and Spokane school districts, explaining some of the work they have done to lower dropout rates in their districts' schools:

Sunnyside School District

The Sunnyside School District has raised its graduation rate from 41% in 2007 to 79% in 2012. A focused and intentional process led to this dramatic improvement.

The school district used a transformation model that was supported by a district-wide improvement grant (Summit Grant) and a school improvement grant (SIG). These resources allowed the district to develop curriculum guides aligned to state standards across each grade level. Time was also added to the school day at the high school, which allowed for more academic interventions and support.

A high school counseling model known as "All Hands on Deck" brought a case management approach to the counselors' work. Counselors now spend a majority of their day out in classrooms working and supporting teachers and students.

Monroe School District

Monroe has an 84% on-time graduation rate, and a greater than 90% rate for extended graduation. To improve that further, the district is focusing on ninth grade. According to Monroe officials, the evidence shows that if you get ninth graders to finish between 5.5 and 6 credits, they are more likely to graduate. The district provides a double period block class for ninth grade that is increasing the percentage of kids finishing at least 5.5 credits.

Monroe has a large Alternative Learning Experience with multiple programs and a lot of parent involvement. The district has a public Montessori that goes to tenth grade, an environmental high school, a robotics program and a new STEM program.

Monroe is also working at the kindergarten level. The district is following Vancouver in setting up wrap-around services for Title I kids. Monroe started last summer by inviting local services like the YMCA, Library, Fire Department, Food Bank, and Boys and Girls Club to provide activities from 11 am – 12 pm as part of its summer lunch program. According to Monroe officials, key leaders need to understand that family income has a direct correlation to academic outcomes.

Spokane Public Schools

One of the Board's key initiatives in 2010 was to increase the on-time graduation rate in Spokane Public Schools. As a result, additional staff and program resources were allocated to support this initiative. Technical and programmatic responses raised the on-time graduation rate to 76.7% in 2010-11, up from 62.1% in 2008-09. Major factors for this improvement included:

- 1) Monthly student drop reports distributed to each high school. Staff members use these to follow up with students to either get a confirmed transfer or re-engage them in school;
- 2) A single point of contact for students asking to be released from the district with a GED. This provides an opportunity to meet with the student and his or her family and consider all options prior to a release; and
- 3) Evaluation of student data. This allows programmatic responses that provide extra support. These include academic mentors, credit retrieval opportunities, and alternative programs such as On-Track or Career Pathways Diplomas.

In the spirit of this discussion, we have identified five recent studies dealing with dropout and graduation rates.

- The first study is the recently released Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report from OSPI for 2011-12. The report provides an overview of graduation and dropout statistics for schools and districts in Washington.
- The second piece of research, "Pathways to Dropping Out," is part one of a multi-phase report from the Washington Student Oral Histories Project. The report investigates the dropout phenomenon from the perspectives of disengaged students in King County.
- The third item is a 2012 three-part investigative study by Betsy Hammond of *The Oregonian*. In her research she examined the extent and causes of high dropout rates in Portland's Public Schools. The series won her national recognition for investigative reporting from the Education Writers Association in March 2013.
- The fourth article from *Education Week* was written by Caralee Adams and Sarah D. Sparks. They review some data from a recent U.S. Department of Education NCES report, which covers national public school graduation and dropout rates for the 2009-10 school year.

- The final study in this edition is “Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic.” This is the fourth annual update on America’s high school dropout crisis.

Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) prepares an annual report that provides a review of graduation and dropout statistics for schools and districts in Washington. The recently released March 2013 report found that Washington’s four-year graduation rate increased slightly from 76.6% to 77.2%, and that the four-year dropout rate decreased slightly from 13.9% to 13.6% between 2010-11 and 2011-12. The report includes information for all students as well as the sub-categories of students represented within the Washington State Report Card. The report includes data on:

- Adjusted cohort four-year and five-year graduation rates
- Adjusted cohort four-year and five-year dropout rates

<http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/pubdocs/GradDropout/11-12/GradandDropOutStats2011-12.pdf>

Pathways to Dropping Out

The Washington Student Oral Histories Project

This report is part one of a multi-phase study that examines Washington’s dropout phenomenon from the perspectives of disengaged students. Part One: Common Patterns, examines the process of dropping out and the various behavioral patterns it encompasses. The study explores the specific and cumulative educational experiences that influence an individual student’s decision to stay in or leave school, using their own words and experiences.

http://www.wsohp.org/uploads/1/0/1/5/10157286/pathways_to_dropping_out_part_one_3.13.13.pdf

Portland Public Schools’ Dropout Rates

By Betsy Hammond, *The Oregonian*

This award-winning three-part series from *The Oregonian* looks at the low graduation rates of public schools in Portland, Oregon. According to the article, a large part of the problem is that school districts tend to move struggling students into “a network of low-profile, mostly unaccountable alternative schools,” where they say at least 80 percent of students drop out. The newspaper examined enrollment and graduation records for all 7,700 students in Portland’s high school classes of 2010 and 2011, tracking where students entered high school, and then following their records to where they transferred, graduated, or dropped out.

<http://schools.oregonlive.com/dropouts/>

Grad Rate at Highest Since 1970

By Caralee Adams and Sarah D. Sparks, *Education Week*

The January 30, 2013 edition of *Education Week* provided an overview of data from a U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report. The NCES report provides a first look at national public school graduation and dropout rates from the common core of data for the 2009-10 school year. Among other observations, the article suggests that the poor economy may have contributed to the highest U.S. graduation rates since 1970. A link to the article by Adams and Sparks is provided below, followed by a link to the data and NCES report that are discussed in the article.

Partial public availability of article at Education Week –
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/01/30/19nces.h32.html>

Department of Education NCES report - <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309.pdf>

Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic

Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, America's Promise Alliance, and Alliance for Excellent Education

This fourth annual update on America's high school dropout crisis shows that for the first time, the nation is on track to meet the goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by the Class of 2020—if the pace of improvement from 2006 to 2010 is sustained over the next 10 years. A deeper look at the data however shows that gains in graduation rates and declines in dropout factory high schools occurred unevenly across states and subgroups of students. As a result, large “graduation gaps” remain in many states among students of different races, ethnicities, family incomes, disabilities and limited English proficiencies. The report outlines the progress made, as well as the challenges that remain in improving graduation and dropout rates across the country.

<http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Building-A-Grad-Nation-2013-ES-FINAL-web.pdf>