Public High School Graduation Rates

In school year 2011–12, some 3.1 million public high school students, or 81 percent, graduated on time with a regular diploma. Among all public high school students, Asians/Pacific Islanders had the highest graduation rate (93 percent), followed by Whites (85 percent), Hispanics (76 percent), and American Indians/Alaska Natives and Blacks (68 percent each).

This indicator examines the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time with a regular diploma. The indicator uses the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), which is the number of high school diplomas expressed as a percentage of the estimated freshman class 4 years earlier. In school year 2011–12, the AFGR was 81 percent, and some 3.1 million public high school students graduated on time with a regular diploma. The overall AFGR was higher for the graduating class of 2011–12 than it was for the class of 1990–91 (74 percent). However, from 1990–91 to 1995–96 the graduation rate decreased from 74 to 71 percent. During the period from 1998–99 to 2004–05, the rate steadily increased from 71 to 75 percent. After dropping to 73 percent in 2005–06, the graduation rate increased nearly 8 percentage points to 81 percent in 2011–12.
The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate varied by race/ethnicity in 2011–12. Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest graduation rate (93 percent), followed by White (85 percent), Hispanic (76 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native and Black students (68 percent each).
The AFGR varied by state in school year 2009–10. Vermont and Wisconsin had the highest graduation rates, each at 91 percent. Twenty other states had graduation rates of 80 percent or more (ordered from high to low): North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Idaho, Nebraska, Missouri, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, Illinois, Montana, South Dakota, Ohio, Virginia, Tennessee, and Wyoming. Nevada had the lowest rate, at 58 percent. Five other states and the District of Columbia had graduation rates below 70 percent (ordered from high to low): Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, New Mexico, Mississippi, and the District of Columbia.

In terms of changes by state, there was an increase in the AFGR in 43 states from school year 2005–06 to 2009–10. In 3 states (Tennessee, Louisiana, and Vermont) the rate increased by between 9 and 10 percentage points; in 14 others (Alaska, California, New York, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Kansas, Virginia, Maine, Texas, North Dakota, Alabama, New Hampshire, and North Carolina), the rate increased by more than 5 percentage points but less than 9 percentage points. The graduation rate decreased from 2005–06 to 2009–10 in the District of Columbia and 7 states (Hawaii, Delaware, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Nebraska, Arkansas, and Connecticut), with decreases of more than 5 percentage points occurring in Arkansas, the District of Columbia, and Connecticut.


Glossary: High school diploma, Public school or institution