

## GRADUATION AND DROPOUT OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN STATE CARE (2005–2008)

### Introduction

In 2001, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) published a report outlining the educational status of youth in foster care.<sup>1</sup> The report included the first statewide comparison of test scores and graduation outcomes for youth in foster care with the entire student population. Since then, numerous programs and policies at the state and federal levels have been implemented to help improve the educational status of youth in state care.

Many changes taking place in Washington's child welfare system are the result of a legal settlement reached in 2004 between the Department of Social and Health Services and plaintiffs representing foster youth. A group of experts—the Braam Oversight Panel—is overseeing compliance with this settlement and has issued regular monitoring reports outlining the status of these changes.<sup>2</sup> The Braam Panel's implementation plan directs the Children's Administration of the Department of Social and Health Services to:

*... replicate the 2001 WSIPP study . . . for school-age children in foster care three months or longer in FY 2005. The study will be replicated every two years over the settlement.*

The Children's Administration has contracted with the Institute to complete several analyses of the educational attainment of youth in state care. A March 2008 report focused on the number and characteristics of foster youth who met standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) tests.<sup>3</sup> This report summarizes graduation and dropout outcomes for foster youth between 2005 and 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Mason Burley and Mina Halpern (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 01-11-3901.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.braampanel.org>

<sup>3</sup> Mason Burley (2008). *Educational attainment of foster children: 2006 results*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 08-03-3901.

### Summary

Compared with the entire student population, youth placed in foster care have higher rates of reported disabilities, grade retention, and school mobility, and lower levels of academic achievement. All of these factors place a student at a higher risk of dropping out of school and reduce the likelihood of graduation. Foster youth with a longer placement history, however, have better outcomes compared with those who have been in care for only a short time.

While the Institute has conducted previous analyses on the educational attainment of foster youth, this is this first report to compare these outcomes using the standard, federal definitions of dropout and graduation rates. Based on this methodology, we found:

- Approximately 70 percent of high school students in Washington State graduate on time. About 30 percent of foster youth in placement for at least half of the school year, and 40 percent of youth in a full-year placement, graduate after four years in high school.
- The statewide annual dropout rate for high schoolers in Washington State ranges between 5 and 6 percent. Between 8 and 13 percent of foster youth with a long-term (full-year) placement drop out of high school.
- Foster youth with longer-term placements (360 days or more during the school year) have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates compared with foster youth with short-term placements during high school.

The report represents the latest analysis in an ongoing study to investigate educational outcomes for foster youth. Future reports on assessment outcomes and educational advocacy for foster youth are planned for 2010.

## Educational Outcomes Reporting and Foster Youth

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to track the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of school districts in meeting graduation and dropout targets. The NCLB act established standard definitions and reporting categories for state reporting. Since 2002, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has reported dropout and graduation rates consistent with these federal definitions.<sup>4</sup> While other reports have examined graduation outcomes for foster youth,<sup>5</sup> this study is the first in Washington to use the standard, federal definitions to compare the graduation rates of foster youth with the general student population. By using a consistent definition, we can better track progress of efforts to improve the educational attainment of foster youth.

A young person who enters foster care may have a short, temporary out-of-home placement or may be in care for most of his or her childhood. In addition, a foster youth may become a dependent of the state at any age. In 2007, 19,400 youth between the ages of 0 and 17 were in out-of-home placement in Washington State.<sup>6</sup> Since this report examines graduation and dropout outcomes for youth in high school, we include foster students with an active placement during high school (grades 9–12). Since education statistics in Washington State are reported primarily by grade level, this report focuses on the length of foster care placement during the current grade.

We include three different categories of foster youth to compare the relationship between educational outcomes and length of foster care placement:

1. **Foster youth with placements lasting 90 to 179 days during the school year.**  
These are youth who were in an out-of-home placement for less than half of the school year (90 to 179 days). *In the 2007–08 school year, there were 213 high school foster students in this group.*

2. **Foster youth with placements between 180 and 359 days during the school year.**  
These youth were in care for at least half (180 days) of the year, but less than the full year. *During the 2007–08 school year, there were 395 high school foster youth in this category.*
3. **Foster youth with placements of 360 days or more during the school year.**  
These youth were in an out-of-home placement full time (over the entire course of the school year). *In 2007–08, 982 high school foster youth were in care continuously over the course of the school year.*

Exhibit 1 presents the demographic and educational characteristics of each category of foster youth.<sup>7</sup> As these results show, compared with the general student population, foster youth are:

- ✓ **more likely** to be a racial or ethnic minority (37 to 45 percent versus 28 percent)
- ✓ **more likely** to have a reported disability (28 to 42 percent versus 10 percent)
- ✓ **more likely** to be behind at least one grade level (10 to 14 percent versus 5 percent)
- ✓ **less likely** to have a grade point average higher than 3.0 (11 to 15 percent versus 38 percent)
- ✓ **less likely** to be in the same school during the school year (49 to 56 percent versus 88 percent)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2009). *2008 Annual report on students in foster care*. Olympia: Author. <<http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2009documents/FosterCareReporttoLeg.pdf>>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ca/07Report2Intro.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Results include all high school students enrolled in 2004–05, 2005–06, 2006–07, and 2007–08 school years.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Comparing Characteristics of Washington State Foster Youth (by Placement Length)**  
**With All High School Students in the State**  
**2004–05 through 2007–08 School Years**

|  | Foster Care:<br>90 Days During<br>School Year | Foster Care:<br>180 Days During<br>School Year | Foster Care:<br>360 Days During<br>School Year | All<br>Students  |
|--|---|--|--|------------------|
| <b>All Students</b>  | 0.1%  | 0.1%   | 0.4%   |                  |
| <b>Gender</b>  |   |  |  |                  |
| Female   | 53%   | 52%  | 52%  | 49%              |
| Male   | 47%   | 48%  | 48%  | 51%              |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>  |   |  |  |                  |
| Caucasian<br>(not of Hispanic Origin)                              | 62%   | 59%  | 54%  | 72%              |
| Racial/Ethnic Minority   | 37%   | 39%  | 45%  | 28%              |
| African American<br>(not of Hispanic Origin)                       | 15%   | 14%  | 19%  | 5%               |
| American Indian/<br>Alaskan Native                                 | 11%   | 11%  | 13%  | 3%               |
| Asian American   | 2%  | 2%   | 2%   | 8%               |
| Hispanic   | 8%  | 10%  | 9%   | 11%              |
| Multi-Racial   | 1%  | 2%   | 2%   | 1%               |
| Missing  | 1%  | 1%   | 1%   | 0%               |
| <b>Grade Point Average (GPA)</b>                                   |   |  |  |                  |
| 0.0–1.0  | 21%   | 16%  | 14%  | 7%               |
| 1.1–2.0  | 29%   | 26%  | 27%  | 17%              |
| 2.1–3.0  | 31%   | 35%  | 35%  | 32%              |
| 3.1–4.0  | 11%   | 14%  | 15%  | 38%              |
| Missing  | 9%  | 9%   | 9%   | 5%               |
| <b>Disability Status</b>   |   |  |  |                  |
| Reported Disability  | 28%   | 34%  | 42%  | 10%              |
| Serious Behavioral   | 6%  | 8%   | 10%  | 1%               |
| Specific Learning  | 11%   | 11%  | 11%  | 5%               |
| Health Impairment  | 7%  | 9%   | 12%  | 2%               |
| Other <sup>8</sup>   | 4%  | 6%   | 8%   | 2%               |
| <b>Special Ed Services</b>   |   |  |  |                  |
| Special Education <sup>9</sup>                                     | 21%   | 27%  | 32%  | 8%               |
| <b>School Status</b>   |   |  |  |                  |
| Behind Grade Level <sup>10</sup>                                   | 12%   | 14%  | 10%  | 5%               |
| <b>Number of Schools Enrolled in During School Year (Mobility)</b> |   |  |  |                  |
| One  | 50%   | 49%  | 56%  | 88%              |
| Two  | 31%   | 30%  | 27%  | 11%              |
| Three or More  | 18%   | 22%  | 17%  | 2%               |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>729</b>                                    | <b>1,545</b>                                   | <b>3,938</b>                                   | <b>1,273,158</b> |

<sup>8</sup> Other disability includes mental retardation, developmentally delayed, hearing impaired, visually impaired, communication disorder, autism, and traumatic brain injury.

<sup>9</sup> Special Education Services generally indicates presence of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

<sup>10</sup> Based on data in student record that indicates expected year of graduation.

Exhibit 2 shows the characteristics of the three groups of foster youth in this analysis. Many of these characteristics did not vary considerably among the high school youth in foster care. Between 17 and 21 percent of foster youth were placed as a result of behavior; 30 to 40 percent of youth were placed as a result of abuse or neglect. About a quarter of these youth had one previous placement episode, and 13 to 18 percent had multiple (two or more) prior placements.

There were some notable differences between youth with shorter and longer foster care placements during the school year. Among youth with long-term placements, 27 percent were from Region Four (King County). Youth in Region Six (South Sound) made

up 26 percent of all youth in care less than half of the school year. In addition, youth in care less than half of the year (90 to 179 days) were more likely to enter the foster care system at an older age. Fifty percent of these youth were age 14 or older at first placement, compared with only 22 percent of continuous foster youth (in care 360 days during school year). Given the younger age at which this continuous group entered care, it is not surprising that the average (lifetime) time in placement for this group was 6.0 years (compared with 2.9 years for youth with 90 to 179 days during the school year).

The next section looks at trends in graduation rates for foster youth compared with the general student population.

**Exhibit 2**  
**High School Foster Youth Characteristics by Placement Length**  
**2004–05 through 2007–08 School Years**

|  | Foster Care:<br>90 Days During<br>School Year | Foster Care:<br>180 Days During<br>School Year | Foster Care:<br>360 Days During<br>School Year |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Reason for Foster Care Placement</b>                |   |  |  |
| Abuse  | 31%   | 30%  | 28%  |
| Neglect  | 35%   | 35%  | 39%  |
| Child's Behavior                                       | 21%   | 20%  | 17%  |
| Other  | 14%   | 15%  | 17%  |
| <b>Age at First Placement</b>                          |   |  |  |
| 0 to 3   | 8%  | 11%  | 18%  |
| 4 to 9   | 19%   | 23%  | 30%  |
| 10 to 13   | 23%   | 23%  | 30%  |
| 14 to 18   | 50%   | 43%  | 22%  |
| Average  | 11.8  | 10.9   | 9.0  |
| <b>Number of Prior Foster Care Placement Episodes</b>  |   |  |  |
| One  | 27%   | 26%  | 28%  |
| Two or more  | 13%   | 18%  | 14%  |
| <b>DSHS Region</b>                                     |   |  |  |
| Region One   | 13%   | 12%  | 13%  |
| Region Two   | 12%   | 12%  | 11%  |
| Region Three   | 17%   | 16%  | 14%  |
| Region Four  | 18%   | 22%  | 27%  |
| Region Five  | 15%   | 18%  | 16%  |
| Region Six   | 26%   | 20%  | 18%  |
| <b>Average Lifetime Years in Foster Care Placement</b> |   |  |  |
| Years  | 2.9   | 4.2  | 6.0  |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>729</b>                                    | <b>1,545</b>                                   | <b>3,938</b>                                   |

## Graduation Rates

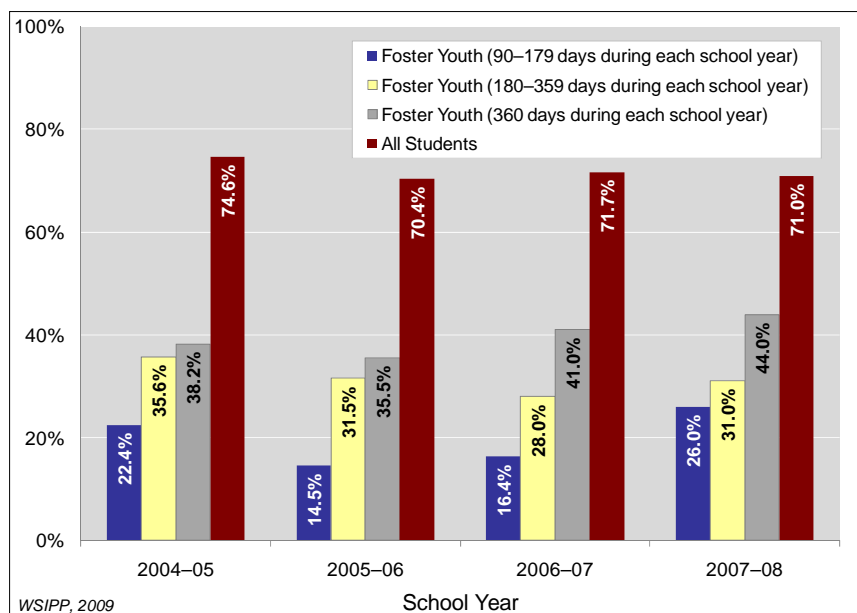
According to the state definition, students are considered high school graduates if they receive a high school diploma from a recognized institution within Washington State. "On-time" graduates are defined as those who receive a diploma by the end of the expected (four-year) enrollment period. Students who receive a General Educational Development (GED) certificate are not considered graduates for federal accountability purposes and are not included in these results. In order to meet federal AYP benchmarks, schools and districts must have a graduation rate of 66 percent. In 2014, this goal increases to 85 percent.

Exhibit 3 shows that over the last four years, 70 to 75 percent of high school students in Washington State have graduated on time. For students with the shortest foster placements (90 to 179 days), only 15 to 26 percent graduated on time.

Youth with a longer-lasting foster care placement, however, graduated at a higher rate compared with other foster youth. In the 2007–08 school year, 44 percent of foster youth with a full-time (360 day) placement during the school year graduated on time.

Of course, students who do not graduate on time may eventually receive a high school diploma or GED after four years in high school. However, many students drop out over this period, as well. The next section looks at rates for dropouts and continuing students.

**Exhibit 3**  
**On-Time Graduation Rates for Washington State Foster Youth Compared With All High School Students**



|   |                                       | 2004–05 | 2005–06 | 2006–07 | 2007–08 |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Graduates</b>                          | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 21      | 18      | 12      | 24      |
|   | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 52      | 94      | 53      | 59      |
|   | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 31      | 54      | 40      | 35      |
|   | All Students                          | 56,969  | 56,449  | 58,758  | 57,598  |
| <b>Total Students (Graduate-Eligible)</b> | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 94      | 124     | 73      | 92      |
|   | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 146     | 298     | 190     | 190     |
|   | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 81      | 152     | 97      | 80      |
|   | All Students                          | 76,371  | 80,160  | 81,967  | 81,142  |
| <b>Graduation Rate</b>                    | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 22.4%   | 14.5%   | 16.4%   | 26.0%   |
|   | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 35.6%   | 31.5%   | 28.0%   | 31.0%   |
|   | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 38.2%   | 35.5%   | 41.0%   | 44.0%   |
|   | All Students                          | 74.6%   | 70.4%   | 71.7%   | 71.0%   |

## Dropout Rate (Washington State Definitions)

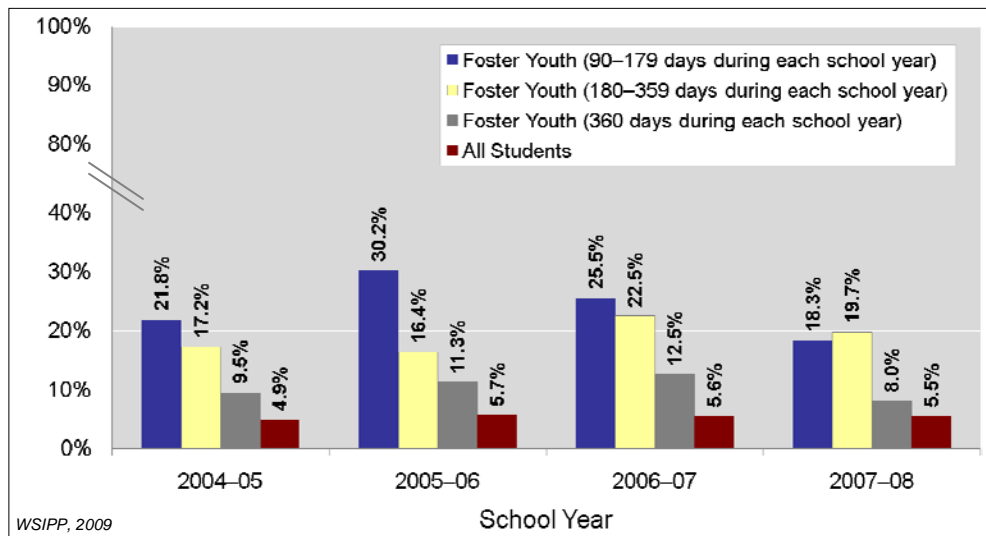
Two types of annual dropout rates are reported for students in Washington State:

- The **annual dropout rate**<sup>11</sup> measures the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without graduating from high school. An annual high school dropout rate can be calculated by totaling dropouts and enrollments across grades 9–12.

- A **cohort dropout rate** calculates dropout activity for a single group of students over time. This rate follows students in grade 9 who dropped out before receiving a high school diploma.

Exhibit 4 displays the annual dropout rate for foster youth and all high school students in Washington State. Dropout numbers by grade level are presented in the Appendix.

**Exhibit 4**  
Annual Dropout Rate for Washington State  
Foster Youth Compared With All High School Students



|                            |                                       | 2004–05 | 2005–06 | 2006–07 | 2007–08 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Dropouts</b>            | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 36      | 48      | 49      | 39      |
|                            | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 60      | 62      | 95      | 78      |
|                            | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 87      | 117     | 125     | 79      |
|                            | All Students                          | 15,538  | 18,119  | 17,823  | 17,655  |
| <b>Net Students Served</b> | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 165     | 159     | 192     | 213     |
|                            | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 348     | 379     | 423     | 395     |
|                            | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 917     | 1,040   | 999     | 982     |
|                            | All Students                          | 314,237 | 319,348 | 320,296 | 319,277 |
| <b>Annual Dropout Rate</b> | Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)  | 21.8%   | 30.2%   | 25.5%   | 18.3%   |
|                            | Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year) | 17.2%   | 16.4%   | 22.5%   | 19.7%   |
|                            | Foster Youth (360 days in a year)     | 9.5%    | 11.3%   | 12.5%   | 8.0%    |
|                            | All Students                          | 4.9%    | 5.7%    | 5.6%    | 5.5%    |

<sup>11</sup> Also referred to as “event” or “incidence” dropout rate.

For all high school students in Washington State, the dropout rate has ranged between 5 and 6 percent in recent school years. Foster youth who were in a placement for less than half of the school year had the highest dropout rate. In the 2005–06 school year, 31 percent of these students dropped out; this rate decreased to 18 percent by the 2007–08 school year. Between 16 and 23 percent of foster youth in care for at least half of the year dropped out. And, among youth with a full-time placement (360 days) the dropout rate ranged between 8 and 13 percent. In the 2007–08 school year, however, the dropout rate for these foster youth was only slightly higher than the general student population.

The annual dropout rate provides a “snapshot” of the percentage of dropouts in a given year. This rate, however, does not gauge the level of student retention over the course of high school. The *cohort dropout rate* reported by OSPI estimates the number of dropouts over time by following the number of students who remain in the 9th-grade cohort at the end of each year. For example, if a 9th-grade cohort starts with 100,000 students and has a dropout rate of 5 percent every year, only 81.5 percent of the original cohort still will be served by the end of the 12th grade (Exhibit 5). This results in a cumulative 18.5 percent (100 – 81.5) dropout rate for this example cohort.

**Exhibit 5**  
**Sample Definition of Cohort Dropout Rate**

| <b>Grade</b>   | <b>9th</b> | <b>10th</b> | <b>11th</b> | <b>12th</b> |
|--|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 100,000    | 95,000      | 90,250      | 85,738      |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 5,000      | 4,750       | 4,513       | 4,287       |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 5.00%      | 5.00%       | 5.00%       | 5.00%       |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 95.0%      | 90.3%       | 85.7%       | 81.5%       |

**Exhibit 6**  
**Estimated Cohort Dropout Rate for Washington State Foster Youth Compared With All High School Students**

|  |  | <b>2004–05</b> | <b>2005–06</b> | <b>2006–07</b> | <b>2007–08</b> |
|--|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Grade 9 Cohort Size</b>                     | <b>Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)</b>  | 57             | 58             | 69             | 68             |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year)</b> | 108            | 110            | 117            | 128            |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (360 days in a year)</b>     | 375            | 403            | 383            | 356            |
|  | <b>All Students</b>                          | 89,581         | 89,522         | 88,740         | 87,231         |
| <b>Percentage Remaining at End of Grade 12</b> | <b>Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)</b>  | 32.8%          | 18.6%          | 27.3%          | 39.8%          |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year)</b> | 45.2%          | 45.7%          | 34.3%          | 40.0%          |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (360 days in a year)</b>     | 65.2%          | 60.0%          | 58.5%          | 70.3%          |
|  | <b>All Students</b>                          | 81.2%          | 78.6%          | 79.0%          | 79.1%          |
| <b>Cohort Dropout Rate</b>                     | <b>Foster Youth (90–179 days in a year)</b>  | 67.2%          | 81.4%          | 72.7%          | 60.2%          |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (180–359 days in a year)</b> | 54.8%          | 54.3%          | 65.7%          | 60.0%          |
|  | <b>Foster Youth (360 days in a year)</b>     | 34.8%          | 40.0%          | 41.5%          | 29.7%          |
|  | <b>All Students</b>                          | 18.8%          | 21.4%          | 21.0%          | 20.9%          |

Based on this formula, Exhibit 6 (previous page) presents the cohort dropout rate for all students and foster students in Washington State. Detailed grade-level results are provided in the Appendix.

The cumulative effect of student dropouts over four years translates into a significant number of students who will drop out by the end of grade 12. Statewide, approximately one in five students entering high school will drop out, according to this definition. Youth with a short-term foster placement are at the highest risk of dropping out using this formula. More than half of the cohort of youth in foster care at least half time (180 to 359 days) dropped out. For foster youth in care full-time, the cohort dropout rate ranged between 30 and 42 percent.

This calculation for a cohort dropout rate has several shortcomings. First, it only provides an estimate of the longitudinal dropout rate—student records are not actually linked over time and across grades. Instead, it is assumed that the present cohort will have future dropout rates equivalent to those observed in the current school year. Second, this definition does not illustrate the degree to which students may transfer in or out of the cohort over the course of the four years. Finally, the definition of dropout can vary from state to state, making cross-state comparisons difficult.

## National Governors Association Graduation Rate Compact

To address these shortcomings, the National Governors Association (NGA) convened a task force in 2005 to recommend a standardized definition for following student completion. The definition ultimately agreed to by all 50 states does not rely on what may be disparate definitions of students with a “dropout” or “unknown” status. Instead, this rate looks at student enrollment patterns over time and requires states to link student data to determine who remains in a 9th-grade cohort by the end of grade 12.

The resulting formula (Exhibit 7) calculates graduation based on a student’s enrollment status in each of the four years during high school. While this formula appears simple, complexities in state educational data systems make tracking student enrollment over time a challenge.<sup>12</sup> Currently, 25 states use the NGA formula to calculate publicly reported high school graduation rates.<sup>13</sup> Washington State will begin reporting the NGA graduation rate in 2010.

In the 2004–05 school year, Washington State did implement a statewide unique student identifier. Consequently, four-year enrollment and graduation trends can now be followed over time for individual students. Using a non-identifiable dataset (with a randomly generated identifier), we estimated the longitudinal graduation rate, according to the NGA formula (Exhibit 8). Since Washington has not reported an official NGA graduation rate, however, this estimate should be considered preliminary.

### *Exhibit 7* National Governors Association Graduation Rate Formula

#### *On-time Graduates (year four)*

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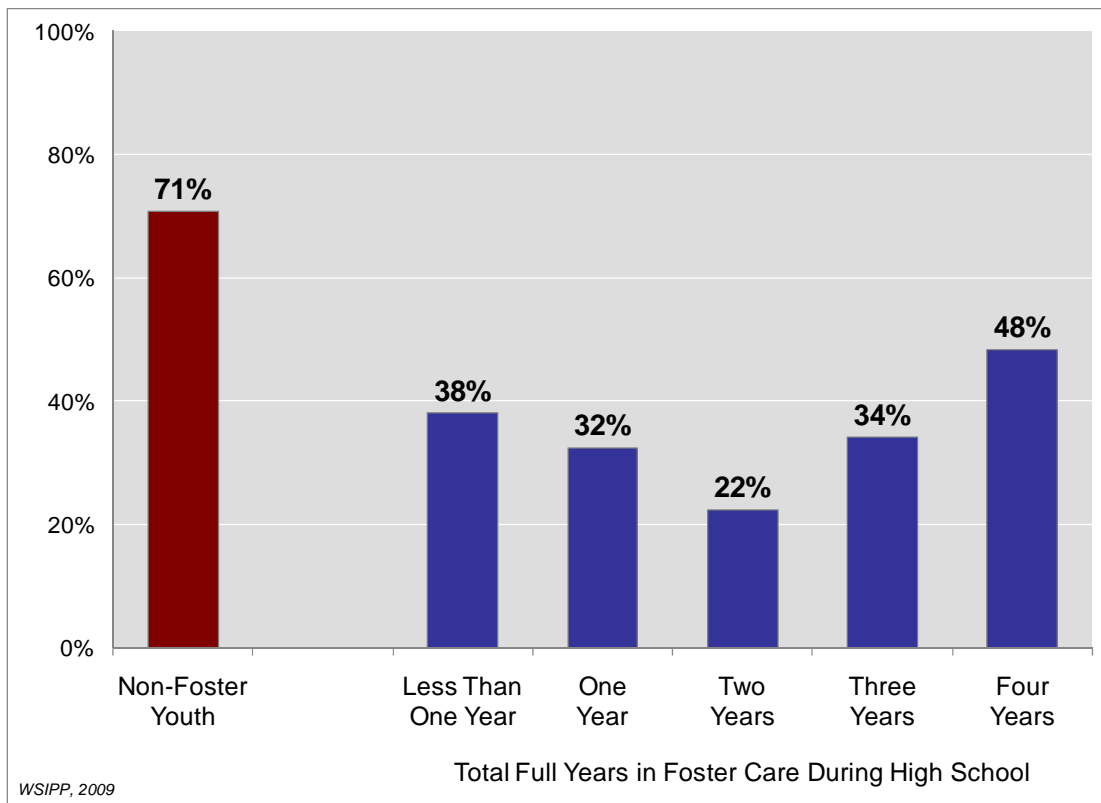
*First-time 9th Graders (year one) + Transfers In (years two – four) – Transfers Out (years one – four)*

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/resources/345> for more detail on the NGA Graduation Rate.

<sup>13</sup> See [http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0907GRADCOUNTS\\_PROGRESS.PDF](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0907GRADCOUNTS_PROGRESS.PDF)



**Exhibit 8**  
**Preliminary NGA Graduation Rate for Washington State**  
**Foster Youth Compared With All High School Students**



| Category   | Non-Foster Students | Years in Foster Placement During High School |              |              |              |              | Foster Students in Cohort |
|--|---------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------|
|  |                     | Less Than One                                | One          | Two          | Three        | Four         |                           |
| First-time 9th graders (2004)  | 83,146              | 161  | 118          | 127          | 143          | 68           | 617                       |
| Total students enrolled in cohort (2004–2008)                                      | 98,748              | 222  | 166          | 182          | 185          | 80           | 835                       |
| Students who transferred out of cohort and did not re-enroll between 2004 and 2008 | 16,759              | 59   | 52           | 57           | 50           | 18           | 236                       |
| Total students remaining at the end of Grade 12 (x)                                | 81,989              | 163  | 114          | 125          | 135          | 62           | 599                       |
| Total on-time graduates from cohort (y)  | 57,985              | 62   | 37           | 28           | 46           | 30           | 203                       |
| <b>NGA Graduation Rate (y/x)</b>   | <b>70.7%</b>        | <b>38.0%</b>                                 | <b>32.5%</b> | <b>22.4%</b> | <b>34.1%</b> | <b>48.4%</b> | <b>33.9%</b>              |

Note: Special Education and Limited English Proficient students with a graduation date beyond four years (2008) are placed in the cohort where they are expected to graduate and are excluded from this calculation. At present, available data only permit an analysis of four-year longitudinal graduation rates. Future analyses will include a five-year longitudinal graduation rate to look at extended graduates.

Using this new definition, we found that **71 percent** of the 9th-grade student cohort entering high school in 2004–05 graduated at the end of four years. Next, we determined how many students had a foster care placement that lasted over the entire school year (September through June) during high school. We then looked at the longitudinal graduation rate for youth who had a short foster placement (at least 90 days, but less than a full year), and placements lasting between one and four years.

For youth in this cohort with an out-of-home placement lasting one to three school years, the longitudinal graduation rate was **22 to 34 percent**. Youth who stayed in a continuous placement over the course of high school have a higher likelihood of graduating. For foster youth with four full years in placement, **48 percent** graduated after four years.

As previously indicated, the operational definition for calculating the NGA graduation rate with Washington State data has not been finalized, and these results should be viewed with caution. Furthermore, for this longitudinal analysis, the definition of long-term foster youth is expanded to include youth with a long-term foster placement in each of the four years during high school. Future work is needed to examine graduation outcomes for youth that have different permanent placements (i.e. guardianship, adoption, reunification) following the foster care episode.

## Summary

This issue paper includes an analysis of the graduation and dropout rates in Washington State for students who were in the foster care system during high school. Using various definitions of graduates and dropouts, we compared results for foster students with the entire student population. The statewide rates correspond to statistics published on an annual basis by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Consequently, the reported rates for foster youth can also be compared to other at-risk populations. And, trends in the graduation and dropout rates for foster youth can be followed over time to monitor progress in educational achievement.

**Appendix A1**  
**Annual Dropout/Graduation Statistics by Grade:**  
**All Washington State Students**

|  | 2004–05        |        |        |        | 2005–06        |        |        |        |
|--|----------------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|
|  | 9              | 10     | 11     | 12     | 9              | 10     | 11     | 12     |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 89,581         | 81,224 | 76,898 | 66,534 | 89,522         | 81,674 | 79,570 | 68,582 |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 3,423          | 3,384  | 4,215  | 4,516  | 3,712          | 3,552  | 5,319  | 5,536  |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 3.8%           | 4.2%   | 5.5%   | 6.8%   | 4.1%           | 4.3%   | 6.7%   | 8.1%   |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 96.2%          | 92.2%  | 87.1%  | 81.2%  | 95.9%          | 91.7%  | 85.6%  | 78.6%  |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 4.9% (15,538)  |        |        |        | 5.7% (18,119)  |        |        |        |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 7.6% (5,049)   |        |        |        | 9.6% (6,597)   |        |        |        |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 74.6% (56,969) |        |        |        | 70.4% (56,449) |        |        |        |
|  | 2006–07        |        |        |        | 2007–08        |        |        |        |
|  | 9              | 10     | 11     | 12     | 9              | 10     | 11     | 12     |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 88,740         | 82,410 | 78,593 | 70,553 | 87,231         | 82,843 | 78,947 | 70,256 |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 3,364          | 3,706  | 4,968  | 5,785  | 3,186          | 3,525  | 4,847  | 6,097  |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 3.8%           | 4.5%   | 6.3%   | 8.2%   | 3.7%           | 4.3%   | 6.1%   | 8.7%   |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 96.2%          | 91.9%  | 86.1%  | 79.0%  | 96.3%          | 92.2%  | 86.6%  | 79.1%  |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 5.6% (17,823)  |        |        |        | 5.5% (17,655)  |        |        |        |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 8.5% (6,010)   |        |        |        | 9.3% (6,561)   |        |        |        |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |                |        |        |        |                |        |        |        |
|  | 71.7% (58,758) |        |        |        | 71.0% (57,598) |        |        |        |

Source: 2009 WSIPP analysis of OSPI data. Numbers may differ slightly from OSPI's reported statistics.

<sup>1</sup> Annual dropout rate equals the sum of total dropouts in each grade divided by the sum of total students served in each grade.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing students are students in grade 12 who did not graduate/complete high school, but were not recorded as having a dropout or unknown enrollment status. The continuing rate equals the number of continuing students divided by the total students served in 12th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Graduates include the number of students served in grade 12, minus confirmed dropouts (in grade 12) and continuing students. The graduation rate is calculated as the percentage of students remaining at the end of grade 11 multiplied by one minus the sum of the continuing rate and grade 12 dropout rate.

**Appendix A2**  
**Annual Dropout/Graduation Statistics by Grade:**  
**Foster Youth in Care for 90 to 179 Days During Current School Year**

|  | 2004–05    |       |       |       | 2005–06    |       |       |       |
|--|------------|-------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 57         | 35    | 42    | 31    | 58         | 43    | 31    | 27    |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 7          | 7     | 10    | 12    | 10         | 13    | 16    | 9     |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 12.3%      | 20.0% | 23.8% | 38.7% | 17.2%      | 30.2% | 51.6% | 33.3% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 87.7%      | 70.2% | 53.5% | 32.8% | 82.8%      | 57.7% | 27.9% | 18.6% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 21.8% (36) |       |       |       | 30.2% (48) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 19.4% (6)  |       |       |       | 14.8% (4)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 22.4% (21) |       |       |       | 14.5% (18) |       |       |       |
|  | 2006–07    |       |       |       | 2007–08    |       |       |       |
|  | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 69         | 53    | 32    | 38    | 68         | 59    | 53    | 33    |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 16         | 9     | 6     | 18    | 5          | 12    | 12    | 10    |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 23.2%      | 17.0% | 18.8% | 47.4% | 7.4%       | 20.3% | 22.6% | 30.3% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 76.8%      | 63.8% | 51.8% | 27.3% | 92.6%      | 73.8% | 57.1% | 39.8% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 25.5% (49) |       |       |       | 18.3% (39) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 21.1% (8)  |       |       |       | 24.2% (8)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 16.4% (12) |       |       |       | 26.0% (24) |       |       |       |

Source: 2009 WSIPP analysis of OSPI data.

<sup>1</sup> Annual dropout rate equals the sum of total dropouts in each grade divided by the sum of total students served in each grade.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing students are students in grade 12 who did not graduate/complete high school, but were not recorded as having a dropout or unknown enrollment status. The continuing rate equals the number of continuing students divided by the total students served in 12th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Graduates include the number of students served in grade 12, minus confirmed dropouts (in grade 12) and continuing students. The graduation rate is calculated as the percentage of students remaining at the end of grade 11 multiplied by one minus the sum of the continuing rate and grade 12 dropout rate.

**Appendix A3**  
**Annual Dropout/Graduation Statistics by Grade:**  
**Foster Youth in Care Half Time (180 to 359 Days) During Current School Year**

|  | 2004–05    |       |       |       | 2005–06    |       |       |       |
|--|------------|-------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 108        | 84    | 75    | 81    | 110        | 91    | 73    | 105   |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 13         | 13    | 19    | 15    | 10         | 16    | 21    | 15    |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 12.0%      | 15.5% | 25.3% | 18.5% | 9.1%       | 17.6% | 28.8% | 14.3% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 88.0%      | 74.3% | 55.5% | 45.2% | 90.9%      | 74.9% | 53.4% | 45.7% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 17.2% (60) |       |       |       | 16.4% (62) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 17.3% (14) |       |       |       | 26.7% (28) |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 35.6% (52) |       |       |       | 31.5% (94) |       |       |       |
|  | 2006–07    |       |       |       | 2007–08    |       |       |       |
|  | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9          | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 117        | 102   | 101   | 103   | 128        | 86    | 84    | 97    |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 12         | 25    | 20    | 38    | 18         | 20    | 19    | 21    |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 10.3%      | 24.5% | 19.8% | 36.9% | 14.1%      | 23.3% | 22.6% | 21.6% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 89.7%      | 67.7% | 54.3% | 34.3% | 85.9%      | 66.0% | 51.0% | 40.0% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 22.5% (95) |       |       |       | 19.7% (78) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 11.7% (12) |       |       |       | 17.5% (17) |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |            |       |       |       |            |       |       |       |
|  | 28.0% (53) |       |       |       | 31.0% (59) |       |       |       |

Source: 2009 WSIPP analysis of OSPI data.

<sup>1</sup> Annual dropout rate equals the sum of total dropouts in each grade divided by the sum of total students served in each grade.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing students are students in grade 12 who did not graduate/complete high school, but were not recorded as having a dropout or unknown enrollment status. The continuing rate equals the number of continuing students divided by the total students served in 12th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Graduates include the number of students served in grade 12, minus confirmed dropouts (in grade 12) and continuing students. The graduation rate is calculated as the percentage of students remaining at the end of grade 11 multiplied by one minus the sum of the continuing rate and grade 12 dropout rate.

**Appendix A4**  
**Annual Dropout/Graduation Statistics by Grade:**  
**Foster Youth in Care Full Time (360 Days) During Current School Year**

|  | 2004–05     |       |       |       | 2005–06     |       |       |       |
|--|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 375         | 293   | 216   | 33    | 403         | 329   | 245   | 63    |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 37          | 23    | 23    | 4     | 38          | 42    | 28    | 9     |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 9.9%        | 7.8%  | 10.6% | 12.1% | 9.4%        | 12.8% | 11.4% | 14.3% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 90.1%       | 83.1% | 74.2% | 65.2% | 90.6%       | 79.0% | 70.0% | 60.0% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 9.5% (87)   |       |       |       | 11.3% (117) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 36.4% (12)  |       |       |       | 34.9% (22)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 38.2% (31)  |       |       |       | 35.5% (54)  |       |       |       |
|  | 2006–07     |       |       |       | 2007–08     |       |       |       |
|  | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 383         | 313   | 238   | 65    | 356         | 336   | 227   | 63    |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 45          | 41    | 31    | 8     | 33          | 28    | 11    | 7     |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 11.7%       | 13.1% | 13.0% | 12.3% | 9.3%        | 8.3%  | 4.8%  | 11.1% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 88.3%       | 76.7% | 66.7% | 58.5% | 90.7%       | 83.2% | 79.1% | 70.3% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 12.5% (125) |       |       |       | 8.0% (79)   |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 26.2% (17)  |       |       |       | 33.3% (21)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 41.0% (40)  |       |       |       | 44.0% (35)  |       |       |       |

Source: 2009 WSIPP analysis of OSPI data.

<sup>1</sup> Annual dropout rate equals the sum of total dropouts in each grade divided by the sum of total students served in each grade.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing students are students in grade 12 that did not graduate/complete high school, but were not recorded as having a dropout or unknown enrollment status. The continuing rate equals the number of continuing students divided by the total students served in 12th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Graduates include number of students served in grade 12, minus confirmed dropouts (in grade 12) and continuing students. The graduation rate is calculated as the percent of students remaining at the end of grade 11 multiplied by one minus the sum of the continuing rate and grade 12 dropout rate.

**Appendix A4**  
**Annual Dropout/Graduation Statistics by Grade:**  
**All Foster Youth in Care (90 to 360 Days) During Current School Year**

|  | 2004–05     |       |       |       | 2005–06     |       |       |       |
|--|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|
|  | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 540         | 412   | 333   | 145   | 571         | 463   | 349   | 195   |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 57          | 43    | 52    | 31    | 58          | 71    | 65    | 33    |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 10.6%       | 10.4% | 15.6% | 21.4% | 10.2%       | 15.3% | 18.6% | 16.9% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 89.4%       | 80.1% | 67.6% | 53.1% | 89.8%       | 76.1% | 61.9% | 51.4% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 12.8% (183) |       |       |       | 14.4% (227) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 22.1% (32)  |       |       |       | 27.7% (54)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 38.2% (31)  |       |       |       | 34.3% (54)  |       |       |       |
|  | 2006–07     |       |       |       | 2007–08     |       |       |       |
|  | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    | 9           | 10    | 11    | 12    |
| <b>Net students served</b>                                   | 569         | 468   | 371   | 206   | 552         | 481   | 364   | 193   |
| <b>Number of dropouts</b>                                    | 73          | 75    | 57    | 64    | 56          | 60    | 42    | 38    |
| <b>Dropout rate</b>  | 12.8%       | 16.0% | 15.4% | 31.1% | 10.1%       | 12.5% | 11.5% | 19.7% |
| <b>Percentage of cohort remaining at the end of the year</b> | 87.2%       | 73.2% | 62.0% | 42.7% | 89.9%       | 78.6% | 69.6% | 55.9% |
| <b>Annual dropout rate (Total)<sup>1</sup></b>               |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 16.7% (269) |       |       |       | 12.3% (196) |       |       |       |
| <b>Continuing rate (Total)<sup>2</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 18.0% (37)  |       |       |       | 23.8% (46)  |       |       |       |
| <b>Graduation rate (Total)<sup>3</sup></b>                   |             |       |       |       |             |       |       |       |
|  | 31.6% (105) |       |       |       | 39.3% (109) |       |       |       |

Source: 2009 WSIPP analysis of OSPI data.

<sup>1</sup> Annual dropout rate equals the sum of total dropouts in each grade divided by the sum of total students served in each grade.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing students are students in grade 12 that did not graduate/complete high school, but were not recorded as having a dropout or unknown enrollment status. The continuing rate equals the number of continuing students divided by the total students served in 12th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Graduates include number of students served in grade 12, minus confirmed dropouts (in grade 12) and continuing students. The graduation rate is calculated as the percent of students remaining at the end of grade 11 multiplied by one minus the sum of the continuing rate and grade 12 dropout rate.

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Document No. 09-11-3901



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