

## U.S. Department of Education Sets Standard for Calculating High School Graduation Rates

In recent years, the increased focus on accountability in public education has led to a growing demand for an accurate, consistent method for measuring national, state, and school district high school graduation rates. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included an on-time graduation rate as an accountability-reporting requirement. At the National Governors Association meeting in July 2005, governors from 45 states adopted recommendations for creating a common formula for calculating graduation rates. The governors acknowledged that the lack of such a measure has led to continuing vast disparities in state reporting, not just among states but even within states. Their goals included the development of a common formula for calculating dropout and graduation rates and a reassessment of high school curricula leading to more rigorous programs.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Department of Education, in response to these needs, asked the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to conduct a scientific examination of commonly-used formulas for calculating high school completion, and the results of the NCES research have recently been released in a two-volume, 160-page publication that describes the analysis of those measures and makes recommendations based on that analysis.<sup>2</sup> Using a combination of descriptive univariate statistics and regression analysis, the NCES compared four common proxy measures to that of the true cohort rate that was calculated using existing student-record-level cohort data from two states.

The analysis concluded that the measure known as the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) “is the only measure that is consistently among the best performing indicators in each analysis.” The AFGR for a given cohort of 9<sup>th</sup>-graders is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates by the number of first-time 9<sup>th</sup>-graders who began three years earlier.<sup>3</sup> A national summary of the AFGR calculations by state for 2001-2002 through 2005-2006 is available on the IRE website at <http://www.delmar.edu/IRE/reports.html>.

For many years, the Del Mar College Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness has tracked public high school graduation rates for Nueces and San Patricio counties. A chart listing this data and the estimated graduation rates for academic years 1993-2008 is included in the table below. The method used for calculating the local graduation rates is very similar to the AFGR. It is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates for a given year by the number of 9<sup>th</sup>-graders enrolled three years earlier. For example, there were 6,597 9<sup>th</sup>-graders enrolled in academic year 2004-2005; 4,366 students graduated in 2007-2008, resulting in a graduation rate of 66.2 percent for public high schools in Nueces and San Patricio counties. Please note that the enrollment figures available from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) do not currently differentiate first-time 9<sup>th</sup>-graders, so this refinement cannot be added at this time to our calculations. However, using the alternate three-year average method proposed by the NCES results in an estimated graduation rate of 73.4 percent. The true graduation rate is most likely somewhere between these two figures.

The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness supports the recommendations of the NCES to develop and implement a nationwide AFGR. It is important to note that the 78th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 186 in 2003, directing that public school districts collect data consistent with the NCES formula beginning in 2005-2006. The 2008-2009 school year is the fourth year the definition is in effect.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, “Governors Endorse a Standard Formula for Graduation Rates,” July 18, 2005

<sup>2</sup> *User’s Guide to Computing High School Graduation Rates Volume 1* and *User’s Guide to Computing High School Graduation Rates Volume 2*, National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences, August 2006

<sup>3</sup> *The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate for Public High Schools From the Common Core of Data: School Years 2001–02 to 2005-06*, National Center for Education Statistics Publications, January 2009

<sup>4</sup> *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2007-08*, Texas Education Agency, July 2009

**Public School Enrollment and Projections  
for Nueces and San Patricio Counties**

Year	Births Number	School Year	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade	Number Graduates	Percent of 9th Grade Graduating	Graduation Year	Estimated First-time 9th graders	% Graduating Using estimate of FT 9th graders *
1985	6,694	1991-92	6,135	6,028	6,328	6,386	6,322	6,624	6,157	5,987	6,555	5,363	4,559	4,192	3,801	64.2%	1992		
1986	6,553	1992-93	6,209	5,997	6,108	6,404	6,452	6,599	6,680	6,072	6,758	5,471	4,514	4,025	3,569	59.9%	1993	5,608	63.6%
1987	6,208	1993-94	6,002	6,031	6,118	6,222	6,433	6,635	6,751	6,538	7,138	5,458	4,672	4,017	3,726	60.8%	1994	5,726	65.1%
1988	6,186	1994-95	5,985	5,907	6,040	6,085	6,229	6,457	6,689	6,523	7,461	5,690	4,571	4,115	3,768	57.5%	1995	6,012	62.7%
1989	6,073	1995-96	6,000	5,884	5,903	6,021	6,018	6,275	6,540	6,609	7,703	5,875	4,768	3,975	3,695	54.7%	1996	6,068	60.9%
1990	6,349	1996-97	6,131	5,909	5,953	5,896	6,004	6,187	6,354	6,380	7,762	6,016	5,102	4,072	3,819	53.5%	1997	6,300	60.6%
1991	6,515	1997-98	6,300	5,934	5,881	5,888	5,866	6,071	6,272	6,195	7,799	5,910	4,931	4,433	4,262	57.1%	1998	6,625	64.3%
1992	6,350	1998-99	6,328	5,957	5,797	5,810	5,759	5,984	6,167	6,122	7,532	5,813	5,007	4,454	4,371	56.7%	1999	6,747	64.8%
1993	6,399	1999-00	6,034	5,963	6,012	5,752	5,733	5,868	6,010	5,991	7,387	5,569	4,985	4,621	4,468	57.6%	2000	6,760	66.1%
1994	6,305	2000-01	5,948	5,748	5,895	5,916	5,748	5,708	5,975	5,853	7,056	5,541	4,822	4,630	4,469	57.3%	2001	6,664	67.1%
1995	6,453	2001-02	5,962	5,774	5,758	5,820	5,962	5,818	5,797	5,889	7,035	5,517	4,899	4,561	4,462	59.2%	2002	6,432	69.4%
1996	6,257	2002-03	6,001	5,715	5,693	5,717	5,808	5,966	5,837	5,731	6,882	5,459	4,881	4,613	4,603	62.3%	2003	6,350	72.5%
1997	6,542	2003-04	5,984	5,745	5,669	5,700	5,708	5,827	6,063	5,783	6,739	5,508	4,809	4,682	4,675	66.3%	2004	6,188	75.5%
1998	6,376	2004-05	6,005	5,761	5,699	5,641	5,741	5,784	5,937	6,010	6,597	5,377	4,831	4,530	4,409	62.7%	2005	6,116	72.1%
1999	6,462	2005-06	6,128	5,845	5,746	5,589	5,749	5,612	5,839	5,844	6,775	5,475	4,801	4,624	4,250	61.8%	2006	6,093	69.8%
2000	6,452	2006-07	6,377	5,830	5,732	5,707	5,611	5,612	5,660	5,719	6,498	5,603	4,857	4,626	4,235	62.8%	2007	5,949	71.2%
2001	6,367	2007-08	6,238	6,138	5,798	5,672	5,652	5,508	5,626	5,545	6,439	5,345	5,025	4,728	4,366	66.2%	2008	5,952	73.4%
2002	6,069	2008-09	6,167	6,034	6,024	5,736	5,737	5,550	5,521	5,694	6,073	5,250	4,875	4,870	4,685	69.1%	2009	6,129	76.4%
2003	6,020	2009-10	5,754	5,920	5,988	5,967	5,749	5,715	5,605	5,442	6,566	4,822	4,641	4,633	4,457	68.6%	2010	5,896	75.6%
2004	6,238	2010-11		5,523	5,874	5,931	5,980	5,727	5,772	5,525	6,276	5,214	4,262	4,410	4,242	65.9%	2011	5,803	73.1%
2005		2011-12			5,481	5,819	5,944	5,957	5,784	5,689	6,372	4,983	4,609	4,051	3,897	64.2%	2012	5,480	71.1%
2006		2012-13				5,429	5,832	5,921	6,016	5,701	6,561	5,059	4,405	4,380	4,213	64.2%	2013	5,825	72.3%
2007		2013-14					5,441	5,809	5,980	5,931	6,574	5,209	4,472	4,186	4,027	64.2%	2014	5,567	72.3%
2008		2014-15						5,420	5,867	5,895	6,839	5,220	4,605	4,250	4,088	64.2%	2,015	5,652	72.3%
2009		2015-16							5,474	5,783	6,798	5,430	4,614	4,376	4,210	64.2%	2016	5,820	72.3%
										5,396	6,669	5,398	4,800	4,385	4,218	64.2%	2017	5,832	72.3%
											6,223	5,296	4,771	4,562	4,388	64.2%	2018	6,067	72.3%
												4,941	4,681	4,534	4,362	64.2%	2019	6,030	72.3%
													4,368	4,449	4,279	64.2%	2020	5,916	72.3%
														4,151	3,993	64.2%	2021	5,520	72.3%

Source: Texas Education Agency. Shaded area indicates projected figures.

\* Estimate of FT (first-time) 9th-graders is calculated using NCES formula.