



Research Brief

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Pennsylvania's High School Graduates

MIDDLETOWN, Pa – Every year, June marks the annual rite of graduation for thousands of Pennsylvania high school students. Many of these students will be leaving for college in the fall, while others will join the workforce. Of Pennsylvania's total enrollment of 2,123,868 children during the 2003-2004 school year, 141,053 or 6.6 percent graduated from high school.

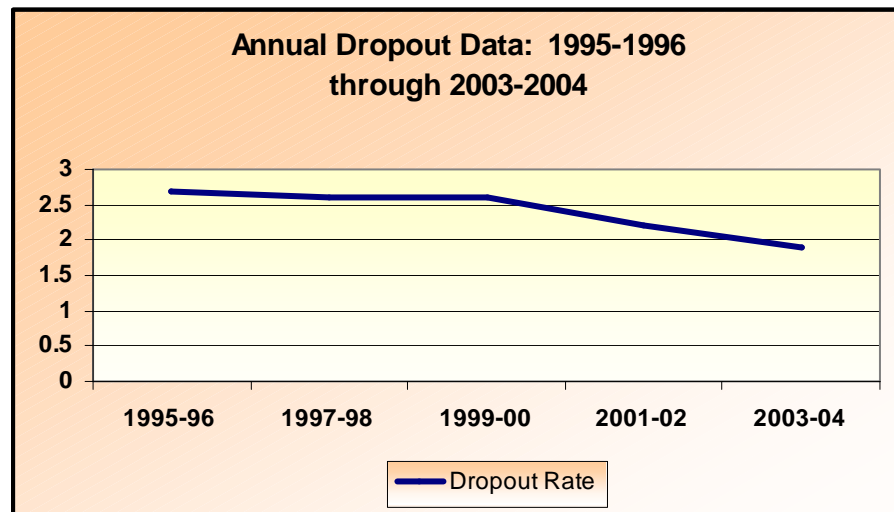
Graduate Characteristics

Over 87 percent of high school graduates in 2003-2004 matriculated from public schools, while the remaining 12.5 percent graduated from private or nonpublic schools. The number of graduates was split evenly by gender, with 70,513 males and 70,540 females earning their diploma. Unsurprisingly, Philadelphia (15,219), Allegheny (13,541), and Montgomery (9,885) schools produced the most graduates, while graduates in sparsely populated rural areas like Cameron (66), Sullivan (66) and Forest (58) Counties numbered less than 100. (Table 1)

Mirroring the state's racial and ethnic composition, 83.1 percent of the graduates were White (Non-Hispanic), 11.1 percent were Black (Non-Hispanic), 3.2 percent were Hispanic, and the remainder were of another race group. The number of public high school graduates at the end of the 2003-2004 school year increased 7.9 percent over 2000-2001, better than the United States as a whole and every state contiguous to Pennsylvania except New Jersey (+12.3 percent).

Dropouts

An analysis of the 10 year period between 1994 and 2004 shows that Pennsylvania's dropout rate has steadily declined from a high of 2.7 percent (21,257) in 1994-1995 to a low of 1.9 percent (16,986) in 2003-2004. Dropout rates continue to affect minority



populations disproportionately, however. More than 43 percent of the dropouts in 2003-2004

were Black (Non-Hispanic) or Hispanic. The dropout rates were highest for Hispanics (5.2 percent), followed by Blacks (4.0 percent), and American Indians/Alaskan Natives (3.1 percent). The dropout rates for Asian/Pacific Islanders and Whites (Non-Hispanic) were both below 2.0 percent.

Dropouts have fewer options available to them, and tend to find employment in less-skilled positions. For dropouts where post-dropout activity was reported in 2003-2004, 30.6 percent found blue-collar jobs, 27.3 percent went on to get a GED or other education, 17.2 percent were service workers, 16.5 percent were unemployed, and just 1.6 percent found jobs as white collar workers.*

College Bound

As the dropout rate has declined, the number of college-bound graduates has steadily increased. Since 1994-1995, the graduation rate has risen 4.9 percent to 74.2 percent in 2003-2004. The largest numbers of college-bound graduates were in Allegheny (11,101), Philadelphia (10,586), and Montgomery (8,407) Counties. Montgomery (85.0 percent), Pike (85.0 percent), and Chester (84.0 percent) Counties had the highest percentages of college-bound graduates. Nineteen Pennsylvania counties matched the state rate of 74.2 percent or higher college-bound graduates, while ten counties had less than 60 percent. Potter (56.5 percent), Fulton (55.4 percent), and Sullivan (50.0 percent) had the lowest percentages of college-bound graduates. (Table 1)

Statistics show that students in private schools are more likely to go to college than those in public schools: 89.1 percent were college-bound in 2003-2004 compared to 72.1 percent of those that graduated from public schools. Race and ethnicity are also a factor in whether or not a student is college-bound. Over 86 percent of all Asians/Pacific Islanders were college-bound in 2003-2004, followed by Whites (Non-Hispanic) (75.4 percent), American Indian/Alaskan Natives (68.1 percent), Blacks (Non-Hispanic) (67.5 percent), and Hispanics (58.2 percent). More women were college bound than men in all categories.

Benefits of a College Education

Not convinced of the benefits of a college education? Consider the following: As of 2004, the median earnings of Pennsylvanians with a Bachelor's degree was \$42,956, \$17,000 more than persons with a high school degree and \$24,000 more than high school dropouts. A graduate or professional degree boosts median earnings to more than \$56,000. Moreover, the poverty rate is just 3.5 percent for persons with a Bachelor's degree, but jumps to 9.8 percent for high school graduates and 21.0 percent for dropouts. As of 2004, 31.4 percent of the commonwealth's population 25 years and over had at least an Associate's degree.

Notes: * Post-dropout activities were reported for about 46% of the 16,986 dropouts.

Sources: *Pennsylvania Department of Education: Public, Private, and Nonpublic School Enrollments 2003-2004, Public, Private, and Nonpublic School High School Graduates 2003-2004; American Community Survey 2004.*

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth's official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau's National State Data Center Program.

Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center's State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg's Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.

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Table 1. College Bound Graduates, Pennsylvania Counties: 2003-2004

Area	Total Graduates	Total College Bound	Percent of graduates that are College Bound
Pennsylvania	141,053	104,663	74.2
Adams	1,252	769	61.4
Allegheny	13,541	11,101	82.0
Armstrong	854	596	69.8
Beaver	2,168	1,620	74.7
Bedford	531	304	57.3
Berks	4,552	3,277	72.0
Blair	1,518	954	62.8
Bradford	805	482	59.9
Bucks	7,842	6,389	81.5
Butler	2,032	1,646	81.0
Cambria	1,738	1,196	68.8
Cameron	66	43	65.2
Carbon	674	462	68.5
Centre	1,149	839	73.0
Chester	5,369	4,512	84.0
Clarion	541	358	66.2
Clearfield	1,137	720	63.3
Clinton	401	233	58.1
Columbia	879	599	68.1
Crawford	806	528	65.5
Cumberland	2,351	1,896	80.6
Dauphin	2,864	2,177	76.0
Delaware	6,694	5,375	80.3
Elk	481	357	74.2
Erie	3,406	2,497	73.3
Fayette	1,343	816	60.8
Forest	58	38	65.5
Franklin	1,412	855	60.6
Fulton	157	87	55.4
Greene	455	287	63.1
Huntingdon	487	277	56.9
Indiana	918	635	69.2
Jefferson	535	333	62.2
Juniata	254	153	60.2
Lackawanna	2,406	1,865	77.5
Lancaster	5,275	3,396	64.4
Lawrence	1,068	772	72.3
Lebanon	1,268	878	69.2
Lehigh	3,441	2,678	77.8
Luzerne	3,610	2,777	76.9
Lycoming	1,244	875	70.3

Table 1 (Continued) College Bound Graduates, Pennsylvania Counties: 2003-2004

Area	Total Graduates	Total College Bound	Percent of graduates that are College Bound
McKean	573	361	63.0
Mercer	1,470	978	66.5
Mifflin	421	248	58.9
Monroe	2,203	1,595	72.4
Montgomery	9,885	8,407	85.0
Montour	196	162	82.7
Northampton	3,504	2,712	77.4
Northumberland	1,084	696	64.2
Perry	501	299	59.7
Philadelphia	15,219	10,586	69.6
Pike	373	317	85.0
Potter	223	126	56.5
Schuylkill	1,653	1,171	70.8
Snyder	427	266	62.3
Somerset	952	608	63.9
Sullivan	66	33	50.0
Susquehanna	582	368	63.2
Tioga	481	294	61.1
Union	315	230	73.0
Venango	748	469	62.7
Warren	510	294	57.6
Washington	2,148	1,646	76.6
Wayne	651	429	65.9
Westmoreland	4,311	3,464	80.4
Wyoming	354	283	79.9
York	4,621	2,969	64.3