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HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES: 2005-06

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ABSTRACT

For the first time, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction is reporting a four-year on-time graduation rate for each high school and district across the state based on the incoming 9th grade class of 2002-03. This rate is based on the number of those 9th grade students who graduated four years later (by the Spring of 2006). While the overall WCPSS rate of 82.6% was relatively high compared to the state and other school districts, large discrepancies exist between student subgroups. Black/African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, and students from three identified risk groups (students with disabilities, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and students with limited English proficiency) had graduation rates below that of other students.

BACKGROUND

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires schools that graduate 12th grade students to report a graduation rate as part of the measurement of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Until 2005-06, the available data systems across the state were not capable of producing a true “four-year” cohort graduation rate as intended by the legislation. Loosely defined, a four-year cohort graduation rate answers the question, “Of the 9th grade students who start school in a particular year, how many of them receive a high school diploma four years later”?

Although a seemingly simple question on the surface, the state’s data systems were unable to produce such a rate until 2005-06 due to the many complicated details behind capturing and reporting that type of information. Prior to 2005-06, the state had relied primarily on a less desirable method referred to as an “on-time” graduation rate for calculating and reporting graduation rates for AYP purposes. This measurement answered the alternative question, “Of the students who graduated in a particular year, how many of them did so in four years or less”?

Beginning with the 2006-07 school year, the change in the new four-year cohort rate will be used as the metric for AYP graduation rates for any North Carolina high school that graduates seniors. The 2005-06 four-year cohort rate – the baseline for the measurement of that change – is being reported for schools, districts, and the state as a whole for the first time via the 2005-06 NC School Report Cards which are produced by NCDPI and the Governor’s Office (<http://www.ncreportcards.com>).

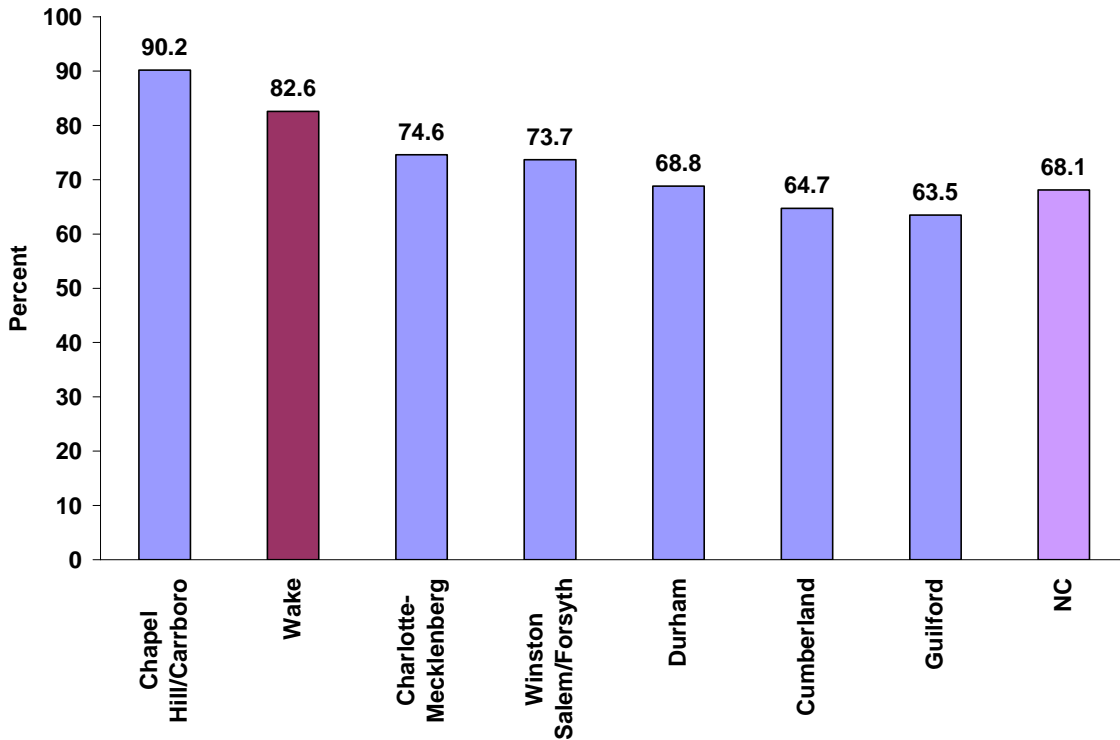
DEFINITION OF THE RATE

This four-year cohort graduation rate for 2005-06 is defined as follows: The percentage of students entering the 9th grade *for the first time* during the 2002-03 school year who earned a diploma by or prior to the spring of 2006. There are a number of complex rules established by the state with respect to how and whether students are counted. Examples of those rules and exceptions include:

- Students repeating 9th grade in 2002-03 (i.e., were also in 9th grade in 2001-02) are not included;
- Students who transfer into a school *after* 9th grade are included if they transfer on grade level;
- Students who transfer from one NC public school to another *on grade level* are taken out of the sending school’s calculations, and are added to the receiving school’s calculations;
- Students who leave the school and their whereabouts cannot be tracked (e.g., students who move to another state or another country) are removed from the rate calculations; and
- Students who receive certificates of completion rather than an actual diploma (e.g., certain students with disabilities) are not counted as graduates.

Using this metric, the overall graduation rate for the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) in 2005-06 was 82.6%, meaning that just over four out of every five students who enrolled in 9th grade for the first time in the Fall of 2002 graduated four years later. Compared to other districts and the state as a whole, the WCPSS four-year graduation rate was high (Figure 1). Rates for each WCPSS high school are reported in the Appendix.

Figure 1
Four-Year Graduation Rates for Selected Districts and NC, 2005-06



Among various student subgroups, female students had a graduation rate just over 7 percentage points higher than male students (Figure 2). The four-year graduation rate varied considerably (from 58% to 92%) among ethnic subgroups, with White, Asian, and American Indian students showing rates at or near 90% (Figure 3). Students with disabilities, students eligible for free or reduced price-lunch, and students with limited English proficiency also had graduation rates that were substantially below the system-wide average (Figure 4).

Figure 2
WCPSS Four-year Graduation Rates by Gender, 2005-06

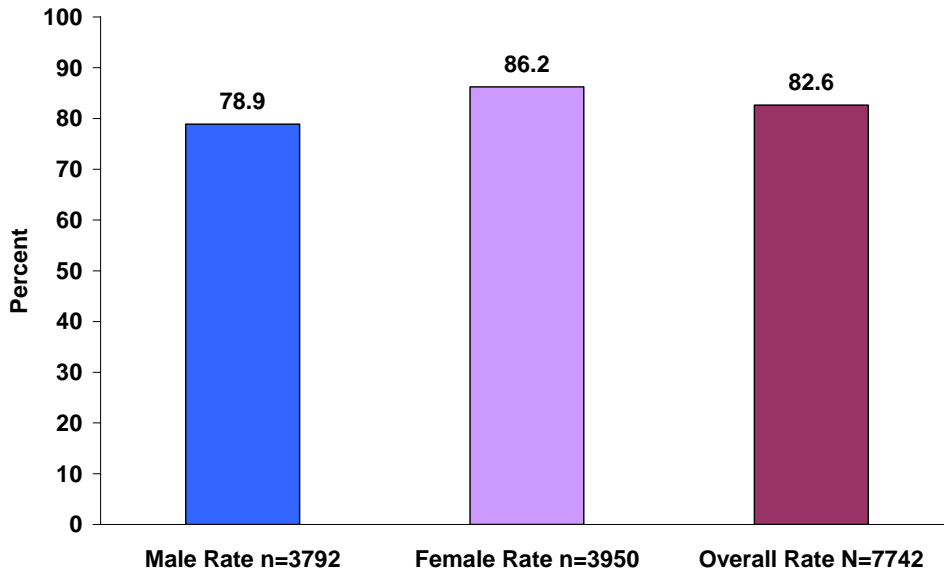


Figure 3
WCPSS Four-year Graduation Rates by Ethnicity, 2005-06

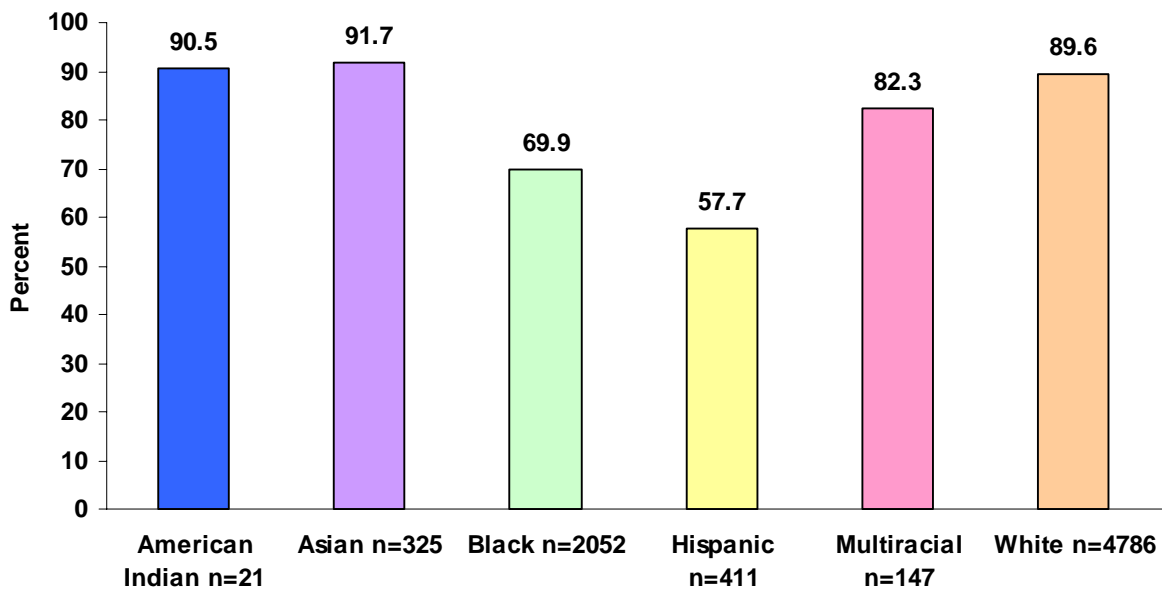
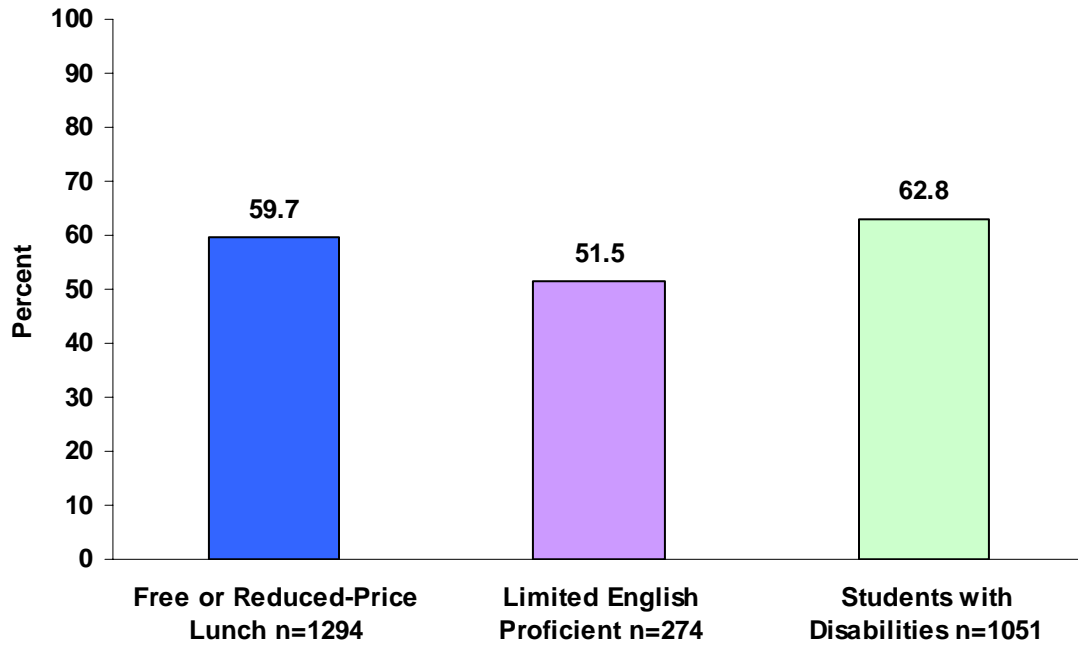


Figure 4
WCPSS Four-year Graduation Rates by Risk Group, 2005-06



SUMMARY

While the overall graduation rate of 82.6% for WCPSS in 2005-06 was relatively high compared to the state and other similar school districts, large discrepancies exist between various student subgroups. Black/African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, and students from the three risk groups identified (students with disabilities, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and students with limited English proficiency) had graduation rates that were substantially below that of other students. In the future, it will be possible to monitor the changes in these cohort graduation rates over time to see whether the likelihood of graduating from high school in four years increases overall, and in particular students in the three risk subgroups. With the advent of new, more stringent statewide graduation requirements for students entering high school in 2006 and beyond, the possible effect of that policy change on graduation rates can also be examined beginning with the graduating class of 2010.

Appendix

**Table 1
Four-year Graduation Rates by WCPSS High School, 2005-06**

| School/Unit | Rate |
|------------------------|-------------|
| NC | 68.1% |
| WCPSS | 82.6% |
| Apex | 89.3% |
| Athens Drive | 81.5% |
| Broughton | 88.8% |
| Cary | 82.5% |
| East Wake | 74.8% |
| Enloe | 90.1% |
| Fuquay-Varina | 80.7% |
| Garner | 75.5% |
| Green Hope | 90.3% |
| Leesville Road | 90.6% |
| Longview | 5.9% |
| Middle Creek | 88.9% |
| Millbrook | 82.5% |
| Phillips | 50.0% |
| Sanderson | 78.6% |
| Southeast Raleigh | 89.3% |
| Wake Forest-Rolesville | 84.5% |
| Wakefield | 87.6% |

Note: Rates are not calculated for high schools that did not operate a 9th grade in 2002-03.