

Cohort Dropout Rate: How It Helps Us Focus High School Reform

What is the relationship between the cohort graduation and dropout rates?

There is no relationship between the annual event dropout rate and the leaver graduation rate. Whereas , there is a strong relationship between the cohort dropout rate and the cohort graduation rate.

The event dropout rate represents the percentage of the *entire* high school population who drop out of any grade level in a given year. The denominator for the statistic is therefore very large. Students who drop out, return to school the next year and drop out again are counted as two drop outs, students who drop out and return to graduate are counted as a drop out AND a graduate.

The cohort rate represents the dropout history across four years for one single class (entering Grade 9 for the first time in a given year). The denominator is much smaller than that of the annual event rate, as it represent approximately one fourth of the total high school population.

The numerator of the “cohort” dropout rate is a very different metric than the one used to determine the annual event rate. It reflects the cumulative dropouts for a cohort of students entering Grade 9 at the same time across a four-year period (Grades 9-12). In the same example, the student who drops out, returns, and drops out again would only be counted once as a drop out (final status). The calculation of the “cohort” dropout rate is the sum of the dropouts (students who ultimately dropped out and did not return – final status) divided by the number of students from the original 9th grade cohort.

When a class had a leaver graduation rate of 85% and the annual event dropout rate was 2%, it was assumed incorrectly that somehow the remaining 13% of the class were “missing”. But the annual event dropout rate did not represent the dropouts from the graduating class which has a much smaller denominator.

However there is a strong relationship between the cohort graduation rate and the cohort dropout rate. Adding the cohort graduation and dropout rates will come very close to 100%. The remaining students received Special Education certificates of attendance (and do not count as graduates in the cohort rate) or may still be enrolled in school, working toward a diploma.