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Now One in Five

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About this paper

This is the fourteenth paper in the NH Center for Public Policy Studies' "Plumbing the Numbers" series of reports on education finance. The paper updates some of the analysis done in the 9th and 11th reports.

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Now One in Five:

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Executive Summary

This paper updates our previous work on dropouts. We present aggregate statistics consistent with our previous work, updated to include three more years of data 2003 – 2005. The results of this analysis are promising, but reporting issues continue to plague the state's understanding of the true drop out rate.

We can report a significant change in the drop out rate in New Hampshire. Updated figures indicate that between 1999 and 2004 the true dropout rate has been slowly and consistently declining from 25 percent to 20 percent. The Center published reports on the problem of dropouts from the public high schools of New Hampshire in June 2002 and February 2004. Those reports indicated that the true dropout rate was about 25 percent at a time when official figures stated that it was only 15-20 percent. Our reports were instrumental in bringing considerably more attention to this issue on the part of educators, legislators, local education officials, news media, and the public.

Despite this progress, the official record of drop-outs provided by the Department of Education, based on reports submitted by school districts, continues to undercount dropouts by as many as 1,000 students per year. This undercount appears to be still largely attributable to school districts' inability to track and report accurately students who transfer from one school to another. In 2004/05 1,828 high school students were reported to have transferred to another New Hampshire public high school, yet only 1,061 were reported to have actually entered. Missing and unnoted were 767 students.

Significant steps are being taken to improve the tracking of drop-outs in New Hampshire. Before the end of 2006 the department's new database of all public school students will provide more accurate graduate and dropout statistics for the 2005/06 school year. This database, the Initiative for School Empowerment and Excellence (i.4.see), will track individual students as they move from school to school. We recommended creation of this system in our 2004 report and it was authorized by the legislature that year. This system will introduce real-time reporting in the 2006/07 school year, further improving the tracking of students and increasing the chance of quickly recovering some dropouts.

In summary, this paper demonstrates that school districts have undercounted and under-reported their true dropout rates by failing to track students who transfer in and out of their schools. Hundreds of students seemingly disappear between the time they transfer out of one school and into another. This 'leakage' in the system has implications for school districts under the No Child Left Behind law, but also for policy makers and local education program designers trying to address the issue of drop-outs in New Hampshire.

Recommendations

1. *The department must tighten up on reporting of students who depart the public high schools.* A category for reporting departing students called "Other Reason" was introduced three years ago and an increasing numbers of departures of that type have been reported, reaching 183 in 2004/05. No explanation has been required and none of these students are counted as dropouts in the

official statistics. The department should require an explanation of each such student departure in its data collection.

2. The department should tabulate each expelled student as a dropout in calculating dropout rates unless the expelling district can document that that student has enrolled within the year in a different school or a home-schooling program. We made a similar recommendation in our 2004 report. Students whose behavior results in expulsion should not be counted as a success of the school system.

3. The legislature should amend RSA 193-A and require parents of home-schooled high school students to report on whether their children have completed minimum high school graduation requirements or have terminated home-schooling without meeting those requirements. We made this same recommendation in our 2004 report. Students who leave a public high school for home schooling may or may not complete the equivalent of a high school diploma. Because there is no required reporting, their ultimate status is unknown.

4. During the 2006/07 school year the department should require all movement of students among high schools to be reported on a real-time basis using the new web based entry screens that are part of its i.4.see data system. This is the department's stated intent. Planned training for assigned district staff must take place this fall. Ensuring that school districts comply will take considerable effort on the part of the department and may require significant sanctions against those districts that do not comply.

1. Our Previous Work

The Center has been monitoring high school dropout data and participating in activities related to measuring high school completion rates since its inception in 1996.

We issued our first public report on school dropouts in June 2002, *One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*.¹ That report examined the annual and cumulative dropout rates of New Hampshire public high schools based on data from graduating classes of 1996 through 2000. We found that approximately 25 percent of New Hampshire's high school students had dropped out between the fall of eighth grade and graduation. That report generated considerable public attention and was at least partially responsible for actions by the New Hampshire Legislature and some local school districts to address the problem of dropouts.

In February of 2004 we issued our second report, *Still One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*.² That report investigated the situation during the 2001 and 2002 school years. We found that approximately 24 percent of high school students had dropped out before graduating, a slight improvement over the 1996-2000 years.

Each of these two reports presents a detailed analysis and explanation of the methodology we have used to make estimates of dropouts from graduation and enrollment data submitted by the state's school districts to the NH Department of Education (DoE). They also explain why we believe the official dropout statistics have undercounted the number of dropouts. Not all of those explanations and details will be repeated here. Readers are referred to those reports for further details on our past work.

2. Findings from Aggregate Data

We have updated our previous analysis with aggregate data for three more school years: 2003, 2004, and 2005.

Graduation Rate is Improving

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the percent of students who are not graduating has declined slowly and consistently from 25.7 percent in 1999 to approximately 19.5 percent for the graduating class of 2005. In Table 1 this is labeled the "Non-Graduating Cohort Rate." This rate is higher than the annually reported "4 Year Cumulative (Dropout) Rate" (also in Figure 1) that has been published by the DoE since 2001.³ The DoE rate is based on the count of dropouts submitted by the school districts on a special annual "Dropout Report." Both rates show a decline over the 2001-2005 period. We agree with the DoE that the proportion of dropouts has been falling – and falling at a commendable rate. Aggregated across all public high schools, the count of high school graduates as a percentage of the eighth grade enrollment has been rising.

¹ Douglas Hall, *One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*, NH Center for Public Policy Studies, Concord, NH, June 2002. Available at www.nhpolicy.org.

² Douglas Hall and Beth Morton, *Still One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*, NH Center for Public Policy Studies, Concord, NH, February 2004. Available at www.nhpolicy.org.

³ "High School Dropouts," various years, available on the NH Department of Education web site at: <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/data/DropoutsAndGraduates.htm>

While we have no firm data to relate cause and effect, it seems likely that the recent increase in the graduation rate is the result of much closer attention being paid to the problem of dropouts by local school boards and administrators. Observers note that in the past few years some districts have worked to identify potential dropouts and to create programs and policies that will appeal to them to complete their high school education. In addition, the DoE has distributed special federal funds to supplement some of these local efforts.

Figure 1

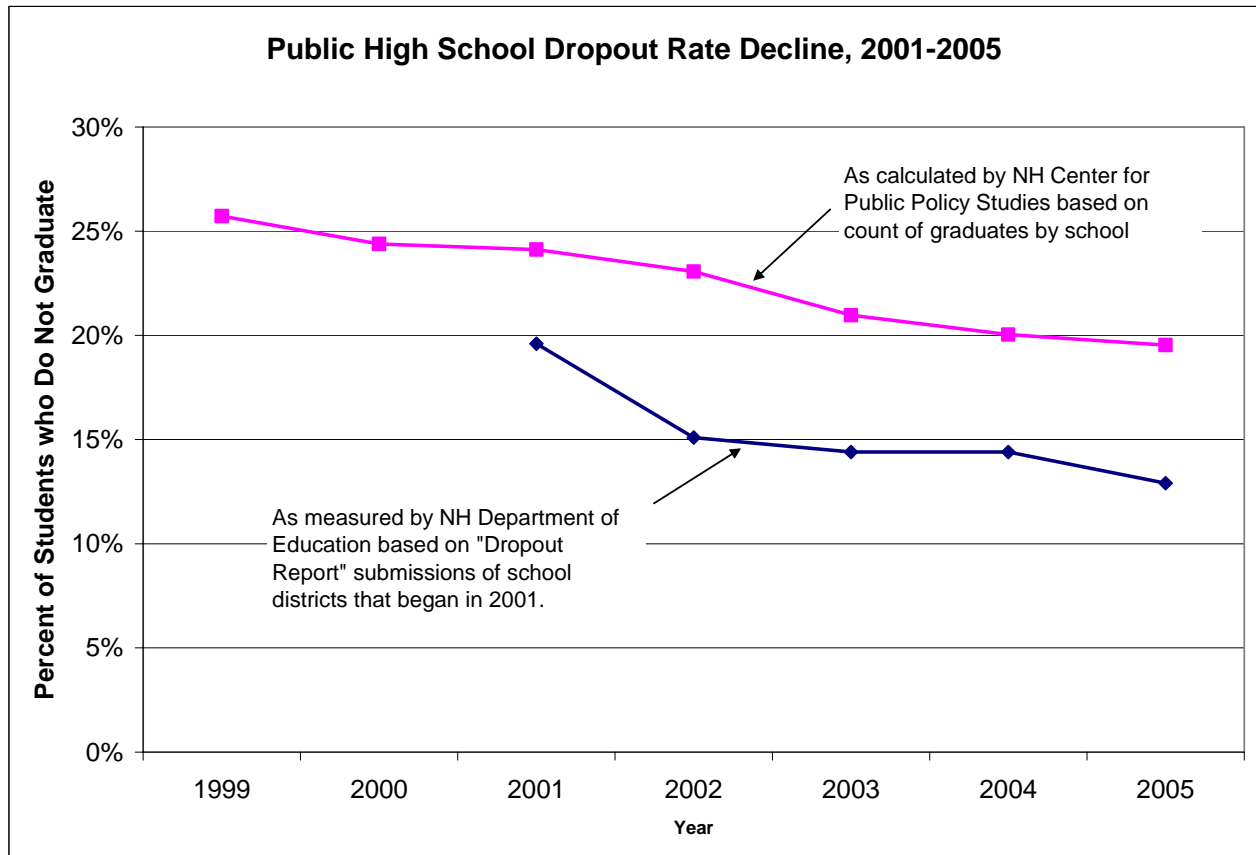


Table 1: Non-Graduation Rate, 1996-2005

Graduating Class	8th grade enrollment	Graduates	Graduating Cohort Rate	Non-graduates	Non-Graduating Cohort Rate
1996	12,881	10,046	78.0%	2,835	22.0%
1997	13,537	10,376	76.6%	3,161	23.4%
1998	14,118	10,653	75.5%	3,465	24.5%
1999	14,926	11,087	74.3%	3,839	25.7%
2000	15,487	11,711	75.6%	3,776	24.4%
2001	15,738	11,942	75.9%	3,796	24.1%
2002	15,967	12,285	76.9%	3,682	23.1%
2003	16,848	13,315	79.0%	3,533	21.0%
2004	16,793	13,428	80.0%	3,365	20.0%
2005	17,209	13,847	80.5%	3,362	19.5%

The definition of a dropout is important. Students who leave their public high school to obtain an “adult diploma” or a GED are not graduates of their high schools and therefore are generally to be counted as dropouts. While pursuing his or her basic education through such other means can be viewed as a personal success for the student, it should not be counted as a success for the school system because it implies that the school system was not responsive to that student’s needs and aspirations. The DoE definition for counting dropouts is included as Appendix 2.

Table 2: Differences in Rate Estimates

NH DoE Report			NHCPPS Analysis	
School year	Count of Reported Dropouts	4 Year Cumulative Dropout Rate	Graduating Class	Non-Graduating Cohort Rate
2000-01	3,131	19.6%	2001	24.1%
2001-02	2,553	15.1%	2002	23.1%
2002-03	2,441	14.4%	2003	21.0%
2003-04	2,500	14.4%	2004	20.0%
2004-05	2,344	12.9%	2005	19.5%

Dropouts Are Still Underreported

While the data suggest improvement, much of the rest of this report, however, is devoted to showing why we believe that the Non-Graduating Cohort Rate is a much better estimate of the true dropout rate among the state’s public high school students than the DoE’s 4-Year Cumulative Rate.

Essentially, we believe that school districts have been unable to accurately identify and count dropouts. We believe that the true count for 2004/05 was about 1,000 higher than the actual report of 2,344.

For each school year Table 3 displays the number of dropouts that were reported. And for each graduating class, it displays the number of non-graduates. In any given school year, the identified dropouts will be from all four high school classes: freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior, whereas non-graduates are all from a particular class cohort. For that reason the numbers will never be exactly equal. But they should be very similar. As Table 3 shows, the difference is about 1,000 students per year; these are students who are not being identified and counted as dropouts but are not graduating either. We have named these “missing in action.”

Table 3

NH DoE Report		NHCPPS Analysis		
School year	Count of Reported Dropouts	Graduating Class	Non-graduates	Missing in Action
2000-01	3,131	2001	3,796	665
2001-02	2,553	2002	3,682	1,129
2002-03	2,441	2003	3,533	1,092
2003-04	2,500	2004	3,365	865
2004-05	2,344	2005	3,362	1,018

It has been difficult to get school administrators and state officials to reconcile the difference between reported dropouts and non-graduates. The first admission that there were discrepancies occurred three years ago when the state's previous Commissioner of Education, Nicholas Donohue, acknowledged that 25 percent of students "are not obtaining a regular diploma as part of their high school cohort."⁴ However, there was no official recognition that these were students who had dropped out of the high school system.

We should be clear that we have no evidence that the underreporting of dropouts is purposeful. For the most part, it appears to be the result of inattention to detail on the part of the high schools themselves. The DoE bears some responsibility for the undercount, however, by not reconciling some data in reports that it receives and by not requiring school districts to explain what happened to students that have neither been counted as graduates nor counted as dropouts.

We continue to believe that the difference is attributable to districts counting students as "transfers" who do not actually complete a transfer to another school. Incorrectly counting students in this manner is recognized as a potential problem nationally. One federal requirement under the No Child Left Behind Act is that states must "avoid counting a dropout as a transfer."⁵

3. Following a Graduating Class through the Years

In our first two reports on this subject we presented graphs that displayed the aggregate enrollment of a given year's graduating class from the time it was in 2nd grade through its spring graduation ten and a half years later. We presented these graphs for graduating years 1996-2002. Similar graphs for the most recent graduating years are presented below.

⁴ Nicholas Donohue, "Recommendations from Commissioner Nicholas Donohue" to the Drop Out Study Committee, NH Department of Education, October 16, 2003.

⁵ "Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook for The State of New Hampshire," New Hampshire Department of Education, January 31, 2003 and revised June 3, 2003, p. 26.

Figure 2

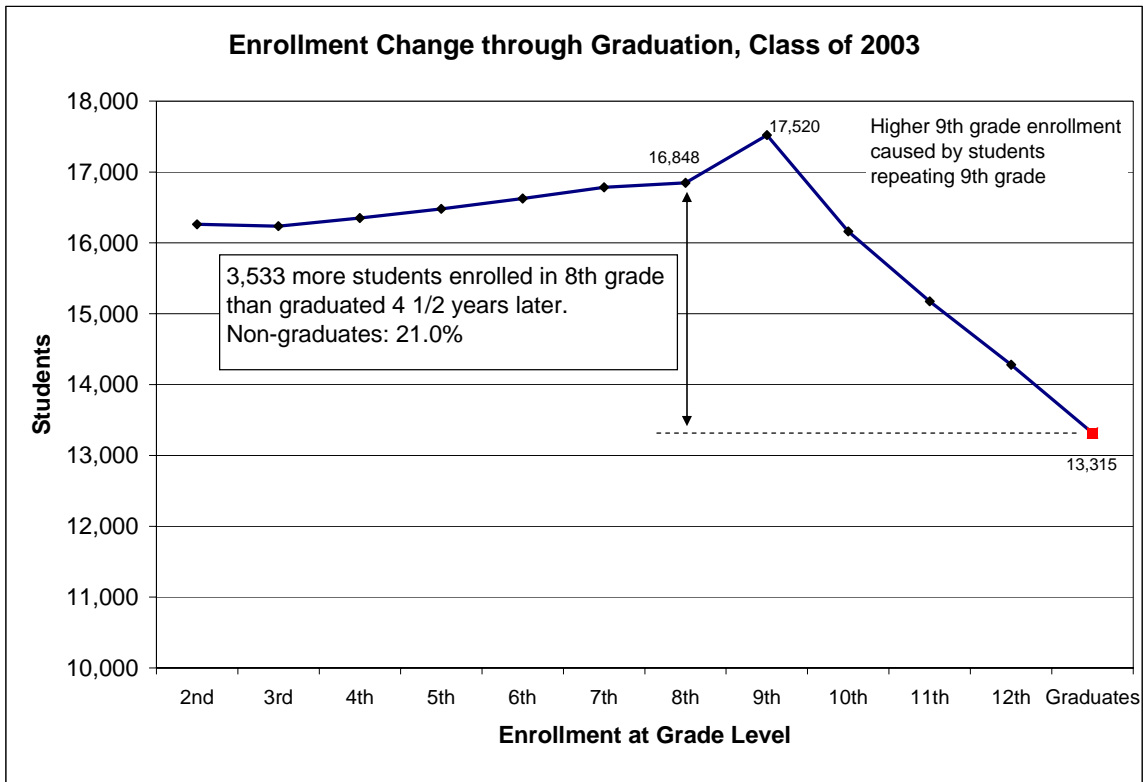


Figure 3

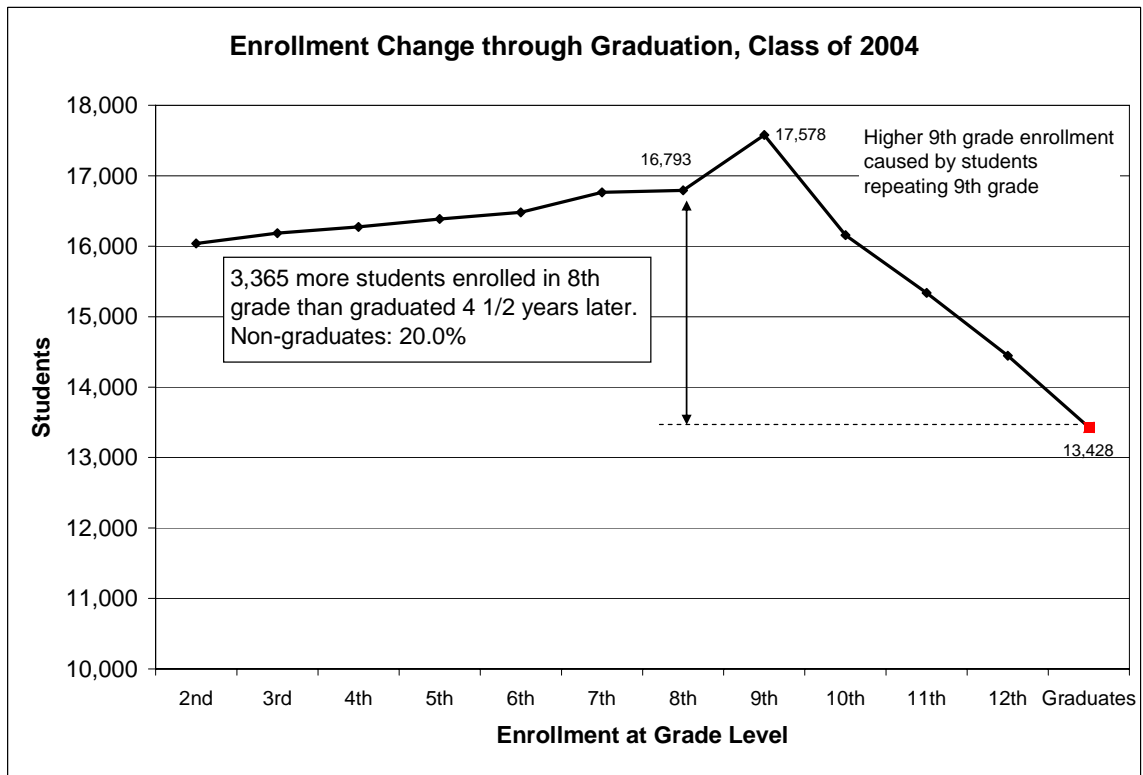
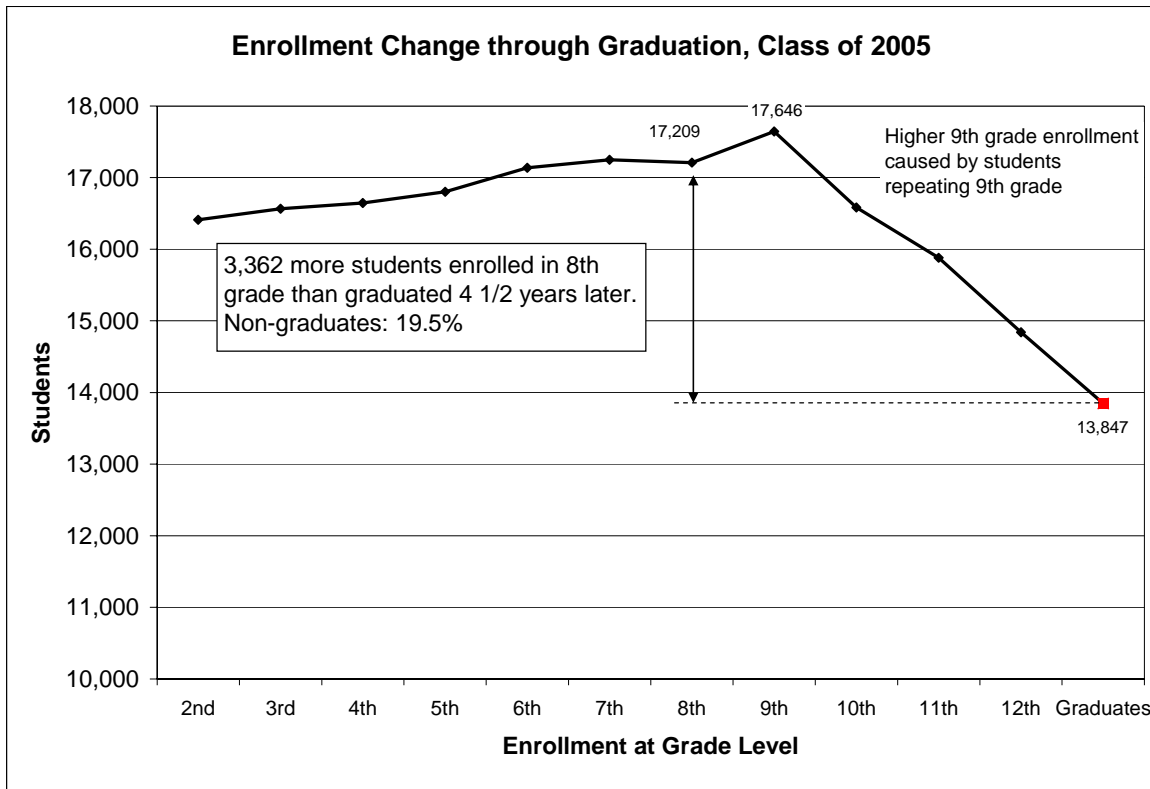


Figure 4



These enrollment graphs, like those in our earlier reports, generally show a slow increase in the number of students over the years from 2nd grade to 8th grade. This is attributed to the slow net migration of families into New Hampshire.

The graphs also show the unusual peak in enrollment that occurs in 9th grade. This occurs because many more students repeat 9th grade than any other grade level. The 9th grade enrollment numbers include students who had just entered 9th grade from middle school as well as students who were originally in the prior year's 9th grade but were held back because they had not accumulated sufficient credits to be considered sophomores. (In June 2001, for example, the high schools reported that 1,206 9th graders were not promoted and were therefore counted among the 9th grade enrollment in October 2001, the year in which the graduating class of 2005 entered high school from middle school.) If not correctly taken into account, this could result in erroneously estimating a larger number of non-graduates than actually is the case.⁶ Comparatively fewer students are held back and repeat 8th grade. (In June 2001 only 213 8th graders were not promoted.) For this reason, we use the 8th grade enrollment as the starting point for determining how many students do not graduate.

The peak is not caused by students who had attended private middle schools or had been home schooled who then moved into public high schools for 9th grade. While this does occur in some

⁶ A student who repeats ninth grade will be counted twice - once in each of two successive 9th grade counts. But that student can only graduate once. Over time, therefore, the sum of the number of graduates will always be fewer than the sum of the 9th grade enrollments, even if not one student drops out.

communities, there are other communities where there is a net movement from public middle schools to parochial high schools and boarding prep schools. The small net flow of students in this regard is to the private schools, not from them. It does not cause the peak enrollment seen in 9th grade.

4. Where Have the Missing Students Gone?

Confronting the reality that the actual count of graduates is about 1,000 students fewer per year than the 8th grade enrollment and the counted dropouts would imply, the natural question is “Where did the missing students go?” We have offered an explanation in our previous reports: that students have been reported as transferring out to another public high school but many of those students never actually showed up and enrolled at any such school.

Some observers have been appropriately incredulous that this could happen. Could up to 1,000 high school students per year be lost to the state’s public school system without explanation or anyone noticing? These observers have suggested alternative possibilities. The most common suggestions are that students must be moving out of state, or going to private school, or have shifted to home-schooling. We have investigated each of those possibilities in some detail in our previous reports and found each suggestion implausible. Nevertheless these suggestions continue to be made.

5. Annual Reporting of Student Entries and Withdrawals

The state requires each school district to submit information on the number of students that enter or exit their school and where they have gone. Theoretically, the forms used to collect information on these entrances and departures – the A-3 form titled ‘General Statistics of Public and Non-Public Schools’ – should capture every category of student movement. (Appendix 1 contains a list of the categories and definitions. It also contains Figure 7 showing how the different categories are related and Table 11 with the complete data for each category for the most recent school years.) In what follows, we review some of the categories of entrance and exit and assess its implications for both the accuracy of the reporting process and for its potential implications for understanding the source of the 1,000 children missing in action.

Movement within a School

Sometimes high school students move from one “homeroom” to another. Most schools do not report such movement to the state because they maintain a single centralized register of their students and no change is recorded. But for a few schools that have separate registers in each homeroom, they are required to report students moving out of one homeroom as a W1 and into another homeroom as an R1. Obviously, for each school the count of W1s should exactly equal the count of R1s. And, in turn, the state total of R1s and W1s should be exactly equal. As shown in Table 4, however, it rarely is.

Table 4: Movement in the Same School

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
R1	from another room, same school	140	139	167	176	157	120	117	157
W1	to another room, same school	-131	-98	-145	-159	-151	-120	-119	-138
	Net change	9	41	22	17	6	0	-2	19

In the 2004/05 school year, 72 of the 77 high schools reported exact matches in these numbers. However, Timberlane reported 9 entering and none leaving, Pemi-Baker reported 8 entering and none leaving, Rochester reported 2 entering and none leaving, Fall Mountain reported one entering and none leaving, and Epping reported none entering but one leaving. The school superintendents, local school boards, and DoE all seemingly accepted this illogical data without questioning its validity.

The numbers involved are small. But they point to a large problem: Somehow some schools are reporting counts that do not make sense and the DoE has neither recognized the problem, nor corrected it.

Movement between Schools within the Same District

It should be easy to count and track students accurately within the same school. It is a little more complicated when students transfer between schools in the same district. At the high school level this is possible only in Manchester (with three high schools) and most recently in Nashua (with two high schools). The number of students who are counted as leaving one school to attend another school in the same district should be almost exactly equal to the number who are counted as entering another high school from the same district. (Small differences could be explained by mid-year movement of students down to or up from a middle school.)

As shown in Table 5, there has always been a discrepancy. In school year 2001/02, 251 students were reported as withdrawing to attend another school in the same district while only 152 were recorded as having entered at another such school. Somehow, 99 students simply disappeared from the aggregate student counts that year.⁷

Table 5: Movement in the Same District

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
R2	from same district	154	117	160	194	152	167	193	277
W2	to same district	-214	-185	-159	-202	-251	-259	-203	-310
	Net change	-60	-68	1	-8	-99	-92	-10	-33

⁷ We investigated this phenomenon in some detail in *Still One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*.

In the 2004/05 school year, 55 out of the 77 high schools reported exact matches in these numbers. A few others reported differences of 1 or 2 students. However, Exeter reported none entering and five leaving, Kearsarge reported two entering and 14 leaving, Laconia reported none entering and 11 leaving, Manchester reported 124 entering and 138 leaving⁸, Rochester reported four entering and none leaving, and Winnacunnet reported six entering and none leaving.

The numbers involved are larger than the errors in accounting for students moving within the same school, but they are still small in comparison to the total high school population of about 65,000 students. The discrepancy, however, makes clear that not all districts have been accounting for all of their students accurately.

Movement between Schools in Different Districts

If school districts cannot accurately account for students who simply move within the same school or within schools in the same district, keeping things straight when students move between public high schools in *different districts* is likely to be fraught with problems.

The numbers in Table 6 clearly show this problem. In this case, the problem is much larger.

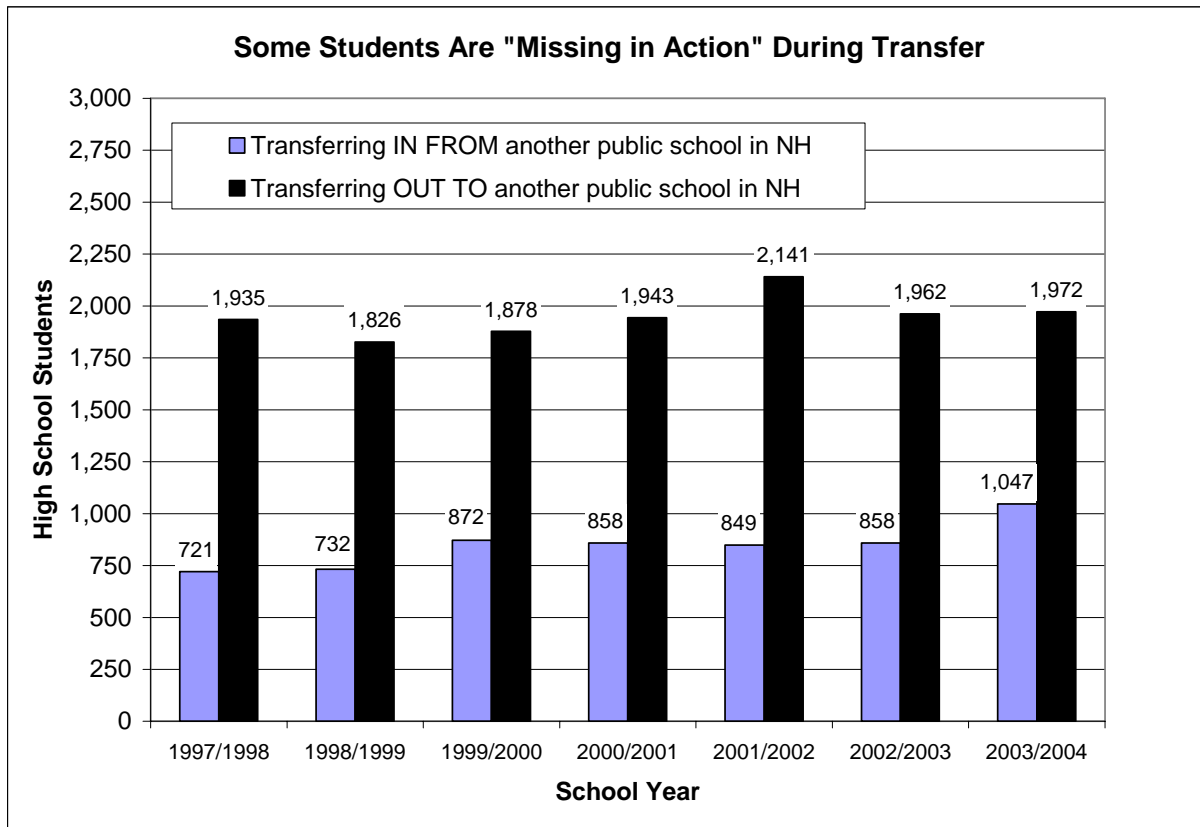
Table 6: Movement Among Districts

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
R4	from other NH public school	721	732	872	858	849	858	1,047	1,061
W4	to other NH public school	-1,935	-1,826	-1,878	-1,943	-2,141	-1,962	-1,972	-1,828
	Net change	-1,214	-1,094	-1,006	-1,085	-1,292	-1,104	-925	-767

In 2004/05 the school districts reported that 1,828 high school students had withdrawn from their schools to attend a public high school in a different New Hampshire district. But the districts only reported 1,061 high school students having arrived from another public high school in New Hampshire. There has been a net loss of around 1,000 students per year when students transfer between districts. The data from Table 6 are shown in Figure 5.

⁸ The difference of 14 seems to be attributable to students who left Central High School without offsetting arrivals at West or Memorial High Schools.

Figure 5



The DoE has duly recorded without comment this loss year after year in the statewide totals from the A3 reports submitted by the districts. The most recent reports show a dramatic decline in the numbers of these missing transfers, from 1,292 during the 2001/02 school year to only 767 during the 2004/05 school year. (However, as noted below, it also shows a new and growing category of student withdrawal which is simply termed "other" and carries no explanation.)

Movement to and from Home-Schooling

Students who transfer from a public high school to home schooling are recorded on the A3. In 2004/05 there were 243 students who quit high school for home schooling and 47 home-schoolers who transferred into a public high school. This is a net reduction of 196 students. Over the 1998-2005 period, the public school system has had a net loss of about 100-200 students per year to home schooling.

Table 7: Movement to/from Home Schooling

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
R5	from home schooling	30	22	31	28	31	46	44	47
W5	to home schooling	-149	-157	-137	-151	-167	-250	-181	-243
	Net change	-119	-135	-106	-123	-136	-204	-137	-196

Movement to and from Private Schools or Out of State

Some high school students do move out of state during the year. Some do leave public school to enroll in a private school in New Hampshire. But so, too, do students move into New Hampshire from outside and some students leave private schools to enter the public schools during their high school years. What is important is the *net flow* of such students. Data on this is also reported on the A3 forms.

Table 8: Movement to/from Private Schools and Other States

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
E2	from outside New Hampshire	764	803	824	771	743	769	857	733
R8	return from another state	26	10	11	7	16	16	26	37
R3	from NH private school	158	153	119	143	156	192	243	240
W3	to NH private school or other state	-286	-338	-376	-341	-271	-517	-606	-655
	Net change	662	628	578	580	644	460	520	355

As shown in Table 8, (code E2) during a typical year between 700 and 800 students move into New Hampshire and enroll in one of the public high schools. During the 2004/05 school year there were 733 such incoming students.

As shown in Table 8, (code R3) about 200 students per year transfer into a public high school from a private high school. There were 240 such students in 2004/05.

Students who withdraw from a public high school to attend a private high school or to move out of state are given the same code (W3) and are tallied together. As shown in Table 8, there have been 300-600 such students each year. Most recently, in 2004/05 a total of 655 students transferred out of a public high school to go out of state or to attend a private school in NH.

The movement of public high school students to/from private school and to/from other states has resulted in *an addition* of 350-650 students per year to high school enrollment. There is *not a net loss of students; there is a net gain of students from private schools and other states.*

Miscellaneous Departures

Beginning with the 2002/03 school year, a new code for recording departing students was introduced. This code (W9) was titled simply "Other Reason." The DoE's definition of this new code is "Student who left school for a reason not covered under withdrawal codes W1-W8, but who is not considered a drop out. For example, a foreign exchange student."

As shown in Table 9, the number of student departures recorded under this code has grown from 0 in 2001/02 to 183 in the most recent year. While the departure of a foreign exchange student for return to his or her home country in mid-year should certainly not be counted as a dropout, the definition is broader than this example and gives districts considerable leeway.

Table 9: Students Leaving for "Other Reason"

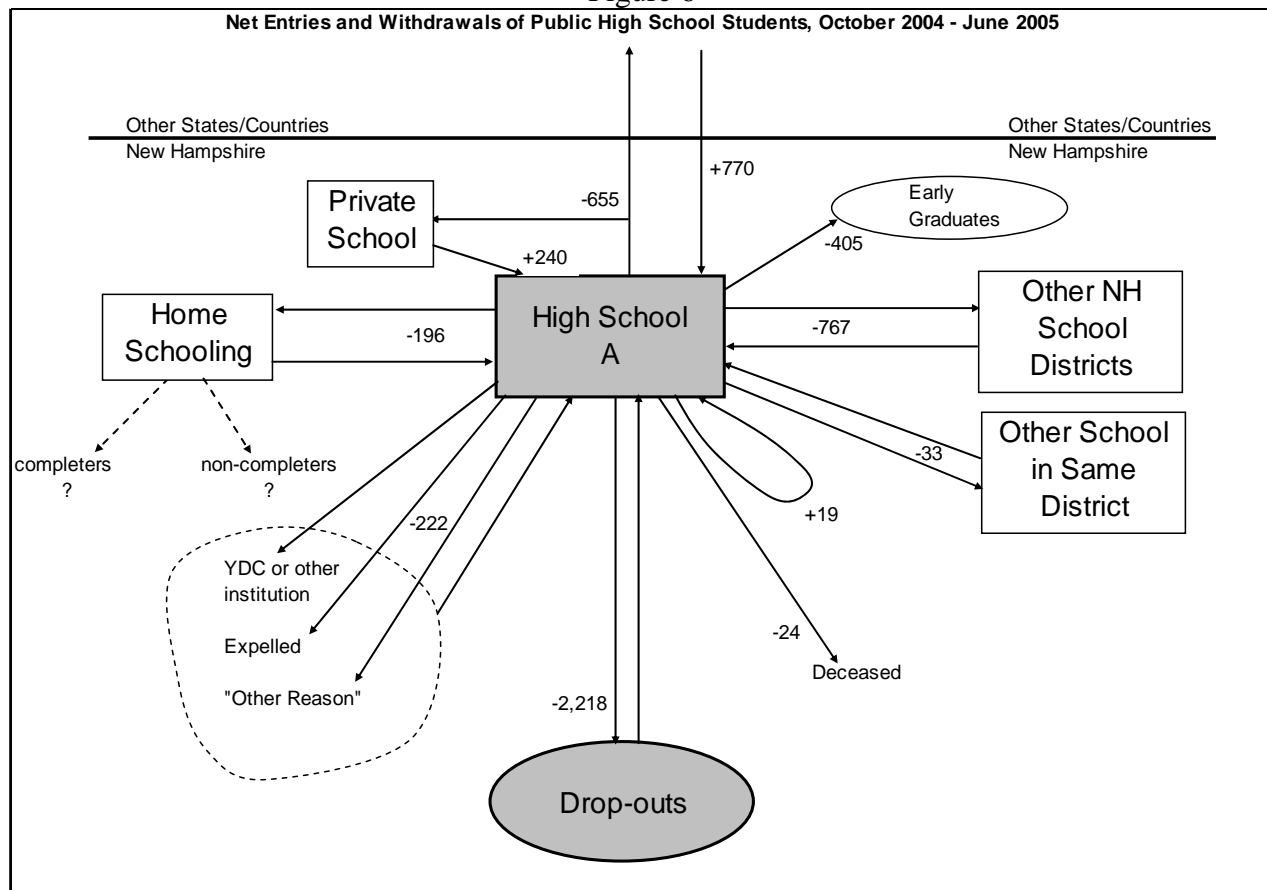
Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
W9	departing for "other reason"	0	0	0	0	0	-85	-187	-183

In its data collection, the DoE should require school districts to provide an explanation of the circumstances and reason for each student that is listed as having withdrawn from school under this "Other Reason" category.

Net Flow

Figure 6 summarizes the net flow of students to/from the public high schools due to all reasons between the October 2004 enrollment count and the end of the school year in June 2005. Among others, it includes all the changes displayed in Tables 4 through 9 above. There was a net loss of 3,491 students. Of those, 2,218 were recognized dropouts and 405 were early graduates.

Figure 6



Our Conclusion

As shown in Table 10, the state’s A3 reports show a net loss of public high school students of about 3,500 students per year. It should come as no surprise that this is very similar to the rough average of the count of non-graduates in each graduating class (Table 3).

Table 10: Net Change in Students from All Entry/Departure Reasons

Code	Short definition	School Year							
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
W9	net addition or (loss)	-3,592	-3,600	-3,545	-3,632	-3,632	-3,618	-3,511	-3,491

Similarly, our estimate of students who are “missing in action” annually is about 1,000. And the A3 reports show an impossible disappearance of students while transferring among public high schools of about 1,000 per year. We are lead to the obvious conclusion that the 1,000 students per year who disappear while transferring are essentially the 1,000 students who end up not graduating and also not being counted as dropouts.

6. Initiative for School Empowerment and Excellence

As one result of the Center’s 2002 report on dropouts, the state legislature established a House/Senate committee to study the problem of high school dropouts. The Center presented factual material to that committee and recommended that the state create a centralized database of public school students to more accurately track student movement. The DoE made a similar recommendation to that committee. The study committee endorsed the idea in late 2003. The Center pressed further by including the following in its February 2004 report:

The legislature should enhance public-school accountability by supporting the creation of a uniform database of all students in the public schools. The NH Department of Education should develop and maintain that database to verify the enrollment, transfer, graduation, and dropout status of each student and statistics of the districts. Without such a uniform mechanism for tracking and verification, any calculated graduation rate or dropout rate for any school district will be subject to interpretation, disagreement, and political conflict.⁹

The House and Senate members of the study committee, both Republicans and Democrats, sponsored a bill in the 2004 legislative session to create just such a database.¹⁰ The Center’s staff testified in favor of the bill and worked with key legislators to secure its passage. The legislature also appropriated the funding necessary to design and build such a database.

⁹ Douglas Hall and Beth Morton, *Still One in Four: School Dropouts in New Hampshire*, NH Center for Public Policy Studies, Concord, NH, February 2004.

¹⁰ SB-333 of the 2004 legislative session, “An act establishing a unique pupil identification system.” The sponsors were Senators O’Hearn, Odell, and Peterson and Representatives Carson, Scovner, and Naro.

The result has been a project within the DoE entitled “Initiative for School Empowerment and Excellence” with the acronym “i.4.see.” This project holds great promise for bringing much more accurate accounting of student movement and dropouts within the next 6-12 months.

Building the New Student Database

The DoE’s first step was to create a State Assigned Student Identifier (SASID) for each public school student. This ten digit SASID enables the identity of each student to be protected and confidential and to avoid the need to use other possible identifiers such as social security numbers.

All school districts submitted files containing information on each of the 220,000 public school students enrolled in the fall of 2005. At the end of the 2005/06 they began submitting comparable end-of-year enrollment information. Comparison of the fall enrollment and end-of-year enrollment data sets will identify those students who had been recorded by their schools as transferring to another public school but who did not show up at another school. This will be the state’s first such attempt to verify such transfers.

In the fall of 2006 the school districts will submit a third data set that will contain the fall enrollment for the 2006/07 school year. This data set will allow a more accurate and verifiable count of high school dropouts for the first time. The third set of data is required in order to add 2006 “summer dropouts,” those who dropped out between June and October, and to add back any of the prior year’s dropouts who return to school in September. Based on recent experience at least 500 students drop out of high school over the summer.

Real Time Tracking of Students

The original i.4.see design called for submission of data sets only twice a year. This would not permit real time tracking of students. In the fall of 2005 the Center recommended a change in the design to Lyonel Tracy, Commissioner of the Department of Education. He agreed with the recommendation and ordered the development of online entry screens that would allow each high school to enter departures and arrivals of students in real time. The new real time tracking process is planned to be placed in use for the first time in October 2006 shortly after the districts submit their fall enrollment files to the DoE.

The DoE conducted a pilot training in the use of the new data entry screens in Concord in May with three high schools in attendance. More training is planned for the beginning of the school year and i.4.see field support personnel will be working to assist with compliance. The DoE anticipates that this model will enable the same success that they have found with the bulk i.4.see data file submissions – 100 percent compliance. Ensuring that school districts comply will take considerable effort on the part of the department and may require significant sanctions against those districts that do not comply.

Real time tracking will enable quick follow-up when a student fails to appear at a school to which he or she has reportedly transferred. Lacking real-time reporting, such a student will be discovered to have left the educational system only after the end of the school year. By then even finding the student may prove difficult. With real-time reporting, immediate follow-up can occur and the student could be recovered in a timely manner, a goal of dropout prevention and recovery programs.

The Result

This will be the ultimate “follow the child” system. Once the new system is fully operational later this year, on any given day school administrators and others will be able to know how many students have already dropped out of each high school, how many out-of-state students have enrolled, what the net flow of students to/from home-schooling and private schools has been, etc. For the first time, real-time tracking of high school students will be possible throughout the year.

7. Recommendations

Current Recommendations

- 1. The department must tighten up on reporting of students who depart the public high schools. A category for reporting departing students called “Other Reason” was introduced three years ago and an increasing numbers of departures of that type have been reported, reaching 183 in 2004/05. No explanation has been required and none of these students are counted as dropouts in the official statistics. The department should require an explanation of each such student departure in its data collection.*
- 2. The department should tabulate each expelled student as a dropout in calculating dropout rates unless the expelling district can document that that student has enrolled within the year in a different school or a home-schooling program. We made a similar recommendation in our 2004 report. Students whose behavior results in expulsion should not be counted as a success of the school system.*
- 3. The legislature should amend RSA 193-A and require parents of home-schooled high school students to report on whether their children have completed minimum high school graduation requirements or have terminated home-schooling without meeting those requirements. We made this same recommendation in our 2004 report. Students who leave a public high school for home schooling may or may not complete the equivalent of a high school diploma. Because there is no required reporting, their ultimate status is unknown.*
- 4. During the 2006/07 school year the department should require all movement of students among high schools to be reported on a real-time basis using the new web based entry screens that are part of its i.4.see data system. This is the department’s stated intent. Planned training for assigned district staff must take place this fall. Ensuring that school districts comply will take considerable effort on the part of the department and may require significant sanctions against those districts that do not comply.*

Status of our 2004 Recommendations

The six recommendations that we made in our “Still One in Four” report of February 2004 are in italics below. The sixth recommendation is the most important and its successful completion will ensure that the intent of the first three recommendations is met.

- 1. The department should annually reconcile the statewide total reported number of graduates in each graduating class with the number of reported dropouts and the enrollment of that class from eighth through twelfth grade. The department has not done this with its manual reporting systems. The i.4.see system should allow such reconciliation as it tracks each students over time. Tracking*

the first cohort of students from their 8th grade enrollment through graduation will first be possible in 2010.

2. *At a minimum, the State Board of Education should use its newly established authority under RSA 189:28 (HB139) to require districts to report all students who transfer in or out of all high schools, including "alternative" high schools and programs.* The Board of Education has not done this. However, the i.4.see system will result in better data in this regard.

3. *The department should require all school districts to file a report identifying all graduates by name and diploma type, thus enabling the department to verify each district's count of graduates using definitions required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.* The department has not done this with its manual reporting system. However, the i.4.see system will be able to produce an exact count of graduates by diploma type.

4. *The department should ensure that each district counts students it has expelled as dropouts unless the district documents that those students have enrolled within the year in a different school or a home-schooling program.* The department still does not count expelled students as dropouts on its manual reporting of dropouts.

5. *The legislature should amend RSA 193-A and require parents of home-schooled high school students to report on whether their children have completed minimum high school graduation requirements or have terminated home-schooling without meeting those requirements.* The legislature has not passed such a requirement.

6. *The legislature should enhance public-school accountability by supporting the creation of a uniform database of all students in the public schools. The NH Department of Education should develop and maintain that database to verify the enrollment, transfer, graduation, and dropout status of each student and statistics of the districts.* In 2004 the legislature did pass SB333 that authorized the creation of the i.4.see data system and authorized its funding with federal funds. The department is completing its first year using this system and anticipates that the results will ensure an accurate assessment of the status of each student.

Appendix 1: Student Entry and Withdrawal Codes

Original Entry

E-1: Students enrolled at the beginning of the school year. A student who enters a New Hampshire school for the first time in a given school year

E-2: A student who began the school year in another state, but this is the first NH school entered

Re-entry

R-1: Student received from another room in the same school when homeroom registers are kept

R-2: Student received from another public school in the same school district

R-3: Student received from a NH non-public school, public academy, JMA school, or Charter school

R-4: Student received from a NH public school outside the school district

R-5: Student received from an approved home schooled program

R-6: Student re-entering the same school district after withdrawal under a code of W6 – W9

R-7: Student re-entering the same school district after withdrawal under a code of W20 – W29

R-8: Student re-entering from another state who was previously registered in NH this school year

R-12: Student remained in the same school but the town of fiscal responsibility changed

Withdrawal

W-1: Student promoted or transferred to another room in the same school during the school year when homeroom registers are kept

W-2: Student promoted or transferred to another public school in the same school district

W-3: Student transferred to a non-public school, public academy, JMA school, Charter school, or outside the state

W-4: Student promoted or transferred to NH another public school outside the school district

W-5: Student transferred to an approved home schooled program

W-6: Student transferred to another public institution such as prison, juvenile institution, or mental institution

W-8: Student expelled

W-9: Student who left school for a reason not covered under withdrawal codes W1-W8, but who is not considered a dropout. For example, a foreign exchange student

W-10: Student deceased

W-11: Student who left due to early graduation or completed all requirements for graduation prior to the end of the school year

W-12: Student's town of fiscal responsibility changed but the student remained in the same school

W-20: Students in grades 7-12 who dropped out of school.

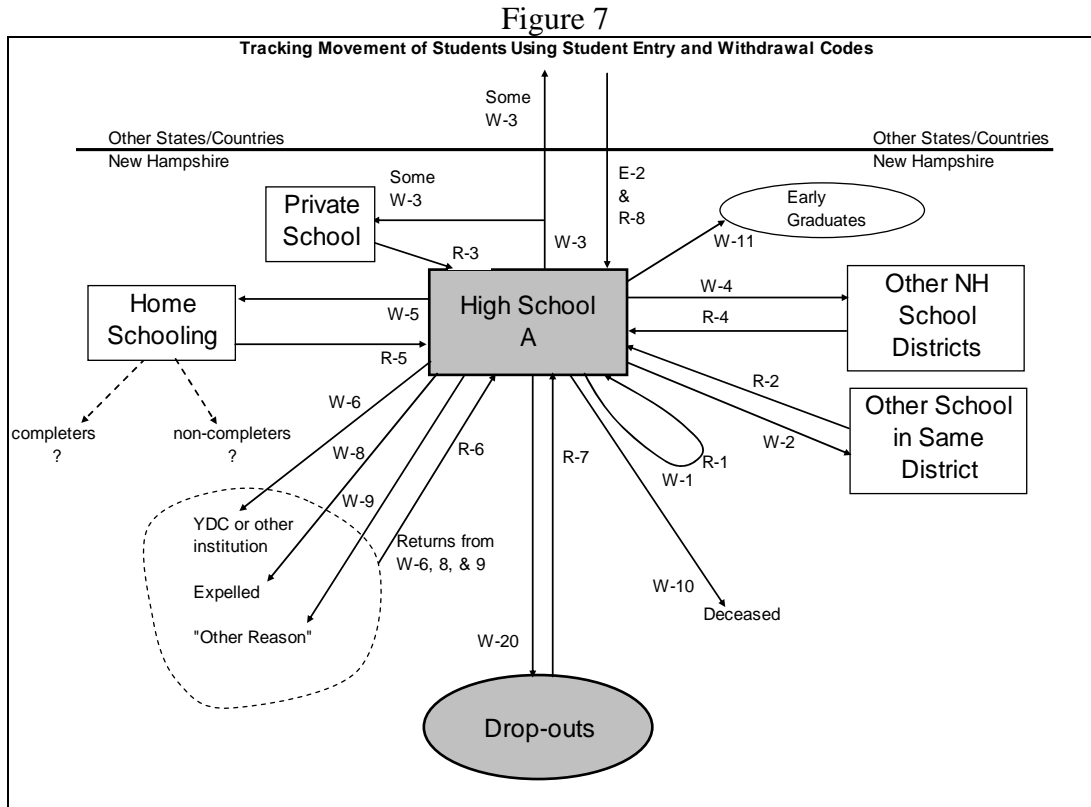


Table 11: Student Entries and Withdrawals, 1998-2005

Code	Short definition	School Year								Note on Calculation
		1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	
High School Entries										
E2	from outside NH	764	803	824	771	743	769	857	733	
R1	from another room, same school	140	139	167	176	157	120	117	157	
R2	from same district	154	117	160	194	152	167	193	277	
R3	from NH non-public	158	153	119	143	156	192	243	240	
R4	from NH public	721	732	872	858	849	858	1,047	1,061	
R5	from home schooling	30	22	31	28	31	46	44	47	
R6	return from expulsion, juvenile justice, YDC, etc.	191	165	214	211	204	244	189	176	
R7	return of dropout in same year	226	199	210	201	194	189	229	221	
R8	return from another state in same year	26	10	11	7	16	16	26	37	
	Total	2,410	2,340	2,608	2,589	2,502	2,601	2,945	2,949	
High School Departures										
W1	to another room, same school	131	98	145	159	151	120	119	138	
W2	to same district	214	185	159	202	251	259	203	310	
W3	to NH non-public or outside NH	286	338	376	341	271	517	606	655	
W4	to NH public	1,935	1,826	1,878	1,943	2,141	1,962	1,972	1,828	
W5	to home schooling	149	157	137	151	167	250	181	243	
W6	to YDC, etc.	135	161	143	140	178	203	156	187	
W8	Expelled						41	37	28	
W9	Other reason				0	0	85	187	183	
W10	Deceased	20	9	20	21	65	12	17	24	
W11	Completed prior to end of year	211	230	236	296	268	294	347	405	
W20	Dropouts	2,921	2,936	3,059	2,968	2,642	2,476	2,631	2,439	
	Total	6,002	5,940	6,153	6,221	6,134	6,219	6,456	6,440	
Net Changes										
	Net from another room, same school	9	41	22	17	6	0	-2	19	=R1-W1
	Net from same district	-60	-68	1	-8	-99	-92	-10	-33	=R2-W2
	Net from another NH district	-1,214	-1,094	-1,006	-1,085	-1,292	-1,104	-925	-767	=R4-W4
1	Net change within the NH public school system	-1,265	-1,121	-983	-1,076	-1,385	-1,196	-937	-781	
2	Net recorded dropouts	-2,695	-2,737	-2,849	-2,767	-2,448	-2,287	-2,402	-2,218	=R7-W22
	Net from private and out-of-state	662	628	578	580	644	460	520	355	=E2+R3+R8-W3
	Net from home-schooling	-119	-135	-106	-123	-136	-204	-137	-196	=R5-W5
	Net from YDC, etc.	56	4	71	71	26	-85	-191	-222	=R6-W6-W8-W9
	Deceased	-20	-9	-20	-21	-65	-12	-17	-24	=W10
	Graduated early	-211	-230	-236	-296	-268	-294	-347	-405	=-W11
3	Net change to all other causes	368	258	287	211	201	-135	-172	-492	
	Net Addition/(Loss)	-3,592	-3,600	-3,545	-3,632	-3,632	-3,618	-3,511	-3,491	

Appendix 2: Department of Education Definition of Dropout

The following is taken from the Department of Education instructions to school districts on how to count dropouts, "Dropout Reporting Procedures For the 2004-2005 School Year," dated September 8, 2005.

A student is a dropout:

1. On the day following the student's declaration of dropout status, if age 18 or older.
2. On the day following the parent's or guardian's declaration of dropout status, if age 16 or older.
3. On the 16th consecutive day of failure to attend school, when the absence has not been excused by the school board and when the student is 18 or older.
4. On the 16th day following the end of an expulsion period if the student has failed to return to school or to enroll in another school or home schooled program and the student is 18 or older.
5. On the day a district removes a student from the attendance roster because he has reached age 21 and has not yet graduated. (A district may permit continued attendance for a student over 21.)
6. On the 16th consecutive day of failure to attend an adult education program that the school board has approved as an alternative program. This student will be considered a dropout from the public school last attended. (Students in adult education programs are generally considered dropouts. See the more detailed discussion of adult education programs in the next section.)

Note: Students attending an adult education program may be considered "enrolled" only if the school board has approved attendance in the adult education program with the expectation that the student will be awarded a high school diploma before the student reaches the age of 21. The district of residence must monitor the attendance and progress of the student.

Note: In items 3, 4 and 6, a student is identified as a dropout after a 15 day unexplained absence. On day 16 the withdrawal should be recorded in the school register. The actual withdrawal may be back dated to the 1st day the student was absent, recorded as the 16th day, or recorded as any day in between. For example, a student who fails to return after the summer will be recorded in the register as enrolled on the first day of school. His withdrawal may be dated as the 1st day of school or any day through the 16th. Each school board should consider staff activities related to dropout intervention, and establish guidelines for selecting the withdrawal date. AREA and cooperative school districts should consider the financial implications.

7. On the day a student leaves school to pursue a GED.

A student is not a dropout:

1. During a period of suspension or temporary expulsion.

2. If she/he has transferred to another approved public or private school or home schooled program within NH, or an out-of-state school. Transfer status is indicated by: (a) a request for the transfer of records or other notification by the receiving school; or (b) a written statement by a parent or guardian indicating the student will be attending another school, but declining to provide the name of the school because of safety concerns; or (c) the truant officer verifies that the student has moved out of the district.

Note: If you have difficulty verifying enrollment at a private school (regular or home schooled), or you wish to verify home schooled supervision by the state contact Roberta Tenney at 271-2079.

3. If the student is enrolled in an adult education program and is expected to earn a high school diploma before she/he turns 21 and the school board has approved such attendance as an alternative program.

Note: Students in adult education programs are generally considered dropouts. Such students may be considered “enrolled” only when the school board has approved attendance in the adult education program with the expectation that the student will be awarded a high school diploma before the student reaches the age of 21. The district of residence must monitor the attendance and progress of the student. If the student drops out of this program or switches to a GED program, she/he will then be considered a dropout from her/his original high school.

Note on reporting attendance on the A3: If the adult education program is operated by the student’s home district and the student’s course load is full-time, then the student’s enrollment should be included with the regular high school membership reported on the A3. If the program is operated by another district, the other district will report the student’s membership on an A3 and an A13S. If the program is operated by an organization other than a school district, a full-time student who the district continues to monitor should be reported on an A13-OTHER form.

4. If she/he is a truant. This student must be carried on the roster as absent. (The school district may declare the student to be a dropout on her/his 18th birthday.)

5. If she/he moves out of the country. (Verification of enrollment in a foreign school is not required.)

6. If she/he has been incarcerated. (In most cases, an incarcerated student will be reported as a transferred student.)

7. If she/he has died.

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