

# Dropouts

by Ellie Fiore

The statewide dropout rate for Oregon was 4.9% for the school year 2001-2002. This figure declined from 5.3% the previous year, and was the lowest rate in 10 years. The Oregon Department of Education attributes the declining dropout rate to increased efforts at dropout prevention and increased success of existing prevention programs. New legislation requiring schools to publish district report cards and assessment test scores have helped educators identify needs and target resources more efficiently. Additionally, the high unemployment rate in the region likely contributes to the low dropout rate, as fewer opportunities exist for young people outside of school.

Dropout rates in the region and across the states reflect geographical differences. Forty-three percent of the state's dropouts were from Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas Counties. Together, the Portland metropolitan area and the Willamette Valley enroll 67.1% of Oregon's students but have 71.5% of the dropouts. Clark County, Washington reported a dropout rate of 7.8%, very similar to the statewide rate of 7.7%. Differences in data collection and difficulty obtaining data help explain the large difference between Oregon and Washington.

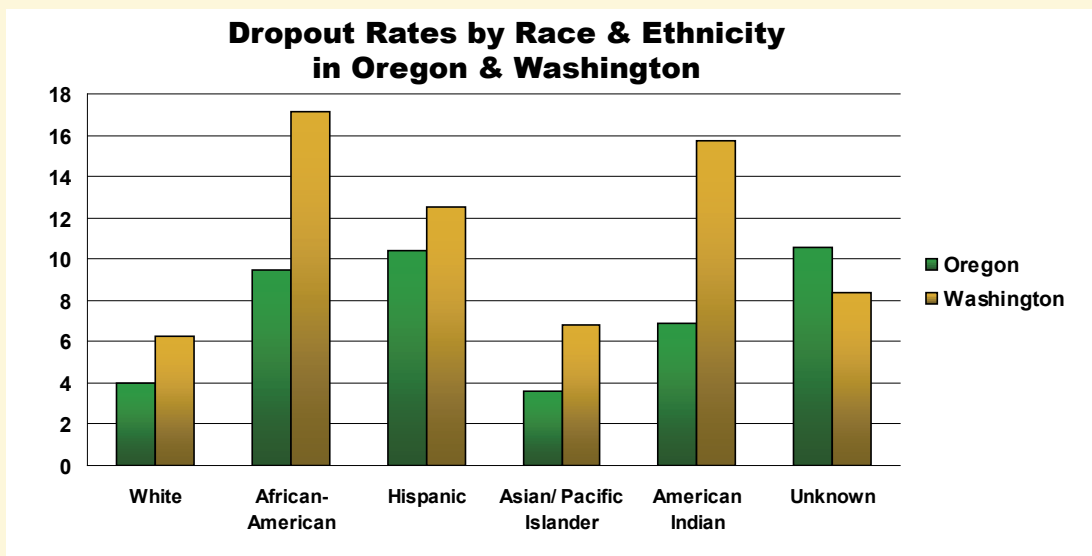
In both states, boys are more likely to drop out of high school than girls. Significant differences also exist among ethnic groups. Hispanic and African-American students in Oregon were more than twice as likely to dropout as were their white counterparts, with rates of 10.4% and 9.5%, respectively. In Washington, Asian

and White students had comparable dropout rates under 7%, while over 17% of African-American students did not graduate. In Washington, 12.5% of Hispanic students dropped out, as did 15.7% of American Indians there. In Oregon, the dropout rate for American Indians is 6.9%.

Students in both states give similar reasons for dropping out of high school. Most students report that they were too far behind to catch up, often despite being enrolled for four years. Others frequently cited reasons include lack of parental support, a dysfunctional home life, and employment obligations or opportunities.

As noted above, Oregon and Washington employ different methods of collecting dropout and graduation data, and caution should be used in making comparisons across state boundaries. Washington follows federal standards for data collection created under the No Child Left Behind Act, while Oregon, like a majority of states, uses methodology certified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). For the 2000-2001 school year, Oregon had the 11th highest dropout rate of the 45 states compared by NCES.

Oregon also is one of only nine states to collect dropout data on the student level, a procedure that increases accuracy. Additionally, Oregon does not count students who receive their GED as dropouts, while Washington does. For the 2001-2002 school year, GED recipients would account for about 0.4% of the Clark County dropout figure. Neither state counts recipients of adult diplomas from community colleges in their dropout rate.



Sources: Oregon Department of Education, Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction