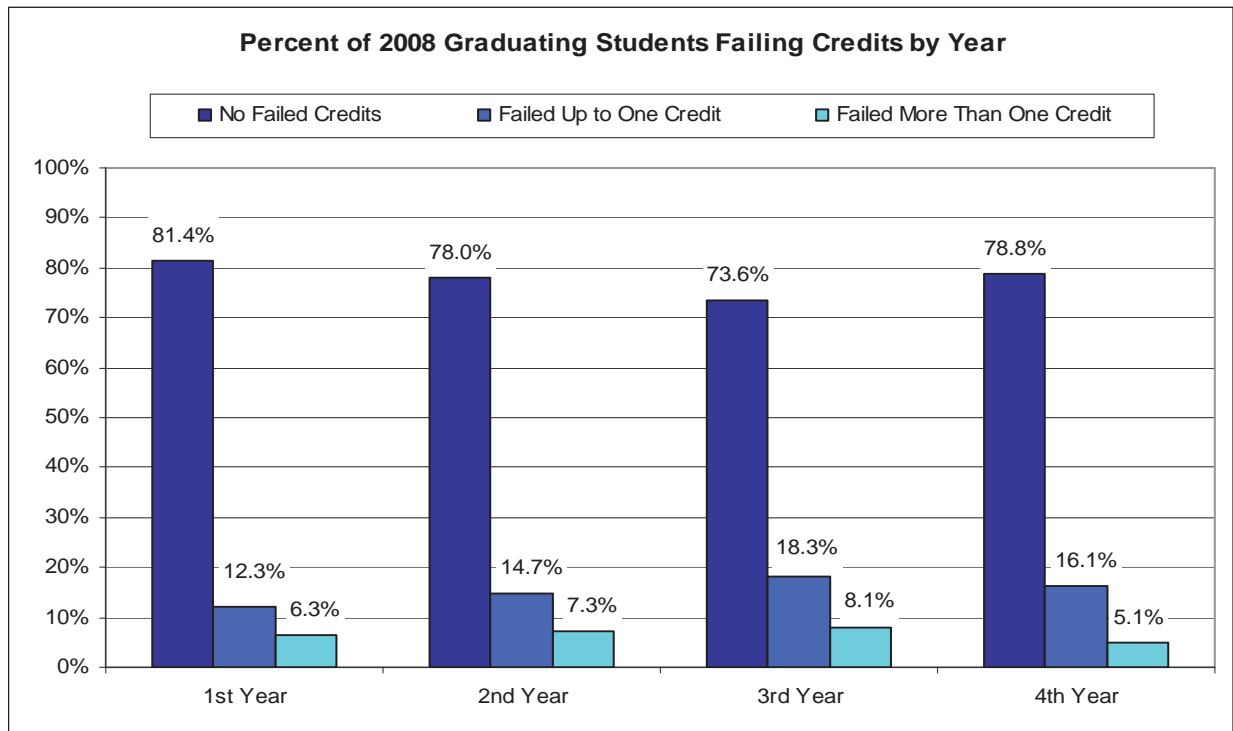




Who's Failing What?¹



The bad news:

- In this sample of Washington's 2008 graduates, 47.3% of students failed at least one credit during high school, with 21.0% failing two or more credits. Additional analyses by year in school revealed that course failure rates were fairly consistent across the four years of high school, with slightly higher rates in the third year and slightly lower rates in the first year.
- Additional analyses from a stratified random sample of the 14,875 transcripts found that course failures were most likely to occur in core subject areas. Of the students making up this (smaller)

¹ In 2007, the State Board of Education conducted a study to determine what course credits students were *required* to take in order to graduate from high school. In 2008, the Board commissioned a transcript study by the BERC Group to determine what course credits students in the graduating class of 2008 were actually *taking*. The BERC Group examined course-taking patterns of 14,875 high school seniors from 100 schools in 100 districts. Every county was represented in the sample. The minimum HEC Board requirements were used because they provide a standard, measurable metric of comparison in Washington State. Both the graduation requirements database of all 246 districts with high schools and the full transcript study can be found on the Board's Web site at: <http://sbe.wa.gov>.

sample, 35.5% failed math, 26.4% failed English, 25.5% failed social studies, 22.4% failed science, 10.6% failed world language, and 7.0% failed fine arts.

The better news:

- Many students (40%) did not make up failed courses because the course was an elective or the student had already met minimum graduation requirements for that subject area.
- About one-third of the students (32.3%) re-took the class during the following term, but consequently graduated with fewer than the possible credits (e.g., 24 possible credits, but graduated with 23). Some students (9.7%) elected to repeat the class in the following term by adding in a zero hour of after-school class to their schedules. A small percentage of students participated in summer school (7%) or an online class (5.5%) to make up the course failure.

Questions for Discussion

- What stands out for you about this data?
- Attention is often drawn to the transition challenges of the ninth grade year, yet in this study, the *fewest* number of failures occurred during the freshman year. By contrast, more overall failures, including more failures in multiple courses, occurred in the junior year. How does this correspond with your experience, and what do you think is happening?
- Although it would be tempting to declare, “Failure is not an option,” that does not appear to be the reality in many of our schools. One of the criticisms of CORE 24 is there is no safety net—no cushion for failure. Yet some would say policy that *assumes* failure is bad policy. What needs to be done to decrease the likelihood of failure?