



Dropout Rate for WCPSS: 2012-13

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Introduction

In April 2014 the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) released its annual statewide Dropout Report covering the 2012-13 school year. This district report contains the dropout rate for WCPSS high school students and also depicts rates for other large school districts in North Carolina (NC) in addition to selected WCPSS student subgroups.

A common misconception about dropout rates is that they are simply the opposite of graduation rates, but the relationship is a bit more complicated. Graduation rates are based on four- or five-year cohort graduation rates for an intact group of students, while dropout rates show only the percentages and numbers of students who drop out during a single school year. Dropout counts are unduplicated within a single school year, but a student can be counted as a dropout more than once in his educational career. For example, a student who drops out more than once in the same year is counted only once as a dropout for that year. However, students who drop out during more than one school year are counted as dropouts for each of those years. Some dropouts, though counted as dropouts during the year they leave, may even return to school later and eventually graduate.

Abstract

Despite increases in student membership each year, WCPSS continues to maintain a steady decline in dropout counts. In 2012-13, the WCPSS high school dropout rate fell to 1.95%, its lowest rate ever. The WCPSS rate is lower than the state’s rate, and also the lowest of the other four large school districts in North Carolina (Guilford 2.07%, Forsyth 2.72%, Mecklenburg 3.02%, and Durham 3.21%). WCPSS dropout rates by ethnicity in 2012-13 also fell for all subgroups, with Black/African-American students experiencing the largest drop of 1.8 percentage points, from 4.6% in 2011-12 to 2.8% in 2012-13.

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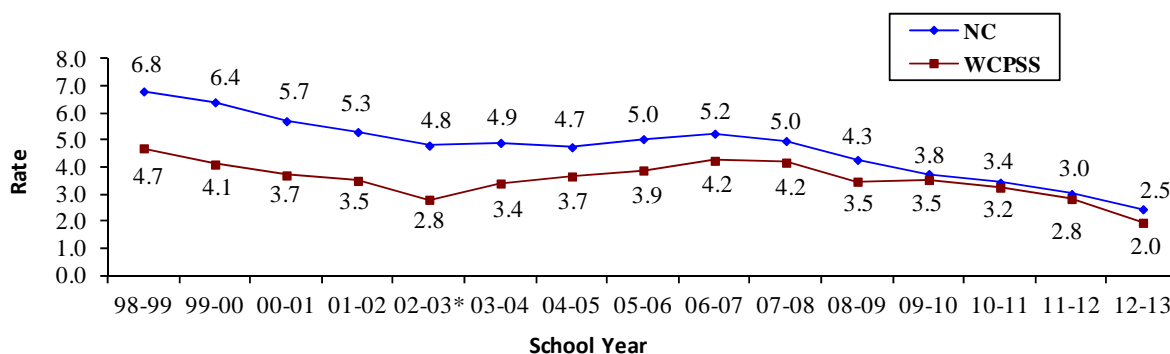
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Results

Rates for WCPSS and NC

The dropout rate for WCPSS in 2012-13 was lower than the state rate by about half a percentage point (Figure 1). Although the gap between the WCPSS and NC rates was around 2.1 percentage points in 1999, over the last several years the gap has slowly narrowed as both rates have generally been improving. (In all figures in this report, dropout rates are rounded to the nearest tenth for ease of display.)

Figure 1
NC and WCPSS High School Dropout Rates, 1999 – 2013



Note: *The 2002-03 dropout rate is higher than the rate NCDPI reports because additional dropouts were discovered after the official data submission to NCDPI.

Rates and counts for WCPSS and other large NC school districts

Although a student can technically drop out from any grade level, most do so during or after grade 9, and as such, official state reporting typically focuses on high school. As Table 1 below shows, the WCPSS dropout rate for grades 9-13 fell from 2.83% in 2011-12 to 1.95% in 2012-13. Other large comparison districts in North Carolina had slightly higher dropout rates in 2012-13 than did WCPSS.

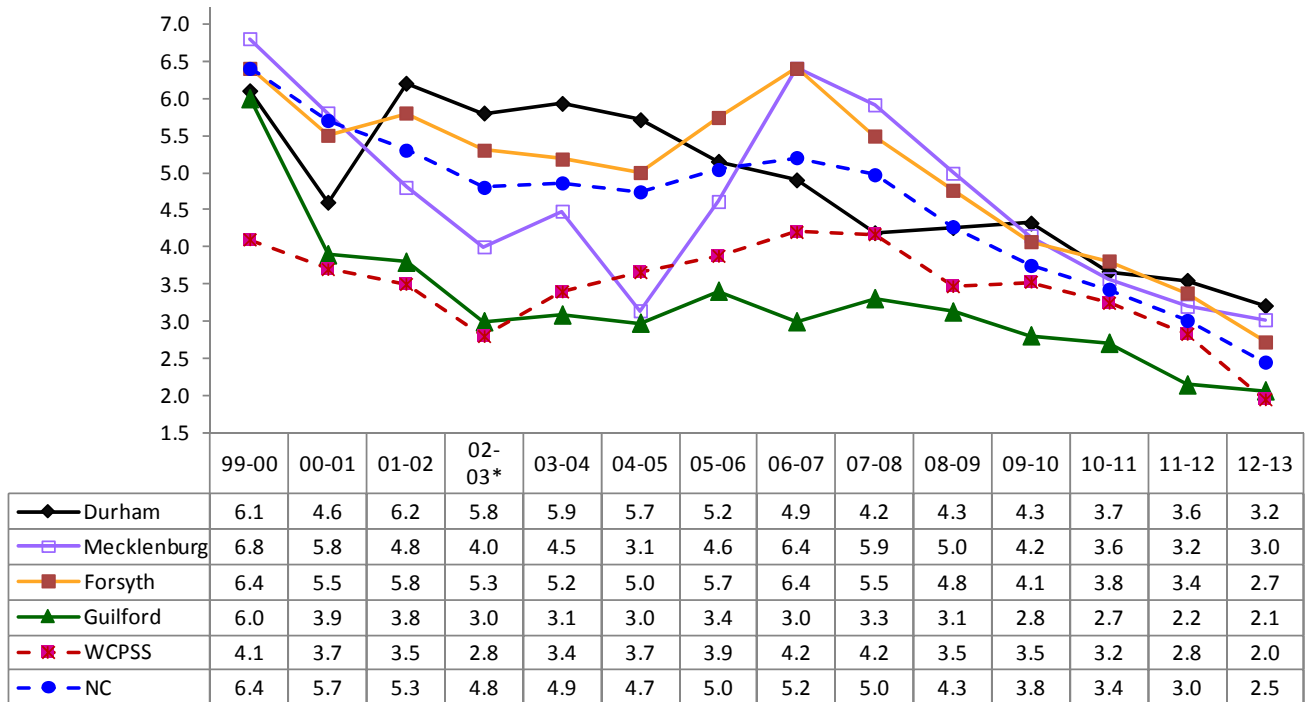
Table 1
WCPSS High School Dropout Rate vs. Other Large NC School Districts, 2012-13

LEA	WCPSS		Guilford		Forsyth		Mecklenburg		Durham	
	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13
Rate	2.83%	1.95%	2.15%	2.07%	3.38%	2.72%	3.20%	3.02%	3.55%	3.21%
Count	1,236	870	495	487	540	435	1,278	1,232	362	322

Note: Data source: NCDPI Annual Dropout Report, 2012-13.
The formula for the dropout rate can be found in the NCDPI Dropout Procedures Manual, 2013.

As Figure 2 shows, WCPSS and the other comparison districts in the state have each seen a steady decline in dropout rates in the last four years. WCPSS and Guilford have maintained a rate lower than the state in each of the last 14 years. With a dropout rate at 1.95%, WCPSS is the first large school system in the state to have a rate this low during this time span.

Figure 2
High School Dropout Rates for Selected NC School Districts, 1999 – 2013



Note: * The 2002-03 WCPSS dropout rate is higher than the rate NCDPI reports because additional dropouts were discovered that year after the official data submission to NCDPI.

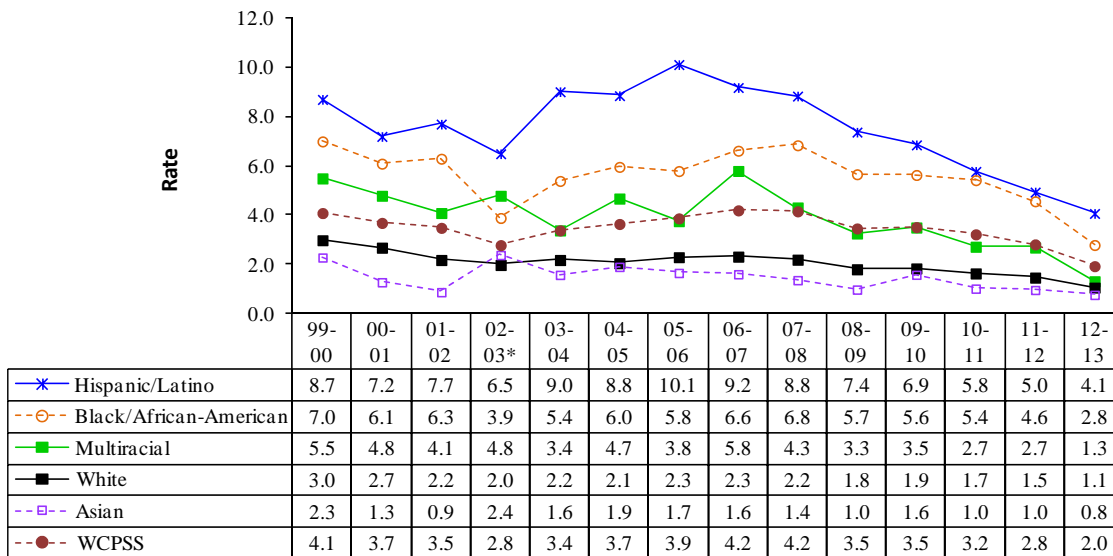
To facilitate layout, this figure displays percentages for y-axis starting from 1.5%.

Source: NCDPI Annual Dropout Report, 2012-13.

WCPSS Dropout Rates by Race and Ethnicity

As in past years, WCPSS dropout rates by race and ethnicity have continued to decline, with all groups improving to less than half of their individual rates in 1999-00. The dropout rate for WCPSS Black/African-American students fell to 2.8% in 2012-13, its lowest point in the last 14 years, and represented the largest one-year drop among all sub-groups (1.8 percentage points). White and Asian students have continued to experience a steady decline in their dropout rates as well. The Hispanic/Latino dropout rate, while still highest among racial and ethnic groups in WCPSS, has also improved significantly, falling from a high of 10.1% in 2005-06 to a low of 4.1% in 2012-13. Despite these improvements, Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino high school students are still dropping out at a rate 3-4 times that of their White and Asian peers.

Figure 3
Dropout Rates by Race and Ethnic Groups, 1999 – 2013: Grades 9 – 13



Notes: * The 2002-03 dropout rate is higher than the rate NCDPI reports because additional dropouts were discovered after the official data submission to NCDPI.

Asian and Multiracial student groups constitute less than five percent of the total dropout group; therefore, their rates may fluctuate more from year to year than rates for the other ethnic subgroups.

A separate rate is not reported for Native American and Pacific Islander students due to low numbers in these groups.

Dropout Counts by Gender, Race and Ethnicity

This next set of tables shows the relative proportion of WCPSS dropouts across various student subgroups. Out of a total of 870 high school dropouts in WCPSS, 535 (61.5%) were male and 335 (38.5%) were female. This split generally mirrors the results for other school districts statewide (NCDPI, 2014). While the number of Hispanic/Latino dropouts decreased from 2011-12 to 2012-13, this group showed a proportional increase as a percentage of all dropouts, from about 22% to over 27%. Black/African-American dropouts showed a decrease in their number (-210) and proportion (from 44% to under 39%) of total dropouts.

Table 2
Number and Percent of WCPSS Dropouts by
Race/Ethnicity, 2011-12 and 2012-13

Race/Ethnicity	2011-12 Counts/%	2012-13 Counts/%	2012 & 2013 Difference
Black/African-Amer.	544 44.0%	334 38.4%	-210
White	322 26.1%	240 27.6%	-82
Hispanic/Latino	277 22.4%	237 27.2%	-40
Multiracial	52 4.2%	26 3.0%	-26
Total	1,195	837	-358

Note: Total number of dropouts in 2011-12 was 1,236; in 2012-13 it was 870 (difference of 366). Dropout counts for Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander students are not included in the table due to small numbers. Percentages are calculated on the complete set of high school dropouts.

While 9th grade is the most common grade for a high school student to drop out, most of those students have generally been retained at least once before, either in 9th grade or prior. Table 3 shows the number of dropouts by grade level and age. The most common age/grade combination for a WCPSS high school dropout in 2012-13 was the 17-year-old 9th grader, representing 14% of all high school dropouts. With respect to age alone, 18 was the most common age for dropouts overall.

These data suggest that most dropouts have fallen behind academically in the years prior to their actual dropping out of school, and that the majority are spending multiple years enrolled in a high school before finally deciding to leave. Assuming that the typical “on-track” 9th grader who has been progressing through school at the normal pace is no more than 15 years of age during grade 9, 16 in grade 10, etc., then 745 of the 870 dropouts in WCPSS in

2013-14 (86%) were already at least one year behind in school prior to dropping out, with 483 (56%) being at least two years older than their grade level classification would suggest (Table 3).

Table 3
Number of WCPSS High School Dropouts by Grade and Age, 2012-13

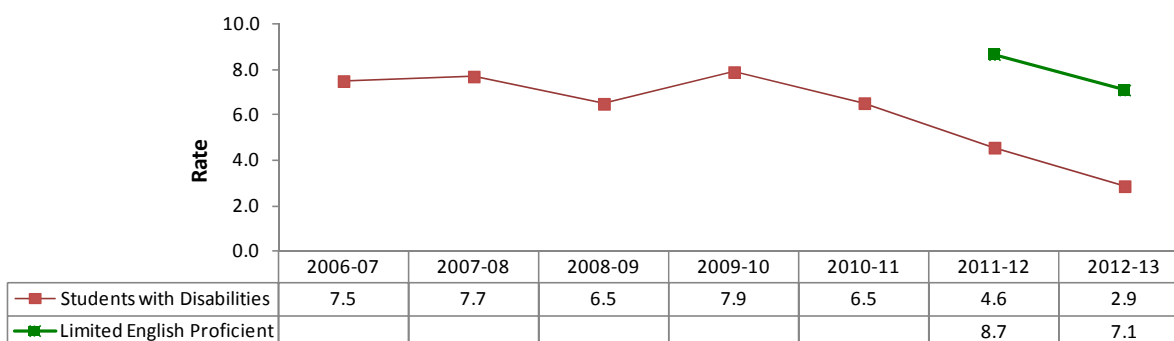
Grade	Dropout Age									TOTAL
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
9	1	1	61	123	87	28	6	1	0	308
10	0	1	23	62	75	44	12	1	0	218
11	0	0	2	32	79	46	18	5	0	182
12	0	0	0	5	60	60	26	8	3	162
Total	1	2	86	222	301	178	62	15	3	870

Notes: Counts greater than 20 are shaded for emphasis.
Data source: NCDPI Annual Dropout Report, 2012-13.
Grade 13 had no dropouts in 2012-13.

Other Subgroups

Similar to the other subgroups, dropout rates for students from other subgroups defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act have also continued to improve. Rates for students with disabilities have declined by more than half over the last seven years. Although rates for limited English proficient students are higher than for students with disabilities, their rate declined by more than one and a half percentage points in 2012-13 as well.

Figure 4
WCPSS High School Dropout Rates by Selected NCLB Subgroups, 2006 – 2013



Note: 1. Due to changes in the available data sources for NCLB subgroup identification, revisions were made to the 2011-12 rates in this publication.
2. Due to recent changes in the method of determining LEP status as well as the LEP data source, only the rates for the past two years are shown.

Discussion

The steady decline in dropout rates in WCPSS mirrors outcomes for the state for all ethnic groups. Among racial and ethnic groups, Black/African-American students had the highest decline in dropout rate in 2012-13. Although Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino students in 2012-13 represented less than 40% of the overall student population in WCPSS, these subgroups still comprised more than half of WCPSS dropouts (NCDPI, 2014).

Almost half of the 2012-13 dropouts in North Carolina were recorded as dropping out due to attendance problems, consistent with previous years (NCDPI, 2014). However, while low attendance may precede a student dropping out, both truancy and dropout are perhaps best viewed as related outcomes being driven by the same underlying factors. Many of the other possible reasons cited in the NCDPI report are issues students experience both inside and outside of school (e.g., academic problems, discipline problems, moving, working instead of going to school, incarceration, unstable home environment, need to care for children or parent(s), health problems, etc.). The fact that most dropouts are already over the typical age for their grade when they decide to leave school further suggests that dropping out of school is a process that begins years before the final decision to leave is made.

Decades of research on the potential causes behind a student's decision to drop out of school have highlighted the complexity of the decision. Factors related to the student as well as the home and school environments can all play a role (Rumberger & Lim, 2009). These multiple factors have also been described as a combination of things that both "push" students out and those that "pull" students away from school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Because a variety of factors are at play when students decide to drop out, schools and communities need a multi-pronged approach for addressing factors influencing decisions to leave school prior to graduation. Examining the role of the middle school years, in particular the middle-to-high school transition, may provide further insights on how to intervene earlier to prevent high school dropouts.

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