An Analysis of States' FFY 2011 Annual Performance Report Data for Indicator B2 (Dropout)

A Report Prepared for the

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by the

National Dropout Prevention Center

for Students with Disabilities

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IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

NDPC-SD
National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

Indicator B2: Dropout Rate

INTRODUCTION

The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) was assigned the task of compiling, analyzing, and summarizing the data for Indicator 2—Dropout—from the FFY 2011 Annual Performance Reports (APRs) and the revised State Performance Plans (SPPs), which were submitted to OSEP in February of 2013. The text of the indicator is as follows:

> Percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.

This report summarizes the NDPC-SD's findings for Indicator 2 across the 50 states, commonwealths and territories, and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), for a total of 60 agencies. For the sake of convenience, in this report the term "states" is inclusive of the 50 states, the commonwealths and territories, as well as the BIE.

MEASUREMENT

The OSEP Part B Measurement Table for this submission indicates that the data source for Indicator B-1 should be the same as used for reporting to the Department under IDEA section 618. States are instructed to, "Use 618 exiting data reported to the Department via EDFacts in file specification N009 or via DANS using Part B Exiting Table 4."

Under the Measurement section, the table indicates that, "States must report a percentage using the number of youth with IEPs (ages 14-21) who exited special education due to dropping out in the numerator and the number of all youth with IEPs who left high school (ages 14-21) in the denominator.", and that sampling is not allowed.

In a December 11, 2012 memo from OSEP to the Chief State School Officers, State Directors of Special Education, and State Data Managers, States were advised that, "For Indicator 2, States may report using the data source and measurement included in the Part B Indicator Measurement Table that expires July 31, 2015, or the State may choose to report using the same data source and measurement that the State used for its FFY 2010 APR that was submitted on February 1, 2012." Most states chose this option.

CALCULATION METHODS

Comparisons of dropout rates among states are still confounded by the existence of multiple methods for calculating dropout rates and the fact that different states employ different calculations to fit their circumstances. The dropout rates reported in the FFY 2011 APRs were calculated using one of four methods: an event (annual) rate calculation, an adjusted cohort rate calculation (as for Indicator B-1), the exiter rate described in the OSEP measurement table, or a leaver (estimated cohort) rate calculation.

Event rate calculations, reported this year by the vast majority of states (43 states, or 72%), provide a basic snapshot of a single year's group of dropouts. Most states reported an event rate for students enrolled in grades 9-12, though some states reported using data for grades 7-12.

The next most frequently reported type of rate, the adjusted cohort calculation, tends to yield higher dropout rates than do event-rate calculations. Cohort-based rates provide a very accurate picture of attrition from school over the course of four or more years. As the name suggests, the adjusted cohort method follows a group or cohort of individual students from 9th through 12th grades. It is adjusted to reflect changes in cohort membership that result from transfers, emigration, and death. Eight states (13%) reported a cohort-based dropout rate this year.

Seven states (12%) reported using the new OSEP exiter rate in this APR. This rate yields higher dropout rates than the other methods because it compares the number of youth with disabilities who drop out with all youth with disabilities who exited school by all methods (graduated; received a certificate; aged-out; transferred to regular education; moved, known to be continuing; died; or dropped out,), as opposed to comparing the number of dropouts with the population of youth with disabilities who are enrolled in school or who are members of a particular cohort. While the exiter method of calculation tends to yield high dropout rates, it does offer a single, standard measure that permits comparison of dropout rates across all states, as the §618 exiting data are reported in a standard manner by all states.

Finally, two states (3%) calculated leaver rates this year. These types of rate provide an estimate of the dropout rate for a cohort of students. Calculations of this type generally result in rates that approximate true cohort-based rates in magnitude. They are generally higher than event-rate calculations.

A few states calculated and reported more than one flavor of dropout rate—usually an event rate and a longer term measure. This makes sense, as they provide different types of information, which can inform different uses. For example, the event rate can help inform a state of the effect that new policies, procedures, or programs had on dropout in the short term. Longer-term, cohort-based rates can provide useful information about the impact of school-completion initiatives or other interventions that can take longer to manifest an effect.

Figures 1 – 4 show states' dropout rates, based on the method employed in calculating their dropout rate for the FFY 2011 APR (using SY 2010-11 data). Please note that the Y-axis (vertical axis) scales differ among these four figures.

Figure 1

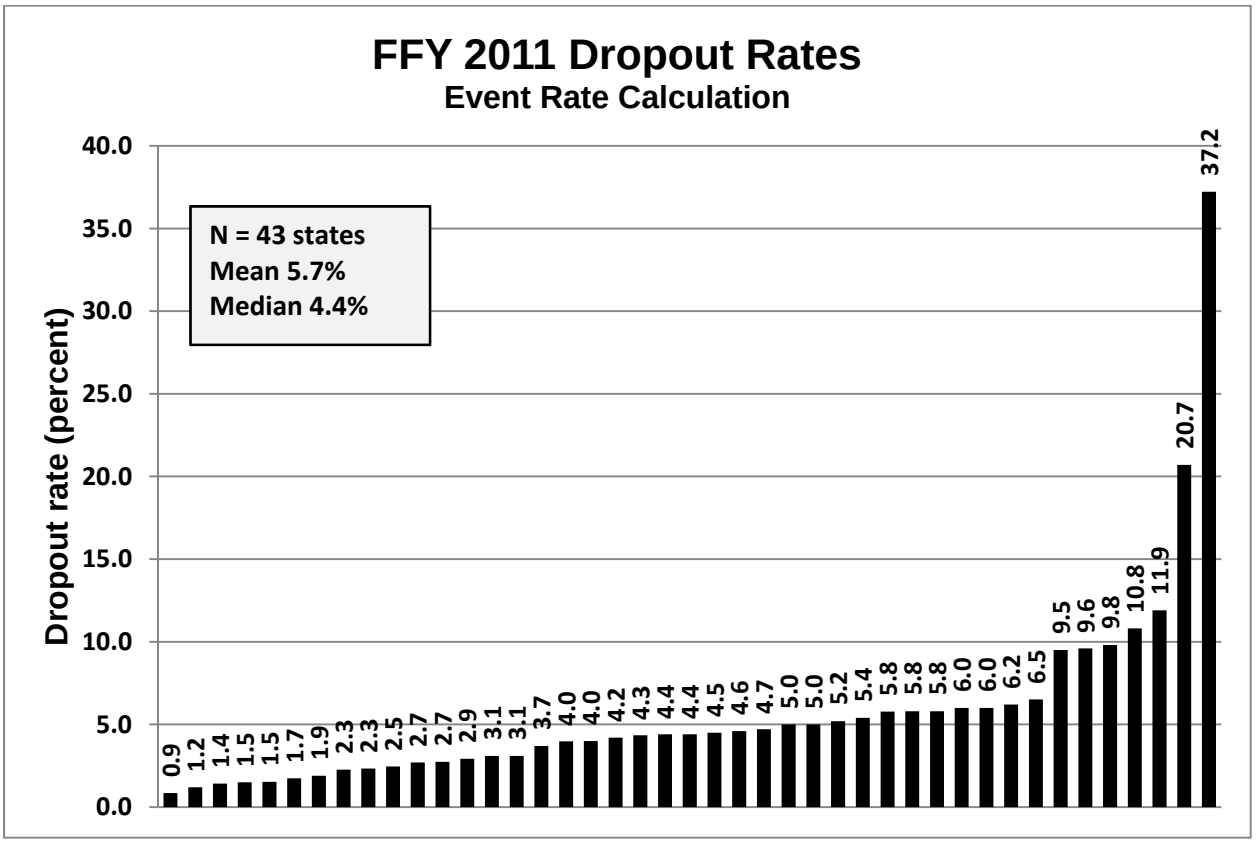


Figure 2

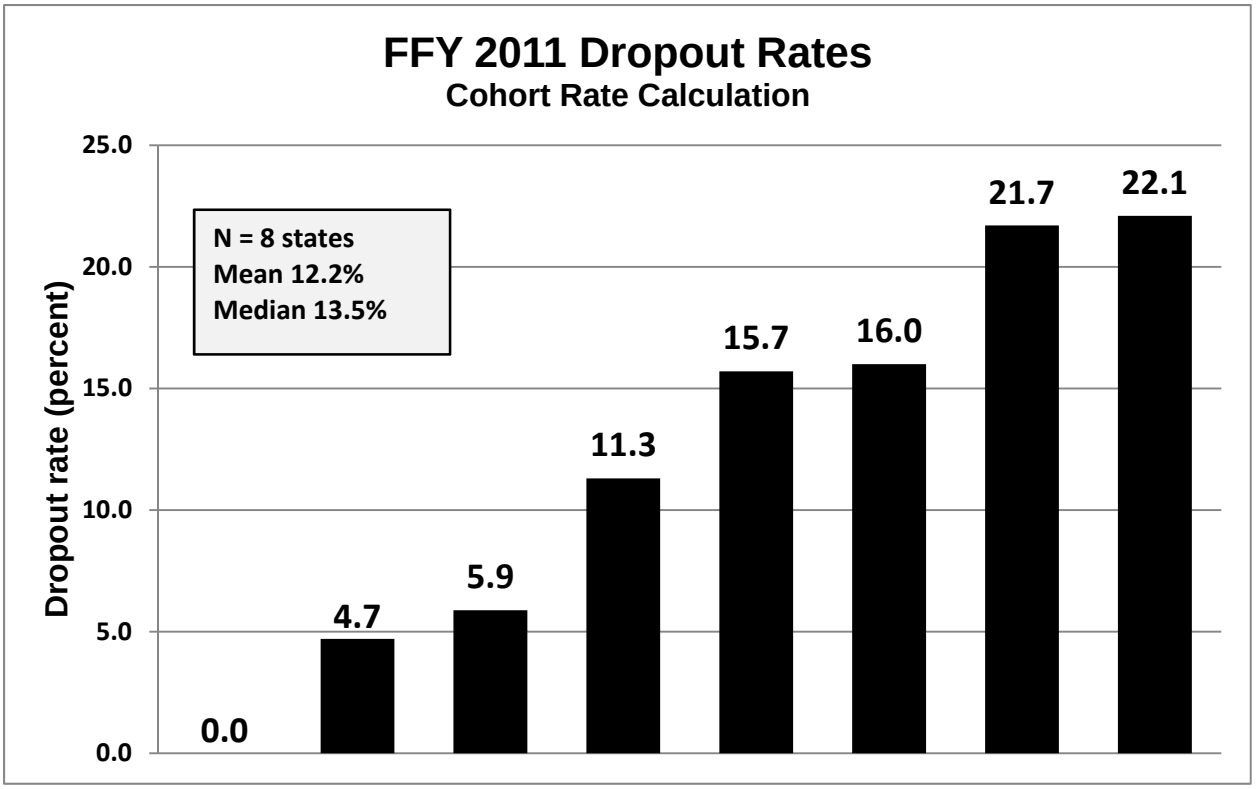


Figure 3

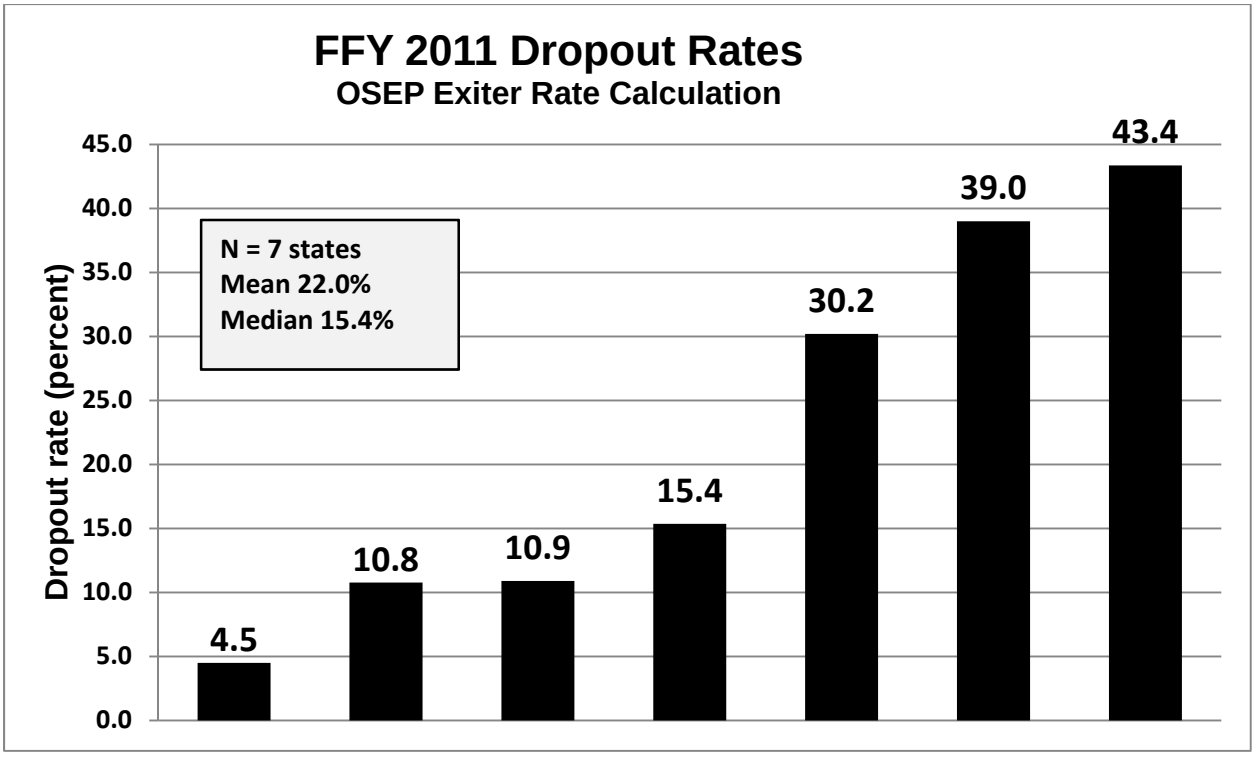
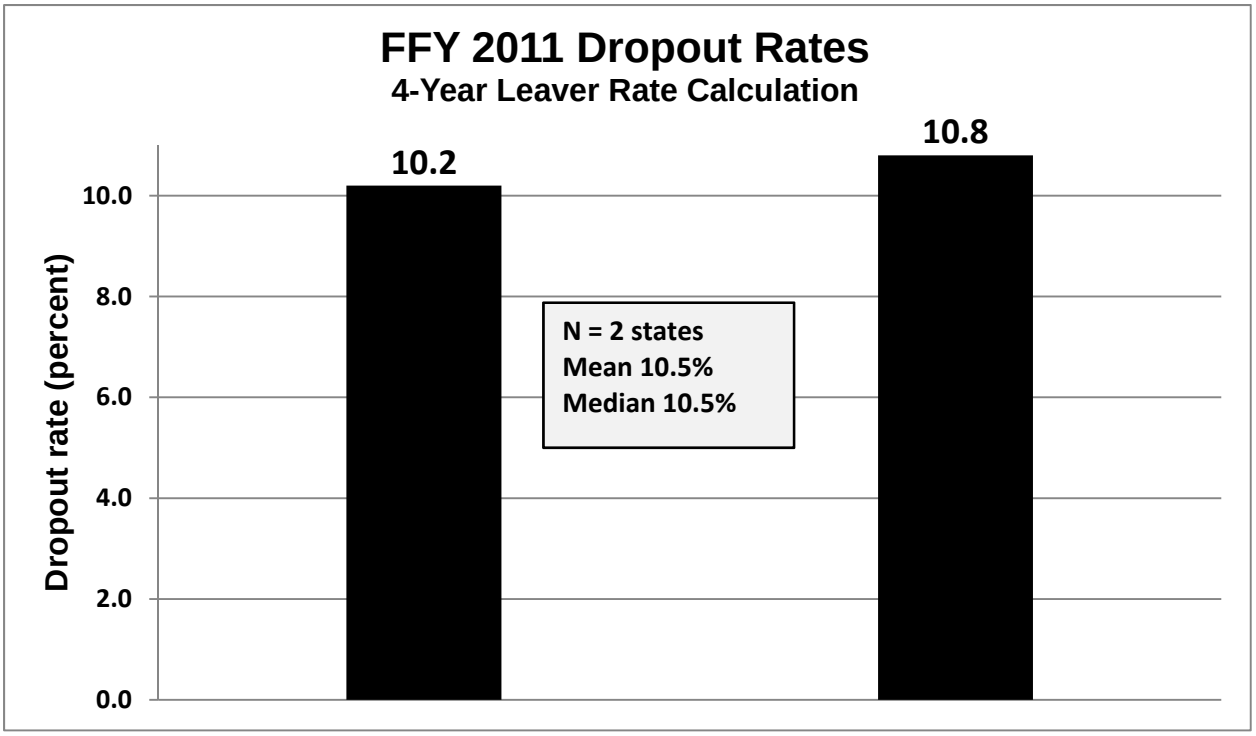


Figure 4



STATES' PERFORMANCE ON THE INDICATOR

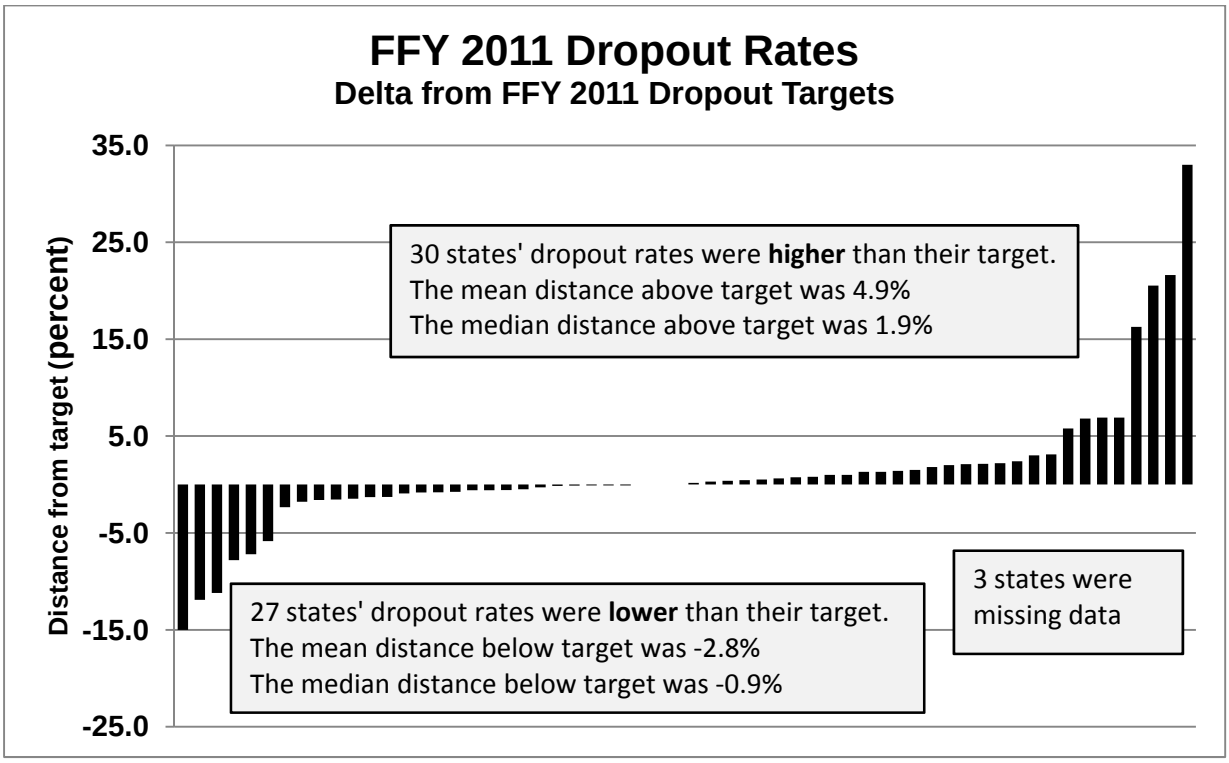
Because states are not required to specify dropout-rate targets under ESEA, they have continued using their SPP targets for improvement. In FFY 2011, 27 states (45%) met their SPP performance target for Indicator 2 and 30 states (50%) missed their target.

It must be noted that seven states (12%) adopted OSEP's new exiter rate in FFY 2011; however, not all of them revised their dropout rate targets. Some of these states compared their FFY 2011 rate under the new calculation with their old SPP improvement target. Similarly, in the progress/slippage calculation, some states compared the rate from the new formula with last year's rate, which was calculated using their old method. So, while the number of states that met their target under this year's APR is lower than the number from last year's APR (45% versus 60%), it should be realized that the aforementioned factors are likely having an impact.

Over the years of the SPP, states have generally improved at setting realistic, achievable targets for improvement. Most states' performance was quite close to the target they had set, regardless of whether they met or missed that target. The mean amount by which states outperformed their dropout target was –2.8% (median –0.9%); the mean amount by which states missed their dropout target was 4.9% (median 1.9%). Figure 5 shows the amount by which each state surpassed or missed its dropout rate

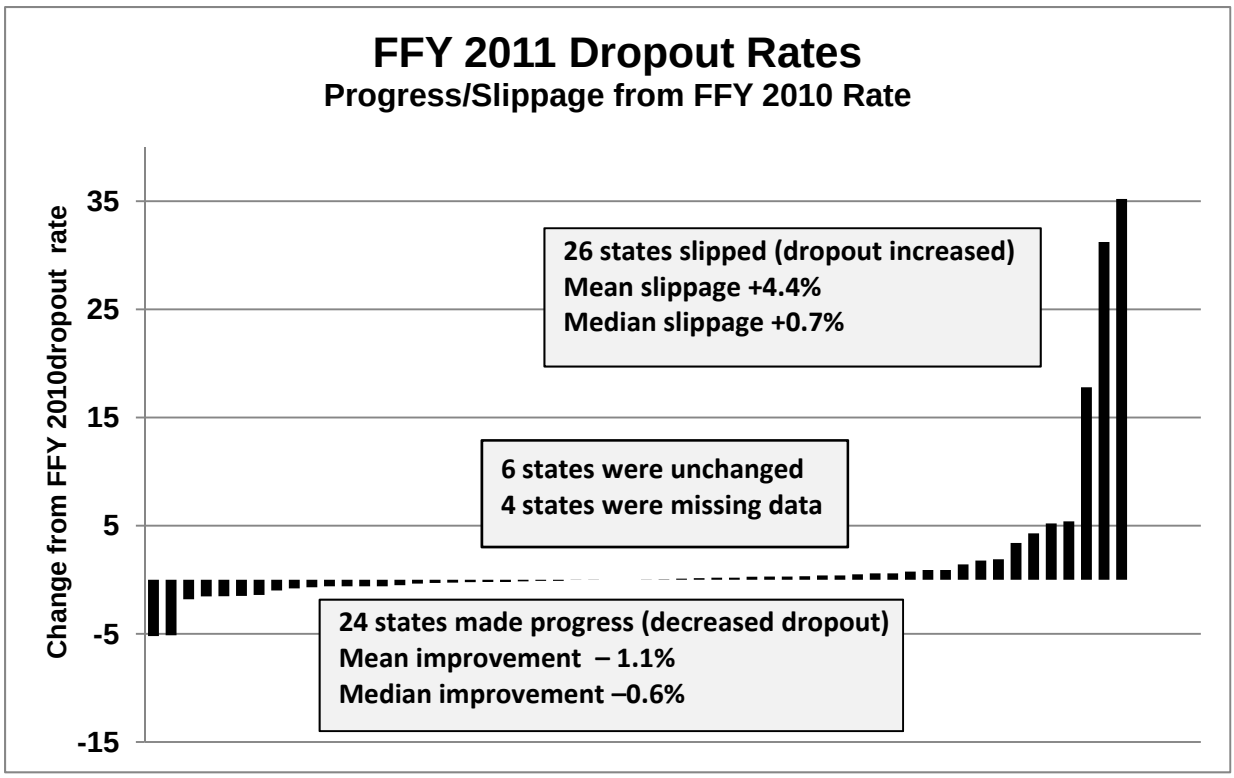
target. Note: to meet the target on this indicator, a state must be at or below the dropout rate target value they specified in the SPP.

Figure 5



As illustrated in Figure 6, 24 states (40%) made progress, lowering their dropout rate. The mean amount by which these states lowered their dropout rates was –1.1%, with a median value of –0.6%. In FFY 2011, 28 states (47%) experienced slippage and saw dropout rates increase. The mean amount of increase in these states' dropout rate was 4.4%, with a median value of 0.7%. In six states (10%) dropout rates remained unchanged from the previous year. To contrast this, in FFY 2010, dropout rates increased in 22 states (37%), with a mean increase of 1.9% and a median value of 0.9%. As discussed above, it should be remembered that some states should not have made the comparison of FFY 2011 data with their FFY 2010 data because of their change in measurement for the indicator.

Figure 6


FFY 2011 Dropout Rates
Progress/Slippage from FFY 2010 Rate
Change from FFY 2010dropout rate
35
25
15
5
-5
-15
26 states slipped (dropout increased)
Mean slippage +4.4%
Median slippage +0.7%
6 states were unchanged
4 states were missing data
24 states made progress (decreased dropout)
Mean improvement – 1.1%
Median improvement –0.6%