

## **More Information on The Methodology, Data, and Terms Used in the AP Dropout Factory Story**

### **Methodology**

The promoting power data used on the AP website is an update of the work we have been doing since 2001. For details see the paper we wrote in 2004 "Locating the Dropout Crisis" at [www.gradgap.org](http://www.gradgap.org). In August we released our analysis of the most recent data available-the Class of 2006-at a Senate briefing. It examined the number of high schools with low promoting power 60% or less at the State level.

The AP then asked if we would be willing to work with them on a school level analysis. Because this involves naming schools, we use a three year average. On the AP website we are only listing schools that for the class of 2006, 2005, and 2004 had average promoting power of 60% or less. We also further restricted the sample to a) regular and vocational high schools, b) high schools which enroll at least 100 students and had at least a 10th and 12th grade, and c) schools which had valid data for all three Classes (2004, 2005, and 2006).

To be included in the analysis schools needed to have freshman enrollment data in 2001, 2002, and 2003 and senior enrollment data in 2004, 2005, and 2006. As a result, any school that was not in existence prior to 2001 is not included.

We are comparing 9th grade or 10th grade enrollment (in 10-12 schools) to 12th grade enrollment 3 or 2 years later. We are using fall enrollment numbers from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data. Districts and states supply this data to the U.S. Department of Education.

We state that schools which have an average promoting power of 60% or less for the Class of 2004, 05, and 06 "Fit the profile of a dropout factory". School which continually have 60% fewer freshman than seniors are usually schools in which the majority or near majority of students who enter the 9<sup>th</sup> grade do not ultimately earn a diploma from the school.

There are local reasons why a school's promoting power may be more or less than the state reported graduation rate. The main reason promoting power would be lower than a school's reported graduation rate is if there is substantial net out migration. In other, words if between the start of the freshman year and the start of the senior year considerably more students transfer out of the school than transfer in. However, for earlier years, we checked this against county level census data and showed that there were only a few percent of schools where net out migration was more than 10%. Moreover, using a three year average, guards against one-time events i.e. a major employer leaving town or a military base closing. In any given class of students, this could cause a large decline in enrollments between the freshman and senior year. However, in the following year, the reduction of students should impact freshmen enrollments as well and promoting power would then measure what percent of these students made it to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The main reason promoting power could be higher than actual graduation rates is if a district does not have clear promotion criteria from grade to grade in high school. In this case students who have been enrolled for four years may be counted as seniors but be very far away from earning enough credits to graduate. In these districts there will be a considerable drop off from 12th grade enrollment to diplomas.

There are also some rare cases we are learning of schools that serve as 9 to 10 feeders for specialized 11-12 schools, with some students staying in the home school to graduate. Using the 60% cut point, however, provides a buffer. Even if various factors mean we are off by 10 percentage point then the school is still one in which 30% of students are continually not making it to 12th grade-either dropping out or leaving the school.

Finally, it is important to note that we are not following individual students over time. We are comparing enrollments at one point in time to enrollments at another point in time. Both the 9<sup>th</sup> grade enrollments and the 12<sup>th</sup> grade enrollments will include students who are on-time, first time students and off-time, students repeating the grade and/or in the case of 12<sup>th</sup> grade arriving there after repeating an earlier grade. As a result, rather a student is a first time ninth grader or repeating the grade, if they ultimately make it to 12<sup>th</sup> grade they will be counted in the analysis.

## **Data**

The link which follows provides access to the spread sheets which contain the data the AP used to formulate their tables. It includes beginning and 12<sup>th</sup> grade enrollments for the Class of 2006 and year by year promoting power rates for the Class of 2004, 2005, and 2006.

[List of Schools with a Weak 3 yr Avg 2004 2005 2006V3.pdf](#)

[Average ppmean06 \(2005 Sample 3 years valid data\) State Distribution and Estimated DropoutsV2.pdf](#)

## **Use of the Term Dropout Factory**

We acknowledge that some people may view the term “Dropout Factory” has a harsh and unfair term. We use it to describe a harsh and unfair situation, under-resourced and over-challenged high schools which educate primarily low income and minority students and year after year are unable to graduate the majority or near majority of students who enter the school. We recognize that these schools are filled with hard working and dedicated teachers and administrators and resilient students. Our goal is to shine a spotlight on what has been called a “Silent Epidemic” the low graduation rates of the nation’s low income and minority students and to demonstrate that the dropout crisis is concentrated in a relatively small sub-set of schools. This potentially makes solutions more possible as resources and supports can be targeted to where they are most needed. Our views on what those solutions might be can be found at [www.gradgap.org](http://www.gradgap.org) - click on the link to Ed Week Editorial and Research to Support it and in our recent paper What Your Community Can Do to End its Dropout Crisis available at [www.csos.jhu.edu](http://www.csos.jhu.edu) under What’s New.

## **Data Questions**

If after reading more on our methodology and examining the data, you believe there has been an error in the data that was reported to the US Department of Education or there are extenuating circumstances the data does not reflect then please e-mail us directly at [rbalfanz@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:rbalfanz@csos.jhu.edu) or [twest@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:twest@csos.jhu.edu). We will look at your case and if we can verify the above, we will state so on our website and post the reason why.

Robert Balfanz  
Johns Hopkins University