

Dropout Rates

Headline

Among youth ages 16 to 24, Hispanics accounted for 40 percent of all high school dropouts in 2004. However, they only made up 17 percent of the total youth population. ([See Figure 1](#))

Importance

Young people who drop out of high school are unlikely to have the minimum skills and credentials necessary to function in today's increasingly complex society and technological workplace. The completion of high school is required for accessing post-secondary education and is a minimum requirement for most jobs.¹ High school dropouts are more likely than high school completers to be unemployed.² Additionally, a high school diploma leads to higher income and occupational status.³ Interestingly, however, many youth who drop out of high school eventually earn a diploma or a GED. One study found that 63 percent of students who dropped out had earned a diploma or GED within eight years of the year they should have originally graduated.⁴

Studies have found that young adults with low education and skill levels are more likely to live in poverty and to receive government assistance.⁵ High school dropouts are likely to stay on public assistance longer than those with at least a high school degree. Further, high school dropouts are more likely to become involved in crime.⁶

Trends

Dropout rates of young people ages 16 to 24 in the civilian, non-institutionalized population gradually declined between 1972 and 2004, from 15 percent to a low of 10 percent in 2003, where the rate remained in 2004. ([See Table 2](#)) In this indicator, dropouts are those who are not enrolled in and have not completed high school. In 1972, the dropout rate among non-Hispanic blacks was 21 percent, and, among non-Hispanic whites, it was 12 percent. These rates declined substantially for each group between 1992 and 2004, narrowing the gap between the two groups (though the rate for blacks remains twice that of whites). The dropout rate for non-Hispanic black youth reached an historic low of 11 percent in 2001. ([See Figure 1](#)) This drop is at least in part related to the dramatic increases in incarceration rates among black high school dropouts since 1980, which takes them out of the civilian non-institutionalized population on which these estimates are based.⁷ Rates among Hispanic youth have declined in last few years from 30 percent in 1998 to 24 percent in 2004.

Differences by Race and Ethnicity

Black and Hispanic youth are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to drop out of high school. In 2004, 7 percent of non-Hispanic whites ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in

school and had not completed high school, compared with 12 percent of blacks and 24 percent of Hispanics. ([See Figure 1](#)) The high rate for Hispanics is in part the result of the high proportion of immigrants in this age group who never attended school in the U.S.⁸ Asian youth, with a dropout rate of 4 percent, had the lowest dropout rate among all racial and ethnic groups in 2004. ([See Table 1](#))

Note: Estimates for 2004 reflect the new Office of Management and Budget race definitions, and include only those who are identified with a single race. Hispanics may be of any race.

Differences by Gender

In 2004, 12 percent of males ages 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, compared with 9 percent of females. Although males comprise one-half of the population, they make up 57 percent of the dropouts in this age group. ([See Figure 2](#))

Differences by Immigration Status

The dropout rates for high-school students ages 16 to 24 vary by immigration status. Foreign-born students had a dropout rate of 26 percent in 2004, compared with 17 percent for children born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents, both of which are higher than the national average. While foreign-born students make up 11 percent of the total population of students in this age group, they make up 28 percent of the dropout population. ([See Figure 3](#))

State and Local Estimates

State estimates from 1991 through 2002 are available from:
<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003411.pdf>

State estimates from 2000 through 2003 are available from:
http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/compare_results.jsp?i=440&dt=2&yr=4&s=a&dtype=&x=166&y=12

International Estimates

International estimates are available from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) at:
http://www.oecd.org/document/11/0,2340,en_2649_37455_35321099_1_1_1_37455,00.html (See Indicator A1)

National Goals

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed into law January 2002, aims to make sure that all children achieve academic proficiency within 12 years and gain the educational skills

necessary to succeed later in life. It also attempts to ensure that children are monitored at an early age to ensure that all children succeed and aims to reduce the achievement gap between subgroups. More information is available at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>.

Definition

This indicator uses the status dropout rate⁹ which measures the percentage of young adults aged 16 through 24 in the civilian, non-institutionalized population who were not enrolled in a high school program and had not received a high school diploma or obtained an equivalency certificate.¹⁰

While this indicator uses status dropout rate, other indicators such as on-time high school completion or high school graduation rates are also used to measure high school outcomes.

For more information see the Urban Institute's "High School Graduation, Completion, and Dropout (GCD) Indicators" available at:

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411116_GCDCatalog.pdf

Data Source

Data for 2004: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004: Detailed Tables*: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html>

Data for 2003: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2003: Detailed Tables*: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2003.html>

Data for 2002: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2002: Detailed Tables*: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2002.html>

All other data: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2003*. NCES 2003-067. Washington, DC: 2003. Tables 17-1 and 17-2. Based on October Current Population Surveys analysis. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003067>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, October Current Population Survey, various years <http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/>

Approximate Date of Next Update

Summer 2006

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001. *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000*, NCES 2002-114, by P. Kaufman, M.N. Alt, & C.D. Chapman. Washington, DC: Author. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/

² Caspi, A., Wright, B.E., Moffit, T.E., & Silva, P.A., 1998. "Childhood Predictors of Unemployment in Early Adulthood," *American Sociological Review*, 63 (3), 424-451.

³ Miller, P., Mulvey, C. and Martin, N., 1995. "What Do Twins Studies Reveal about the Economic Returns to Education? A Comparison of Australian and U.S. Findings," *The American Economic Review*, 85(3), 586-599; Sewell, W., Hauser, R., & Wolf, W., 1980. "Sex, Schooling, and Occupational Status," *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(3), 551 – 583.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *Issue Brief: Educational Attainment of High School Drop Outs Eight Years Later*, NCES 2005-026. US Department of Education Services. Institute of Education Sciences. Available online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005026.pdf>.

⁵ Boisjoly, J., Harris, K., and Duncan, G., 1998. "Initial Welfare Spells: Trends, Events, and Duration," *Social Service Review*, 72 (4), 466 – 492; Moore, K., Glei, D., Driscoll, A., Zaslowsky, M., and Redd, Z. (in press). "Poverty and Welfare Patterns: Implications for Children," *Journal of Social Policy*.

⁶ Freeman, R. (1996). "Why Do So Many Young American Men Commit Crimes and What Might We Do About It?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 10(1), 25 – 42.

⁷ Western, B. and Pettit, B. (2002). "Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality". *Contexts*, 1:37-43.

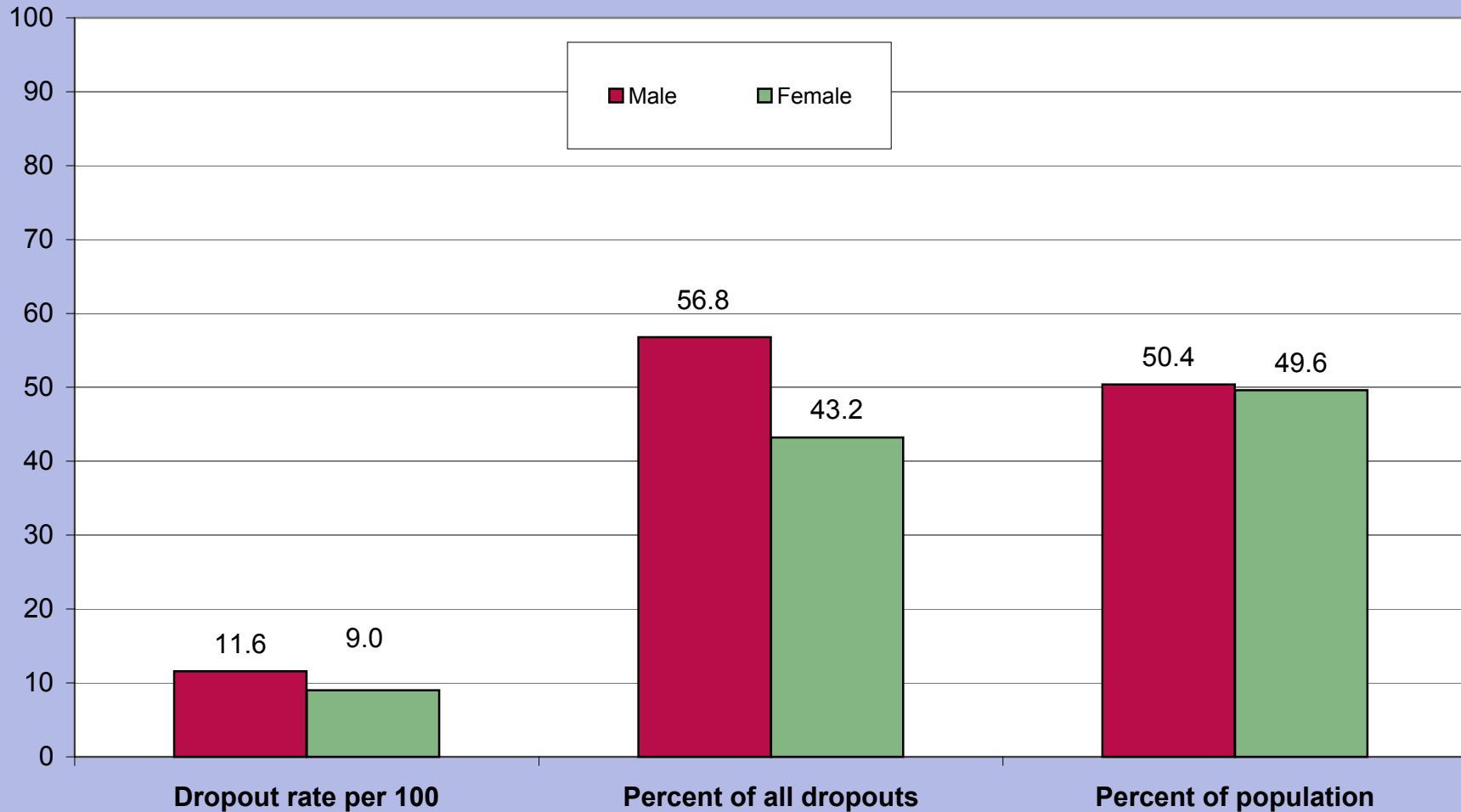
⁸ Fry, Richard. (2003). "Hispanic Youth Dropping Out of U.S. Schools: Measuring the Challenge." Pew Hispanic Center. <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=19>

⁹ Note: status dropout rate differs from event dropout rate, which is measured as the percentage of young people aged 15 through 24 who dropped out of grades 10 through 12 in the past year.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000*, NCES 2002-114, by P. Kaufman, M.N. Alt, & C.D. Chapman. Washington, DC: Author, p. 2. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/

Figure 2

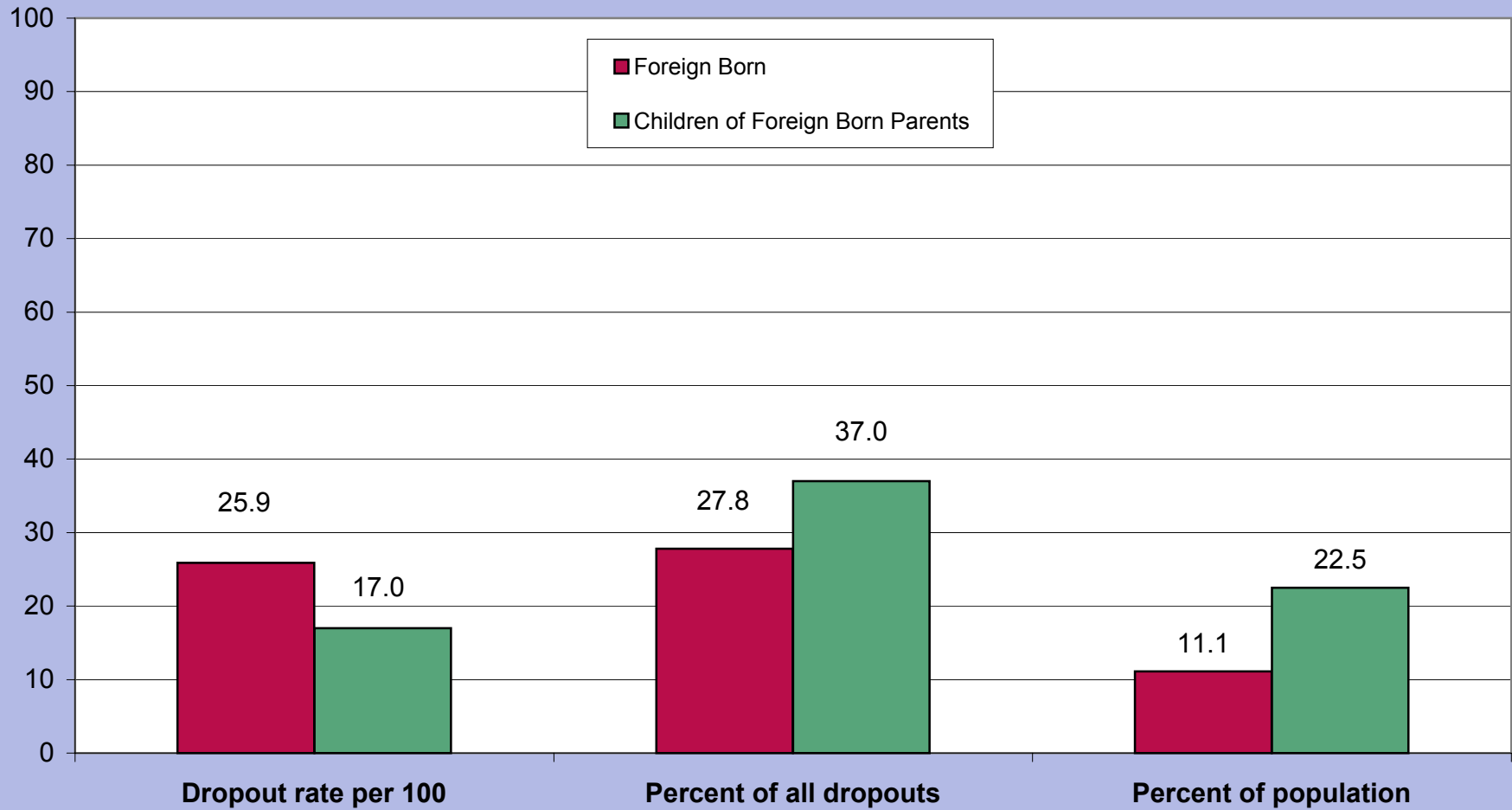
Dropout Rate, Percent of All Dropouts, and Percent of Population of Youth Ages 16 to 24, by Gender, 2004



Source: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004*: Detailed Tables: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html>

Figure 3

Dropout Rate, Percent of All Dropouts, and Percent of Population of Youth Ages 16 to 24, by Gender, 2004



Source: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004*: Detailed Tables: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html>



Table 1

**Dropout Rates¹ and Number and Percentage Distribution of Dropouts Ages 16 to 24, by Selected Characteristics:
October 2004**

Characteristic	Dropout rate (percent)	Number of Dropouts (thousands)	Percent of all dropouts	Percent of population
Total	10.3	3,766	100.0	100.0
Gender				
Male	11.6	2,140	56.8	50.4
Female	9.0	1,626	43.2	49.6
Age				
16-17	4.4	380	10.1	23.4
18-19	10.9	840	22.3	21.1
20-21	12.3	984	26.1	21.8
22-24	12.7	1,562	41.5	33.6
Race/ethnicity²				
White, non-Hispanic alone	6.7	1,529	40.6	62.1
Black alone	12.1	635	16.9	14.4
Hispanic	23.8	1,499	39.8	17.3
Asian alone	3.5	52	1.4	4.1
Immigration status				
Foreign Born	25.9	1,048	27.8	11.1
Children of Foreign Born Parents	17.0	1,394	37.0	22.5

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100.0 due to rounding. Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

¹This indicator uses the status dropout rate which measures the percentage of young adults aged 16 to 24 who were not enrolled in a high school program and had not received a high school diploma or obtained an equivalency certificate.

²Due to relatively small sample sizes, American Indians/Alaskan Natives are included in the total but not shown separately. Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004: Detailed Tables*: Table 1.

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html>



Table 2

Dropout Rates¹ of 16- to 24-Year Olds, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Selected Years 1972-2004

	1972	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total²	14.6	13.9	14.1	12.6	12.1	12.0	11.1	11.0	11.8	11.2	10.9	10.7	10.5	9.9	10.3
Race/ethnicity³															
White, non-Hispanic	12.3	11.4	11.4	10.4	9.0	8.6	7.3	7.6	7.7	7.3	6.9	7.3	6.5	-	-
White, non-Hispanic alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.3	6.7
Black, non-Hispanic	21.3	22.9	19.1	15.2	13.2	12.1	13.0	13.4	13.8	12.6	13.1	10.9	-	-	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.7	12.1
Hispanic	34.3	29.2	35.2	27.6	32.4	30.0	29.4	25.3	29.5	28.6	27.8	27.0	25.7	23.5	23.8

¹This indicator uses the status dropout rate which measures the percentage of young adults aged 16 to 24 who were not enrolled in a high school program and had not received a high school diploma or obtained an equivalency certificate.

²Due to relatively small sample sizes, American Indians/Alaskan Natives and Asians/Pacific Islanders are included in the total but not shown separately.

³Due to changes in the race categories, estimates from 2003 are not strictly comparable to estimates from 2002 and before. Hispanics may be of any race.

Note: "Numbers for years 1987 through 2001 reflect new editing procedures instituted by the Bureau of the Census for cases with missing data on school enrollment items. Numbers for years 1992 through 2000 reflect new wording of the educational attainment item in the CPS beginning in 1992. Numbers for years 1994 through 2000 reflect changes in the CPS due to newly instituted computer-assisted interviewing and the change in the population controls used in the 1990 Census-based estimates, with adjustments for undercounting in the 1990 Census."

Source: Data for 1972-2001: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2003*. NCES 2003-067.

Washington, DC: 2003. Tables 17-1 and 17-2. Based on October Current Population Surveys analysis. Data for 2002: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2002: Detailed Tables*: Table 1. Data for 2003: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2003: Detailed Tables*: Table 1.

http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2003.html. Data for 2004: Child Trends' calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2004: Detailed Tables*: Table 1. http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2004.html

