

KEEPING COUNT OF ALL AND LOSING COUNT OF A FEW:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

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The quality of the construction of the high school dropout rate is the policy issue investigated in this dissertation. This qualitative dissertation explores the constructs necessary to create a high school dropout rate and seeks to unearth complexities in the construction of the high school dropout rate. Every single year, approximately 1.2 million students do not earn a high school diploma.

Dropout rates are one method of assessing the magnitude of the problem and helps to shed light on the health of the public school system. A number of researchers have questioned the accuracy of data reported by schools for public information. Current educational procedures regarding non-completion are ineffective with respect to calculating “dropout” rates. In the absence of clear standardization of student exit codes at any level of government, comparisons across states are arbitrary and therefore invalid and by extension meaningless. It is imperative to examine how the data is collected, reported, and verified.

Several factors undermine the comparability that is assumed when educational statistics are reported. This investigation shows different ways by which high school dropout rates are constructed. The quality of the educational statistics should be paramount since they show trends in the health of the public school system and are useful for decision making. The youths that are exempt from counting in the dropout rate will continue to be ignored until this policy issue is addressed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A number of researchers have questioned the accuracy of data reported by schools that inform the public of the status of public education. For the past decade, researchers have debated the validity of the reported graduation rates and the myriad ways used to construct high school graduation rates. (Orfield, 2004; Swanson, 2004; Hauser & Koenig, 2011) Is it possible for the “widespread disagreement among researchers, statisticians, and policy analysts about the ‘actual’ rates, how they are best measured, and what trends are evident over time”, to reach a consensus (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 5)?

The U.S. Department of Education in October of 2008 revised regulations to amend how to calculate the graduation rate with more standard definitions and how to report to the federal government. The same 2008 regulations do not require states to track and report on the dropout rates. Additionally, states are not required to report dropout data on State or Local Education Agency (LEA) report cards. Dropout rates are considered complementary indicators of school success.

The most important objective of the finish line of the secondary school process is obtaining a high school diploma. The dropout rate which should be an indicator of school “success” could be construed as being arbitrary, inaccurate, and subject to political influence. There is no official standard method of calculating dropout rates, nor a standardization of the definition of “dropout” among the states. With the absence of clear standardization, comparisons across states are arbitrary and therefore invalid and to an extent, meaningless. Also, accountability measures are more difficult to indicate and enforce.

Specifically, certain youth are vulnerable to being misrepresented in the overall statistics at all levels of the school system. Aggregated statistics mask the reality of the sub-groups that are not performing at the “norm” of the reported aggregated statistics.

How dire is the problem of “dropouts”? Is it a “crisis”, are we fighting an “epidemic”? Is the problem getting better or worse? Are certain school reforms exacerbating or improving the “dropout” rate? The statistical trends and local reports could be worsening in response to educational policies, such as high stakes testing, and other high school reform strategies (Orfield, 2004).

Many researchers agree that a good estimate for the national graduation rate is between 67 to 73 percent. Almost one third of all students fail to graduate high school; among minorities, the dropout rate bellows up to near 50 percent (Orfield, 2004; Bridgeland et al., 2006). More disturbing figures are found when the data is disaggregated based on racial grouping. Within New York State, the high school graduation rate for the Black racial group is 35.1 percent and for the Hispanic racial group is 31.9 percent (Losen, Orfield, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).

Critically, we need to examine how the data collected leads one to agree with either the claim that every one out of three or every three out of ten or some other ratio accurately describes this population of youth. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, told CBS during an interview on *Face the Nation*, that:

We have a dropout rate that is staggering, 30 percent of our students don’t graduate from high school. That’s 1.2 million students every single year in 9th graders that don’t complete 12th grade. I really believe we have an education crisis in our country. What are they going to do? They’re basically condemned to a life of poverty and social failure. (Schieffer, 2009)

Yet, the staggering crisis of youth not graduating with their cohort is not reflected at a national, state, or local level. Official and/or reported dropout rates rarely reflect the concept that one third of our students do not graduate on time. Many states report only an annual dropout rate which belies the truth. The Wyoming Department of Education in their data collection guidebook released October 1, 2009 instructs districts to continue to report dropout rates in one manner: “Dropout rates are based on a single year of data while graduation rates are high school cohort rates, or based on four years of data.” (Wyoming Department of Education & Zimmerschied, 2009, p. 22). Besides the annual dropout rate, two other types (status and cohort) are recognized methods of calculating early school leavers.

Definitions of Dropout Rates

Event dropout rates provide a measure of the percentage of high school students who drop out of high school over the course of a given school year. This is sometimes referred to as the annual dropout rate or simply the dropout rate.

Status dropout rates report the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, irrespective of when they dropped out. This is the one currently most used internationally.

Cohort dropout rates are designed to measure the percentage of students in a given cohort or class who drop out over a period of time.

National, State, and Local Dropout Rates

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education, reports for 2007 a percentage of only 8.7 for the status dropout¹ rate among persons 16 to 24 years old. (The reported graduation rate is 75.4% for the 2007 school year). (Cataldi & Kewalramani, 2009) Another example of an educational statistic that raises suspicion of accuracy is reflected in the following report. New York State Comprehensive Information Report 2007-08 reports a) a dropout rate of 2.9 percent and b) a total non-completers² rate of 3.4 percent. (The reported graduation rate on the NYS Accountability and Overview Report 2007-08 reports for all students are 71 percent.) (New York State Department of Education, 2009) Finally, New York City, reports for the Class of 2007 a 13.8 percent (less than one-sixth) dropout rate at the end of four years. In addition,

“the Class of 2007 dropout rate decreased by 0.8 percentage point compared with the Class of 2006, reflecting a consistent decrease in the dropout rate that began with the Class of 2004. This decrease may be in part attributable to a change in DOE policy requiring exit interviews with potential dropouts” (Rosenblum & Bell-Ellwanger, 2008, p. 1).

Additionally, NYC reports a 2006-2007 event dropout rate (one year) of six percent. Moreover, NYC claims, “these statistics have been validated by an independent audit” (Rosenblum et Bell-Ellwanger, 2008, p. 1).

Who is accountable to whom? What information is really made accessible to the public? “Who is the public— the moral community—to whom public schools are responsible” (Fine,

¹ Status dropouts are persons not enrolled in school who neither completed high school, nor received GED credentials. This rate is constructed from the non-institutionalized civilian population.

² Total non-completers = dropped out + entered approved high school equivalency preparation program.

1991, p. 194)? Who can or should challenge the various state and local departments of education for being dishonest?

Purpose/Significance of Study

Educational statistics provide educators, the public and policymakers with indicators as to the health of the school system. One significant area of educational statistics is school completion and non-completion. Current educational procedures regarding non-completion are lax with respect to calculating dropout rates. No standardization of exit enrollment codes exists between cities and states. With the absence of clear standardization, comparisons across states are arbitrary and therefore invalid and to an extent meaningless. Critically, we need to examine how the data is collected, reported, and verified.

This qualitative study contains four components that seek to extend our current conversation of how the student high school dropout rate is constructed. It begins with a general discussion, then a state by state comparison, followed by a specific case study, and ends with a national policy issue brief. One component consists of an analysis of how to generally construct the high school dropout rate. The second component is an analysis of the variation of state student exit codes. Then a case study that uses the data and process described earlier using the NYC public school system. Finally, body chapter discusses the inconsistent and inaccurate reported dropout rates as a policy issue.

This study projects to propose:

- 1) an abstract understanding of the essential components necessary to construct a dropout rate
- 2) a standardization of exit enrollment codes
- 3) an interpretation of the significance of dropout rates using an equity framework.

The researcher's study seeks to fill the gap within the literature of how the high school dropout rate is constructed.

Research Question

The central guiding question that this study explores is "How are high school dropout rates constructed?" The broad research question leads to the primary foci of the research as represented by the sub-questions below:

- 1) What are the necessary components of constructing a high school dropout rate?
- 2) How do states and school districts divide authority of exit code system development?
- 3) How do exit codes vary for individual students from state to state?
- 4) In particular, how does New York City construct its high school dropout rate?
- 5) What are some of the policy issues concerning the construction of the high school dropout rate?
- 6) How is the public informed about the consequences of the high school dropout rate?

Outline of Dissertation

Chapter One introduces the study. Chapter Two is a critical review of the literature and discusses the research surrounding this issue. Topics to be investigated are: at-risk factors, consequences, definition of terms, equity and statistics. Chapter Three explains the methodology used to study the research questions developed from the literature review and my hypothesis for the research. The central research question, "How are high school dropout rates constructed?" lays the groundwork for the body chapters. My hypothesis that the high school dropout rate is poorly constructed and leads to incomparable rates is the motivation for this study.

The body chapters are formed around answering the central research question in four different layers of analysis. Chapter Four reports the general derivation of how one constructs a high school dropout rate. Chapter Five reports how states vary in their construction of high

school dropout rates. Chapter Six is a specific case study of how New York City's school districts reportedly construct their high school dropout rate. The last body chapter, Chapter Seven is a policy issue brief with the quality of the construction of the high school dropout rate as a policy issue. This study concludes with Chapter Eight. This chapter reports findings from each of the body chapters and a synthesis of the findings. This study ends with a discussion of how the dropout rate is framed and communicated.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this critical review, characteristics of dropouts, equity issues, and statistics, will all be explored. Though it would appear that either one completes high school or one does not, unfortunately though in educational statistics rarely does the graduation rate plus the dropout rate equal 100 percent.

One true rate cannot exist and never be achieved. “True” depends on everyone agreeing on one definition and accepting it as being absolute. The rates we seek are relative to our definitions and validity in implementation. This critical review of the literature is divided into three sections: 1) Characteristics: who, why, and terminology, 2) Equity: Inequity 3) Statistics: Educational Indicators.

This multi-pronged framework is necessary as each area or perspective taken independently does not fully address the issue of reporting accurately the dropout data, or the importance of a) terminology and b) significant social and moral consequences for the future development of the country with respect to early school leavers. By examining and understanding these perspectives as a whole our understanding of the impact of educational policy on non-completers will be deepened.

Characteristics:

Educational attainment or lack thereof reflects larger trends of inequality that exist in our society. Given the historical, societal weight placed on families, schools and communities, not all students are given the opportunity to learn and therefore share a greater risk of leaving high

school without a diploma. Performance indicators are usually reported based on race, gender, English-language proficiency, socio-economic status, geographical location, disability classification and migrant status. Most of the following statistics are not surprising, though the degree of inequality might not be shared with the general public. The following statistics are obtained using the CPI method³. For the high school class of 2001, Swanson and colleagues find a national graduation rate of 68 percent which indicates that “nearly one-third of ninth graders fail to complete high school with a regular diploma within a four-year period” (Swanson, 2004, p. 20).

Many researchers have found that as a subgroup based solely on race, blacks and Latinos/Latinas are less likely to complete high school than white or Asian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Bridegland et al., 2006; Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1990; R. W. Rumberger, 1983). National graduation rates for American Indian, Hispanic, and black are 51 percent, 53.2 percent and 50.2 percent. By contrast, Asian students have a rate of 76.8 percent and white 74.9 percent. Disaggregation based on race shows a racial gap with respect to graduating of approximately 25 percent. A graduation gap of this magnitude should be part of the conversation when discussing the achievement gap (Swanson, 2004; Orfield, 2004).

Graduation rates by gender show a considerable and systematic disparity. Researchers examining gender have found consistently that males are at a greater risk of not completing high school. Male students are more likely not to complete high school than female students. Female students have a 72 percent graduation rate compared to a 64 percent graduation rate for males (Swanson, 2004).

³ CPI: Cumulative Promotion Index, researcher Swanson and Education Week (unclear). See Appendix B: Definition chart, for explanation of calculation using this method.

Patterns can also be found that show the racial gap is highest in the Northeast, followed by the Midwest, the West and the lowest in the South. Yet, the overall graduation rate (not considering race) of these regions are reversed— the Northeast and Midwest have the highest. Two regions, the West and the South have lower graduation rates compared to other regions (Lehr et al., 2004; Schargel, 2004; Swanson, 2004). Yet, these same two regions have racial gaps that are less pronounced. This research points to the importance of understanding the situation broadly and in depth. Information that is disaggregated (i.e. by region, locality, states) might highlight disparities that may not have been apparent from the aggregated data.

Furthermore, in any one region, disparities are also found when considering locality (urban, suburban and rural). Researchers have found that non-completing rates are higher among students in urban areas than in rural or suburban areas (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Nationally, central cities average 58 percent compared to suburbs with 73 percent. Breakdown by region which is already a 15 percent graduation gap is increased when the location gap is considered a subgroup. In the Northeast, central cities average 48 percent, and the suburbs average 82 percent (a 34 percent difference).

Graduation rates for rural areas vary if the region is low poverty or high poverty. The higher the poverty is regardless of the region, the lower the graduation rate. The graduation rate for public high schools was higher in rural areas than in cities, but was lower in rural areas than in towns and suburbs (NCES, 2007).

Researchers have found that more than half of black students who attend high schools in Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and New York do not graduate on time. (Balfanz, & Legters, 2004) A study focusing on which high schools produce the nations' dropouts was

conducted by Balfanz and Legters (2004). In their analysis they found eleven central findings of which four are below:

- High schools with the worst promoting power are concentrated in a sub-set of states. Nearly 80% of the nation's high schools that produce the highest number of dropouts can be found in just 15 states (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas).*

* It is noteworthy that in 1998, approximately 60% of the total US population resides in the 15 states mentioned above. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b).

- There are currently between 900 and 1,000 high schools in the country in which graduating is at best a 50/50 proposition. In 2,000 high schools, a typical freshman class shrinks by 40% or more by the time the students reach their senior year. This represents nearly one in five regular or vocational high schools in the U.S. that enroll 300 or more students.
- Nearly half of our nation's African American students, nearly 40% of Latino students, and only 11% of white students attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm.
- Poverty appears to be the key correlate of high schools with weak promoting power. (Preface v)

Balfanz (2004) uses the phrase "dropout factories" to describe the segment of schools which produce many of the nation's dropouts. They codify the promoting power of a high school as the ratio of freshman to seniors four years later. They argue that this ratio provides a reliable indicator of the extent to which a high school is succeeding in graduating the students who entered its doors four years prior. They make it apparent that this is only an indicator, not the actual figures. We must note however, a promotion power percentage does not equal the

graduation or dropout rate of the schools. The data above provides a starting point for identifying the schools with the weakest promoting power that are in dire need of attention and transformation.

Other categories, such as English language learners, disability classification and migrant status also show similar patterns of gaps with respect to average national graduation rates. Rates for the three groups mentioned above are particularly vulnerable to inaccuracy because defining them is difficult and inconsistent across schools. “Changes in the ways students are classified result in rates that are not comparable over time, which can lead to false conclusions about the rates for particular groups” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 37).

Finally, the most pronounced disparity exists when both poverty and segregation (due to racial isolation) are taken into account. These statistics cut across racial, gender, and regional gaps. However, poverty occurs disproportionately in certain racial groups. Researchers have found that poverty and segregation are both strongly related to lower graduation rates and consequently higher levels of non-completion (i.e. Rumberger, 1983, Orfield, 2004). This is not to suggest that because one grows up poor that in and of itself determines school failure. But Hahn and colleagues (1987) write:

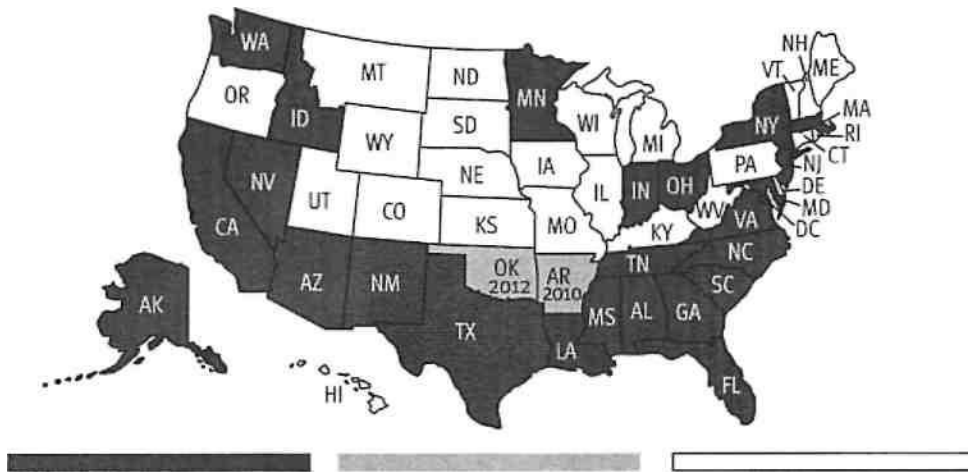
It does say that when the burden of deprivation is not eased by the allocation of resources and the dedication of concerned and committed adults, it's much harder to succeed. To state the case directly: without a lot of help, it's very difficult for a youngster to overcome the hurdles of poverty (p.3)

The distribution of teachers across schools has consistently placed the weakest teachers with the weakest students. Education research is continuously defining and re-defining how to measure teacher quality. Given that the teacher has been and will continue to be defined in

various ways, one thing remains constant, to date, no matter how one measures teacher quality, strong/good teachers are not evenly distributed throughout the public school system. Poor children and minority children were “less likely to be taught by the strongest teachers and more likely to be taught by the weakest” (Haycock & Crawford, 2008, p. 16). Data analysis shows that poor and minority students often enter the school system with challenges. But rather than organize our system to ameliorate this problem, “we exacerbate it by assigning them disproportionately to our least effective teachers” (Haycock & Crawford, 2008, p. 16).

Another disturbing trend is the distribution of places that have state mandated high school exit examinations. These exit exams or “high stakes testing” are more prevalent in states with higher percentages of black and Hispanic students, as well as states with the greatest degrees of poverty. There is a growing suspicion that these mandatory exit examinations will exacerbate the school dropout rates, and that poor and minority students will be more negatively affected than other students. The map (see Figure 2.1 below) shows the distribution of states with exit exams versus states with no plans to have exit exams.

Figure 2.1 States with Mandatory Exit Exams in 2009



States with mandatory exit exams in 2009:	States phasing in exit exams by 2012 but not yet withholding diplomas:	States with no mandatory exit exam:
AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA (24 states)	States phasing in exit exams by 2012 but not yet withholding diplomas: AR (2010), OK (2012) (2 states)	States with no mandatory exit exam: CO, CT, DE, DC, HI, IL, IA, KS, KY, ME, MI, MO, MT, NE, NH, ND, OR, PA, RI, SD, UT, VT, WV, WI, WY (24 states and DC)

Source: Zhang, August 2009.

The effect of poverty is crippling to the opportunities available to youth graduating high school. Nationally, districts with more than 38 percent of the students qualifying for free/reduced price lunch have a graduation rate of 58 percent compared to districts with less than 38 percent, with a graduation rate of 76 percent . (Swanson, 2004). This poverty gap of 18 percent should be part of the conversation when discussing ways to decrease the achievement gap. Other researchers have found that due to their poverty, they are more likely to receive government assistance. (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007) On average, earning a high school diploma slashes one’s chances of experiencing poverty in half, with the poverty rate

falling from 24 percent to 12 percent for those with a high school diploma. Among adults who have earned at least a Bachelor's degree, poverty rates fall below four percent (Swanson, 2009). Acquiring education and training beyond high school offers further substantial benefits.

At-Risk Factors

A large body of research has focused and identified a wide range of factors associated with students leaving before gaining a high school diploma. There is no single explanatory factor that accurately predicts why students drop out of high school. (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2006) Research has acknowledged that the phenomenological study of dropout behavior is both an event and a process. Leaving school early (an event) is often the result of a long process of disengagement. (Newmann, 1992) This process of disengagement that ultimately leads to withdrawal has personal, parental, social, and historical confluence.

Individual, family, school and community/societal factors have all been identified as part of the process that impacts the event of dropping out (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; R. W. Rumberger, 2001). These four domains have been recognized as distinct yet porous classifications.

These factors have meted out into several risk factors that provide information to dropout prevention programs. Caution must be taken to understand that these are parameters for a multi-faceted problem. Much of the literature cited in this section is based on comprehensive literature reviews.

Studies have linked some individual characteristics that place the young person at a greater risk of leaving school early. Some individual factors have been identified as follows a)

low self-esteem (Finn, 1989); b) pregnancy, marriage (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002); c) low educational aspiration (Newmann, 1992); d) need to work to help their family financially (Jordan, McPartland, & Lara, 1999); and e) desire to work (Warren & Lee, 2003). Some of these factors (i.e. becoming a teen parent, working to help family) coincide with behavior that manifests outside of adolescence. When these early adult responsibilities occur it decreases their chances of completing high school (Hammond et al., 2007).

Some school related factors are a) academic failure, i.e. over-age, low achievement (R. W. Rumberger, 2004; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999); b) boredom; c) suspension or expulsion; and d) opposition to authority/teachers. School disengagement indicators are absenteeism/truancy (R. W. Rumberger, 1995; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999), few credit accumulations resulting in retention (R. W. Rumberger, 1995; (Roderick, 1999), and no extra-curricular participation (R. W. Rumberger, 2004; R. W. Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage, & Rutter, 1986).

Several family related factors are a) parents' educational attainment (R. W. Rumberger, 2001; Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001), b) speaking a language other than English (Rosenthal, 1998; R. W. Rumberger, 2001), and c) non-traditional family structure, i.e. single-parent, teenage parent, grandparents, foster (R. W. Rumberger, 2001; Teachman, 1996; R. W. Rumberger, 2004).

Various community/societal factors are a) peers educational behavior and attainment (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002) b) school/neighborhood locations (i.e. urban, suburban, rural) (Lehr, 2004; Schargel, 2004) c) impoverished communities (Rosenthal,

1998; R. W. Rumberger, 2001) d) health disparities (Ruglis, 2009) and e) race/ethnicity (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Orfield, 2004; R. W. Rumberger, 2001; Schargel, 2004; Teachman, 1996).

A number of studies have been conducted using multi-variable statistics to show a better predictor model of risk factors when comparing them to other factors. A large number of factors have been identified (described above in four domains) and are also interrelated. Educational statisticians are using multi-variant statistical techniques to “track multiple risk factors across several domains and to develop models based on a combination of factors” (Hammond et al., 2007, p.24). These statistical models simultaneously control for independent relationships between and among at least two or more factors and the dependent variable. “Multivariate statistics help explore these types of interactions by controlling for the effects of a number of factors while assessing the strength of the relationship of each one factor with dropping out independent of the others” (Hammond et al., 2007, p. 24).

In 2002, researchers Gleason and Dynarski constructed two risk factors based on a combination of characteristics. A composite risk factor and a regression risk factor track multiple risk factors across several domains. The composite risk factor defines a student as “at risk” if s/he had a certain number of single risk factors. The regression risk factor uses a model to combine single factors (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). They use a logic model to calculate, for each student, the predicted probability of dropping out. They defined students to be at risk if their “predicted probabilities exceeded a threshold, setting the threshold so that the proportion of students classified as at risk equaled the proportion of actual dropouts in the sample” (p. 32). These advanced statistical techniques move the field towards creating a better risk indicator using most of the data to determine whether a student is at risk of dropping out.

Several studies report on demographic variables situated in the individual factors umbrella. These individual attributes (gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status) in and of themselves are not sufficient explanations for student disengagement and eventual withdrawal. I propose that these individual attributes must be combined with cultural, societal histories and expectations which then morph into societal factors. Some societal factors that are associated are a) low socioeconomic status b) low performing schools c) unsafe neighborhoods d) racial/gender/location/poverty inequalities.

A majority of the educational literature on dropouts focuses on the at-risk qualities of the individual. Not until 1991 did someone attempt and succeed to critically approach the phenomenon of dropouts. Researcher Michelle Fine used a critical ethnographic approach in her study “Framing Dropouts” to engage in a conversation about the sociology and politics of school dropouts. The focus of studying school dropouts turned to make visible the structures, ideologies, and practices that systematically pushes out these youth. It became and still is a classic research study in the dropout literature today. “Framing Dropouts” focused on the policies and practices that allowed a typical comprehensive public school to be able to produce dropout rates estimated to be between 40 to 60 percent. Since then, very few bodies of research critically reflect on school dropouts as a social problem full of complexities of race, class, and gender (Fine, 1991).

Consequences

Youths face dire social consequences if they do not obtain a high school diploma. A number of aspects of the quality of life are severely threatened for early school leavers. These youths experience poorer health, higher rates of incarceration, lower wages, higher dependency on social services, and lower participation in the civic aspects of society (Bridgeland et al.,

2006). Cost analysis shows benefits of spending more on educational services that target actual and potential early school leavers than the alternative of no action. “We know that education is expensive, but poor and inadequate education for substantial numbers of our young may have public and social consequences that are even costlier” (Belfield & Levin, 2007, p. 1).

Recently, arguments have been submitted regarding the relationship of one’s academic attainment and one’s overall health. The more schooling one has the better their health is likely to be. Although educational attainment is highly correlated with income and occupation, there is a growing body of research that shows evidence that suggests that education has the strongest influence on health (Freudenberg, & Ruglis, 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2006). “Good education predicts good health, and disparities in health and in educational achievement are closely linked” (Freudenberg, & Ruglis, 2007, p. 1).

There is a correlation between education, schooling, and good health: “At every age range, the more education the healthier the individual” (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Ruglis, 2009, p. 2). A paper evaluating theories and evidence of education and health was presented at the National Poverty Center conference in 2007. Researchers reported several findings:

- Better educated people have lower morbidity rates from the most common acute and chronic diseases, independent of basic demographic and labor market factors.
- Life expectancy is increasing for everyone in the United States, yet differences in life expectancy have grown over time between those with and without a college education.
- Health behaviors alone cannot account for health status differences between those who are less educated and those who have more years of education.
- The mechanisms by which education influences health are complex and are likely to include (but are not limited to) interrelationships between demographic and family background indicators, effects of poor health in childhood, greater resources associated

with higher levels of education, a learned appreciation for the importance of good health behaviors, and one's social networks. (Cutler, & Lleras-Muney, 2007)

Along with identifying the various ways in which population health and education are intertwined, certain research provides viable avenues for prevention and intervention. Though one cannot stop all of the health behaviors it is possible to reduce the occurrence of unhealthy practices. Research conducted by Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007) suggests to health professionals concrete ways to engage in the work of improving school achievement and reducing the incidence of dropping out which in turn will improve the health of adolescents.

In 1997, the Bureau of Justice Statistics published a special report on education and the correctional population. Almost 65 percent of all incarcerated persons (including prison inmates (state, federal), local jail, and probationers did not receive a high school diploma. Separated into two categories, those persons with some high school or less always had a higher percentage than those persons who passed the General Educational Development (GED) test. For example, 39.7 percent of state prison inmates had only some high school or less, versus, 28.5 percent who had a GED. Interestingly, slightly more than a quarter of the state inmates received their GED while serving time in a correctional facility. Again, a specific example of the state prison inmates shows that 68 percent at the time of the study did not receive a regular high school diploma.

This data supports conclusions reached by other researchers. Approximately two thirds of all state prison inmates have not completed high school (Losen et al., 2004). Some states are much higher than others and over time the jails get more crowded. In 2006, research results conducted by Texas Appleseed, showed that in Texas's adult prisons more than 80 percent of inmates are high school dropouts (Fowler, 2007).

Moreover, 47 percent had only some high school or less (not including the GED) when they entered *any* correctional facility. As a person acquires more educational attainment, the probability of being incarcerated decreases (see Table 2.1 below). (Harlow, 2003)

Table 2.1: Annual Salary and Projected Lifetime earnings per Educational level*

Educational Level	Median Annual Earnings	Average (Mean) Annual Earnings	Projected Lifetime Earnings
High School Dropout			
Less than 9th Grade	\$13,540	\$17,717	\$406,200
9th to 12th grade non-grad	\$15,883	\$21,214	\$476,490
High School Diploma (Including GED)	\$23,854	\$30,166	\$715,620
Some college	\$29,854	\$36,481	\$895,620
Two-year Degree	\$33,841	\$39,556	\$1,015,230
Bachelor's Degree	\$45,477	\$58,286	\$1,364,310
Master's Degree	\$56,097	\$69,496	\$1,682,910

*U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a)

The earning power of a worker varies with their educational attainment and other factors. The median annual income for a high school non-completer in 2008 was \$15,883, compared with \$23,854 for a high school graduate, a difference of \$7971. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a) As Table 2.1 indicates, the median annual earnings increases approximately 10,000 dollars. At each plateau, (HS dropout, HS diploma recipient, two year degree, four year degree, and master's degree) the earnings jumps more or less \$10,000.

A worker with a high school diploma will earn an average of \$239,130 or more over his or her lifetime than will a high school non-completer (\$715,620 versus \$476,490). For incremental increases in graduates, the lifetime benefits for the graduate and their community and their nation are staggering. Dropouts earn about \$1 million dollars less over a lifetime than college graduates (See Table 2.1). These young adults without regular high school diplomas represent a tremendous waste of human potential and productivity. Dillon (1949) wrote

“Educational programs of the right kind, adequately supported, are the most economical and effective measures that can be taken to conserve our human resources (p. 88).

As the income chart shows above, annual incomes with a median of approximately \$16,000 are earned by early school leavers. With time, as with most persons, relationships turn into families. Family income is significantly related to incidence rates of maltreatment. A report from the Department of Health and Human Services (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996) found children whose families earned \$30,000 per year or more compared to children whose families earned below \$15,000 per year were:

- Almost 14 times more likely to be harmed by some variety of abuse⁴ (physical (12), emotional (13)⁵, sexual (18))
- More than 44 times more likely to be neglected (physical (48), emotional (29), educational (56))
- Over 22 times more likely to die from abuse or neglect (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996)

In 2001, for youth lacking a high school diploma, four out of every ten young adults (ages 16 -24) received some type of government assistance (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In order to address the needs of both child abuse and neglect and increasing graduation from high school for all youth, working relationships and collaboration need to occur in greater numbers and be sustainable between the government assistance agencies and schools/school districts/states. This potential partnership can help “capitalize on the unique role of school professionals as front-line observers” (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, p. 1).

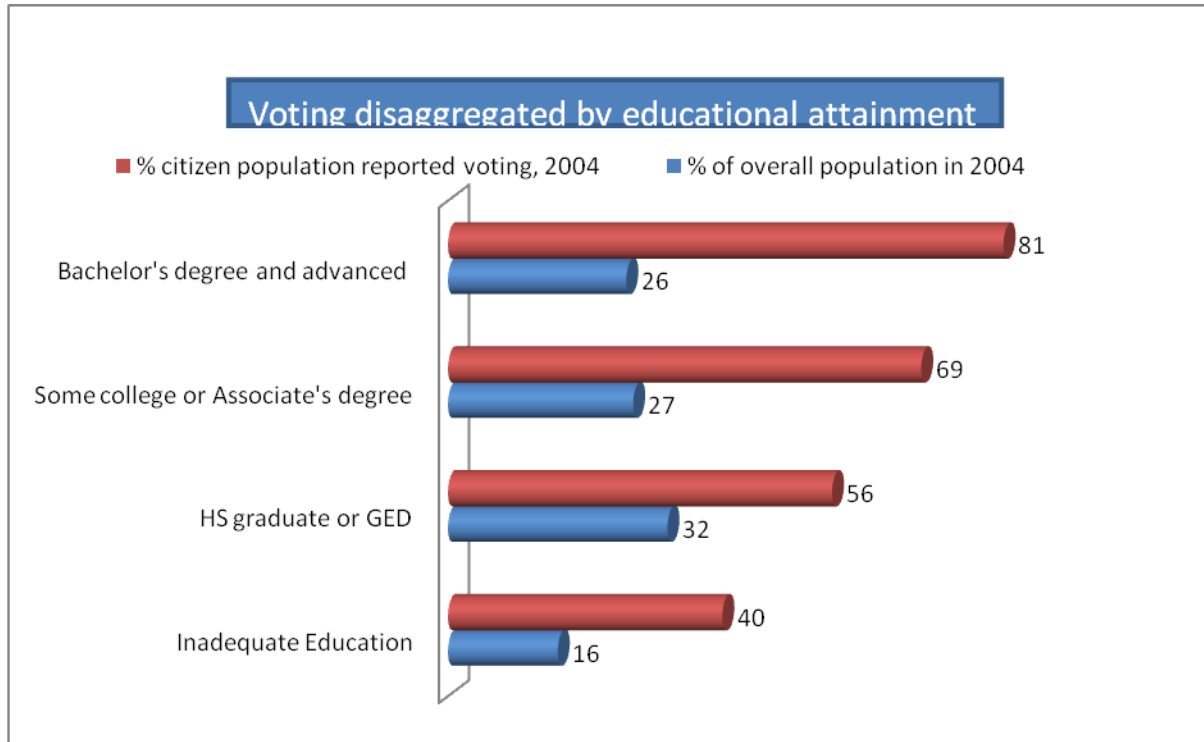
⁴ Endangerment Standard: children who experienced abuse or neglect that put them at risk of harm were included in the set of those considered to be maltreated, together with the already-harmed children

⁵ Harm Standard: children identified to the study were considered to be maltreated only if they had already experienced harm from abuse or neglect

The first annual Teachers College Symposium on Educational Equity was held in October 2005. Professor Henry M. Levin wrote a summary of the symposium entitled “The Social Costs of Inadequate Education”. Section four, “The Civic Costs of Inadequate Education” discussed various ways inadequate education (which they define as attainment of less than high school graduation) prevents vast numbers from participating in American civic and political life. College graduates are three times more likely to vote in presidential elections than ones without a high school degree. They are also far more likely to be affiliated with a political organization (Levin, 2005).

Political participation and activities include but are not exclusive to voting, campaigning, attending rallies, contributing financially to a campaign, contacting government officials, protests, boycotts, and signing petitions. This research combined with other research shows that “people with higher levels of educational attainment are more civically and politically engaged” (Levin, 2005, p. 18). Below is a graph (see Figure 2.2) that depicts voting activity by educational attainment for the 2004 presidential elections.

Figure 2.2: Voting disaggregated by educational attainment



Source: Levin, 2005, p. 18.

The aforementioned graph depicts an uneven distribution of the overall citizen population compared to the percent of citizens that reported voting in 2004. Eighty percent of those persons with a bachelor’s degree or higher reported voting compared to less than half (forty percent) of those persons with less than a high school degree. Almost half of the overall population has only attained a high school degree (48 percent), yet an average of less than half (48 percent) of them reported voting in the 2004 presidential elections.

In *The political costs of unequal education*, Junn painted a picture of education as a cornerstone of the democracy system in the United States of America. She writes “education makes democracy possible because it aids in the cognitive, ideological, and strategic

development of democratic citizens, allowing voters to acquire political information, deliberate about issues, voice perspectives, and engage in politics” (Junn, 2005, p.1).

As with many areas of analysis certain subtopics overlap. Education, incarceration, and civic responsibilities are enmeshed. As previously mentioned, adults incarcerated are more likely to enter the justice system without a high school diploma. Of all the states, only Vermont and Maine allow their inmates to vote. All other states deny prisoners the right to vote while incarcerated. Many states ban felons (who have served their time for committing a serious crime) from voting after being released. It is at the discretion of each state to legally disenfranchise felons. “Forty-eight states prohibit current inmates from voting, 36 keep parolees from the polls, 31 exclude probationers , and only two — Vermont and Maine — allow inmates to vote” (Holding, 2006, p.1). Almost four million felons are out of prison and are denied the ability to participate in our democratic society by voting (Holding, 2006). A majority of these felons were early school leavers.

A single risk factor will not determine whether an individual will not complete high school. Most researchers agree that the problem of dropout is undeniably complicated (Astone NM & McLanahan SS, 1994; Hess, 2000; R. W. Rumberger, 1995; R. W. Rumberger, 2001; Wehlage, 1989). Researchers have furthered their models of predicting dropouts to be composite risk factors that utilize a minimum number of risk factors together to better estimate the incidence of dropping out. Yet, the field seeks to continuously improve on models that predict behavior. Weber, in his study found that the average dropout prediction scale only identifies about one-third of actual dropouts (as found in Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Researchers will continue to pursue models that are better able to indicate that a youth is heading down the wrong path.

Definition of Terms

Students who do not complete high school are currently referred to as “dropouts”. Educational research introduces the term “dropouts” and focuses primarily on individual and family characteristics. Over the decades, the labeling of this population of youth, as dropouts, delves deeper than the explicit meaning of dropping out to additionally include a meaning of sole responsibility for their failure and negative emotional, social, and academic self-esteem traits.

This particular notion of the language and consequences of using the term dropout is scarce in educational research. In an effort to reclaim legitimacy some have called for using the term “pushouts”. This term refers to the institutional, not individual, role schools play in policies and practices that (deliberately) encourage students to prematurely end their schooling. A nuanced exploration of the process by which students were pushed out of the regular public education system is necessary.

In January 2003, the organization, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), filed the first of eventually three lawsuits. The first case was filed against Franklin K. Lane High School for its illegal practices in discharging students who, ages 15-20 “were being told they had to leave school simply because they were too old, would not graduate in four years or did not have enough high school credits toward a diploma” (Advocates for Children of New York, 2009). AFC investigated and found this to be a long standing citywide problem with high schools pushing out students.

Within a few weeks, the City Department of Education agreed to undertake a mailing to approximately 5,000 students who had been discharged or transferred from FKL. In this mailing, the Department explained that these students each had a right to return to school and to stay in school until the year in which they turned 21. As a consequence of this

mailing, hundreds of students were offered the opportunity to re-enroll at FKL High School. (Advocates for Children of New York, 2009)

In the Fall of 2003, two additional lawsuits were filed with similar patterns of violating students rights against Bushwick High School and Martin Luther King, Jr. High School. All three of the individual school cases were settled as of March 2005 and became known as “The Trilogy of Push Out Cases”. Since 1981, the *New York Times*, has published eight articles with the query of ‘discharge’ and advance search of education ranging from 2003 to 2009. A majority of the articles occurred during the time frame of the ‘Trilogy of Push-Out Cases’. From Oct 2005 to April 2009 there was a time gap in reporting on this issue (at the *New York Times*). Researcher Jennings and Haimson’s timely report in the *New York Times* regarding New York City and the ‘discharge’ situation brings this issue back into the public sphere (Medina, 2009).

More than five years later, much of the information needed to evaluate the validity of New York City’s high school discharges remains hidden. The public still does not have access to transparent information about who the discharged students are, why they were discharged, why the discharge rate has increased over time, and why the discharge rate for students in their first year of high school in particular has doubled. (Jennings & Haimson, 2009)

The multiple methods of pushing students out of the educational system are indeed complex. The argument above is explicit to pushing students out illegal via the discharge method. Another argument is the school to prison pipeline that pushes students out of schools and into correctional facilities (Fowler, 2007; Reyes, 2006; Hyman, 2005; Wald & Losen, 2003). The school to prison pipeline begins with sanctioned school disciplinary practices that remove students from mainstream classrooms and concludes with incarceration. The over-policing is criminalizing student misbehavior (Fowler, 2007). Furthermore, Ruglis, extended this term

(push-outs) to also include zero tolerance policies and practices, high stakes testing practices, school promotion policies, English-Only language and immigration policies, and tracking and labeling into special education (Ruglis, 2009).

Ruglis is one of the few examples of researchers that has (re)theorized school dropouts. She posits for the erasure of school dropout with the replacement of school push-out. Additionally, she argues that school dropout which has also signified the field where the issues embodied with diploma denial are examined be termed school non-completion. Ruglis suggests this broad heading (school non-completion) has underneath six sub-categories: a) School push-out, b) School leaver c) School refusor (or resistor) d) School forceout e) School neglected f) School denied. She notes that these categories are neither fixed nor exclusive, yet are extremely important to furthering methodological frames and conceptual analysis of why students do not complete school (Ruglis, 2009).

A variety of terms are used to describe high school non-completers. Explanations, definitions, and how we operationalize this group of youngsters is important to the validity of educational research regarding school completion. In the United Kingdom, another term applied to school dropouts is “disaffected youth” (Smink & Schargel, 2004). Other countries, for example Canada, Ireland, and Australia, have adopted the term “early school leaver” to refer to these youngsters (National Economic and Social Forum, 2002; Ferguson, 2005).

In Canada, three types of early school leavers have been identified: dropouts, tune-outs, and push-outs. The new term, tune-outs, refers to students “who remain in school but have disengaged from learning; unless they interrupt class or cause problems, they are tolerated or ignored” (Ferguson, 2005, p. 60).

In one study (The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000–2005) researchers Nelid and Balfranz, identify yet another term called “near-dropouts”. This categorization refers to students who were technically enrolled but who were absent from school more than half of the time (Neild, & Balfanz, 2006).

Earlier, researcher Kelly, argues for the use of the term “fade-outs”. She describes fade-outs as students who attend infrequently, leaving and returning several times without their necessarily being a decisive moment of dropping out or being pushed out (Kelly, 1993). This term embodies the disengagement process that happens over time.

As this example shows, tune-outs, near-dropouts, and fade-outs share similar characteristics. Little effort has been put into synthesizing previous research and terminology with respect to youths without diplomas. This study will attempt to expand, synthesize, and further the current understanding and thinking of the terminology regarding early school leavers.

Equity

What does the information above reveal about the current state of education in the United States? A comprehensive educational plan is needed to deliver educational equity. Effective investments, resources, and willpower need to be focused on students who are receiving inadequate educations. The benefits in doing so far exceed the costs of those investments. More emphasis and targeted policies need to be directed to the center of the issue. “The dropout problem relates primarily to racial and ethnic minorities and students from low-income backgrounds” (Rebell, 2007, p. 257).

As our society develops, educational credentialing becomes more of an imperative in order to have the opportunity to pursue one's life ambition. Dillon (1949) wrote about early

school leavers as a major educational problem. Our society is moving towards college for all and I would argue we should be at least equally as focused on high school graduation for all. Both educational issues are equity issues that affect minorities and the poor disproportionately.

Over the last two decades, there has been an increase in the attainment and respectability of the General Educational Development (GED) award. Often the acronym, GED, is mistaken for General Equivalency Degree. Until the federal government announced new regulations in October 2008, in an attempt to have uniform, comparable graduation rates within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, GED recipients were allowed to be counted as high school graduates. The U.S. Department of Education took the position that GED awardees are not equal, and should not be counted as a high school graduates. States and districts have at their discretion to count or not count students who leave to obtain a GED as high school dropouts. “GED-holders are more similar to dropouts than to school completers in terms of their educational and employment outcomes” (NRC, 2001a found in CEP).

Most African Americans, Latinas/Latinos and, American Indians, are over represented in the high school dropout rate. Schools found in urban neighborhoods exhibit extraordinarily high levels of racial isolation in their high schools. “Through policies and institutional mechanisms, racism is firmly entrenched yet invisible to many.” Brayboy and colleagues review of the literature points to the fact “that there are tremendous racial inequities in schooling” (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007, p.180).

It is critical to keep the equity alive in the discussions of non-completion, because foremost is the expectation and hope that education and society, expect to provide “an equitable share of the benefits of schooling”. Moreover, the conversations of educational equity continue

to be necessary until “the predictive value of race, sex, and social class in determining educational achievement” is nil (Grant, 1989, p. 90).

Equality often gets defined in terms of inequality, much the same way the argument goes dropout rates are defined in terms of graduation rates. Although there is an interrelationship conceptually, at some point a line of separation must be drawn that shows their differences and uniqueness.

In 2007, McKinley, Brayboy, Castagno and Maughan reviewed the research in education literature examining race in education scholarship. They found it necessary to outline how they defined equity and equality and the differences in these terms.

By equality, we mean sameness and, more specifically, sameness of resources and opportunities. This concept of equality is the long-term goal of a just society: children, regardless of race, socioeconomic class, or gender, should have access to the same resources and opportunity outcomes. By equity, we mean a system where unequal goods are redistributed to create systems and schools that share a greater likelihood of becoming more equal (Brayboy et al., 2007, p. 159-161).

Researcher Sirotnik (1990) defined equity as indicating “when there are no systematic differences in the distributions of these conditions, practices, and outcomes based upon race, ethnicity, sex, economic status, or any other irrelevant grouping characteristic” (p. 168). His position is that equity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for excellence. The route to achieving educational excellence, if that is the stated goal, cannot be achieved without educational equity. The rhetoric found in education is slighted towards excellence for all in the foreground, and equity in the background.

Educational equity, as defined by Secada (1989), should be “construed as a check on the justice of specific actions that are carried out within the educational arena and the arrangements that result from those actions” (p. 69).

Based on the earlier description of completion and non-completion rates and the disproportionate categories based on race/gender/class/region/location/language, serious questions must be asked Is it just? Are we working towards equity?

Education and schooling can be described in terms of threefold: 1) access 2) participation and 3) outcomes. Access refers to resources inputted to be distributed among the students by the schooling system. These resources include but are not limited to a) physical b) financial and c) human (mainly administrators, and teachers). Participation refers to processes within the schooling system such as how they are treated by teachers, what courses they take, promotion procedures, and disciplinary rules. Finally, outcomes can be considered outputs found by examining mainly school completion and non-completion and academic achievement scores (Secada, 1989).

Extending the concern for equality of education, two additional considerations are found in the literature on educational equity. Firstly, the social and racial student composition of the school, must be considered when asking “Is it just?” Secondly, equality of results should occur for both conditions, given individual inputs that are the same and given individual inputs that are different (Secada, 1989).

Statistics

“Statistical manipulations have the effect of trivializing a significant social and educational problem” (Hahn et al., 1987, p. 10). Dropout rates have been and continue to be

inaccurate, unreliable data. “Most state and local dropout statistics are flawed to the point of being worthless, yet little federal or state money is devoted to getting accurate numbers” (Orfield, 2004, p. 3).

There are often a number of categories in which students are not counted as dropouts, even if they never graduated (Orfield, 2004). These categories must be standardized in order to have valid statistical comparisons. In 2006, the National Forum of Education Statistics recommended for all districts an exit code system that is mutually exclusive. They have developed 23 subcategories (six broad categories) that any state or school district using them would be able to account successfully for 100 percent of its students (2006).

Constitutionally, education as an institution was established as a state/local right. On meeting their own needs, states/local districts have developed unique informational systems that might or might not include an exit code system. In some states, a standard set of exit codes exist and are maintained by the state educational agency. These same states might or might not require their local education agencies to use their state exit code system. Other states may provide wide-ranging guidance to their districts regarding broad categories but not specific subcategory codes. And, in some cases, as of 2006, no state wide exit codes exist for five states, WY, NE, ID, IL, and KS; hence the development of exit codes is entirely at the discretion of the district (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006). “...Countries report data based on collection procedures that are fundamentally flawed, or on definitions that are either non-standard or poorly understood” (Puryear, 1995, p. 80). Who is a dropout? No universally accepted definition exists. The lack of consensus to an accepted definition is problematic. An essential element of educational reform is state activity since states maintain much of the authority for education, including policy and funding (Burstein, 1986).

“A good education indicator system is expected to provide accurate and precise information to illuminate the condition of education and contribute to its improvement. Indicators are thus expected to assist policymakers as they formulate schooling goals and translate those goals into actions” (Shavelson, McDonnell, & Oakes, 1991, p. 1).

Researchers have used a working definition to guide their discussion of educational indicators and indicators systems. “An indicator is an individual or composite statistic that relates to a basic construct in education and is useful in a policy context” (Shavelson et al., 1991, p. 1). A system of indicators measures distinct components of the system and is designed to provide more accurate, comprehensive depiction of the condition.

Resistance refers to focusing on the negative (dropout rates) rather than focusing solely on the positive (graduation rates). These rates among others are necessary to provide a comprehensive indicator system. Revelation of more accurate dropout rates might bring criticism to school systems and policymakers. “Few school administrators would want to publicize the fact that many of their students, after spending several years in classrooms, have learned very little. Most policymakers seek to avoid criticism, and many therefore perceive better education indicators as a threat” (Puryear, 1995, p. 88).

Education statistics guide the discussion of the impact of educational reforms. Several trends, such as high stakes testing—high school exit exams, English-only policies, charter schools, and the new small schools movement, have and will continue to rely on statistics to prove their worth and success. Can research show the relationship between these trends and dropout rates? So far research is inadequate, questionable, and contradictory. For example, the Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent non-profit organization, convened an expert

panel in March 2003 to help clarify what is and is not known about how exit exams affect dropout rates. “Research on how exit exams impact dropout rates is limited and inconclusive, so policies continue to be made in the absence of good information about the consequences for students and society” (Chudowsky, & Gayler, 2003, p. 1). One thing that the panel was able to conclude from the research is that “there is no evidence of exit exams *decreasing* dropout rates” (p. 4, Italics in original).

Sophisticated statistical techniques are attempting to isolate the effect of the exit exam policy from all the other inputs and concurrent reforms and policies that might be affecting dropout rates at the same time. There is no conclusive evidence yet on this endeavor. There is a general concern that high stakes testing is exacerbating the dropout problem. Until advanced statistics provide empirical evidence, the few studies that have been conducted conclude “that there is only moderately suggestive evidence, to date, of exit exams causing more students to drop out of school” (CEP 2007, p. 63).

Additionally, the Center for Education Policy, on November 2009, released their eighth annual report on their comprehensive study of state high school exit examinations. All 26 states with current or planned mandatory exit exams were surveyed and the other 24 states and DC do not plan to implement exit exams. The report of the CEP finds:

Since 2002, the stakes attached to state high school exit exams have risen for students and schools. Sixteen more states have begun withholding diplomas from students based on their exam performance, and the number of states that also use their high school exit exams for accountability under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has risen from 2 to 24. Many states have changed their exams to reflect new academic standards and curricula. Since 2002, most states have increased the number of subjects tested. And

several states have shifted from minimum competency exams to comprehensive or end-of-course (EOC) exams aligned to content at a higher grade level. (p. 1)

Based on their research both short term and long term recommendations are made to assist in making sounder long term policies that facilitate the goal of ensuring that all students are able to earn a diploma. Research is still sparse on the effects of high stakes exit exams (mandatory tests students must pass in order to receive a high school diploma). “Since these exams now affect more than two thirds of American students, and soon will affect about three fourths of students (when all the states have carried out their intended policies), much great attention ought to be paid to understanding the effects of these exams” (Zhang, 2009, p. 9). One of the recommended questions to be addressed through comprehensive research is: “Are policies requiring passage on these exams for receipt of diplomas leading to higher dropout rates from school” (Zhang, 2009, p. 9)?

In the current educational context, evaluating schools is not politically neutral. “...there is a great deal of ‘research’ that is either designed to prove a political stance or is spun to accomplish the same goal” (Bracey, 2000, p. 14). “When information systems are mandated from the administrator onto the school level personal potential for disconnect and distrust is ever present. Never politically neutral, the potential for misuses and abuses of student data systems by states or districts or both is ever present” (Goodlad & Keating, 1990). Who’s accountable for reported information beyond the moral and ethical commitments assumed with the collection, reporting and interpretation of data?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

After completing the review of the literature, several questions remained regarding the high school dropout rate. These remaining concerns lay the foundation for the following research questions. The research questions, below (see Table 3.1) are presented with their corresponding body chapter, and a summary of their methodology.

Research Questions and Methodology

Table 3.1: Research Questions and Methodology

Central Research Question: “How are high school dropout rates constructed?”			
Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Chapter Answered
Q1: What are the necessary components of constructing a high school dropout rate?	◇ Local, state and national archival data	◇ Use direct interpretation ◇ Develop naturalistic generalizations	Four
Q2a: How do states and school districts divide authority of exit code system development?	2a: ◇ Survey method of state education department	2a: ◇ Descriptive Statistics	Five
Q2b: How do exit codes vary for individual students from state to state?	2b: ◇ Survey method of state education department ◇ Secondary data (state student exit code systems)	2b: ◇ Identify patterns across cases ◇ Identify patterns within cases ◇ Memo-ing	Five

Q3: In particular, how does New York City construct their high school dropout rate?	◇ Archival data related to school completion and non-completion ◇ “The Class of 2007 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2006-2007 Event Dropout Rates” by the Office of Accountability, August 2008 contains the most recent reported information about NYC’s dropout rate.	◇ Use direct interpretation ◇ Develop naturalistic generalizations	Six
Q4: How is the public informed about the consequences of the high school dropout rate?	4: ◇ National legislation and archival data	4: ◇ Decision Analysis and Direct Interpretation	Seven

This methodology section will include the research design, data collection and analysis, conceptual framework and theoretical considerations. As shown above (see Table 3.1), the central research question will be investigated using a variety of approaches. This allows the “the construction of the high school dropout rate” to be viewed from several different viewpoints, which allows for a more varied, nuanced understanding of the study.

Research Design

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identify a research design as “a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.14). Qualitative methods are an exploration of social issues in a natural setting where the researcher is the prime instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Spradley, 1980). Before carrying out plans,

prevention programs, devising a strategy, attempts at remediating the problem, the first step begins or should begin with understanding the problem.

Qualitative research allows researchers to pursue “a commitment to understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of interest to them” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 416). This study will be a qualitative study employing a variety of approaches pertinent to answering the particular research question. After conducting the literature review and brainstorming lingering unanswered questions, four distinct, interrelated areas emerged.

Abstraction (Chapter Four)

Archival data will be gathered from local, state, and national sources to understand the basic abstract elements to construct a high school dropout rate. The chapter expands research by George Murrow who conducted a conceptual study which established an ideal set of criteria necessary for the uniform study of dropouts. Decision analysis will be used as a conceptual tool to present a) constructs b) alternatives, and c) consequences.

Case Study (Chapters Five and Six)

A case study is an in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon to describe, explain, or evaluate data in relation to relevant literature and to understand and show the perspective of participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

A case study is an exploration of a bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. Multiple sources of information can include but are not limited to observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports. “The context of the case involves situating the case within its

setting, which may be a physical setting or the social, historical, and /or economic setting for the case” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The case can be single or collective, multi-sited or within-site, focused on a case or an issue. In this study, it will be a collective case study, multi-sited, focused on an issue: the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Further, Creswell (2003) identifies a case study as an exploration of a single phenomenon that is bounded and constrained by time and activity. The phenomenon of school non-completion has become a major contemporary issue worthy of further exploration from the perspective of educational statistics. This is a challenge because every year, the methodology of the type of “case” - constructing the high school dropout rate – has the potential to change and yet still remain vague and imprecise. One could argue it does not have a clean beginning and ending point, and I have to work with contrived boundaries. My boundaries are porous and continuous beyond the study.

Policy Issue Brief (Chapter Seven)

The policy issue brief will be prepared with the following five major components:

- (a) Executive Summary
- (b) Stakeholders
- (c) Issue’s history
- (d) Define the issue
- (e) Monitor the issue’s development

A policy issue brief is a concise avenue of presenting gathered research concerning an issue and possible solutions. It helps unaware policymakers and/or community members make informed decisions based on research. The issue is defined with the development of relevant

solutions proposed by others. These solutions allow the stakeholders to consider the range of different options available to ameliorate the policy issue. The stakeholders can then decide if they want to follow the recommendations or if they want to create their own by combining or taking pieces of different elements.

Setting

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) will provide the context for delving into the construction of the dropout rate. The Department of Education operates the public schools in New York City and is the largest system of schools in the United States. Currently, NYC is managed unilaterally by the mayor (who is serving an unprecedented third term) and an appointed chancellor that unilaterally runs the school system. The current school reform efforts and reorganization of the administrative structure are attempts to increase the achievements of all of its students.

The other setting is all the states in the United States of America. All the states and the District of Columbia have a governing body which centralizes information for their local education agencies. Individual state rights preclude the variations of board or departments of education. No two states operate the same set of student exit code taxonomy.

Data collection: sample selection

Collecting data should serve the purpose of answering questions whose answers are not immediately obvious. Once data is collected in order to be useful it must be analyzed. Researchers have to discern between collecting data and collecting data for a purpose. One danger in collecting data to be analyzed qualitatively is collecting too much data. Eisenhardt (1989) recommends to researchers to plan in advance the number of cases and acknowledges that

there is no ideal number of cases. She further advises limiting the number of cases because the task of analyzing “quickly becomes difficult to cope with the complexity and volume of the data” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 545). It is also important to limit the cases to prevent data and theoretical saturation.

Sources of Data

For purposes of this study, local, state and national data sources were utilized. A short questionnaire was conducted with all state education departments. Below is the electronic mail message sent to all state departments:

Greetings. My name is Shana Henry and I am a doctoral student at the Graduate Center, CUNY. The title of my dissertation is ‘the construction of the high school dropout rate’. As part of my study, I am comparing state exit code systems for all 50 states and trying to understand the relationship between states and districts. I received your contact information from the Data Quality Campaign website.

I have two requests/questions.

1. For your state, the state exit code system is _____ to the local education agencies (e.g. districts). Do you a) required/mandated, b) optional/recommended, c) provides general guidance (but not specific codes), or d) left to the discretion of the district.

2. Please provide the link which has the document in which you list the state exit codes/ending enrollment/withdrawal codes and definitions? Or can you send as an attachment?

If your office does not have this information, can you forward my message to the most appropriate office? I thank you in advance for your assistance.

I am happy to provide a copy of my finished dissertation.

Best,

Shana Henry

Doctoral Candidate, Urban Education

Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY) Cell #404.660.6233

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) has listed on their website, information from respondents which allowed DQC to conduct their analysis, state by state (<http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/stateanalysis/respondents>). The persons listed on this website will be the primary contacts with the questionnaire mentioned above. If no response is received, a second round of e-mails will be sent. After this, a second contact (the person primarily responsible for data collection) will be found from their state education department website. Finally, the website also provides a list of telephone numbers for each state respondent. If necessary, phone calls will be used in an effort to obtain the data.

Archival Data, Documents, Reports

- New York City Department of Education --<http://schools.nyc.gov>

For example, website links that indicate active, current enrollment, attendance for the current school year will be used. Searching “Find a school” and searching by grade level, to ensure high school grade ranges of 9th thru 12th grade will be used.

Link to Reports	Type of Report
http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/graduation.html	This reports Graduation/Dropout Rates for New York City ranging from the Class of 2008 to the Class of 1997.
http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/The_Class_of_2007_4Y_Graduation_and_Dropout_Report.pdf	This report, “The Class of 2007 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2006-2007 Event Dropout Rates” by the Office of Accountability, August 2008 contains the most recent reported information about NYC’s dropout rate.
http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/GRAD_RATE_2008_EXTENDED	New York City 2004 Cohort Graduation Rates (Class of 2008) Extended Report

pdf http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Class_of_2004_Final_Longitudinal_Report_shortversion.pdf	The Class of 2004 Final Longitudinal Report – A Three- Year Follow-Up Study
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- Documents pertaining to legislation regarding the collection and reporting of dropout rates

Link	Type
http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/pps/attendance/Decoder-NYSLaws.html Section 3202.1(a) – Chapter 16, Title IV, Article 65, Part I	NYS Education Laws Regarding Attendance Who can be dropped for non-attendance
Section 3202 - Title IV, Article 65, Part I, S 3202.7 http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/spp/2009/ind1.htm	Education of incarcerated youth Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) for 2005-2010 which contains defining the graduation rate cohort.

Data Analysis

Excel will be used to explore, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate all of the codes and definitions for all fifty states, Washington D.C. and New York City. Excel has the capability to do basic data analysis tasks, simple descriptive statistics. Each of the student exit codes will be entered state by state in order to facilitate the process of finding commonalities and differences. Each state will have their student exit codes coded for the following five overarching categories: 1) completion (combined graduated with standard diploma and left with non-standard diploma (e.g. Certificate, GED) 2) transferred out of school 3) still enrolled (e.g. retained, interim) 4) dropped out and 5) Exempt (passed away) using the Microsoft Program, Excel.

The exit codes will be gathered, transcribed, and coded by the researcher. I will keep a record and organize when, where, and the identity of each of the respondents to systematically record and identify the source of each of the states student exit codes. This type of organization is necessary to gather information in a methodical fashion.

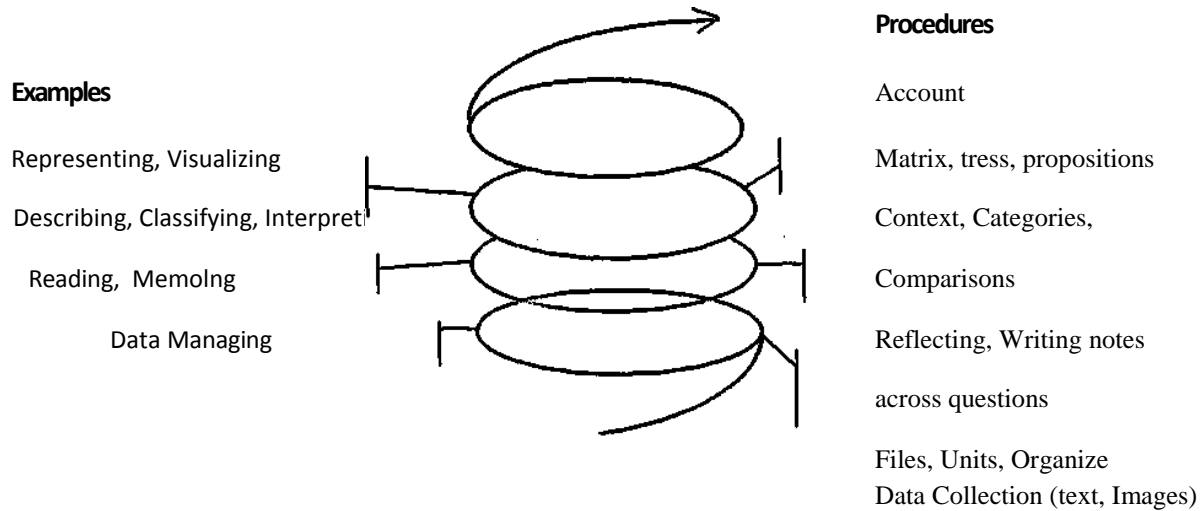
For the state by state analysis a within-case and cross-case analysis will be employed. A detailed description of each case and themes within the case will be followed by a thematic analysis across the cases. To begin the process of coding, initial general categories will be formed. I will use the constant comparative method, “originally introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later expanded by Lincoln and Guba (1985)” to begin analyzing and coding the data (Creswell, 1998, p. 140).

I will employ a non-linear process of analysis strategy. In order to analyze the qualitative data gathered from all the States, I will attempt to be explicit in the process of analyzing the data collected. The following describes the intended process for one case and analyzing each set of the 51 exit codes. Rather than attempt to understand this process linearly, I chose to follow a non-linear process with the understanding that neither process is absolutely contained within the boundary as described below.

Non-Linear process of data analysis

Creswell (1998) depicts the analysis process partially as a contour represented by a spiral image, which he calls a “data analysis spiral”. He suggests that the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than the traditional fixed linear approach. Using this data analysis spiral (See figure 3.1), I hope to begin with text data (student exit codes) and exit with findings of an account or a narrative. This circular process is inherently non-linear, as several points in the analysis will necessitate me to move backwards and circle around and around.

Figure 3.1: The Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell, p.143)



Creswell (1998) explains his “data analysis spiral” as follows:

“Data management, the first loop in the spiral, begins the process... Researchers continue analysis by getting a sense of the whole database...moving from the reading and memoing loop into the spiral to the describing, classifying, and interpreting loop. In this loop, category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis... In the final phase of the spiral, researchers present the data, a packaging of what was found in text, tabular, or figure form. The cells contain text, not numbers (p.142-145).”

Conceptual Framework

One can use a decision framework from a theoretical, methodological inquiry and/or analysis and practical standpoint. Decision theory combines theories of choice, value, and uncertainty with mathematical models to produce optimization of various decisions. Decision theory has been formalized since the late 1960’s dealing strictly with cognitive models and explanations and mathematical models. Currently, it has expanded to include psychological components (stress, conformity, etc.) complexity, reasoning, risk, bargaining and negotiations. This project will use decision as a method of analysis

Decision analysis provides a framework for articulating and integrating “the values and professional judgments of decision makers and experts with the existing data to examine the

overall implications of alternative courses of action”. It also is “a philosophy, articulated by a set of logical axioms, and a methodology and collection of systematic procedures, based upon those axioms, for responsibly analyzing the complexities inherent in decision problems" (Keeney, 1982, p. 806). Researcher Keeney (1982) writes:

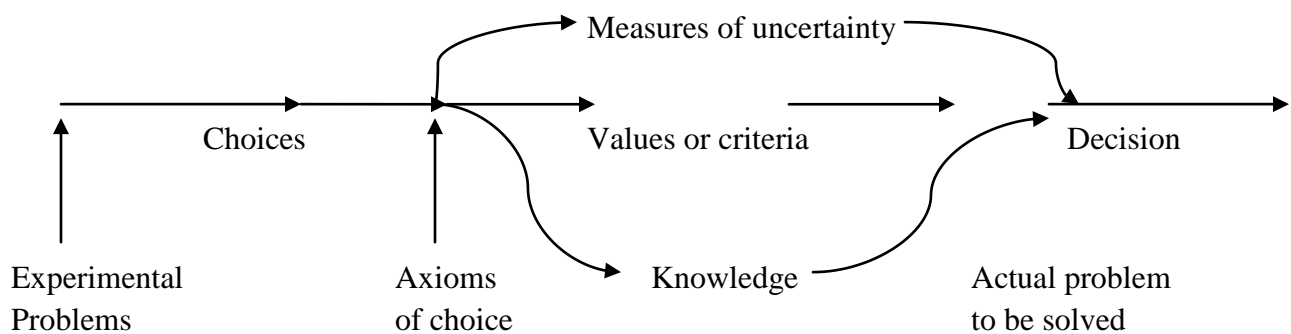
The practical implication of the decision analysis axioms is the provision of a sound basis and general approach for including judgments and values in an analysis of decision alternatives. Decision analysis focuses on aspects fundamental to all decision problems, namely

1. A perceived need to accomplish some objectives,
2. Several alternatives, one of which must be selected,
3. The consequences associated with alternatives are different,
4. Uncertainty usually about the consequences of each alternative,
5. The possible consequences are not all equally valued.

p.807

The five aspects mentioned above are fundamental to decision problems. Researcher White (1969) presents a schematic illustration (see Figure 3.2) of essentially these same characteristics.

Figure 3.2: Schematic illustration of Decision Analysis



Decision analysis will be used to evaluate the numerous variations of state student exit codes. Decision theory has its roots in the quantitative research paradigm and has shifted to also include decision making in the qualitative research paradigm. Decision Making is a form of

research and method that focuses on the processes people use when making decisions in their everyday lives.

Decision making is comprised of the interaction between decision maker, problem and context. Once context is introduced, it adds the element of placing the actors in a social environment. Decision making uses a process that has its roots in “decision research in a historical and theoretical context and provides a critical evaluation of its principal research methods” (Ranyard, Crozier, & Svenson, 1997, preface i). “A unique aspect of decision analysis is that its theory and procedures were developed to formally introduce and process subjective judgments in the evaluation of alternatives” (Keeney, 1982, p. 829).

Time can be presented as either synchronic or diachronic. This study uses a synchronic perspective of time. This selection meshes with the selection of the methodology of comparative case analysis. The synchronic view presupposes no temporal dimension. The data collected represents a cross-sectional view that shows a “snapshot” of the data.

In the process of building the decision tree it is important to understand the broader perspective. Researchers, von Winterfeldt and Edwards, view broadly the structuring of trees and diagrams as a three-step process, 1) identify the problem, 2) Select an analytical approach, and 3) develop a detailed analysis structure.

Addressing the following questions is part of the process of step one: identifying the problem: “What is the nature of the problem? Who is the decision maker? What are the decision maker’s values? What are the generic class of options? Which groups are affected by the decision? What is the purpose of the analysis?” (von Winterfeldt, 2007, p.82-83)

The nature of the problem is to objectify a dropout rate and to standardize the subjective process of the constructs necessary to calculate the dropout rate. Since the decision maker is a

complicated mix of actors, researchers, politicians, policy-makers, and school system this precludes the use of some analytical approaches. It makes assigning numerical values to each of the alternatives and using a quantitative approach impossible without the input of the full cast of actors.

In selecting an analytical approach, I am using the lenses of researcher (decision maker), to model the problem through use of the decision tree. During step number two, an exploration of all possible alternatives in great detail reveals the path to follow. In this case, a decision tree is used solely as a conceptual tool to represent the variables necessary to construct a high school dropout rate.

The third and final step is to develop a detailed analysis structure. The decision tree is a structure for building the means of taking a construct and laying out known alternatives and some of their consequences (von Winterfeldt, 2007).

Once alternatives and consequences are presented, the conceptual exercise is complete. Attaching probabilities to the decision tree would presume that the context and motivation of a specific case is known. Without the context, choosing a particular alternative based on probabilities would be helpful in making a rational decision.

Howard Raiffa explains that there is a need for a new field called Decision Sciences. In this new field of study, game theory, negotiation theory, and organizational design among others should be taught. Decision science is a new field and much more research is needed before decision theory or decision analysis becomes common in educational research. “The decision sciences department should establish strong ties to the professional schools (especially business, public policy, public health, medicine), to the engineering school, to the departments of

economics, psychology, government, mathematics, statistics, philosophy, and especially to the school of education” (Raiffa, 2002, p.68).

As the research field evolves, ideas and, constructs become at the same time both distinct and blurred. In the case of decision making, decision theory and decision analysis are now considered two distinct disciplines. Decision analysis focuses on the application of decision theory to real world, complex problems. These two fields which have recently been separated are intricately linked together. It seems plausible that in the future, more educational research will use decision sciences.

Theoretical Considerations

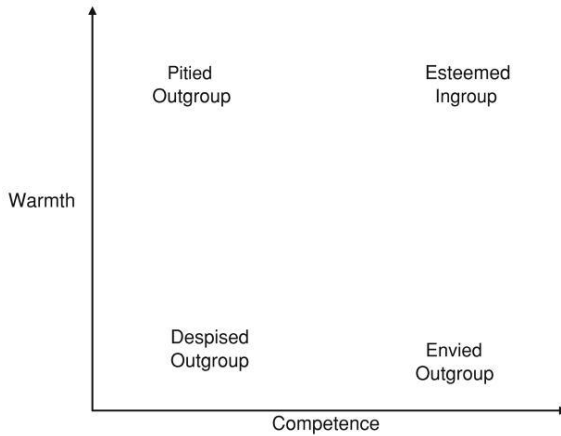
These rates have the potential to be meaningful indicators. Why are the rates allowed to be constructed in their current fashion? Those students that are currently allowed to be removed from the cohort through various manipulations are exactly the same students that are most neglected in our society. There has been and continues to be a longstanding unequal treatment of human beings based on categorizations of race, class, gender, and neighborhood.

Stereotyping manifests itself in both perception and reality. Due to our attitudes and perception of abilities of groups based on certain characteristics, we then enact behaviors and rules that produce our stratified system. Presented below are two Stereotype Content Models. The first one is a reproduction of the general model (Massey, 2008, p. 12). The second one is the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) as applied to Student Exit Codes over-arching categories (Figure 8.3). The final figure shows the SCM in three-dimensional space adding categories of race, class, gender, and neighborhood (see Figure 8.4).

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) shows a two-dimensional space of social stereotyping broken into four basic quadrants. No lines delineate the quadrants into separate

compartments because there is always an overlapping, and fluid boundaries of these spaces. It is dynamic and as society changes, our conceptions of groups evolve.

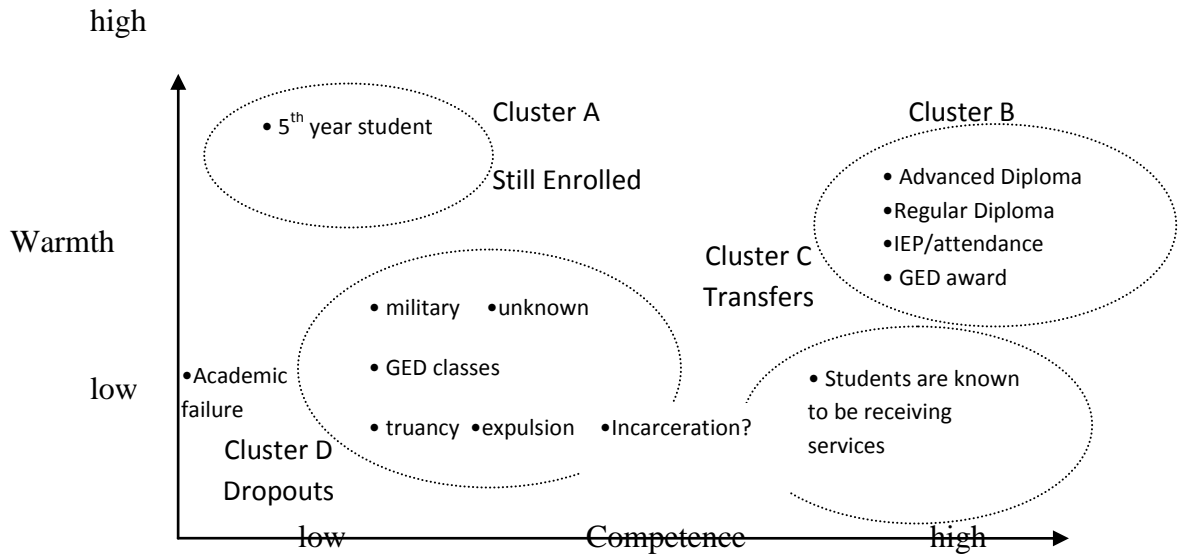
Figure 8.2: The Stereotype Content Model



The researcher applied the SCM to various exit codes categories (See Figure 8.3).

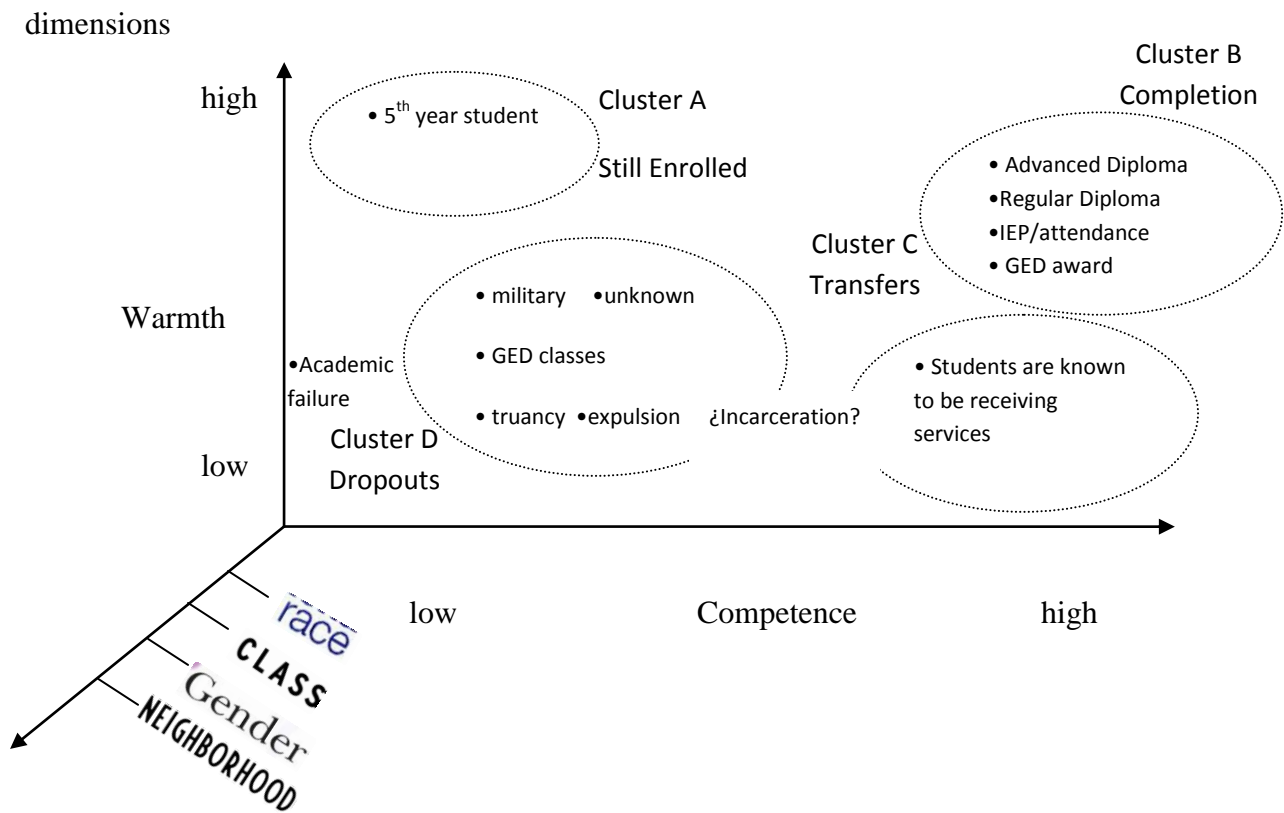
These four categories should be theoretically the only over-arching categories allowed in the exit code system for students. Based on this study, the social space generally occupied by esteemed in-group members (high warmth, high competence) includes graduates and other known completers (Advanced Diploma, Regular Diploma, IEP/attendance, GED award). The envied out-group (high competence, low warmth) is occupied by transfers (only those known to be receiving services). Those students still enrolled occupy a position of pity (high warmth and low competence). Finally, the most despised group, dropouts, occupies the space most detested and socially rejected (low warmth and low competence). Examples of sub-types of dropouts are military, unknown, GED classes, truancy, expulsion, and academic failure. Incarceration as a sub-code currently straddles dropouts and transfers.

Figure 8.3: Stereotype Content Model Applied to Student Exit Codes Over-arching Categories



Human interactions begin with cognitive boundaries that place people into social categories that manifest themselves in very real ways. The complexity of understanding humankind leads to studying psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Imagine a conceptual map that imposes race, class, gender, and neighborhood onto the application of Student Exit Codes and the Stereotype Content Model? The application of the Stereotype Content Model to Race, class, gender and neighborhood is shown in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4: SCM Applied to Student Exit Codes Overarching Categories in three



The figure above creates a three dimensional space that includes the development of analysis by race, class, gender and/or neighborhood. The probability that a student will be a part of one of the clusters is not evenly distributed, but heavily weighted based on race, class, gender, and neighborhood.

An example of one of the clusters, dropouts, (the despised out-group), analyzed along the third dimension, is the poor, black male attending school in an urban setting. An analysis of this new three-dimensional space is possible given known statistical trends.

The poor, black male going to high school in an urban setting is often characterized as low competence and low warmth. Statistically,

- Of all African-American men that were born in late 1965 or later with less than a high school diploma, 60 percent already have a prison record (28 months median time served). (American Correctional Association, 2010)
- Only 41 percent of black men graduate from high school in the United States. (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010)
- 45 percent of black children live below the poverty line, compared with 16 percent of white youngsters. (Hacker, 1995)
- Blacks account for only 12 percent of the US population but 44 percent of all prisoners in the United States are black. (Morehouse Male Initiative, n.d.)
- Of black males born this year, 29 percent can expect to spend some time behind bars. One in 14 black children has a parent in jail or prison. One in 20 black men is incarcerated, compared with one in 155 white men. (Department of Justice, 2003)
- For every three black men in college, four are in prison. (Department of Justice, 2003)

As long as statistics such as the ones stated above are not causing a major uproar, the inequity of our public school system and justice system with respect to black males, will continue to exist and be disproportionate to white males. There is a troubling relationship between race, education, and incarceration.

Limitation

One factor limiting the methodology in this study is access to New York City's disaggregated data. Based on previous research of other researchers, access is limited to New York City's student data system. One researcher found "it is impossible to evaluate the legitimacy of these discharges until the Department of Education publicly reports data by the

category of discharge, commits to independent audits of schools' discharge records, and makes these audits publicly available" (Jennings & Haimson, 2009, p.5).

This study is limited to the data provided to the public by the NYC school system. Study results may differ based on the release of the disaggregated data of how many students belong to each student exit code. An alternate conclusion may be reached if future research is conducted with that data that is currently unavailable.

Chapter 4

General Derivation of the High School Dropout Rate

Introduction

This chapter explains abstractly how one constructs a high school dropout rate. A rate does not simply appear naturally; it has to be constructed by someone or an entity. How does one decide what information belongs in the numerator and denominator in order to create a ratio?

Who are the decision makers? Who decides which of the variable constructs outlined below are inputted into creating the high school dropout rate? Who counts in the denominator? There is not one standard, universal truth considering the subjective.

Since 1870 in the United States of America, the percentage of graduates receiving diplomas has been calculated (Swanson, 2010). Most of the conversation has focused on the phenomenon of graduation rates. This study focuses on the dropout rate. Why? Both the graduation and the dropout rate are siblings, figuratively speaking. Inherently, they are linked. To construct both requires data from the same initial parent database.

If the procedures are changed to reliable, consistent, standardized codes, procedures and formulas for one rate, it follows that the data would then be available to also compute the other reliable, consistent standardized rate. It is possible to have an *accurate* graduation rate and an *inaccurate* dropout rate and vice versa. Three sections must be defined and standardized. Each part of the ratio must be defined. It is possible to define “who counts as a graduate” and not define who counts as a dropout.

On April 1st, 2008, then Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, made an unprecedented announcement at the America’s Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Campaign to “take administrative steps to ensure all states use the same formula to calculate how many

students graduate from high school on time, and how many drop out” (Spellings, 2008). The Department also moved towards disaggregating the data by race, background and income level.

During her speech as prepared she made the following comments:

One reason that the high school dropout crisis is known as the ‘silent epidemic’ is that the problem is frequently masked or minimized by inconsistent and opaque data reporting systems. For example, in some districts, a student who leaves school is counted as a dropout only if he or she registers as one. In others, a dropout's promise to get a G.E.D. at an unspecified future date is good enough to merit ‘graduate’ status. With such loose definitions of what it means to graduate, it's no wonder this epidemic has been so silent! (Spellings, 2008)

Finally, in October 2008, new regulations for calculating graduation rates were issued by the U.S. Department of Education. This changed the method of calculation for the graduation rates from states to national. This regulation uses a “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” and loosely defines how to adjust the beginning cohort (Spellings, 2008, p. 1). It explicitly created one definition of who counts as a graduate to be defined as follows: “Students who graduate in four years include students who earn a regular high school diploma by the end of their fourth year; before the end of their fourth year; and, if a state chooses, during a summer session immediately following their fourth year” (Spellings, 2008, p. 1). This national definition was mandated to be used by all states.

This unprecedented step was necessary but not sufficient to standardize the calculation. Why was it not sufficient? I propose two reasons: first, the definition still contains two pathways that have the possibility that using the same data set would lead to two different graduation rates. The binary option, “if a state chooses” implies a state may or may not choose and allows two pathways of calculation. This cannot be part of a standardized definition for accountability

purposes. To be uniform, the regulation must mandate that all states either include or exclude summer sessions for fourth year students to count as graduates.

Secondly, the uniformly defined regulation failed to define who counts and does not count in the denominator. Without having a standardized list of exit codes, code categorizations, and a formula, neither a graduation rate nor a dropout rate can be compared across states, districts and schools. The basis for this dissertation assesses the current decisions and consequences for accounting for all students in order to create standard school indicators, particularly the high school dropout rate.

Moreover, once the two reasons above have been addressed then the graduation rate theoretically would be standardized. To also standardize the dropout rate, one must also uniformly define, “Who counts as a dropout?” Uniformly defining who counts as a dropout for statistical purposes is still in its infancy stages.

From 2001, since the revision of the ESEA act (NCLB) when it first included graduation rates as part of the accountability measures, to Oct 2008 states and districts were allowed to create their own answer to the question, “Who counts as a graduate?” Decades of grossly inaccurate data was allowed. How much longer? How many more studies by researchers, suits by lawyers, and distrust by the public will happen before standardized answers are mandated to both “Who counts as a dropout?” and “Who counts in the base of the calculation of the graduation and dropout rate?”

Who counts as a graduate? This has been defined for statistical purposes (see Appendix A) and satisfies standardization for the numerator for calculating rates. Crucially missing are all of the other components that create the complete picture, the cohort, the denominator. Who counts as a dropout? Who counts as a transfer? Who counts as still enrolled? There has been

little examination of the constructs, procedures, and formulas of the completion and non-completion data.

Construction

The high school dropout rate is a comparison of two factors. The resulting ratio is one single number. The numerator reflects the proportion of students who *count* as a dropout. The denominator reflects the proportion of the students who *count* as the base student membership.

Part / Whole is an elementary concept which is often taught and learned in mathematics classes.

In this case, the part represents “all dropouts” and the whole represents all students in the base”.

All dropouts / all students in the base

Unfortunately, the pathway to the resulting ratio is full of twists and turns, bumps, potholes, and political involvement can be found along the way. It bypasses elementary understanding and reaches heights of complexity. Smoothing out the road towards the resultant ratio requires the actors to analyze the purpose of constructing school indicators and thereby subsequently creating standardized, national definitions.

Many variables should be taken into account before the rate is calculated. Morrow conducted a conceptual study which established an ideal set of criteria necessary for the uniform study of dropouts. Morrow included two elements in the computation of a dropout rate, first the time frame over which the rate is computed and second, the pool of possible dropouts. The second element encompassed both the range of grade levels included and the method used to account for student membership. He also, as part of his study, included recommendations for the definition of a dropout. His definition of a dropout had three essential components:

- 1) What it means for a student to be no longer enrolled
- 2) The transfer of a student’s enrollment to another institution

3) The graduation options offered by high schools. (Morrow, 1986)

Within the last twenty years of his study, research on school dropouts has not progressed with regard to a common body of knowledge regarding a theoretical or practical focus on constructing school rates. The conceptual as well as the concrete problems still exist today. Building on Morrow's research, the study examines the construct needed to calculate a standardized dropout rate.

For understanding the structure of the creation of the high school dropout rate, I will employ the decision tree as a conceptual framework. This tool, the decision tree, has been used quantitatively assuming it is possible to present knowledge in terms of probability and rational thought. I will use this same tool, the decision tree in a qualitative manner. The exercise, of laying out the problem, the alternatives and consequences, proves to be fruitful in furthering ones understanding of the complicated nature of a creating a high school dropout rate. The remainder of this chapter seeks to reconstruct the convoluted nature of creating a high school dropout rate, generally.

Decision analysis recognizes the "limitations of human decision makers and the complexity of the environment in which it has to be implemented" (Edwards, Miles, & Von Winterfeldt, 2007, p. 7). The insight gained from using this as an analytic tool allows me to gain clarity regarding what can be a complicated procedure. "The point is not to 'get an answer' but rather to gain understanding of the available alternatives" (Clemen, 1996, p. 14). Moreover the information mapped out below in the decision tree gives one an understanding of some of the decisions available and the alternatives. "A decision tree is not meant to be a complete and exhaustive representation of all future decisions and events. Instead, it is to capture the main

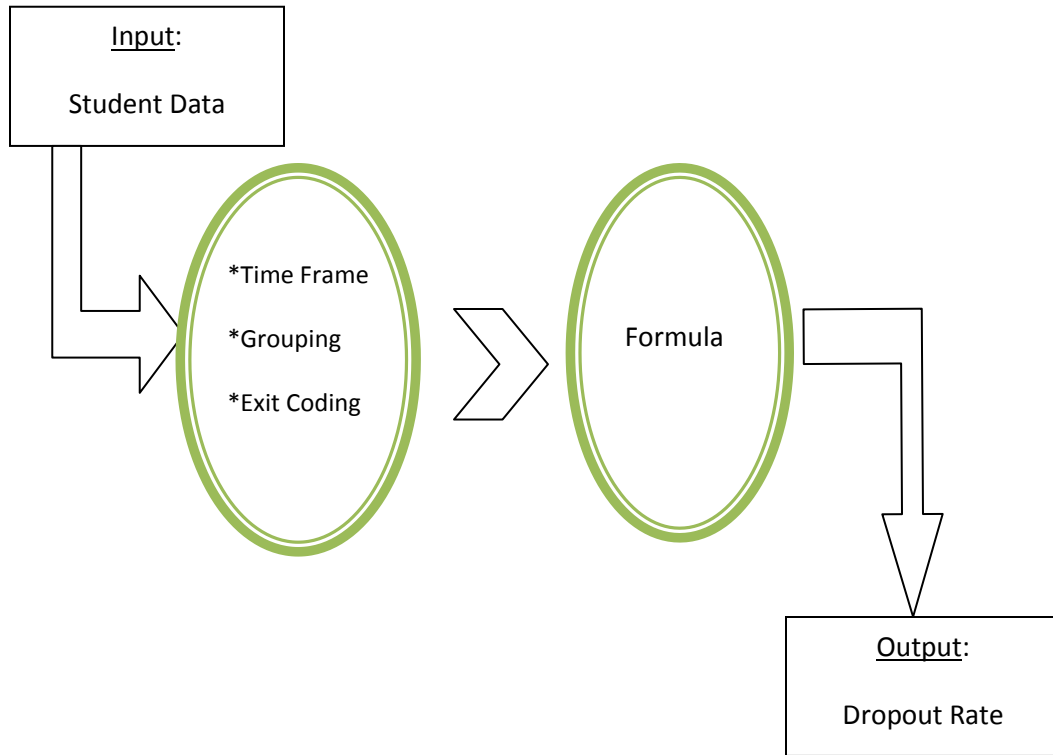
aspects of decisions and events that can make a difference to the ultimate consequences” (von Winterfeldt & Edwards, 2007, p. 102).

The most dominant alternatives are presented for each construct with associated pros and cons. “Ultimate consequences” exist, but exist in varying effects based on the constituents. Eventually rates are constructed and real consequences are attached to these rates. The same consequence could be beneficial to the school system and detrimental to students. Furthermore, no absolute “ultimate consequence” exists. Varying constituents each interpret their own ultimate consequence. Is this alternative beneficial for all parties involved? The context based on the weight of history, culture, society, etc. influences the outcome of which alternative is preferred and why.

Also, there are a wide range of consequences, and not simply two binary options as represented in this analysis. This study constructed a paradigm to show one benefit and one detriment as an attempt to schematically show two dominant options in the plethora of consequences. Similarly, the pros and cons are conceived from the viewpoint of the researcher. This viewpoint does not shed light on the benefits and detriments for other constituents, i.e. students, families, politicians, school administrators.

General derivation

Figure 4.1: The construction of the high school dropout rate



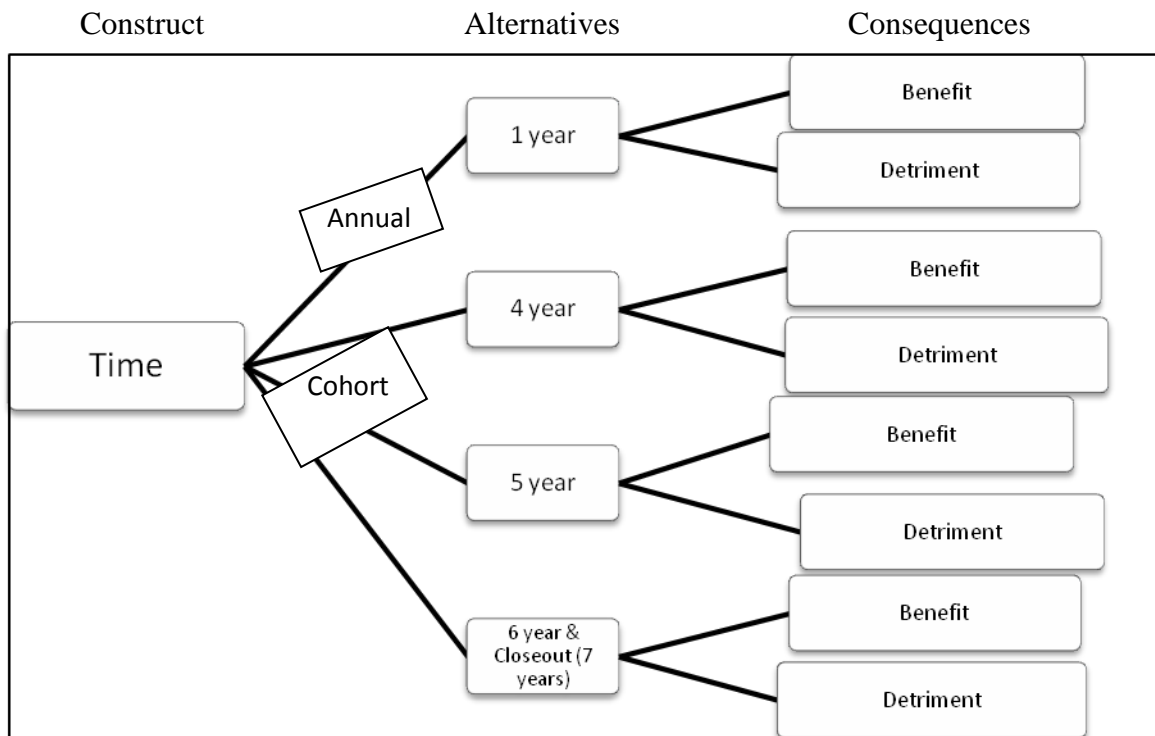
The graphic above (Figure 4.1) shows a conceptual framework for the construction of the high school dropout rate. First, student data must be gathered to capture individual student information on entering and ending enrollment in school. Then depending on the decision makers, three essential elements (time frame, grouping, and exit coding) must be defined. This is a crucial part of the process, but still not sufficient in constructing the high school dropout rate. In addition, a formula must be created to determine who belongs in *both* the numerator and the denominator. Finally, inputting the student data through this “machine” will produce an output of a high school dropout rate.

Three elements necessary are: 1) time frame, 2) grouping and 3) exit coding. A qualitative analysis of each construct follows using a decision tree as a guiding tool for analysis.

For example, in my first decision tree reflecting the construct of time frame, one might assume that the central question is “How long of a collection period?” In a society that continually values efficiency, the answer is often, “not very long”. Several factors are attributed to answering the above question: a) cost associated with collection period b) database capabilities c) purpose for collecting the data. (National Forum on Education Statistics (US), 2006) This purpose lends itself to operationalize “time frame” as one year. However, if the essential question shifted to be “Over the expected graduation time frame, how many students did not finish with their classmates?” then the optimal “time frame” is four years.

The construct of time frame

Figure 4.2: The construct of time frame



The construct of time frame continuously gathers data and has a point at which the data collection stops, is grouped and reported by the spatial concept of time. Each of the four distinct time frames measures data that comprises slightly different phenomena. “Different methods

with different populations produce different results” (Kaufman, 2004). The alternatives for the construct of time frame are a) one year, b) four year c) five year d) Six year and closeout (seven years). These four options have two pathways of conceptions, annual and cohort. The annual is represented by one year. The cohort is represented by years four, five, six and seven. The dominant alternative for the cohort is four years. These are the options currently available to gather the data within a concrete time range. This does not mean that in the future other options will not appear. Hypothetically, an alternative can be used in the future that represents years four plus the subsequent summertime called “four plus”.

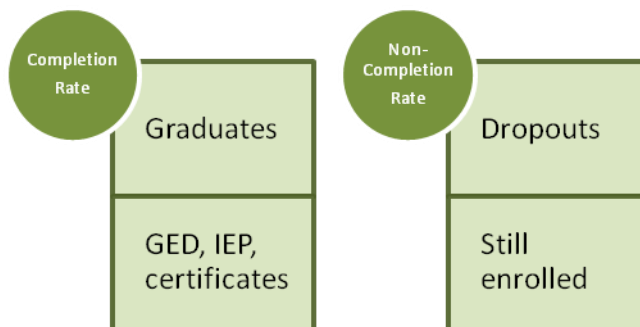
All options can be computed out of one universal data set, but usually one is dominant as a tool of reporting and the others are supplementary. The consequences are based on the chosen alternative and explicit implications are evident and implicit implications are assumed. The consequences represent a range from beneficial to detrimental for each constituent. Depending on the decision makers values, goals, and intentions, one route might provide the desired information gathered from the data set.

The alternative “One Year” is a representation of all youth (regardless of age or grade level) that leave school each school year. “One year” has the possibility to be used to track *annual* changes in the experiences of students. The cycle for data collection is one year. A beneficial consequence of a one year is the absolute number of youth each year that interrupts their educational pathway. This alternative was and still is very popular due the previous limitations with student databases and information systems to calculate the dropout rate using other alternatives. A detrimental consequence of “one year” is that the time frame is not congruent with the paired rate indicator of graduation. This rate does not compare students to their entering cohort, as the graduation rate does. It is difficult (for the average person) to

interpret the significance of a one year dropout rate. This method has the potential to show positive or negative results based on newly implemented policies.

The alternative four year is a representation of the extent to which public high schools are losing students within the expected period of on-time graduation from high school. A beneficial consequence is this rate can indicate the range of success of the school within a given cohort. Coupled with the graduation rate, this dropout rate can provide a meaningful indicator of the health of the school system. Many school districts calculate a non-completion rate (which includes dropouts and still enrolled). A dropout rate is couched within a non-completion rate. A dropout rate focuses on those students who have left the system without a regular diploma. Similarly, a graduation rate is couched within a completion rate. (See Figure 4.3 below)

Figure 4.3: Completion and Non-Completion Rates



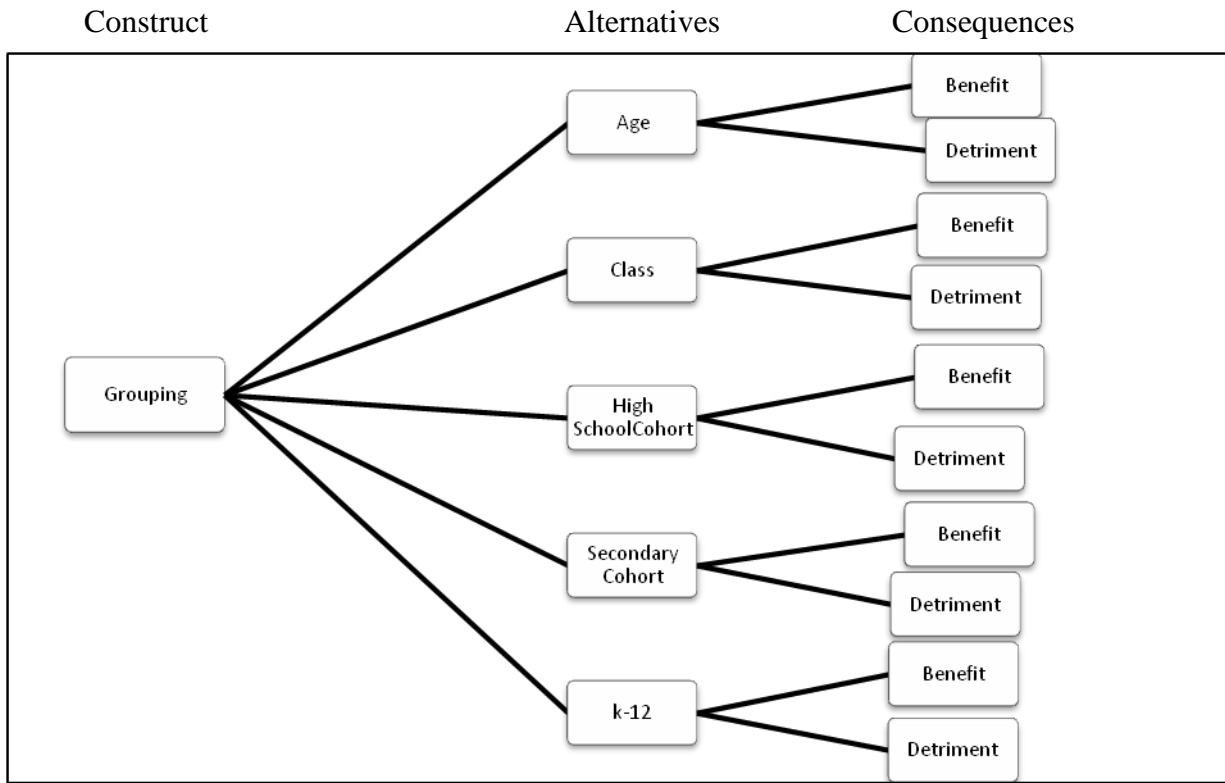
A detrimental consequence is the cycle for initial data collection is four years. An interim estimate of the progress of each cohort can be used until the dropout rate is calculated four years later. One way researchers do calculate an interim estimate is called “promoting power”. The promoting power rate is a ratio of the number of students in a grade level divided by the previous grade level. For example, how many students were promoted to 10th grade would be calculated by taking the new 10th graders divided by all the possible ninth graders that could have been promoted.

The alternative five-year is a representation of the extent to which public high schools are losing students within a period of five years. A beneficial consequence is that a five year rate acknowledges the diversity of the student population. A number of students take longer than the traditional four year span to complete high school, i.e. English language learners (ELL). For a variety of reasons, some students need more than four years to graduate. This rate gauges the progress towards graduation that is more inclusive by allowing five years to then judge the system. A detrimental consequence is the data collection cycle takes five years to complete. As with the previous time frame, interim estimates can be used before the five year time frame is reached.

The alternative, close out, which includes six and seven year periods suggests the extent to which public high schools students do not graduate with their cohort. A beneficial consequence is this dropout rate captures every student for a particular entering cohort (sometimes referred to as a class, i.e. Class of 2011) when final seven year statistics are compiled. In this time frame close-out, either a student is classified as a graduate or a dropout. This close-out time frame is unique in that the category of “still enrolled” does not exist. A detrimental consequence is that the data collection cycle is much longer than when the majority of students who complete and/or fail to complete high school. This is a summative form of statistics. It does not allow for intervention programs/policies/strategies to be implemented for this particular cohort.

The construct of grouping

Figure 4.4: The construct of grouping



The construct of grouping collects data by different sets and reports by the clustering of sets of students. Each of the five distinct set frames (as shown above in Figure 4.4) measures data that contains slightly different phenomena. The alternatives for the construct of grouping are a) age b) class c) high school cohort d) secondary cohort e) k-12. These five options encompass different student populations and consequently lead to varied interpretations of the dropout rate.

These five alternatives are the most dominant options currently available, though they are not exhaustive. It is reasonable in the future that other grade levels (such as pk-12, k-16, 9-14, 9-16) might appear. The consequences represent a range from beneficial to detrimental. Moreover, commonly reported groupings/categories that are secondary calculations are by gender, age for

grade on entry into high school, race/ethnicity, English language learner (ELL) status, immigrant status, school type, and special education. These categories all reflect grouping after the initial data has been constructed for the whole student population. Hence, if the initial, primary, data variable constructs (time frame, grouping, and exit coding) are non-standardized then the resulting secondary analysis into categories (gender, race, ELL) are also based on flawed data.

The alternative, age grouping is another categorization. The dropout rate referred to as the status dropout rate is based on the grouping of age. For example, a report could examine the dropout issue based on how many 16-year-olds are not in high school and do not have a high school credential. Or the alternative age can classify based on an *age range*. For example, the federal government predominately uses this alternative in reporting dropout rates. “The *status dropout rate* represents the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate)” (Aud, S., et al., 2010, p. 68).

This alternative has a range of consequences. One potential beneficial consequence is the ability to compare the persistence and progress of the United States with several other countries. Many countries use age as the grouping alternative. This allows comparison regardless of whether the educational systems use different systems of grading/levels. A 14-year-old criterion is more universal versus a 10th grader, sophomore, 5th form, etc. One detrimental consequence is within the United States — i.e. the educational system is based on grade levels which can incorporate various age groups. For example, a majority of 17-year-olds are juniors but several are also sophomores or seniors.

The alternative, class is one such system this is based on grade level. Research indicates that the highest incidence of dropping out occurs to those classified as ninth graders. At one time, it was assumed that the highest incidence occurred with the senior class. This alternative refers to the official credit bearing class designation. For example, it is possible that some students who have been in high school for two years, but technically have only accumulated credits which would classify them as a ninth graders and then discontinue their education. Officially, these students would be reported as ninth grade dropouts, regardless of them spending two years in school and despite their chronological age.

One consequence is the benefit of targeting resources to one particular grade level. Since research has determined that of the four classes, students leave as ninth graders higher than any other class, policies and programs have been created to address this concern. Some schools have ninth grade academies, and advisories, in an attempt to make the first year experience more personal. A detrimental consequence is reporting the dropout rate as a cross section of one year, one class. It does not present the entire story over time. It does not answer the question, how many students do not complete high school who entered four years before?

The alternative, high school cohort collects the data based on four years of schooling at the high school level. This alternative necessitates having a student information system and longitudinal database. Recent advances in technology allow for tracking individual students over time. Twenty years ago, this option was not feasible due to the limitation of student data base programs. A beneficial consequence is that it allows for more accurate data versus previous estimations of dropout rates. A potential detrimental consequence is that the length of time it takes to create the first report of dropout rates. Other indicators can be used before the high school cohort indicator is ready. Promotion power allows for the progress of the high school

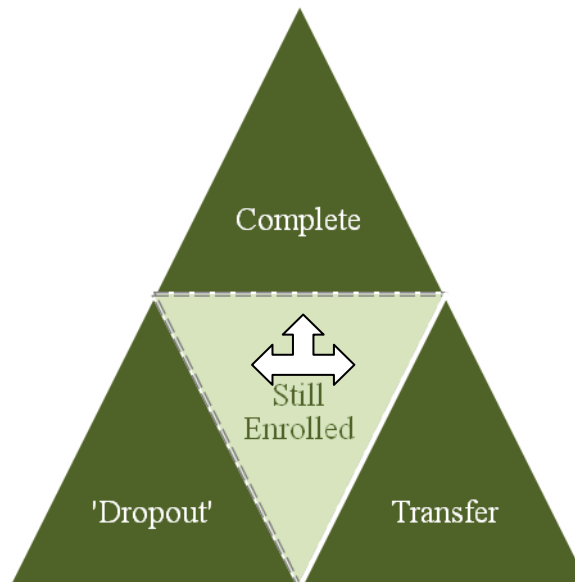
cohort to be measured as an estimate of the eventual graduation and dropout rate. The promotion power calculates an estimate using data from how many students were promoted from one grade level to the next grade level.

The alternative, secondary cohort classifies students based on six years of schools from seventh grade to twelfth grade (to graduation). Similar to the high school cohort, this option gives a broader picture of the success of the public school system. A beneficial consequence is it captures the middle school population and their educational attainment. Furthermore, it includes students who drop out during the summer before entering high school, students who were retained in middle school, and subsequently never reach high school. These students would be accounted for in this alternative secondary cohort. A potential detrimental consequence of using this alternative is that the length of time to collect the first set of data. Also, the data collection would have to be sophisticated to track students from multiple feeder systems (middle schools or junior high) to high schools. This would have to be a district wide effort to collect the dropout rate using secondary cohort as the grouping construct.

The alternative, k-12 is rarely used as an option for grouping students to calculate the dropout rate. A beneficial consequence is the ability to see how a neighborhood or community is collectively achieving its goal of educating students. This moves beyond seeing the responsibility of high school attainment occurring only during the last four years of schooling. A detrimental consequence is the complexity of tracking individual students over 12 years. Family mobility, out of state transfers, transfers between public and private school, all present real challenges to implementing this alternative.

The construct of exit coding

Figure 4.5: The construct of exit coding



The construct of exit coding is not displayed with alternatives and consequences. This complicated construct has endless possibilities of the avenues students can exit from high school. Consequences based on one alternative does not make sense. Instead, Figure 4.5 (above) shows an idealistic schema of overarching exit code categories. At the end of four years, students either a) complete (includes graduates) b) transfer (legitimately to another institution where they can earn high school credits) or c) dropout (those who do not complete and are currently not enrolled). The still enrolled category with the extension of time (see alternatives of the time construct), will exit as either a) completer b) transfer or c) dropout.

The construct of exit coding allows for the identified student in a specific school to be subsequently tracked of changes to their enrollment status. Even though as stated above, there are endless reasons why or how a student exits school, it is still possible to create a structure that uniforms the construct of exit coding.

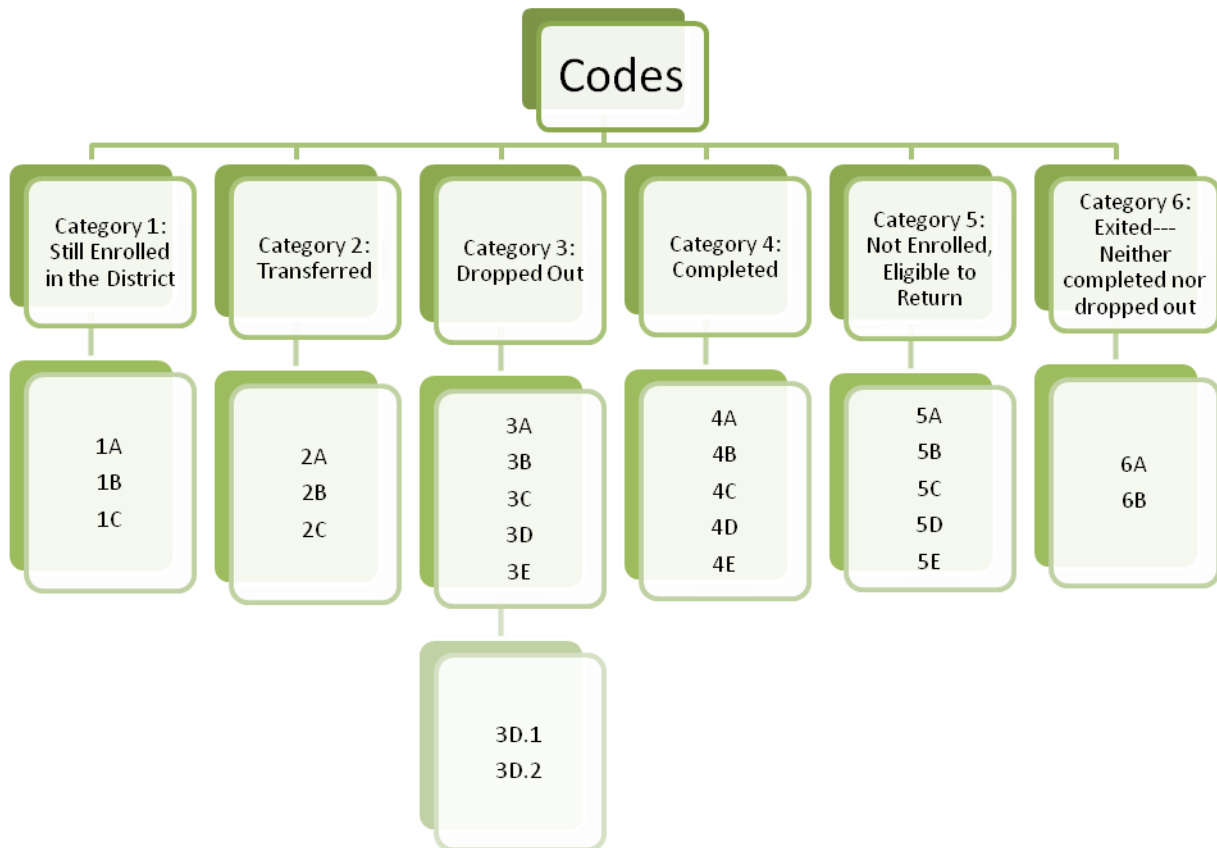
The Federal Framework

The broad categories found in the Standard Student Exit Codes taxonomy (see Figure 4.6) were recommended in 2006, by the Exit Codes Task Force of the National Forum on Education Statistics. This Standard Student Exit Codes Taxonomy and the definitions will be referred to as “the federal framework”. The Task Force found it necessary to have six over-arching categories, 23 sub-categories, and two sub, sub-categories. The six broad categories are: a) still enrolled b) transferred c) dropped out d) completed e) not enrolled/ eligible to return f) exited—neither completed nor dropped out. The details of the sub and sub-sub categories can be found in Appendix B.

The sub-sub categories (i.e. 3D.1, 3D.2) demonstrate how state systems can insert additional codes to meet their particular needs, but preserve the consistency of one exit code system. The broad categories and 23 sub-categories would stay consistent throughout all states, but the sub-sub categories would vary considerably.

Constructing one set of exit codes that meets the needs of every state might seem impossible. The possibilities for a student exiting are infinite, yet through consensus certain over-arching categories can be created. The federal framework presents a reasonable attempt to account for every student, with descriptions of every sub-category. “The Task Force’s goal was to construct a taxonomy that could account, at any point in time, for all students enrolled (or previously enrolled) in a particular school or district” (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006, p.2). This study uses this model because the goal of the Task Force aligns with the aim of this section, the construct of exit coding.

Figure 4.6: The Standard Student Exit Codes Taxonomy



The number of potential alternatives for exit codes is too numerous to attempt to arrange. Some codes are written loosely with multiple interpretations, or fraught with vagueness. It is possible, as in the case of New York State and New York City that they both have 28 subcategories, but they do not share the same 28 subcategories. In addition to the actual quantity of exit codes that varies across states and districts, the quality of the codes is also important.

In 2006, the number of state codes varied from 0 (Illinois) to 53 (Louisiana). The taxonomy of exit codes created by the task force (as shown in Figure 4.6, above) lists a total of 23 subcategories. It was designed to be used by any state because states may amend it to include a level below the sub-categories that fit the particular needs of their state. The Exit Codes task force produced a state by state chart of state codes and showed how it could be cross-walked

with each state. Through an iterative process, the Task Force identified 23 subcategories which “would be able to account successfully for 100 percent of its students” (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006, p. 2).

A Critical review of the Federal Framework

The federal framework which accounts for every student when examined more closely has two critical shortcomings. Firstly, it has several categories and codes where the content is ambiguous (i.e. parts of Category Four and all of Category Five). Secondly, a serious fault is the incompleteness of the recommendations it proposes. This incompleteness is acknowledged by the Task Force themselves “It (the taxonomy) does not address the following issues: computing or evaluating dropout, graduation, or completion rates” (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006, p. 2). A task force with the aim of helping “education agencies develop effective information systems for tracking the enrollment status of students” should have also made recommendations for the construction of a standardized graduation and dropout rate” (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006, p. 1).

A reconstruction of the federal framework which has six categories to represent the four categories is essential. Categories five and six in the federal framework should be eliminated. Most of the codes represent situations of students still enrolled but with special circumstances. A detailed analysis of these codes (see Table 4.1 and Table 4.2) highlights the ambiguity of meaning which potentially causes loopholes for districts.

Category five, with the exception of 5E, should be re-organized into Category 1. Category 1 should be titled: “Still Enrolled”. This new expanded category should contain those students still enrolled **both** within and outside of the district. The parts of category five all

contain students who are enrolled, but are temporarily not served by the school district. Code 5E does not belong in exit codes when dealing with secondary schools.

If the category must be preserved to indicate that those students are enrolled but not receiving services by the district, then the following analysis applies. Category five could be necessary for monitoring the status of students throughout their time in secondary programs. However, to construct school indicator rates, a time frame, grouping and exit coding must be decided.

Once the time frame has been decided, the cut-off date must be decided. Many districts are reporting cohort dropout rates that end the data collection period the last day of school, and some extend this time to include August graduates. At the end of the data collection period, Category five should be converted into the appropriate category (1, 2, 3, or 4). At the same time the question is posed, “Did the student graduate?” students previously in Category five should be queried, “Did the student re-enroll?”

Three possible paths exist for students previously recorded in category five. If they enrolled after their non-attendance regardless of the reason, then they should be assigned a new code in categories one, two, or four. If they have not re-enrolled, then they should be assigned the appropriate code in category three. For the cohort model, four year, five year, and six year rates are calculated. It will be the rare case that students in category five after the four yr rate is calculated will still be in the situation that caused them to belong to category five in the first place. If this is the situation that a student legitimately belongs to category five at the end of the collection period, then they should temporarily be placed in category one. This counts them in the data as still enrolled. After the data has been collected, then the student can be re-assigned to

category five for the following school year. Table 4.1 summarizes the re-framing of category five.

Table 4.1: Re-framing of Category Five

Federal Framework-- Old	Comment	Recommended---New
5A	Reason for non-attendance is the same: student not attending for disciplinary or other reasons	Category 1D
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5B	Medical condition prevents them from receiving services	Category 1E
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5C	Student still enrolled in a foreign exchange program	Category 1F
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5D	Student still enrolled in an early admission college program	Category 1G
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5E	n/a for school indicator rates for secondary schools	None

Category six should also be dissolved. Students that have died are truly the only circumstance that is neither completed nor dropped out. For accountability purposes, this category of students should be placed in the broad category of transfer with an asterisk. The asterisk acknowledges that this student should not be thought of as a transfer per se but as someone who has legitimately left the school system and can be removed from the cohort. Code 6B is simply confusing. Firstly it contains two different types of students, so they should have

had 6B.1 and 6B.2. The first “type” of student described in this code is someone who has completed school, and has returned to attain additional credentials and then exited without achieving those additional credentials.

The second type of student described in this code is someone who is beyond the age which the state guarantees a free, appropriate public education. This part of the Code 6B does not belong in a code set for secondary schools. The student should be referred to an appropriate adult education setting for further educational development. Table 4.2 summarizes the re-framing of category six.

Table 4.2: Re-framing of Category Six

Federal Framework -- Old	Comment	Recommended ---New
6A	Student did not transfer but they ‘exited’. Student is no longer attending and is legitimately removed from the cohort. Note: This is truly an ‘other’ category, but for accountability purposes, if grouped under ‘transfers’ it allows the school to remove the student from the cohort. The ‘exiter’ neither completed nor dropped out. Furthermore, it avoids the creation of another Category of ‘other’ that potentially could have several codes that do not belong.	Category 2D* *exited
6B	“Students have returned to school after receiving a completion credential and have subsequently exited school”, should have a temporary code of ‘still enrolled’. (federal framework, p.11)	1H
	“Students have returned after they reached the age until which the state guarantees a free, appropriate public education and have subsequently exited school ” (federal framework, p.11) Comment: if the student is older than 21 years old, they should not be allowed to re-enroll in a secondary program, they should be referred to an adult educational setting (i.e. G.E.D. programs).	None

Eliminating “Othering”

Is it simple? Does transfer, graduate, dropout and still enrolled encompass all students? Is there a reason for exclusion? The term, “other circumstances for ending enrollment” creates opportunity for “othering”. “Othering” conceptually creates a dichotomy of us/them, self/other, haves/have nots, etc.

Systems for exit codes traditionally have used “other reasons for ending enrollment” which creates an opening for legitimate and illegitimate. It artificially separates, those in these categories (similar to categories five and six), are *not* portrayed as a) still enrolled b) graduate c) transfer or d) dropout. They are other. They are separated, excluded (from statistics and responsibility), creating a sub-culture of “othering”.

Not setting parameters for who is excluded opens the pathway for districts and/or states to not be accountable for every student. As stated earlier, the only legitimate ‘other’ is a student that is deceased. Eliminating othering embraces inclusiveness and makes us responsible for *all* youth.

Formula

The conceptual framework for the construction of the high school dropout rate includes both the essential elements and the formula (see Figure 4.1). The general formula for calculating a dropout rate is dropouts/all students (adjusted). No universal definition exists for a dropout. Calculating the rate is the final step in producing the numerical percentage. “When the definition of dropout and the manner in which it is calculated are not consistent, comparisons are difficult to make, and when comparisons are made, interpretations may be faulty” (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004, p. 9).

The vital questions are: Who belongs in the numerator? Who counts as a dropout? Variations in the procedure of defining dropouts produce varying dropout rates. For example,

attendance procedures and absentee criterion might lead to coding a student as a dropout. Students that are chronically absent are truants, and eventually these long term absences will be reflected in the student being dropped from enrollment in the school.

Attendance policies for a particular district and/or state will determine the minimum number of days a student must be consecutively absent before they are re-assigned as a dropout. Different states and/or districts range from 15 to 45 days of unexcused absences (Lehr et al., 2004). The length of time from being still enrolled to be re-categorized as a dropout has an impact on who counts as a dropout. A student moves from the denominator to the numerator when calculating the dropout rate. If calculating the graduation rate, this same student (with repeated unexcused absences) would always be counted in the denominator. As this example shows, a variation in the length of time would influence the calculation of the dropout rate but not influence the graduation rate.

The other indispensable questions for the formula are: Who counts in the denominator? Who is included? Who is excluded? In creating the adjustments to the beginning cohort of ninth graders, several variations exist among states and/or districts. It is important to be able to *clearly* identify by exit code system who is included and what category they belong to. This exit code system *must* also include who can count as an exception, (answering the question, “Who is excluded?”).

Dynamic

In one sense, standardizing exit codes implies a fixed notion of who counts. However, the idea that these exit codes are static and unchangeable is false. There should be a continuous evaluation of the appropriateness of future standardized exit codes to the time period in which those exit codes are being implemented.

Once one consistent, well-defined, standardized, mandated student exit code taxonomy is in place, then this taxonomy should be periodically reviewed. The need of the student exit codes taxonomy to be dynamic is evident in our rapidly changing technological era. Some codes will be outdated, and other new codes introduced.

One illustration of the need to view the construction of the high school dropout rate as a dynamic process is who counts as a graduate. Questioning the institution that gives out a high school diploma and its value will inevitably be an issue that needs to be resolved. As technology advances, the notion of what it means to graduate from high school will expand. So far, the majority of students finish with either a local diploma or a GED diploma.

The rise of virtual and/or online high schools needs to now be discussed as a policy question to determine whether these types of institutions will count as a regular high school diploma. Data supports the increase of these types of high schools. “Over half of the states currently have some form of state-run virtual school, with additional state programs in the planning stage” (Rose, 2007, p.1).

As a matter of policy, how do these students differ from traditional graduates? Michigan is one of the first states to pass legislation with the graduation class of 2010, requiring “an online learning experience as a prerequisite to high school graduation” (Rose, 2007, p.1). Do we want to code these students differently, in order to track the sub-category of students who graduate from virtual high schools?

When educational statistics, such as dropout rates, graduation rates, and completion rates, finally become comparable and more accurate, the concern should then be on keeping them up to date with the changing society. The dynamic nature of reasons student ends enrollment, and our definition of what it means to graduate or not graduate high school is unavoidable. We must

build into an accountability system, a systematic method for periodic review of the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Conclusion

This chapter mapped the essential elements by identifying constructs necessary to create a high school dropout rate. My explanation of the essential elements was framed by using decision analysis as a conceptual tool. Each of the three constructs: time frame, grouping and exit coding, are part of the general derivation for computing any dropout rate. In addition, a formula must be defined for calculating the high school dropout rate. A critical review and subsequent re-structuring of the federal framework showed the necessity of code categorizations.

Why? Why the detail? Several reasons exist why accurate student enrollment, exit code data, and defining who counts are needed. A few are “equitable distribution of funds to schools; effective policy decisions about instructional programs, dropout prevention strategies, and graduation requirements; fair determination of a school’s participation rate on tests administered for accountability purposes; and correct and comparable calculations of completion and dropout rates” (National Forum on Education Statistics (U.S.), 2006, p. 1). The rest of this study will investigate various assessments of the current ways in which dropout rates are constructed. The following chapter is a comparative analysis of the ending enrollment codes of all 50 states. It will also show the relationship states have with their districts regarding decisions of creating exit code taxonomies.

Chapter 5

State Exit Code Variations

Introduction

Educational policies primarily fall under the state rights category. Historically, states have delegated power to the districts to oversee the local education agencies. The degree of power varies among the political, economical, racial, and social history of each state. Increasingly, over the last few decades, the federal government has played a more significant and expanded role in mandating rules, definitions, and regulations. This is creating a historical precedence with the involvement of several government bodies in creating educational policies.

In the 1980s, schools were beginning to create and develop their longitudinal data systems. Most states developed their data systems independently of each other to meet their state-specific needs. “There was no federal body that guided system development in a coordinated way that would produce 50 state systems with common characteristics. Thus, data systems vary greatly across the states” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 77).

In the mid-2000’s, due to an unprecedented shift towards accountability, a common metric was sought to enable comparisons across states and districts. Despite efforts to standardize the way that students are identified and rates are constructed, “differences among state data systems and state laws can still affect the estimates” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 78).

The construction of rates (graduation, completion and dropout) represents an educational policy that can involve actors from all levels of policy-making including the school, the district, state, and federal. One necessary component to the construction of these rates is the student exit code system. Each code represents a distinct circumstance under which the student exited from their particular cohort. This chapter examines the variations of state student exit codes. It also

compares and contrasts the essential elements of constructing the high school dropout rate among a select group of states.

What is the current state of the relationship between states and their school districts regarding the authority of exit code system development? Do states mandate, recommend, provide general guidance (but not specific codes), or leave it to the discretion of the district? From state to state what variations exist in the exit codes for individual students? Does the variation facilitate or disrupt the process of standardized and comparability across states?

Relationship Between State and District

Each state determines the extent to which the school districts can determine their own educational policy. This fluctuates between extremes of one size fits all and freedom expressed in the uniqueness of each individual school. What is the New York City school district relationship to New York State with respect to student exit codes? Should there be opportunity for individuality or can one standard fill the needs of everyone?

New York City has developed a unique set of codes from the recommended New York State Exit Code system. Part of this study investigated the frequency by which districts have the right to create their own student exit codes. All states were queried with the following: “For your state, the state exit code system is _____ to the local education agencies (e.g. districts). Do you a) required/mandated, b) optional/recommended, c) provides general guidance (but not specific codes), or d) left to the discretion of the district?”. The results are shown below (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: State Relationship to the districts regarding exit codes

Multiple Choice Option	Results
a) require/mandated	27
b) optional/recommended	10
c) provide general guidance (but not specific codes)	0
d) leave to the discretion of the district	1
Total=	38 (75% response rate)

The table above (Table 5.1) shows that the majority of the states require their public school districts to submit to their state system with their state exit codes. The difficulty interpreting these results is based on what the question implied but did not directly pose. A few states expanded their answer to include what the local education agencies (LEAs) can do regarding their own use of exit codes. For example, Alaska responded with “In Alaska we require a set of exit codes that districts are required to report to the state agency. They are not required to maintain those codes exclusively in their own management information systems” (E. McCormick, personal communication, March 10, 2011). In other words, “the schools can add their own codes” (M. Vignati, personal communication, March 22, 2011).

District of Columbia was the only respondent that chose “left to the discretion of the district” (choice (d)). DC-OSSE represents the most recent state agency that is implementing a standard set of codes for the very first time. In December 2007, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (DC-OSSE) of the District of Columbia was awarded a grant of approximately five million dollars from the US Department of Education’s Longitudinal Data Systems. This project facilitated the creation of Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED) which beginning in the school year 2011/2012 the school districts will be required to use a standardized exit code set. Before this the “DC-OSSE accepts the codes that

are used by each LEA. We collect exits and withdrawals in the aggregate” (N. Sharkey, personal correspondence, April 4, 2011).

A question which would require further research is “Are schools/districts/LEAs allowed to add/modify/create their own set of codes?” This question is responded to in the state of Delaware “...if they add a code they must align it with a state equivalency code” (D. Stover, personal communication, March 30, 2011).

Besides the uncertainty of which exit codes the school districts are using, schools could use one method for internal use and another one for reporting purposes. If schools do create their own rates (graduation, completion and dropout), do they have to get approval? When New York City reports their dropout rate, are they using their own set of internal exit codes, or are they using the state exit codes?

In the case of New York City, they have their own unique set of codes and exit code system. Dataquest from the NYS Education Department responded to the following e-mail inquiry:

“I have a question regarding the interpretation of NYSED policy/ data definitions/guidelines. In reviewing New York City's graduation rates, it appears they have created their own set of ending enrollment codes. My question is: Did New York City DOE receive special permission or a waiver from using the State ending enrollment codes? Is it common practice among other districts to not use the recommended State ending enrollment codes? (link to the codes to which I am referring to <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/sirs/uias.html> (last updated April 2009.)

The response is as follows:

“Thank you for your inquiry. Local districts student management systems may use different codes than the SED codes but any local enrollment codes that they made up would have to map to a State code in order to load to the state student information repository”. (M. Shahen, personal correspondence, April 30, 2010)

New York State is one example of the complexity of the relationship between district and state. The power of which entity can create/modify educational policy is important to the construction of the high school dropout rate. Even though a majority (71 percent) of states *requires* districts to upload to their state system a standardized set of codes, many still *recommend* (not mandate) that state codes are used in the local school system. This gives local school districts the latitude to add or modify without accountability.

State Exit Code Variations

All fifty states and the District of Columbia student exit codes were gathered, coded and analyzed. A chart (see Appendix C) organizes the responses received regarding the exit code information. It has the name of the state, the e-mail address and the response received. Two states, Ohio and Wisconsin, did not respond with the requested information. The researcher found both student exit code taxonomies on their respective websites. Ohio’s *FY 2011 Ohio Department of Education EMIS Manual, Chapter 2: Reporting Student Data* was found at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=367&ContentID=81872&Content=112452> on March 29th, 2011 at 4:57pm. Wisconsin’s Exit Type Data Collection and Reporting was found at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/lbstat/dataexit.html> on April 2nd, 2011 at 5:08pm.

The following data and document analysis results from the primary source of each state's exit code. Furthermore, the District of Columbia is included for analytical purposes as a state hence the following use of "51 or all states".

In analyzing all 51 states, *all* have codes (albeit worded differently) that clearly signify all possible categories: a) still enrolled b) died c) transfers d) dropouts and e) graduates. This information confirms and expands the results of the sixth annual state analysis, *Data for Action 2010*, survey study conducted by the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) for Element 8 of the 10 Essential Elements.

The Essential Elements are aspects of each states longitudinal data system which are necessary to building and using quality data system. Element 8 is "Student-Level Graduation and Dropout Data" and both this study and the DQC study show that all states collect student level data for a variety of reasons why students leave school.

The range of the raw number of codes is from six codes (North Carolina) to ninety-two codes (Delaware). The average number of codes is twenty-six. Some but not all have the following codes: missing, unknown, GED, incarcerated, home schooled, and other. In addition, some explicitly provide the corresponding cohort status category (overarching category). What are the variations across states? In what ways, if any, do these variations impact the construction of the dropout rate?

The organization of the codes between states is strikingly haphazard, as there are glaring differences among the states. The structure of naming the codes varies between numeric, alpha, and alpha-numeric. A number of states include two additional columns (beside code and description) of definition/explanation and cohort status category. The title of the information about coding students' membership varies: regular enrollment and withdrawal codes,

exit/withdrawal type, exit/movement codes, end status codes, exit reason code, exit status, enrollment end status, school exit withdrawal code, ending enrollment code, cumulative ADM leaver and completer codes, leaver reason code, student completion/exit status, and withdrawal status.

Unexcused absences is a surprisingly scarce code across states yet variability still exists in the definition behind when this code must be used. Only one third of the states (6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 24, 29, 31, 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 46, 47, and 49) have a code uniquely designated for unexcused absences. Two crucial differences exist in the implementation of “unexcused absences”.

Firstly, the minimum number of days of consecutive unexcused absences varies between states. Some states allow a student to remain on the roster as a long term absence twice as long as other states. Colorado has a minimum of ten days and New York has a minimum of 20 days. Most states have a minimum number between ten and twenty. Virginia represents a state with fifteen.

Secondly, not all states mandate that the student *must* be dropped from the roll book after the minimum number of unexcused absences has been reached. Some states have built into their longitudinal data system a requirement that the student is automatically withdrawn once they have reached the designated required of days.

For example, New York City keeps students beyond the twenty days in order to continue to use all available resources in order to locate the missing student. Below is a quote from the Paul Robeson community, in response to low attendance rates in pursuit of not closing the school (November 22nd, 2010):

Paul Robeson High School has forty-seven students (approximately half of these students have IEPs) identified as long term absences (LTAs). The DOE makes it very difficult to remove these students from the cohort despite extenuating circumstances. Even when the proper documentation is submitted to the appropriate office, the students are not removed from the cohort for a variety of reasons. We are working diligently to hold the mandated interviews with these students and to counsel them into other programs. Staff members volunteer to assist the attendance teacher by visiting homes on weekends and evenings. (Paul Robeson Community, 2010, p. 8)

The analysis of two highlighted differences in the timing of who must be dropped from the roll and counted as a dropout due to consecutive unexcused absences alters “in the number of days” required when the student counts as a dropout. If at the end of four years, the student is not dropped even though they have been absent over a month they are not calculated as a dropout. The following school year they are dropped for unexcused absences. This only affects the five year dropout rate if such a rate is calculated. The calculation of a five year dropout rate is not mandatory; it is optional. Potentially, students can be “ghost” students on school books, and not be recorded as a dropout until after the four year dropout rate has been calculated.

Different Codes

The state of Indiana contains exit codes that vary in their articulation of the over-arching categorization. Indiana has two reports one for dropouts/mobility codes and the other for graduate codes. An examination of exit type for codes (dropout or mobility) 00-31, 33-34 is found below (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Indiana’s variance of codes and categories

Indiana’s Exit Type Code	Overarching Category	Indiana’s Categorization
00	Still Enrolled	None
21	Died	Student Mobility
19	Transfers	Student Mobility
01-18 except 10	Dropouts	Student Dropout
01-18, graduation report	Graduates	Graduate (different report)
19-31, and 10	None (mixture of above)	Student Mobility
33-34 (32 has been removed)	None (mixture of above)	Other Exit Type Codes

Indiana has an overarching category called “Student Mobility” which does not exist in any other state. It is a concoction of fourteen codes that do not count as a dropout. Some are legitimate: transferred, removed by parents, deceased, transferred out of state, and earned GED. Other codes in student mobility deserve a conversation as to whether they should be categorized as dropouts: poor health, missing, and religious beliefs.

The rest of the mobility codes are questionable depending on the validity of counting them or not counting them as dropouts. If each individual student has been registered in a secondary school/program that leads to a high school diploma then there should be a data trail to verify registration. If this cannot be verified, then by default the student should be counted as a dropout. Examples are a) incarcerated or placed by court order in Department of Child Services b) placement by court order c) enrollment in a virtual school, d) transferred out of state and e) foreign exchange student. (Indiana Department of Education, 2011)

Student Mobility is one example of a bizarre categorization, parallel to New York City’s categorization of discharges. It allows the exemption of students who should not be exempt. It is a mishmash of all of the overarching categories (still enrolled, transfers, died, dropouts) except graduates. Graduates is the only category clearly defined nationally. It stipulates who can and who cannot be included in the category. Threats to the validity of exit codes occur for all the

other categories due to loose guidelines. Indiana's student mobility code category is a prime example of non-standardization by which students are allowed to be exempt from being calculated as a dropout.

Some variations are numerous, but not necessarily problematic for the standardization/validity of the construction of the dropout rate. This section ends with an analysis of three examples of ridiculously vague codes. Ultimately, having clear and well-defined codes, understanding who is included and excluded is the path to a consistent construction of dropout rates.

The state of West Virginia has marriage, pregnancy, and marriage/pregnancy all as *different* codes (Codes 10, 11, and 12, respectively). Yet, a majority of the states (80 percent) do not have one code specifically designated for pregnancy. Some states have one code that encompasses all dropouts and others have several codes for more specific primary reasons for students exit from school.

A few different states conflate the usage of other. The state of Washington has "Other" (dropped out, but reason unknown), (code D0) and unknown (code U1). What circumstance would warrant one code versus the other? It is possible, that unknown refers to when a student is missing and their location is unknown. Yet, the following examples rules out the above possibility for the state of Indiana: a) "Missing but Located" (Code 17), which is different than both similar codes "Unknown or No Shows" not reported missing, b) cannot be located and no transcripts requested (Code 14) and c) "Missing" (cannot be located within boundaries and have been reported to the Clearinghouse for information on Missing Children (Code 26).

The last example demonstrates not just confusion of loosely worded codes, but also the category of the same code is different. In Indiana, a student dropout code is *court ordered* (code

13) and a student mobility code is *placement by court order* (code 23). The dropout court ordered code explains that the student is ordered to drop out of school by the court which has jurisdiction over the student. No explanation is given for the mobility code of placement by court order.

This section illustrated a few variations of the naming of the codes between the states. Many more exist. The confusion, overlapping, vague codes could cause problems in appropriately coding a student that exits school. The following analysis breaks down the variation of the same code used in different overarching categories depending on the state.

Cohort Status Variations

This section will discuss consistencies and inconsistencies of cohort status categorization of certain exit codes. The graduating class of 2011 has one in every five non-graduates nationwide which are found within twenty-five individual school systems. These twenty-five school systems are found in just fifteen states. (Diploma Counts, 2011)

An in-depth analysis of the top five of these states (highest absolute numbers of dropouts) was completed. This analysis goes beyond simply what are the variations between the states. It answers for these states the question “Who is exempt?” It reveals that the same code (group of students) depending on the state will count groups of students as dropouts while other states will exempt the same group of students.

New York, California, Nevada, Florida, and Illinois were the five states with the highest absolute number of dropouts. The range of the absolute number of exit codes was 34 (CA) and 19 (IL). Yet, Nevada has the most codes that count as dropout and Illinois has the lowest. A state comparison of the schematic of their exit code system is presented below (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: State comparison of similar codes and varying categories

	NY	CA	NV (09-10)	FL	IL
Total Number of Exit Codes	30	34	33	33	19
How many codes count as dropouts?	7	10	19	8	4
Dropout Rate? For what grades	9-12	7-12	9-12	KG-12	Elementary or secondary education
Compulsory Attendance age	16 years, each district can extend the age	18 (inclusive)	17	16	16 (exceptions made for employment)

(National Center for School Engagement, 2003)

Many of the codes that appeared as possible threats to the validity of the dropout rate and other frequently occurring codes within the dropout category were analyzed. (See Table 5.4) Expulsion occurs in all of the five states. Incarcerated as its own separate code occurs in New York, California and Nevada but not in Florida, and Illinois. Similarly, transfer to an institution, occurs in New York, and California but not Nevada, Florida, or Illinois.

There is one code, court ordered, that does appear in four out of the five states (not in Illinois), but it appears in varying categorizations. New York codes a student that is court ordered as *other circumstance for ending enrollment*, California as a *transfer*, Nevada and Florida both code court order as a *dropout*. Court Order flows into different overarching categories depending on the state and individual school system.

Table 5.4: Common codes analyzed by existence and code categorization

	NY	CA	NV	FL	IL
‘court order’	Code 323, Other*	Code T165, Transfer	Code W3 (a) vi, Dropout	Code W13, Dropout	X
‘Incarcerated’	Code 8338, Other, Code 323, Other	Code T370, Transfer T380, Dropout ‘justice system’	Code W3(c) iii, Dropout	X	X
Transfer to an Institution	Has 3 codes, code 153, code 323, code 8338	T370, Transfer T380, Dropout	X	X	X
Expulsion	Code 408, Dropout	E300, dropout T165, Transfer	Code W3 (c) I, Dropout	Code W21, Dropout	Code 08

Note: NY abbreviated “other” category equals “other circumstance for ending enrollment”

A number of codes have the potential to blend into more than one overarching category. As our society changes, school systems undertake reforms that tinker towards utopia. High stakes exit exams are an example of a reform tide that has swept over more than half of the country. Students who complete their high school requirements but have not passed the exit exam, cannot graduate with a regular high school diploma.

A few states have now amended their code system to include a separate code for students who complete their requirements except the exit exam. California (Code E230) and Florida (Code W08) both have a unique code for this and the other three states do not. Nevertheless, California categorizes this student as a *dropout*, while Florida identifies the student as a *completer*. This example demonstrates the need for one of the recommendations from this project: continuous revisiting and amendments of codes so that the code system stays relevant with the current educational tides.

Two other similar yet different codes that arise in different categories are transferred to “alternative” programs and transferred to a “GED program” (or other adult education program). “Alternative” programs signify a range of programs that vary from state to state. New York (Code 289), California (Code T167), and Illinois (Code 01) have a unique code for transfer to alternative program but Nevada and Florida do not. Of the three states that do, California and Illinois count them as transfers and New York State does not categorizes them as a transfer, but as other circumstance for ending enrollment.

All of the five states used for this analysis have at least one unique code that is not found in any of the other four states. The New York code “left school previously counted as a dropout” is unique to its coding system. (Code 357) The California code “student was pre-enrolled but never attended the school and does not fit the criteria of exit code N-240” is unique to its coding system. (Code N470) The Nevada code “withdrawn: known not to be attending k-12 school, apprenticeship in accordance with NRS 392.110” is unique to its coding system. (Code W3 (a) viii) The Florida code “any student who graduated from school with a special diploma based on option two—mastery of employment and community competencies” is unique to its coding system. (Code W27) Finally, the Illinois code “medical non-compliance: student removed because their immunization and physical data are not available to the school by the required deadline” is unique. (Code 13) The unique codes are found in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5: Examples of unique codes

State	Code	Description
New York	357	left school previously counted as a dropout
California	N470	student was pre-enrolled but never attended the school and does not fit the criteria of exit code N-240
Nevada	W3 (a) viii	withdrawn: known not to be attending k-12 school, apprenticeship in accordance with NRS 392.110
Florida	W27	any student who graduated from school with a special diploma based on option two-mastery of employment and community competencies
Illinois	13	medical non-compliance: student removed because their immunization and physical data are not available to the school by the required deadline

Interestingly, Nevada’s unique code does appear in a few other states (same connotation but different language). NRS 392.110 is in reference to a significant Supreme Court ruling of religion in the public school. Wisconsin vs. Yoder (1972) involved the Old Order Amish and ruled that the Free Exercise Clause limited the state’s power to require children to attend school. Hence, practicing parents may remove their children after the eighth grade from the public school system (Lupu, Masci, Tuttle, & Kirschner Berz, 2007).

This “special” case still exists today. The withdrawal of these children who could be as young as 14 years old is not included in the district’s dropout count. The youth of Amish are

cited for then pursuing apprenticeship models of education. However, this early withdrawal severely diminishes their ability to integrate into society.

Though Nevada was the only state of the five used in the analysis that had a code for religion, a few other states also have similar codes that exempt students from being counted as dropouts on that basis. In Ohio, “Withdrew pursuant to Yoder vs. Wisconsin” (code #47) are not included in the district’s dropout count. Maryland has a code called “special cases”. The explanation given for special cases is as follows, “other reasons with superintendent’s approval; for students under 16 years of age; this code may be used for students who withdraw in grade 8 for religious reasons”. (Code 42) South Dakota has a code: “Colony student > grade 8 — religious exemption” (Code: 09). There are a few other states that also have a code for religious exemption. “Some states recognize these beliefs and exempt these students from compulsory attendance; others do not and consider these students “dropouts”” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2006, p. 17).

How would the dropout rate of the states that have a population of Amish families, be affected if this code was to be categorized as dropout? A unanimous decision was reached by the Supreme Court decision of Yoder vs. Wisconsin. This decision did not protect the child’s best interest. It is simply, the parents vs. the state. If they choose not to follow the religious pathway of their parents, then they are significantly behind educationally due to early withdrawal.

This is another example of complexity and overlapping of responsibilities, decision-making and accountability at different levels of policy making. Yes, the Supreme Court ruling allows for special cases, but they do not specify that the withdrawal of these children be counted

or not counted as a dropout, withdrawal, transfer or other. In rethinking the construction of the high school dropout rate all students must be accounted for in the taxonomy of coding.

Finally, subtle differences in method will result in possible loopholes for variation in the membership of the cohort. The final example of variation is the case of double entry. Some states allow for duplicate or double entry. The DOE in the state of South Dakota has approved places that students can be counted as double entries for a period up to nine months.

There is a need for periodic review in order to keep the exit codes current. It is not possible to consider all loopholes, and states are skillful in manipulating data. This study suggests in great detail possible threats to the validity of the high school dropout rate. Another example not yet presented but needs to be considered is double entries.

Comparing NYC to the states

In Chapter Five, three themes that could potentially violate the validity of the dropout rate in the NYC school district were identified: 1) discharges 2) GED3) incarceration. Do all states have at least one code that mentions one of the above categories? If so, is it consistent in meaning between the states?

Discharge

Discharge (in reference to withdrawals) is a peculiar word referring to a unique category. It does not exist in any of the state withdrawal codes, including the state of New York. Due to its bizarre usage for accounting for students' whereabouts, there are no corresponding words that are equivalent in connotation to discharge. The other themes, GED and incarceration, do have similar terms, adult education program and correctional institution/justice system/court ordered, respectively. Adult education program is a general term where GED represents a particular type

of adult education program. Correctional institution/justice system/court ordered are all terms that have slightly different meaning but are used interchangeably with incarceration.

GED

GED which is technically an acronym for General Educational Development (GED) has morphed into various other meanings. A number of states have codes specifically mentioning these elusive meanings. As discussed in Chapter Five, there is a blurring of secondary and adult educational programs, especially when GED level work is accepted for secondary level credentialing. It appears that “alternative schools” for under credited youth are a hybrid of secondary and adult education.

How should one categorize a student in pursuit of their GED diploma? Are they considered a dropout, even though they are still attending educational classes? Is their attendance and performance, monitored by a secondary school system?

For this analysis, the percentage of states that have a separate or unique code containing the phrase GED or adult was analyzed. GED reference to completion of obtained diplomas (i.e. ‘Non Graduate – Exited with a document other than a diploma – GED, Alabama, Completion Code 09) are excluded.

Thirty states (59 percent) have a unique code containing GED and/or adult. Twenty-one states (41 percent) do not. This accounts for GED and/or adult being mentioned in the title of the code. It is possible that in the explanation of a particular code, the words GED and /or adult appear. Also, non-diploma program was too general to be included in this search, because it could be a reference for several other programs besides GED program, such as Job Corp or vocational programs.

Of the thirty states that do have this theme, the following is a breakdown of the codes.

- GED only: sixteen states (AZ, AR, CO, CT, IL, KY, ME, MN, MS, MO, NV, NM, NY, RI, VT, WY)
- adult only: thirteen states (CA, DC, FL, GA, ID, KS, LA, MA, MI, NJ, OK, OR, SC)
- Both GED and adult as separate codes: one state (UT)
- None of the above: twenty-one states (AL, AK, DE, HI, IN, IA, MD, MT, NE, NH, NC, ND, OH, PA, SD, TN, TX, VA, WA, WV, WI)

Of the sixteen states that have GED as a separate and unique code, there is disarray in the overarching category with which the code would be placed in order to calculate the dropout rate. Dropout (Illinois, Code 10), transfer (Mississippi, Code T7), and other (Colorado, code 70) are all relevant overarching categories applicable to this one ambiguous theme, GED/adult. For example, Utah has a code that simply says GED (Utah, Code GE). What does that mean? The student enrolled in a GED program, the student received their GED certificate, the student dropped out in order to pursue their GED, or something else?

Federal regulation does not identify GED recipients as graduates who are awarded a regular diploma. The state of Ohio Department of Education gives an explanation for the reporting of a GED student:

Ohio law does not recognize the GED as an Ohio graduation diploma. ... The GED is offered through the Adult Education system. He/she must exit the K-12 education system in order to pursue a GED. When this happens, the district is required to withdraw the student. The student is exiting the district without receiving an Ohio diploma and is therefore considered a dropout. (p. 43)

Finally, Massachusetts, has two similar codes, “Transferred – Adult diploma program, leading to MA diploma” (Code 24), and “Dropout--- Enrolled in a non-diploma granting adult education program” (Code 30). Another state, New York, offers GED classes within certain

school systems during the day (Code 153 and 289). A blurring of adult and secondary school programs is evident in both Massachusetts and New York.

Incarceration

Incarceration has closely related words that appear in many state codes. For this analysis, a search for the following terms was performed a) incarcerated/incarceration b) correctional institution c) justice system. (See Table 5.6) Other terms are too general to be included in the analysis. For example terms such as court ordered and institution. Court order could refer to foster care placement or temporary detention or incarceration. Institution could refer to military, mental health, care shelters, Job Corps, and/or justice system.

Table 5.6: State by state analysis of the occurrence of the code “incarcerated/incarceration”

	‘incarcerated/incarceration’	Correctional institution/adjudication	Has at least two terms/codes	None
State	AR, DE, GA, IN, MA, MI, NJ, NY,	CO, MN, OH, PA,	HI, KS, LA, NV, SC Depending on age, 17 years, or programs with or without an educational program...	AL, AK, AZ, CA, CT, DC, FL, ID, IL, IA, KY, ME, MD, MS, MO, MT, NE, NH, NM, NC, ND, OK, OR, RI, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY
Total Number	8	4	5	34

California has two codes that succinctly address the problem of how to account for incarcerated youth. Both begin with “Student withdrew from/left school and entered an institution that is not primarily academic (military, Job Corps, justice system, etc.) and is/is not in a secondary program leading toward a high school diploma. (Code T370/T380, California)

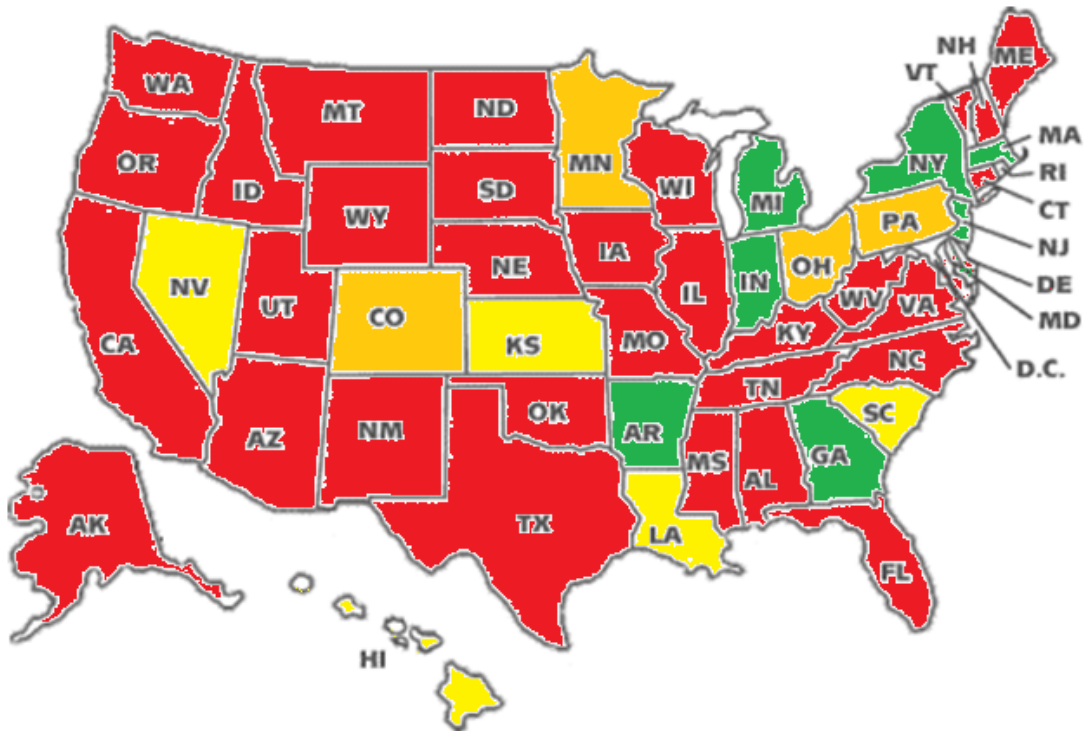
On the other hand, Massachusetts categorizes all incarcerated students as dropouts. “Dropout – Incarcerated, district no longer providing educational services” (Massachusetts, Code

33) A number of states (Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, etc.) count incarcerated students under the overarching category of dropouts.

In the most recent version (2010-11) of the New York State Student Information Repository System (SIRS) Manual, New York State has added the following code to their reasons for ending enrollment: “Incarcerated student, no participation in a program culminating in a regular diploma”. (Code 8338) This code is found under the overarching category “Other Circumstance for Ending Enrollment.” This code for incarcerated youth is not found under the category “Transfers to other schools” or “Dropouts”. This peculiar, particular code (Code 8338) did not exist in the 2009-2010 version of NYS ending enrollment codes.

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) surveyed all states and reported that forty states have the element “incarcerated” in their student level graduation and dropout data. Admittedly, states do collect a variety of reasons that student leave school. Yet, the misleading nature of transparency must be questioned. In this analysis, of the 51 states, only 34 have no code that explicitly ciphers students that have been incarcerated. In fact, 17 states have a separate code that clearly identifies the population of incarcerated youth (See Table 5.6). Figure 5.2 shows the spread of chaos regarding one code that has a huge impact on comparability of dropout codes. The clarity of the gathering, reporting, and analyzing of these essential elements for the construction of the high school dropout rate is clouded.

Figure 5.2: Variation of the use or non-use of ‘incarceration’ exit code found in State Exit Code Systems, A State by State Comparison



- ◇ Green States = incarcerated/ incarceration
- ◇ Dark Yellow States = Correctional institution/ adjudication
- ◇ Light Yellow States = Has at least two terms/codes
- ◇ Dark Red States = None

This section compared New York City’s three most problematic coding categories with several states coding taxonomies. New York City’s category of discharge is unique to New York City, not even New York State mentions discharges. The two other categories, GED and incarcerated/incarceration vary widely across all of the states. Several important clarifications are needed in order to re-organize the current non-common standards of the student exit codes for these categories (GED and incarcerated/incarceration).

Conclusion

Whose responsibility is it to ensure a framework of consistency in defining student standard exit codes for all of the states? The lack of consistency, as shown in this chapter, in constructing dropout rate calculations undermines the comparability and reliability of the dropout rate. How codes and code categorization of exiting student outcomes is vital to accounting for all students and not losing a few.

If there is this much variance between states, one can imagine the difficulty in determining the codes within a single state. The confluence of differing levels of government input into the decision-making process leads to a discombobulated system. The following chapter is a case study of the New York City school district.

Chapter 6

Specific Case of New York City's Dropout Rate

Introduction

This chapter explains in great detail how New York City constructs their high school dropout rate. A rate does not simply appear naturally; it has to be constructed by someone or an entity. Who are the decision makers? Who *decides* who counts in the denominator? Is it the same for most districts or is New York City a unique case?

Since 1870 in the US, the percentage of graduates receiving diplomas has been calculated (Swanson, 2010). Within NYC, the earliest year of reporting cohort classes is 1986, where NYC has reported a high school graduation, still enrolled, and dropout rate. “The Department of Education has studied cohort classes through the seventh and final year beginning with the Class of 1986” (Research and Policy Support Group, 2010, p.1). Over the years, the process has been revised to more accurately reflect a better approximation of the rates.

Moving from the general to the specific, it becomes necessary to show, more specifically, how one district within New York State constructs their high school dropout rate. The essential elements of this method are as follows: (a) the construct of time frame (b) grouping (c) exit coding are detailed using New York City as the specific example. Certain themes (discharges, GED and incarceration) also affect NYC's method of accounting for students. In addition, a silent group of students—the disappeared—is a factor of the construction of the high school dropout rate for NYC schools.

The construct of time frame

New York City collects and reports dropout rates for the construct of time frame using all of the alternatives as described in the general derivation section. (See Table 6.1 below) Some of these rates are much more apparent than others. Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former

Chancellor Joel Klein in discussing the eighth consecutive year of gains in graduation rates also mentioned that the dropout rate has been cut nearly in half since 2005. According to their announcement the dropout rate fell “to a new low of 11.8 percent—a decline of 10.2 points since 2005” (New York City Department of Education, 2011).

Table 6.1: NYC’s application of the construct of ‘time frame’^{6 7}

Construct of Time Frame	“Dropout” Percentage for the Class of 2006	“Dropout” Percentage for the Class of 2009
1 year (Event)	6.9%, 2005-2006	3.2%, 2008-2009
4 year	14.7%*	11.3%**
5 year	20.8%*	n/a
6 year	23.1*	n/a
7 year	23.7*	n/a
Final	24.5*	n/a

Year 1: (Assessment and Accountability, 2007); The rest: (Research and Policy Support Group, 2010); Class 2009: (New York City Department of Education, 2010).

New York City records unprecedented declines in the dropout rate, in which they refer to the four-year rate. However, the “New York City public school population has unique needs that require students to take longer to complete their education” (Research and Policy Support Group 2010, p.12), and should allow for recognition of students who complete high school beyond the

⁶ A total of 17344 (20.3 percent) students had been discharged after four years; this number increased by 1610 to 18954 (22.2 percent) at the end of seven years. Discharged students are not included in the calculations found above in Table 6.1.

⁷ A total of 16979 (21 percent) students had been discharged after four years. Discharged students are not included in the calculation found above in Table 6.1.

traditional, four-year academic sequence (18-year-olds). Particularly, noteworthy are New York City high school students who are:

- 1) Over age (“19.6 percent of the students in the Class of 2006 completed their high school education after their expected graduation date”)
- 2) English language learners (“Particularly noteworthy was the very high percentage of ELL students who were still enrolled in high school after four years and went on to earn a degree within the next three years. This brought their final graduation rate closer to that of non-ELL students that it was after four years.”)
- 3) Special Education designated (“It has been noted in previous reports that special education programs are designed to provide services until students are 21 years old. Thus, four-year expected graduation rates are not necessarily relevant to students in special education classes and programs.”)

Source: (Research and Policy Support Group, 2010)

The construct of time frame when reported as an annual dropout rate shows a relatively low rate when compared to other time frame constructs (four to seven years). For the Class of 2006, the five year dropout rate (20.8 percent) is more than three times the annual (one year) dropout rate (6.9 percent). In this last example of comparing a five year rate versus a one year rate, it is imperative to understand that this construct does not measure the same population of students. The five-year rate gathers its data from one cohort longitudinally. The one-year rate collects data from a cross-section of all grades.

In conclusion, this construct is crucial to understanding if districts and states are measuring the same population over time. New York City is one of the districts that has made the shift to predominately referring to a cohort dropout rate. Other cities and states, still insist on

using the annual dropout rate as its predominate construct of time frame. Wyoming is one of the states that instruct the districts to use the construct of time frame in the following way: “Dropout rates are based on a single year of data while graduation rates are high school cohort rates, or based on four years of data” (Wyoming Department of Education, 2009, p.22).

The construct of grouping

New York City collects and reports dropout rates using two out of the five alternatives (Refer to Table 6.2). The construct of grouping is intertwined with the construct of time frame. Upon comparing Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, there are differences that will show different types of dropout rates.

Table 6.2: NYC’s application of the construct of grouping.

Construct of Grouping	Class of 2009
Age (Status)	n/a
Class	3.2%, 2008-2009
High School Cohort	11.3%
Secondary Cohort	n/a
k-12	n/a

NYC does not report the dropout rate based on the construct grouping of age (chronological) also known as the status dropout rate. However, NYC does report their dropout rate disaggregated by a category called “Age for Grade on Entry into High School”. This category defines “over-age” as a student who has or would reach age nineteen by 2009.

The construct of grouping specifically for New York City has only two implemented rates. Yet, if one expands the unit of analysis to include New York State and further to include the United States of America then rates exist for three of the five alternatives. These both include data from New York City as well as other districts and states. In 2005, the national event dropout rate was 2.1 percent for 15- through 16-year-olds, 2.4 percent of 17-year-olds, 9.1 percent of 19-year-olds, and 24.4 percent of 20- through 24-year-olds (Laird et al., 2007).

The construct of exit coding

The New York City Department of Education, Office of School & Youth Development, reports their taxonomy of codes in the publication “Transfer, Discharge, and Graduation Code Guidelines”. The most recent revision was created for the 2010-2011 school year. This document was obtained by a request for the latest publication from the NYC DOE. This newest document cannot be used in the analysis because there are no data values for the 2010-2011 graduating class. My analysis uses the most recent data from the Class of 2009, and the corresponding code guidelines. The NYCDOE website still contains a previous version published for the 2007-2008 school year. All of these documents standardize the codes for all high schools to use for all boroughs within New York City. The entire code guidelines can be found in Appendix D. The Quick Reference Table for the 2007-08 school year is inserted below. (See Table 6.3)

NYC DOE has three overarching categories: transfer, discharge, and graduation. It also has 28 sub-codes.

Table 6.3: NYC Transfer, Discharge, and Graduation Code Guidelines: Quick Reference Table

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Quick Reference Table

Transfers within NYC Department of Education Schools

CODE DESCRIPTION

00	Transferred to Another DOE School (includes, All Elementary, Middle and High Schools, Home Schooling, Full Time Alternative Program, Home Instruction District 75)
38	Transferred to a part- time DOE GED Program (D79 Only)
43	Transferred to a Full-Time DOE GED Program (D79 Only)
48	Transferred to a YABC Program
51	Transferred to a school or program for a limited time period

Discharges Out of NYC Department of Education Schools

CODE DESCRIPTION

02*	Obtained Full-Time Employment Certificate
04	Under Six Years Old
06	Discharged to a NYC Parochial School
08	Discharged to a NYC Private School
10	Discharged to an institution (Non-DOE)
11	Discharged to a School outside of New York City
12*	Address Unknown (Authorized by an Attendance Teacher)
15	Deceased Student
18	Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling (High School Level)
20	Discharged to a College Early Admissions Program Prior to Graduation from High School
21*	Over 21 Years of Age
35*	Entered Military Service
39*	Voluntary Withdrawal or Discharge after 20 consecutive days of non-attendance
79	Expulsion (For General Education Students who are Over 17 Prior to the Beginning of the School Year)

Diploma Granting Codes

CODE DESCRIPTION

23	Received High School IEP Diploma (Special Education Only)
25	Proof of Receipt of High School Diploma
26	Received Local high School Diploma
27	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma
28	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma with Honors
29	Received at an Earlier Date a Local Diploma, IEP Diploma or High School Equivalency Diploma
30	Received High School Equivalency Diploma (GED)
47	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma
62	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors
*	Dropout Code

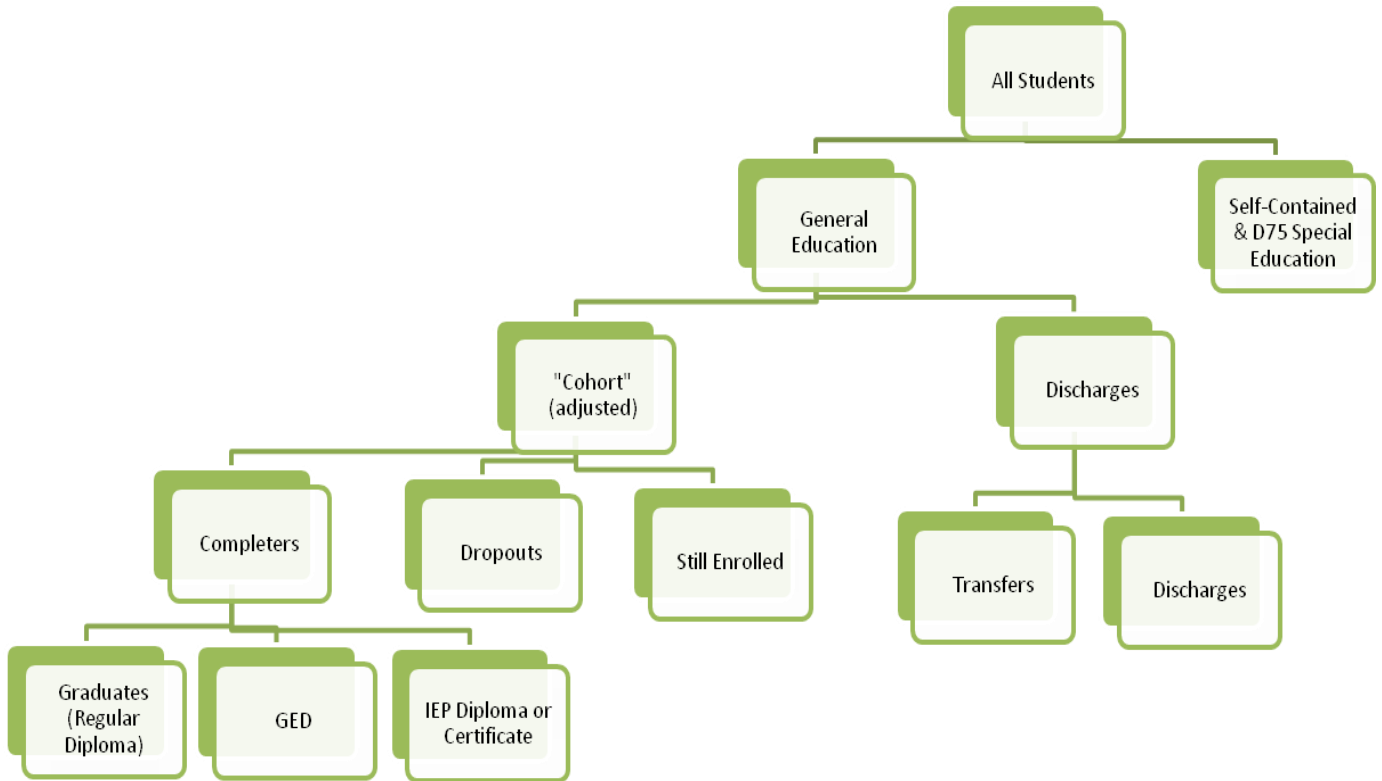
The sub codes listed under the umbrella of graduation codes are not all codes that meet the federal definition of who counts as a graduate. A majority of the codes are completion codes, not graduate codes. Various codes have shifted categories over the years. For example, a code “voluntary withdrawal due to pregnancy” had two categories depending on the age of the expectant mother. If she has completed the school year in which she turned seventeen then she may be discharged, and omitted from the statistics of both graduation and dropout rates. If she has not reached this chronological age requirement then and stops attending school due to her pregnancy, then she is categorized as “voluntary withdrawal or discharge after 20 consecutive days of non-attendance” and counted in the dropout rate statistics.

Another example of a code that has moved into a different category is GED diploma recipients. NYC used to count GED recipients as graduates in their graduation rates. Federal regulation changed this in 2008, when they stipulated who counts as a graduate for NCLB purposes. A GED recipient no longer counts as a graduate. (US Department of Education 2008)

NYC Accounting of Students

New York City reports tables and figures in longitudinal reports every year. Below is a flow chart (see Figure 6.1) to visualize the performance art of the accounting system in New York City by the Department of Education.

Figure 6.1: Flow Chart for Student Accounting in New York City



Adapted from Jennings: (Jennings & Haimson, 2009, p. 12)

Research conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) suggests several issues whose impact is reported as: 1 = minor errors 2 = detectable and 3 = invalidates results for graduation rates. Similar issues and errors exist for dropout rates. For example, they rate “transfer to GED program” (Issue #13) as a three for calculating the NGA graduation rate. “The decision logic being that adding the GED data into the NGA rate is a substantive violation of the business rules” (Taylor, 2007, p. 30).

An example of a minor error is “Super Seniors” (Issue #10) and “Summer dropouts” (Issue #4). Both of these errors can be rectified by having a computer data base system that can track individual students over time that is programmed to loop and catch summer dropouts and

super seniors. Historically, both of those minor issues, made estimations of rates difficult to predict. With the advancement in technology and the actualization of the cohort model, these minor errors can be easily detected and resolved.

The CCSSO report states issues that are all potential loopholes if they do not explicitly define how that sub-group is to be categorized. The ones that potentially allow for substantial violations are usually reflected in the magnitude of the students in one particular category. Other examples of error control issues are a) alternate learning centers, b) non-graded students, c) juvenile centers, d) transfer out of state E) transfer to GED program and F) transfer to home school. (Taylor, 2007) Every issue has to be accounted for in the taxonomy of exit codes regardless of the potential level of error. Below focuses on three substantial potential violations occurring in the specific case of New York City: a) discharges, b) transfer to GED c) incarcerated youth. In general, any of the issues presented by the research team of CCSSO, could potentially invalidate the results if the issue is deemed a high error control issue.

The consequence for having an unknown set of alternatives is evident in the current situation of educational indicators. No standardization exists for code categorizations and comparison between districts and states is questionable in terms of reliability and validity. The consequences of there being a mismatch of codes and non-standardization of categories can range from a minor to a significant error.

Based on the research of the CCSSO, it becomes necessary to highlight the three most volatile, overarching themes, which have substantial potential to invalidate NYC's calculation of the high school dropout rate. Each of the themes: discharges, GED, and incarceration, encompasses several codes, and different categories.

Discharges

New York City DOE has three overarching code categories: transfer, discharge and graduation. These three codes encompass all possible avenues for students to end enrollment. The following shows how discharges are defined:

Discharge codes are used in situations when students drop out of school, or leave a New York City Department of Education school without transferring to another school.

Source: Transfer, Discharge, Graduation Code Guidelines.

However, more recently, in a report by the NYC DOE, an asterisk explaining discharges states: “number of students discharged, primarily to other school systems...” (New York City Department of Education, 2010, Table 1).

Hence a discharge is either a dropout or someone who does not transfer to another school *and* is found primarily in other school systems. Ironically, this is not a typographical error and it typifies the mystification and disorder found in the performance art of the construction of the high school dropout rate in the NYC school system. A student who transfers to another secondary school that offers the possibility of attaining a regular high school diploma is a transfer not a discharge. A student found primarily in an adult program (GED programs) is counted as a discharge. Key differences are the type of school system (secondary or adult) and location (within or outside of the DOE).

Dropout is not an overarching code category for New York City. Instead, dropout codes are grouped within the discharge code category and denoted by an asterisk. Five out of the thirteen discharge codes are dropout codes. The remaining seven codes are interpreted as other reasons for ending enrollment. The following are discharge codes that are not counted as dropouts:

Code 04: Under Six Years Old

Code 15: Student Deceased

Code 18: Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling

Code 21: Over 21 Years Old

Code 36: Enrolled in a Full-time High School Equivalency (GED) program outside of
New York City Public School System

Code 79: Expulsion

Code 4 is non-applicable to high school dropout rates. Code 15 is a legitimate “other” categorization. Code 18 is not included underneath the umbrella of graduate codes because “home schooled students are not granted a diploma from the Department of Education”. They are recognized in accordance with the Regulations of the state not the city. This code should be a completion code that is equivalent to the status of received H.S. IEP diploma.

Code 21 belongs in the discharge category but should be designated as a situation when a student drops out of school. One possible rationale for not including Code 21 as a dropout is that the student is involuntarily ending their enrollment status as a student. The technicality of aging out of the system is outside of their control. However, New York State ending enrollment codes guidelines recommends that a student who has reached maximum legal age and has not earned a diploma or certificate be categorized as a dropout.

Code 79 (expulsion) is similar to Code 21. This should be designated as a circumstance that falls under dropouts. Code 79 occurs because the student involuntarily ends their schooling permanently in that school district. The technicality of expulsion is mandated not recommended. Both Codes (79 and 21) are imposed onto the student to exit the school system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), dropout practices and guidelines, a student expelled with NO option to return should be counted as a dropout (Stillwell, 2010).

Finally, Code 36 is the most difficult to identify a probable rationale for the code. Why are students who transfer to a full-time GED program not under the umbrella of “transfers”? They are and are counted as Code 43. Students who transfer to a full time GED program within NYC and operated by the DOE are technically transfers. Code 36 underneath “discharges” refers to students *enrolled* in GED programs (full-time) outside of the NYC school system. Code 36 is not considered a dropout. Furthermore, a different code (Code 37) is used for the same exact situation but enrolled in part-time study. Then the student is counted as a dropout. According to one rationale provided for explaining discharges, they leave NYC but without transferring to another school. Code 36 appears to have students leave NYC and enrolled in another school. There is no accountability to see if the student who was enrolled actually attended the full-time program. Furthermore, no follow-up occurs to see if beyond enrollment they attended and persisted to receiving the GED award (thereby attaining a high school equivalency diploma).

Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), dropout practices and guidelines, after defining a dropout, explicitly clarifies potential misinterpretations. They pose the question, “How do I handle students who transfer to adult education?” for purposes of data collection. Part of their answer indicates that “students who enroll in adult education programs are counted as dropouts unless the elementary/secondary school system remains responsible for the student... A student who leaves the public elementary/secondary school and enrolls in adult education **is a dropout**” (Bold in original). (Stillwell, 2010, p. D-2) Hence according to the federal NCES guidelines, Code 36 should be defined as a dropout.

Table 6.4 summarizes the above analysis of the usage of discharge codes.

Table 6.4: Discharges (not counted as dropouts) re-classified

Discharges (not counted as dropouts)	Analysis Summary	Re-classified
Code 04: Under Six Years Old	n/a	n/a
Code 15: Student Deceased	Legitimate	Other
Code 18: Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling	DOE is not the granting agency	Completion Code
Code 21: Over 21 Years Old	Directly violates the state guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code
Code 36: Enrolled in a Full-time High School Equivalency (GED) program outside of New York City Public School System	Directly violates the federal guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code upon enrollment
		Completion Code upon completion
Code 79: Expulsion	With no option to return violates the federal guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code

Magnitude

Jennifer Jennings and Leonie Haimson published a study of NYC discharge rates in April 2009. They found nine key findings:

- 1) High school discharge rates have not declined since the 2002 AFC/Public Advocate report was published.
- 2) The increase in the overall discharge rate has been primarily driven by *a doubling in the discharge rate for students in the first year of high school.* (Italics in original)

- 3) The special education discharge rate is especially high, and has increased over time for students in self-contained classes.
- 4) A close review of Department of Education's longitudinal graduation reports suggests that there are dramatic shifts in reported populations that require further explanation.
- 5) Discharge rates vary widely by race, gender, and language proficiency.
- 6) Graduation rates in New York City would be substantially lower if discharges were included in the calculation.
- 7) Schools vary considerably in their rates.
- 8) Though the AFC/Public Advocate report drew attention to the large number of students pushed out of high school to GED programs, GED data released by the New York State Department of Education for the 2002-03 through 2007-08 school years demonstrate that the number of New York City school-eligible students under 21 taking the GED exam has not declined over time...
- 9) According to data from the US Census American Community Survey and enrollment data from New York City parochial schools, recent increases in the discharge rate do not appear to be explained by increased student migration out of the city, increased international out-migration, or increasing parochial school enrollments.
(Jennings & Haimson, 2009)

Every one of the above findings is substantiated by data in their report. The Class of 2009 cohort was analyzed specifically to provide current data (corresponds to number seven listed above). Discharge rates varied considerably depending on the school type. The analysis shows all schools with a discharge count of more than half the number of graduates. The analysis revealed that citywide, 74 out of 371 high schools (20 percent) had exceptionally high discharge numbers. Thirteen discharged more students than they were graduating. In addition, 68 out of the 74 schools had a higher number of discharges than dropouts.

Depending on the school, the discharge rate varies significantly. In twenty percent (74/371) of all high schools in all boroughs, the number of discharges plus the number of dropouts almost equals the number of graduates. This is not including those still enrolled beyond

four years. It is interesting to note, that Staten Island does not have one high school where the number of discharges is more than half of its graduates. A breakdown of the 74 schools is found below (Table 6.5) by borough (see Appendix E for the individual school breakdown).

Table 6.5: Analysis of discharge by borough

	# of discharges	# of graduates	# of dropouts
Manhattan	893	1285	525
Bronx	1776	2434	541
Brooklyn	1414	2326	780
Queens	1037	1671	587
Staten Island	(none)		
Alternative Programs	557	141	430
Total (74 of 371)	5677	7857	2863
All High Schools (371)	16979	47884	8177

For these 20 percent of schools, cumulatively the number of discharges plus the number of dropouts is greater than the number of graduates ($8,540 > 7,857$). This is not true for all of the high schools ($25,156 < 47,884$), it varies in the type of school as evidenced by the disproportionate statistics of discharges, graduates and dropouts.

“Dropout rates are frequently criticized as disproportionately high, yet they pale in comparison to the discharge figures” (Gotbaum, 2002, p. 10). In 2009, almost 17,000 students were discharged, compared with almost 8,200 who dropped out all across the city. These discharge figures may actually conceal even greater dropout rates. Based on Jennings and Haimson findings, they made several recommendations. The fifth recommendation is “the discharge codes should be carefully examined to see if they conform to national standards. Some of the students who are currently defined as “discharges” in New York City should not be

excluded from the cohort for the purpose of calculating graduation rates, and should more accurately be redefined as ‘dropouts’” (Jennings & Haimson, 2009, p. 6).

How many students count in the discharge category? What is the magnitude of this category? “An alarming number of students are exiting New York City public high schools before graduation” (Gotbaum, 2002, p. 33). The aggregate number and percent of students discharged are found below (see Table 6.6). The disaggregated number and percent of students in each code that compiles the discharge category is not available to the public. As a researcher, I was also denied the privilege of the code breakdown.

Table 6.6: Number and percent of students discharged for even years from 2000-2010

Class	General Education Discharges (Absolute Number)	Discharge Rate (Percentage)
2000	13990	17.3
2002	14891	19.0
2004	15626	18.9
2006	17021	20.0
2008	17025	19.2
2010 (2009 for now)	16979	19.0

Source (2008, 2010): New York City Department of Education Four-Year Longitudinal Report.

A report by The Public Advocate for the City of New York, *Pushing Out At-Risk Students: An Analysis of High School Discharge Figures*, challenges the DOE to investigate the discharge phenomenon. Most disconcerting is that the DOE does not have a breakdown of the discharge rates which are needed in order to understand the extent of the problem and consequently craft suitable solutions. The report requests a breakdown including:

1. Demographics of the discharged students
2. Information on how far they have come in completing the high school curriculum
3. Reasons for discharges
4. Whether they were disabled, English Language Learners (ELL) or
5. Students with other special needs.

(Gotbaum, 2002)

It is my hypothesis that NYC DOE would have to be forced (by method of litigation) to reveal and report the breakdown as described by the report mentioned above. Similar to graduation regulations, “Requiring the use of disaggregated graduation rate data for both reporting and determining AYP will ensure that schools, districts, and states focus their efforts on improving the graduation rate of all student groups” (Spellings, 2008) From the latest set of data from the Class of 2009, the breakdown of the discharge rates are still not transparent.

The “Trilogy of Push-Out Cases” in 2003 where NYC settled and invited back thousands of students who were improperly discharged has had no effect on the validity of this category. Which students are discharged? Why? Why has the discharge rate increased over time? Why has the discharge rate for students in their first year of high school in particular doubled? (See Table 6.7)

Table 6.7: General education discharges by year of high school

Class	1st Year of HS	2nd Year of HS	3rd Year of HS	4th Year of HS	Total Discharge
2000	2,886	3,543	3,763	3,798	13,990
2002	3,159	4,015	4,242	3,475	14,891
2004	3,905	4,553	4,145	3,023	15,626
2006	4,521	4,548	4,424	3,528	17,021
2008	5,383	4,348	4,296	2,998	17,025
2009	6,042	4,186	3,820	2,931	16,979

Source: New York City Department of Education Four-Year Longitudinal Reports

As the table above shows, the number of students discharged has increased over the last decade. Despite, the former Chancellor Joel Klein’s condemnation of the practice of pushing-out, discharge figures are higher now than they were in 2003. Klein said: "The problem of what's happening to the students is a tragedy; ... it's not just a few instances, it's a real issue" (Lewin, 2003, p. A1).

As a direct result of the discharge rates rising, graduation rates also increase. Discharged students are “removed from the city’s enrollment rolls entirely; they are not counted as dropouts, nor are they counted in the denominator when graduation rates are calculated” (Jennings & Haimson, 2009, p. 2). Serious concern is warranted about the current and future educational pipelines of those discharged students.

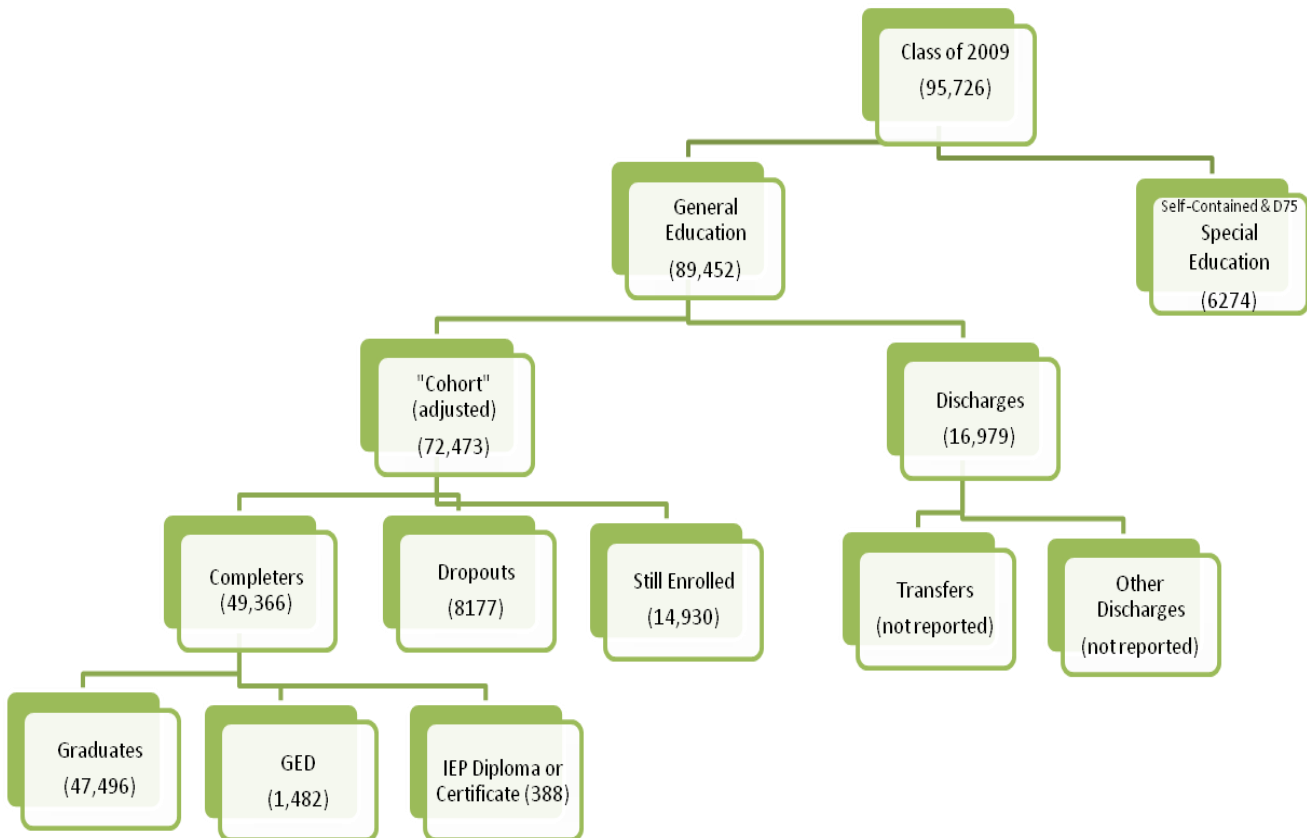
No conclusive evidence has been found to determine why the discharge rate has increased significantly for first year students. In 2000, 2,886 students were discharged by the end of their first year of high school. By 2009, more than twice as many students (6,042) were

discharged (Table 6.7) by the end of their first year. Examining the general education discharges by year of high school (Table 6.7) one can see that no other trend is apparent in the other years of high school. Are students being shuffled out of their first year of high school to construct rates that reflect the political ambition and goals of the current school administration?

The data, as shown in Table 6.7, points to a deliberate target of first year students. “Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger, a senior adviser to the chancellor who oversees research, said department officials had noticed the increase in ninth grade discharges and were trying to determine its cause” (Medina, 2009, p. A22).

Why the first year? This is an alarming trend that is particularly perplexing since students are disappearing at the beginning of their high school career. “The explanation for the increase in the first year discharge rate is not clear, as students cannot be discharged from New York City public schools except in limited circumstances before completing the school year in which they turn 17” (Jennings, & Haimson, 2009, p. 3). Though NYC reports how many students are discharged (broken down by grade level but not by other demographic categories), it does not provide a breakdown by the seven ending enrollment codes that constitute discharges (not counting those designated as dropouts). This information was requested on October 25th, 2010, but so far to no avail. The DOE’s discharge data is convoluted “making it impossible to determine why students left the school, and where they are going” and if they complete high school. (Gotbaum, 2002, p.33) The following chart (See Figure 6.2) is provided to give an example with actual data. The only missing data is how many students are transfers and how many are discharges (not including dropouts).

Figure 6.2: Flowchart of Student Accounting for the Class of 2009 in NYC



It should be noted that Code 10 “In institution (Non DOE)” is organized under the code categorization of transfer, not discharge. In reporting statistics, transfers and discharges are lumped together and are omitted from the calculation of both graduation and dropout rates. I suspect that Code 10 weighs heavily numerically and the educational attainment of this group of students is uncertain. A more nuanced discussion of this code appears later in this chapter.

In conclusion, ownership of the unique categorization of codes called discharges is unique to NYC school district. The overarching category, discharges poses a significant threat to the validity of the calculation of the high school dropout rate (and graduation rate). Federal guidelines, the AFC/public advocate court findings, and research reports all provide evidence that New York City is not complying with its definition of dropouts and hence discharges.

GED

For clarification purposes the GED is an acronym for the General Educational Development award. In some places once someone has received the award they then qualify for a high school equivalency diploma. It is a widely held myth that the GED award stands for General Equivalency Diploma. The GED tests are developed and administered (at the minimum partially) by the American Council of Education (ACE). It is a national examination that is not developed at the local school level.

Below is a table that details the codes (see Table 6.8) which signify high school equivalency programs and their corresponding code categorization for the NYC school system. There are six codes which encompass understanding the murkiness of categorizing the theme GED.

Table 6.8: NYC DOE Codes with GED implications

Code	Code Category	Reporting Category
00 Transferred to Another DOE School (Includes All Elementary, Middle and High School, Home Schooling, Full-Time Alternative Program, Home Instruction, District 75)	Transfer within NYC DOE	Discharge (transfer)
38 Transferred to a Part-Time GED Program	Transfer within NYC DOE	n/a Still Enrolled?
43 Transferred to a Full-Time GED Program	Transfer within NYC DOE	n/a Still Enrolled?
30 Received HS Equivalency Diploma (GED)	Graduation	Completer (GED)
36 Enrolled in a Full-time Equivalency Program Outside the NYC Public School System (Includes GED Programs in Job Corps, Community Colleges, etc.)	Discharge	Discharge (other discharge)
37 Enrolled in non-DOE Part-Time GED Program	Discharge	Dropout

Code 00 is a transfer from one NYC DOE school to another NYC DOE school. Underneath this code is a group of schools phrased “full-time alternative program”. It is unclear from the literature produced by the NYCDOE exactly what curriculum and rigorous content is being taught in these programs. It is also unclear if these students are discharged even though the NYC DOE is still responsible for educating them in the full-time alternative program.

For Codes 38 and 43: transferred to a part-time and full time GED programs within NYC, it is unclear how they are coded for reporting. I am assuming at the end of four years, when reports are created, they are treated the same as any enrolled student. They complete (with a GED), drop out, or are still enrolled. Transferring within the system is not counted as a discharge. Even though they are enrolled in a GED program, the school district is still held accountable for the student to complete high school.

Code 30 (received HS Equivalency Diploma (GED)) is an example of a code that has been demystified because of federal regulation. It used to be that some districts and states reported this code as graduates and others did not. Does a GED count as a graduate for accountability purposes? Fifty years ago, the answer might have been it doesn't matter, they both fared the same in society. Finally in 2008, changes for NCLB purposes defined a graduate as a person who attained a regular high school diploma. The regulation explicitly defined that regular does not include GED credentials. The research shows that a high school graduate and a GED recipient differ with respect to social, financial, and health criteria. A GED recipient is closer to a dropout than a graduate in terms of economic earnings, dependency on government social services, and health (see Chapter 2 for more details).

Codes 36 and 37 are similar except that one is full-time and the other is part-time, respectively. In neither case is confirmation of actual attendance or attainment a part of the accountability procedures. As stated previously, during reporting, Code 36 is counted as a discharge and Code 37 is counted as dropout out. The only difference is full-time and part-time status upon enrollment, (in both cases it doesn't matter if they actually showed up Day One of the GED program).

In summary of these codes that encompass GED programs, there is a difference in how NYC codes them and how they report them. Table 6.8 summarizes the differences in Code categories and Reporting Categories. The reporting categories are completion, dropouts, still enrolled, and discharges (including transfers, and other discharges). Figure 6.2 is a flow chart which further explains and gives a visual representation of the reporting categories. For NYC DOE the overarching code categories are titled transfer, discharge, and graduation (see Figure 6.1). GED students span across two of the three overarching categories, transfer and graduation. Only in the case of the category graduation is it transparent how these students are to be counted in terms of reporting. The transfer and discharge categories are substantial threats to the validity of the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Re-Categorization (implicating GED programs)

There is a need for continuous review and evaluation of the ending enrollment codes taxonomy. Changing school policies/reforms (i.e. the creation of District 79), changing graduation requirements (i.e. increasing number of exit exams), and changing economic times (i.e. increasing educational job requirements) are some reasons why the ending enrollment codes cannot be static. Furthermore, persons evolving definitions of what is acceptable, both morally and legally, change the perception of who counts and where they are categorized.

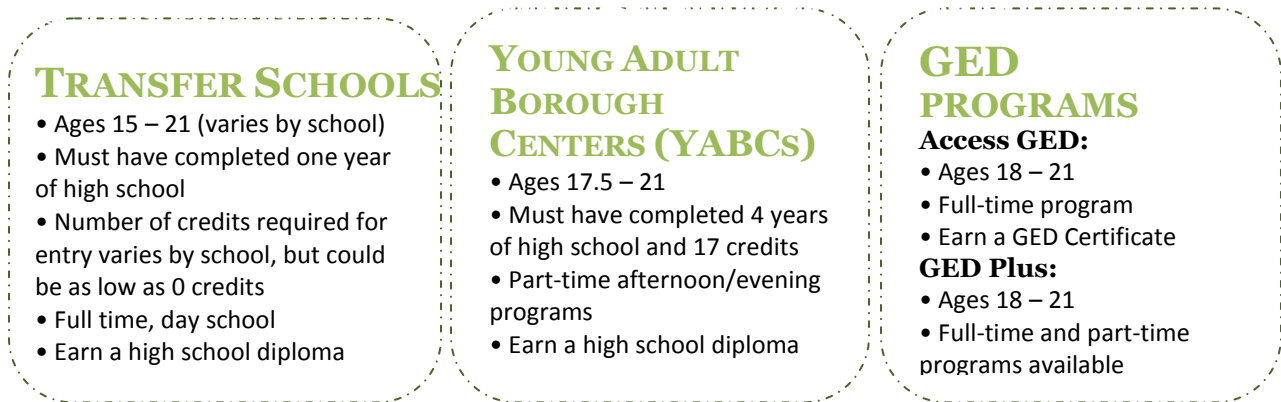
One recent school reform was the creation of District 79, “Alternate Schools & Programs”. Previously, only District 75 (Special Education) existed outside of the General Education program. This district, previously the Alternate Schools category, was overhauled in Fall 2007 into District 79.

The New York City Department of Education strives to ensure that every student has the opportunity to earn a high school or General Education Development (GED) diploma. We recognize that many students need additional supports to succeed in their current

school or require alternative pathways to attain a high school or GED diploma. District 79 was established to help students succeed by providing diverse and innovative educational opportunities that combine rigorous academic instruction with meaningful youth development. (NYC Department of Education, 2011)

Since the creation of District 79, students have three alternate pathways that differ from the traditional high school option. They can transfer to or enroll in a) transfer school b) young adult borough centers (YABC) c) GED programs. These programs are geared towards students aged 15-21 years old who have fallen behind. The following is a short outline of the three alternate pathways:

Figure 6.3: Alternative Academic Options



(New York City Department of Education, 2010)

The GED programs are separated into two categories, Access GED and GED Plus. Both programs receive youth, ages 18 to 21 and award the GED certificate. The only difference is Access GED is a full-time program and GED Plus has available both full-time and part-time programs. It is important to remember these programs (see Figure 6.3 above) are housed within the NYC Department of Education. It is unclear whether District 79 is treated for accountability purposes as District 75 or whether they remain with the General Education population.

An open question remains whether or not these students in District 79 are reported as discharges (transfers) even though they remain within NYC and the schools are operated underneath the NYCDOE. Are they removed from the adjusted cohort? Are students that register for GED programs within NYC schools then removed from the cohort? Does it matter if after day one of their new program if they attend, drop out, or complete the GED program? In 2007, of the students who start alternative degree programs within NYC only 12 percent actually receive GEDs (Green, 2007). Who is accountable? Who counts?

School accountability reports are only available for transfer schools, not YABC or GED programs. Also, transfer schools and YABC Programs do not have a grade configuration. It would be near impossible to calculate cohort rates if the students are ungraded. One of the reasons the Department of Education gives for having ALL of District 79 schools without grade configuration is that students credits vary so students take the courses they need” (New York City Department of Education, 2010).

One consequence of having ungraded students is accountability. The YABC programs have two different time frames, one is “part-time afternoon/evening programs” and the other is “evening academic programs” (New York City Department of Education, 2010, p. iv).

Young Adult Borough Centers are evening academic programs designed to meet the needs of high school students who might be considering dropping out because they are behind or because they have adult responsibilities that make attending school in the daytime difficult. Students graduate with a diploma from their home school after they have earned all of their credits and passed all of the required exams while attending the YABC. Students who are registered in a YABC program remain assigned, for all

accountability measures, to their sending school. Attendance is strictly monitored and documented by the YABC program. (New York City Department of Education, 2010)

These YABCs are ungraded, and are not required to produce a school accountability report, yet if they complete the program (day or night) then they are awarded a regular high school diploma not from the YABC program but from their home school. What happens to students who transfer to YABC programs and do not qualify for the diploma? It is unclear how these students are to be coded. These YABC students must be in at least their five year of schooling. Who is accountable for these students and subsequently groups of students who pursue this option? Who is accountable?

Moreover, the directory for GED programs states “GED students graduate when they pass the GED exam” (New York City Department of Education, 2010). It is unclear, exactly what is meant by graduate. Remember they are educated in these alternative programs, yet credit for graduation is given to the home school. Which school receives credit for non-completion for the students educated in alternative programs? The following sentences follow the above statement, “The GED examination is a battery of five tests: Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Language Arts Reading, and Language Arts Writing. They take more than 7 hours to complete and include a direct writing assessment. The GED examination is administered in English, Spanish and French” (New York City Department of Education, 2010, p. iv).

It seems to suggest that the GED examination is rigorous and comparable to attaining a regular high school diploma. Currently in this society, the educational pipeline towards post-secondary schooling is much greater for those with a high school diploma than a GED award. They have as a group two different trajectories after high school. They are no longer comparable.

Within District 79, the age eligibility requirement is an interesting topic that spans across district and state policies. Though the requirements vary, all students must have attended NYC high schools (large comprehensive high schools, small learning community schools, and new small schools.) for at least one year. The following table summarizes the age eligibility requirements for District 79.

Table 6.9: Age requirements for District 79

Age	Program	Exception
15 – 21	Transfer Schools	
17.5 – 21	YABC	
18 – 21	GED programs	<p>Students who are 17 may enroll full-time if there are extenuating circumstances* and with parent/guardian permission.</p> <p>* Extenuating circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emancipated minor/head of household, • Parent, • Full-time employment

I am assuming that a waiver would be granted for the stipulation of having parent/guardian permission for the youth that presents the extenuating circumstance of being emancipated. If transfer schools allow 15 year-olds, and the student becomes truant and is deemed a long term absence (LTA), are they counted as dropouts or as discharges?

It is interesting to note that the NYS Department of Education has recently amended policy to increase the requirements to receive a high school diploma. Graduation requirements are requiring an increase in Regents Exams (known generally as exit exams). As of Sept 2002, zero Regents Exams (with a score of 65 and above) were required for a local high school diploma. In a span of six years, the Board of Regents phased out the local exam, and has significantly increased the requirements for graduation. As of 2009, twenty-four states have

mandatory exit exams. (Chudowsky & Gayler, 2003) Across the country, more and more states are mandating exit exams as a requirement for high school graduation.

These rigorous requirements come one year apart from the re-vamping of alternative programs into District 79, which includes offering GED programs. As of September 2008, the local diploma for New York State was phased out and is no longer offered to general education students. Passing a minimum of five Regents exams is a new and challenging requirement for a student to graduate high school (New York State Department of Education, 2010).

One hypothesis is that New York City, with the implementation of District 79, and daytime GED programs operated within regular high schools, is allowing GED level work to count as a graduate from their home school. This is blurring the secondary setting with the adult education setting. What are the requirements to graduate from high school? Are they uniform across the state?

The changing demographics in the United States suggest problems that will affect more minorities, their communities and the country. Persons with less than a regular high school diploma are exposed to economic and social hardships. “The good jobs that in generations past allowed unionized workers without an education to earn a family wage and achieve economic security are largely gone” (Orfield, 2004, p.1).

In conclusion, shifting school policies and new reforms, should compel policymakers to have in place a protocol that periodically reviews categorizations of exit codes. This section emphasized GED as one of many potential themes that has the possibility of changing meaning over time. Three current alterations a) District 79 b) phasing out of the local diploma c) increasing educational requirements for life beyond high school make a solid case for the need to consider re-categorizations.

Magnitude

A school system should not be allowed to transfer a student to a GED program and count the student as a legitimate transfer because at that new school they cannot earn a regular high school diploma. A youth could potentially enroll and never set foot inside of the GED classroom. How should this youth be counted? What code categorization applies? Who is accountable for this student and subsequently groups of students who pursue this option? As noted earlier, the magnitude of this population of youth is increasing and is not showing any signs of abating in the near future. Who is accountable? What is the magnitude? The public does not know. Data from the Class of 2009 as shown previously (see Figure 6.2) is available to the public with the exception of transfers and discharges. It is noteworthy that the transfer category is not detailed, and includes the transfer of full time GED bound students.

“In 2002, the AFC/Public Advocate report drew attention to the large number of school-eligible high school students channeled to GED programs” (Jennings & Haimson, 2009, p. 34), especially incarcerated youth. In the 2007-08 school year, more than half of the school-eligible GED test takers (59 percent) passed the exam. The data (see Table 6.10) shown below illustrates the magnitude of New York City school eligible youth.

Table 6.10: Number and Age Distribution of New York City GED School-Eligible Test Takers by Race and Ethnicity, 2002-2008

	2002-03				2007-08			
	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian
16	75	44	37	4	35	14	53	3
17	1026	639	945	192	709	477	996	155
18	1695	748	1296	219	1984	704	2134	325
19	2469	770	1625	394	2542	678	2661	416
20	2062	443	1303	281	2389	450	2298	321
Total	7327	2644	5206	1090	7659	2323	8142	1220

(Jennings & Haimson, 2009)

The data displayed above reveals that over time the number of NYC school eligible students taking the GED has not declined except for white students. Is there a relationship between a reported increase in graduation rates, and the GED test taking rate? If more students are receiving regular high school diplomas, it is reasonable to assume those students will not be taking the GED test. Similarly, if less students are dropping out, it is reasonable to assume those students will also not be taking the GED test.

Incarceration:

Although dropouts constitute less than 20 percent of the overall population, they make up 41 percent of the incarcerated population. (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 15) This is a special population of youth that would significantly alter the reported dropout rate if districts were to report incarcerated students categorically as dropouts.

Who is accountable? If students are adjudicated and placed in a residential setting should those students be removed from the cohort? If so, who then assumes responsibility for their education? What happens after they are released? Who is then responsible for their education? Does the age of the students upon release necessitate different exit categories? The language and wording of the codes indicates the intention of how the code is to be used.

What follows is a detailed analysis for the New York City school system of both a) the code b) how that code is categorized. It is beyond the scope of this study to also report how the written regulations are actually carried out in practice. In other words, the following discussion needs to be understood in the context that this is a representation of given guidelines and stated intentions. This does not reflect what is actually happening in the schools. It does not report on the quality of the education that incarcerated youth receive.

The quick reference table utilizes a code in NYC, transfer to an institution (Non-DOE' [code 10] under the categorization of transfers outside of NYC Department of Education schools' [code categorization, transfer]. The 2007-08 guidelines explain the usage of this code as follows:

This code is used for students who are residing in a full-time institutional setting. This includes students in Special Education programs who are placed in schools or facilities outside of New York City. Verification that the student resides at a Non-Department of Education facility outside or within New York City is required, i.e., Office of Children and Family Services facility, hospital, or foster care institution. Special circumstances where students are institutionalized within New York City require written approval from the Integrated Service Center's Senior Youth Development Director. The effective date of transfer is the date the student entered the institution.

(New York City Department of Education, Office of School & Youth Development, 2008)

Further explanation is needed to unpack and follow various scenarios of this code and code categorization. This code stipulates that the youth must be in a full-time setting, not part-time. This code also only refers to youth who are placed outside of NYC. However, an exception is made for students that are institutionalized *within* NYC. Furthermore, the blending of Special Education and General Education students is evident in this particular code. Yet, this code is categorized as a transfer outside of NYC, when it is possible that the student is still residing within NYC. This code and code categorization has four potentially dubious loopholes: a) full-time versus part-time b) residing within or outside of NYC c) special education versus general education categorization and d) age upon entrance and age upon release.

Fusing of City and State

Regulation is shared between cities and states regarding the institution of incarceration. It is essential to revisit the same code in order to expand the analysis to include the city and state relationship. In re-examining code ten, the following explanation of the code highlights the multiple interactions of city and state responsibilities:

This code is used for students who are residing in a full-time institutional setting. This includes students in Special Education programs who are placed in schools or facilities outside of New York City. Verification that the student resides at a Non-Department of Education facility outside or within New York City is required, i.e., Office of Children and Family Services facility, hospital, or foster care institution. Special circumstances where students are institutionalized within New York City require written approval from the Integrated Service Center's Senior Youth Development Director. The effective date of transfer is the date the student entered the institution.

(New York City Department of Education, Office of School & Youth Development, 2008)

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is the state agency of New York that is responsible for incarceration or placement of juveniles (youth under the age of 16 at the time of the arrest). (Correctional Association of New York, 2011) However in this state, a youth age 16 or older when arrested, may be tried in an adult court and confined to adult jails and prisons. NYS is only one of three states (the others being Connecticut and North Carolina) that try youth at 16 years old in an adult court. This society restricts and contracts privileges based on the criteria of age. One cannot join the military until 18 years and cannot consume alcohol until 21 years, yet the consequences of criminal activities are placed on 16 year olds as adults.

The NYS Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) automatically receives all persons incarcerated once they turn 21 years old. Many youths enter the system as juveniles and depending on their sentence are in custody between the ages of 16 and 21. “A youth confined in an OCFS placement facility may be transferred to an adult prison at age 16 at the discretion of a judge or at age 18 at the discretion of OCFS” (Correctional Association of New York, 2011, p. 1).

If a student begins in New York City, and then is placed in a court-ordered institution, either in NYC or in NYS, what educational programs are offered? After being processed into the juvenile justice system, how many graduate with a high school diploma? No data exists to comprehensively answer this question. A number of students are tested into the GED classes, prepped for the GED classes, and subsequently take the GED examination. The results below (see Table 6.11) are for the 2003-2004 school year.

Table 6.11: GED testing results by incarcerated agency for the school year 2003-2004

Agency	Number of GED Test Takers	Pass Rate	Average Total Score
OCFS	366	60%	2451
DOCS	2,665	71%	2450
County Jails	1,783	71%	2531
Rikers	381	78%	2493
State Total	52, 584	56%	2373

(Kadamus & Cort, 2005)

A high percentage of incarcerated youth are passing the GED exam (see Table 6.11). How many of these youth that pass the GED exam could have pursued and attained their high school diploma? As the chart shows, the pass rates for the GED examination combined for OCFS, DOCS, county jails, and Rikers *exceeds* the total average for all GED test-takers in New York State. A report submitted to New York State Regents provides information regarding the educational programs and services available to youth under the age of 21 who are institutionalized for committing offenses.

Table 6.12: Programs and services provided in NYS for incarcerated/institutionalized youth

Agency	Educational Support Services
<p>OCFS (1,584 students in program on June 30, 2004. 3,289 students received educational services during the 2003-04 school year. 713 students identified on 12/1/04 as students with disabilities; the majority classified with emotional disturbance.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 11-20 having committed an offense before 16 years of age. • 32 facilities. All youth without a high school credential are required to participate in educational programs. <p>State agency operates the education program using State appropriations.</p>	<p>K-12 Academics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GED Instruction Career and Technical Education Job Readiness Library Services Special Education
<p>DOCS (3,027 inmates under 21 years of age on June 26, 2004. 1,549 were receiving educational services. 468 were identified on 12/1/04 as students with disabilities. The majority are classified with learning disabilities.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 16 years or older with sentences generally longer than one year. • 63/70 facilities provide educational services. Seven are work-release facilities and have no educational services. • All inmates below the 9th grade level in reading and math are required by the Commissioner of DOCS to participate in education programs. <p>State agency operates the education program using State appropriations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Basic Education Pre-GED GED Instruction Bilingual English for Speakers Of Other Languages (ESOL) Special Education Career and Technical Education
<p>County Jails (1,560 students on any given day. 8,500 admitted for 2003-04. Rikers' average daily enrollment for 2003-04 is 1,091. The total Rikers' enrollment is 4,556 for 2003-04. Approximately 35 percent are students with disabilities.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 16 years and older in custody generally for less than a year. • 59 facilities (Erie and Onondaga County each have two facilities.) • Some facilities allow individual choice to attend educational programs while others require attendance. • Public school district of location is responsible for educational program and generates State Aid. 	<p>K-12 Academics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GED Instruction Adult Basic Education ESOL Career and Technical Education Job Readiness Computer Training Special Education

(Kadamus & Cort, 2005)

The chart above displays both daily admittance rate and total admittance numbers for one school year. This code, transfer to institution would be utilized for each of the youth at any point during the four years of data collection to compute a cohort time frame. The data presented above would be compounded over four years. The exact frequency of the use of this code is not available to the public.

New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) which houses youth within NYC mandates school attendance for all youth. The NYC Department of Education operates Passages Academy which is a full time educational program. Passages Academy operates out of four sites throughout New York City. Three schools are located inside of the three Secure Detention facilities. The fourth school is operated for all students in Non-Secure Detention. The average student that attends this educational program is “below grade level in reading and math and may require special education” (New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2011). There are literacy, GED and academic classes offered to suit the individual’s educational needs. Students may receive high school credit on their transcripts for their work.

Magnitude

How many youth are incarcerated in NYC? How does this affect their high school educational outcome? What are the intersections of age, gender, and race with respect to incarceration and continuing their educational trajectory?

As a person matures from a child to pre-teenage years to youth, and finally to adulthood the possibility of incarceration increases. When one uses demographic data and compounds the data with age, the incidences of incarceration increases at even a faster rate. The data will also show that gender greatly influences being “caught up” in the system. Race, as with almost all segments of our society, is a factor that shows institutional biases. The race is defined by the

youth's self report at the time of admission. The data gives no clear indication of mixed race youth.

Table 6.13: Age of NYC Youth detained in the Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010

Age	Number	Percent of Admissions
10 years old and younger	9	0.2%
11 yrs old	32	0.6%
12	140	2.6%
13	551	10.2%
14	1,288	23.9%
15	2,522	46.8%
16	603	11.2%
17 yrs old and older	242	4.5%
Total Admissions	5,387	100.0%

Source: (New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010)

The age ranges from seven years old to 20 years old in the detention centers. At the age of 21, youth are automatically transferred to the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS). Though the chart above shows a significant drop in the number of 16-year-olds and older youths who were admitted, this belies the truth. The data is only for those youth tried as juveniles, not tried as adults. It is significant to note, that since 1965 the age of criminal responsibility was established to be age 16 has not changed. New York State is among only three remaining states able to still charge youth, *regardless of the alleged offense*, age 16 and above as adults. (Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice, 2009, p. 16)

The number of youth tried as adults or subsequently transferred to adult prisons who are between the ages of 16 and 21 are found in the DOCS. The Commissioner of DOCS mandated education in the DOCS for all inmates who are assessed (primarily by testing) below a ninth grade reading and/or math level. The following table shows the number of individuals under 21 years by enrollment in educational programs. "As of December 1, 2003, approximately 31 percent of the inmates were identified as individuals with disabilities" (Kadamus & Cort, 2005).

Table 6.14: NYS: Individuals* between 16 and 21 years old in DOCS Prisons by academic enrollment status (2004)

Academic Educational Status	Number of Inmates	Percent
Enrolled in Education	1,549	51%
Not Enrolled in Education	1,478	49%
Total	3,027	100%

Note: All youth in DOCS Prisons are tried as adults.

(Kadamus & Cort, 2005)

Once a youth reaches 16 years old, the youth has the option whether or not to pursue an educational program. The data above suggests that a little more than half choose to enroll in an educational program. In 2005, the DOCS prisons had 3,027 youths under the age of 21, in which there was no k-12 academic option.

The research has consistently found that gender skews one’s chances of graduating from high school. There is a correlation between gender, institutionalization and graduating high school. Eighty percent of all youth admitted in New York City are male (see Table 6.15).

“Currently, the rate at which black males are being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement” (Holzman, 2010, p. 1).

Table 6.15: Gender of Admitted Youth, Fiscal year 2010

	Number	Percent of Admissions
Male	4,307	80%
Female	1,080	20%
Total Admissions	5,387	100%

(New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010)

Furthermore, race and ethnicity (social constructions) also reflects the inequality of the prison system. The following table (see Table 6.16) displays the numbers of admitted youth within NYC. A black youth is approximately sixteen times more likely to be admitted than a white youth. A Hispanic youth is approximately seven times more likely to be admitted than a white youth.

Table 6.16: Race/Ethnicity of admitted youth, Fiscal year 2010

	Number	Percent of Admissions
Black	3,341	62.0%
White	204	3.8%
Hispanic	1,492	27.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	64	1.2%
American Indian	3	0.1%
Other	35	0.6%
Unknown	248	4.6%
Total Admissions	5,387	100%

(New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2010)

This data for New York City reflects a greater disparity than the data suggests within New York State.

There is also reason to believe that the current system is unfair. African American and Latino youth represent only 44 percent of New York’s total youth population, yet they comprise more than 80 percent of all youth in the state’s institutional placement facilities. Remarkably, this disparity has never been adequately investigated to understand its causes or consequences. (Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice, 2009)

The range of educational programs and services offered to incarcerated youth is expansive and complicated. The fluctuation of the length of stay in detention centers is an important factor in providing appropriate education for these youth. Institutions provide nebulous and ill-defined information on educational attainment and accountability procedures. Some

places (county jails and Rikers Island) receive individuals for brief periods such as less than two months. A solution for standardized accountability procedures to track the educational outcome of incarcerated youth might seem overwhelming and impractical due to constant movement and the sheer size.

Notwithstanding, with the technological advancements, one system is capable of merging several systems allowing cross communication. In 2005, New York State acknowledged the need to improve the data collection system.

The individual student tracking system, once fully implemented, will provide the Department with the ability to follow students through the various educational venues in which they are placed. The system will be used by all agencies responsible for the education of students under the age of 21 and allow the Department to track the progress of all students, regardless of their placement status. (Kadamus & Cort, 2005)

The Disappeared:

In the general derivation section, eliminating othering, discussed the possibility of the exclusion of “other” students. According to NYCDOE the disappeared includes but is not limited to a) a peculiar New York State rule (the five month rule) b) no shows c) summer dropouts.

The disappeared is a compilation of many circumstances in which students end up vanishing, and schools are not responsible for their educational outcomes. Who counts? Who has disappeared?

In the New York State regulations, Section 15 (iv) explains the additional public school, school district, and charter school accountability indicators. Commencing with the 2007-08 school year, part of the regulation for purposes of determining adequate yearly progress is below:

1. The graduation rate cohort for each public school and charter school shall consist of those students who first enrolled in grade 9 anywhere three school years previously or, if an ungraded student with a disability, first attained the age of 17 three school years previously, and who have spent *at least five consecutive months*, not including July and August, in the school since first entering grade 9 and whose last enrollment in the school did not end because of transfer to another school, death, *court- ordered transfer*, or *leaving the United States*. (New York State Education Department, 2010, p. 16) (Italics added for emphasis.)

At least five consecutive months, not including the summer months, is a period in which students appear and disappear without being acknowledged. This part of the state regulation allows schools to not be responsible unless a student (even a transfer) completes at least one semester of their high school career *at their school*.

How many students disappear because of this five month rule? No one knows. How would their inclusion change the statistics reported for both the graduation and dropout rate? It is documented that the more often a student transfers schools the more likely they will not complete high school. One study found that the “majority of high school dropouts changed high schools at least once before withdrawing, while the majority of high school graduates did not” (Rumberger, 2001, p. 8). This five month rule allows for the under-reporting of the incidences of high school dropout rates for public schools.

How many no show students disappear? They have for all purposes departed from the public school system, but still exist in reality, in their community and in society. No shows are

not calculated in the high school dropout rate. As the regulation below shows they are cleared off the register because they have not appeared.

V. A. Schools are required to make every effort to identify the status of students who are on the school register but who have not appeared as of the beginning of the new school year.

CLEARANCE OF REGISTER

1. The principal, in conjunction with the attendance coordinator, must develop a Clearance of Register program to include procedures designed to locate and return to school students who have not appeared.

2. The RSNS Report (No Show Report) is to be generated to identify those students who have not appeared. This report lists the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all “No Show” students.

B. All students on a school’s register are to be part of the Clearance of Register process.

(New York City Department of Education Office of Chancellor, 2011, p. 5)

The federal government actions demonstrate that no shows are important and should be reflected in educational statistics for high schools. The official calculation of the graduation rate that the federal government utilizes for comparisons across states takes into account 8th graders who are no shows. The averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR) is the methodology used by the federal government. “The incoming freshman class size is estimated by summing the

enrollment in eighth grade in one year, ninth grade for the next year, and tenth grade for the year after and then dividing by three” (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009, p. 1).

Similarly, summer dropouts never make day one of high school. Summer dropouts can be conceptually all students that are middle school dropouts. These students never reach high school in order to be counted in the high school dropout rate. This term, summer dropouts, refers to students who finish one grade, and do not report to school for the start of the following school year mainly before entering high school. Maine is an example of a state that has defined a:

...student who completes a school year but who is not enrolled on October 1 of the next school year (often called a summer dropout or fall no-show) is a dropout” (Maine Department of Education, 2002, p. 4)

Who is responsible when these missing students stop their education? When does one technically begin their high school career? Is it when they graduate from 8th grade? Does the summertime count? Must they report day one to high school? One report cites “18% of all dropouts failed to complete any schooling above the 8th grade” (Smink & Schargel, 2004, p. 12).

What percentage of students leave school early before high school? It may be four percent, ten percent, or even twenty percent. What policy initiatives would be started based on the severity of this subgroup of dropouts? Understanding the magnitude of the problem helps shape public policies that work on either prevention and/or solutions.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an argument of how the general constructs are utilized in the case of New York City Public Schools. In addition, discharges, GED, incarceration, and the disappeared highlighted significant threats to the validity of calculating “Who counts?” The construction of the high school dropout rate is both complex and complicated. The complexity

involves innumerable alternatives and consequences that is further complicated by a myriad of theories, practices, policies and actors. A consistent attempt was made to organize the complexity into a coherent narrative that moved from the general (see Chapter 4) to the specific (see Chapter 6).

This narrative would change depending on the values of the storytellers, the viewpoint of the decision maker and the current political persuasion of the school system. Something that is complicated can be taken apart, albeit with several layering options, and broken into steps. The varying of human involvement presents different challenges and theories of action. It is impossible to provide the one correct formula for creating the high school dropout rate. It is a construction that begins subjectively, at some point becomes objective, and then returns to subjectivity again with interpretations of that objective rate.

We need to respond critically to the challenge of complexity. Ultimately, every effort should be made to secure additional data in an attempt to move forward thereby highlighting the importance of the conversation in providing opportunities for released youth to continue their secondary and tertiary educational programs. How many youth do or do not earn a high school diploma once their educational path has been interrupted or disrupted by incarceration?

As shown, the construct of codes appears to be inconsistent and therefore unpredictable. States mandate, recommend, or leave to the discretion of their school districts the taxonomy of exit codes, code categorizations and the formula. The next chapter gives a policy issue brief of the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Chapter 7

Policy Issue Brief: The Construction of an Accurate High School Dropout Rate

Introduction

The format of this chapter is a policy issue brief with the quality of the construction of the high school dropout rate as a policy issue. There is a performance art with respect to gathering the information necessary to construct the high school dropout rate. The political decision-making process occurs at several levels, from the district to the state and as well as the federal government. Currently, there is a lack of accuracy and consistency at all levels, yet government proceeds as if these statistics are comparable.

No database has current information on the state of data collection and methods for calculating rates. 2006 was the last time the federal government inquired about the state exit code system. It was a onetime gathering and analysis of the "current" state of and recommendation for a code taxonomy. Subsequently they do not maintain a database that has the current set of state exit codes system. On the 25th of February in 2011, Robert Stillwell, statistician of the Elementary/Secondary & Libraries Studies Division of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), specializes in CCD survey analyst, dropout rates and graduation rates responded to my inquiry below:

Unfortunately I am not very well versed in the exit codes being used, aside from reading that report and knowing the exit code values of a couple of (unnamed) states used in a graduation rate analysis back in 2006. These are used to generate the data that we collect but as we don't have access to student level records I have not seen what most states are using. There is a chance the SLDS people could shoot you in a better direction but I'm sorry to say that I'm not going to be that much help. The dropout rate we publish is just

very simple (number of dropouts over the course of a school year / enrollment as of Oct. 1 of that school year). Having the exit codes and the student records, as I'm sure you already know, would allow you to construct a true cohort dropout rate that would be more precise. Let me know if I can be of any further help. (R. Stillwell, personal communication, February 25, 2011)

Robert Stillwell, is the lead author on the most recent publication of “Public School Graduates and Dropouts From the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008–09” published in May 2011. The federal entity, NCES, is responsible for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data.

NCES activities are designed to address high-priority education data needs; provide consistent, reliable, complete, and accurate indicators of education status and trends; and report timely, useful, and high-quality data to the U.S. Department of Education, the Congress, the states, other education policymakers, practitioners, data users, and the general public. (Stillwell, Sable, & Plotts, 2011, p. preface)

Why is this policy a concern? Why is the above communication important?

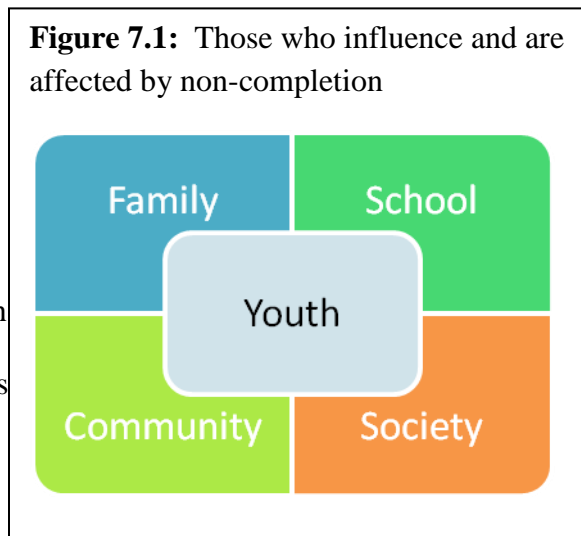
The author of the communication above is a statistician specializing in dropout rates for the NCES. Yet, the national government is aware and continues to publish dropout rates that are simply estimates, not a cohort dropout rate. These estimates are not precise, and yet the government will publish in the same document that they provide “consistent, reliable, complete, and accurate indicators” (Stillwell et al., 2011, p. preface). The government will allow states to generate the data that they collect, but they are not concerned, and have no knowledge of the quality (accuracy) of the data they are collecting. Still, they continue to use the same data to publish national dropout rate statistics.

Executive Summary

The numbers reported for a high school dropout rate are always questionable. Is it consistent? Is it accurate? This issue is more acute today due to several changing conditions in our society. These include the following a) the changing demographics b) the new legislative mandates c) high stakes testing for promotion and graduation, d) heightened public and political awareness.

What do the stakeholders gain from the statistics of dropout rates? They gain an accurate assessment of the magnitude of non-completion. Hopefully, with development of reporting disaggregated rates, they will also gain knowledge of who is most affected.

This indicator of the health of the public school system allows the stakeholders to monitor their success and failures. Figure 7.1 shown to the right depicts the most important groups that are affected and influenced by high school non-completion. As each day passes, advancement for youths diminish every year with a break in their educational opportunities. This is a key public issue as it is intricately intertwined with several other social issues.



Can we do better? We must do better in order to protect the educational rights of youth.

This brief contains the executive summary. It will identify the stakeholders and briefly define the issue. It will review the main points of the issue's history, to include the chronology of events or major developments. Finally, it will attempt to evaluate the importance of the issue and will make recommendations for improving the current decisions required to compute the high school dropout rate.

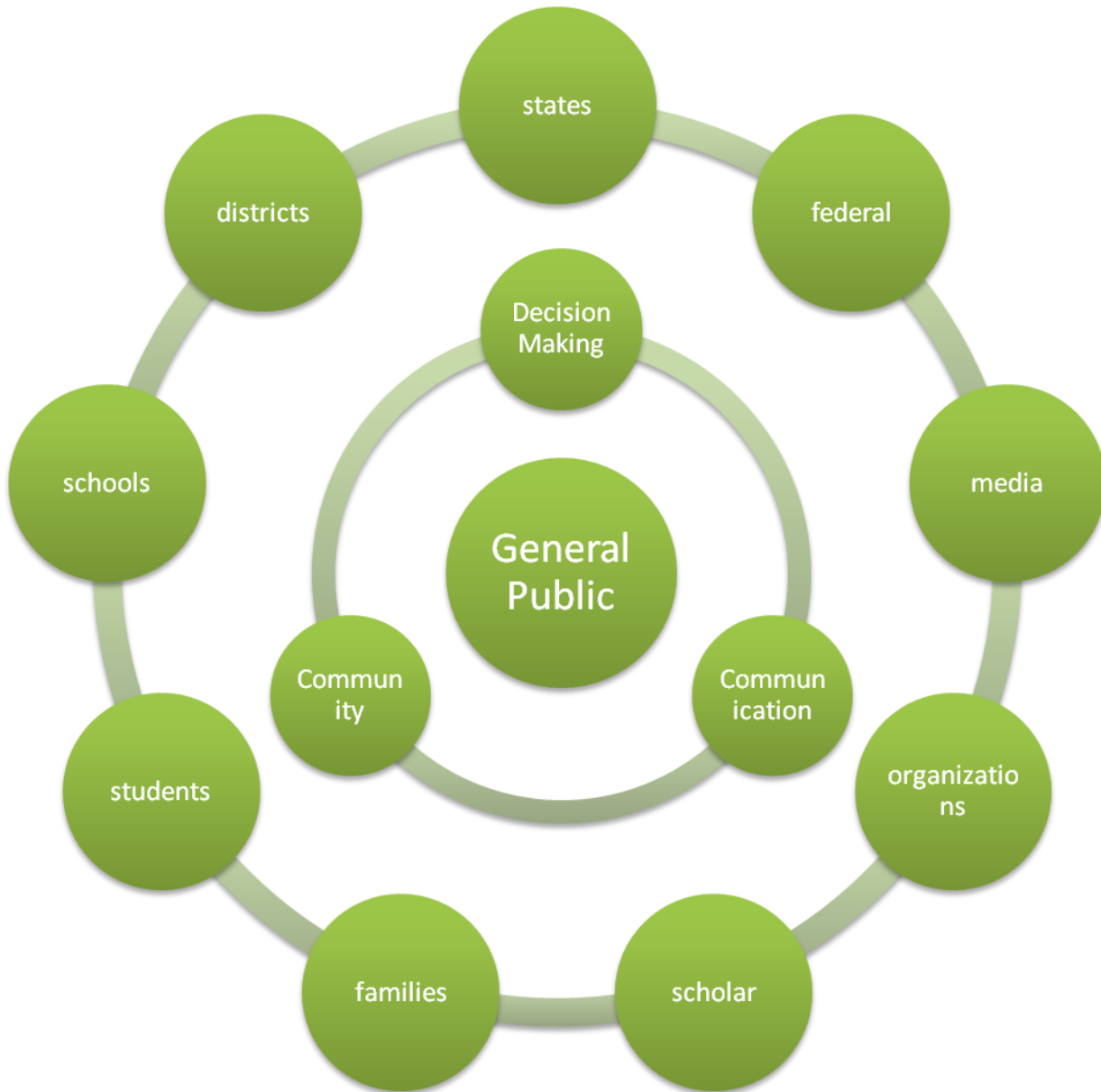
Stakeholders

Defining the stakeholders

Various stakeholders exist when the policy issue deals with compulsory education. Students, families, communities, policymakers, districts, states, the federal government, organizations (i.e. Data Quality Campaign), media, and the general public are all stakeholders in the health of the public school system. All of the above mentioned groups have an interest in the statistics of high school completion. They are all stakeholders; some have more influence than others.

The policymakers are involved at various levels including the districts, states and federal government. The actual rates and their implications are communicated via 1) organizations 2) the media 3) the research community to the general public. Ultimately, the health of the school system as indicated by these completion rates directly impacts communities, schools, families and unequivocally students. All the stakeholders are impacted by the outcome of the high school dropout rate, albeit in different ways (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2: Stakeholders of the statistic of a high school dropout rate



Stakeholders' positions on the issue

Despite the conclusion that there are a number of identities for the statistic, for purposes of this policy-issue brief, the focus will be on the federal government. The federal government is aware that there is an issue with the comparability of the construction of high school completion rates.

Explicitly on a government website the public is cautioned with the following notification: **“Most importantly, there is variation in how states define and measure certain data elements. Student achievement data and graduation rate data are defined differently in each state, and, therefore, should not be compared across states”** Original in bold, (Ed Data Express, 2011). The quote above must be confirmed by each user (the general public) acknowledging they have read and understood the above information when they access this statement of purpose and appropriate use of the data found on the website.

Stakeholder resources

The U.S. Department of Education has the power to mandate that all states follow certain criteria for constructing the high school dropout rate. Flexibility is currently given to the states, by allowing them to define and measure certain data elements. A few awards and programs have been influential in shaping the policy at both the state and federal level.

The federal government funded one competitive program, The Recovery Act, to assist states to build a statewide longitudinal data system. The purpose of the program is to provide “grants to states to design, develop, and implement statewide P-20 longitudinal data systems to capture, analyze, and use student data from preschool to high school, college, and the workforce” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

This program provides an incredible amount of financial resources to several states (however any state that applies and is eligible should be granted the funds, instead of making it competitive). Since the fiscal year of 2005, the federal government has awarded \$265 million to 41 states and the District of Columbia in grants. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) The data systems developed with funds from this grant must have at least 12 elements. Table 7.1

(below) shows five out of the 12 elements most germane to the construction of quality high school dropout rates.

Table 7.1: Elements in state longitudinal data systems most germane to constructing accurate rates

Element	Purpose
A unique identifier for every student that does not permit a student to be individually identified (except as permitted by federal and state law);	To create a individual cohort rate
The school enrollment history, demographic characteristics, and program participation record of every student;	To report data disaggregated
Information on when a student enrolls, transfers, drops out, or graduates from a school;	To have statewide student exit codes system
A system of auditing data for quality, validity, and reliability;	To have accountability
The ability to share data from preschool through postsecondary education data systems.	To share data among institutions that are responsible to educate students (i.e. juvenile justice systems, jail and prison system)

States are still working on integrating these elements, and the purpose for the element might vary from state to state.

Stakeholder actions

The federal government is aware that there are perverse incentives to manipulate conditions and the cohort in order to show a decrease in their high school dropout rate. The trend to have better data, better measures, and in order to make better decisions has been

evolving over several decades. Three examples follow of actions taken by the federal government in order to improve the student information data system.

One concrete step the federal government took was supporting the task force that produced the document called “Accounting for every student: a taxonomy for standard student exit codes” (*National Forum on Education Statistics*, 2006). Unfortunately, the effect of this task force has been minimal, since only two states (Idaho and Oregon) have fully adopted this taxonomy.

Another step taken by the federal government was the regulation change of defining who counts as a graduate. In October 2008, the U.S. Department of Education responded to criticism regarding the No Child Left Behind Act over the last six years. Several substantive changes were made in an attempt to correct the problem of varying formulas for calculating graduating rates. Alas, this too was ineffective for their goal of establishing “a uniform and more accurate measure of calculating a high school graduation rate that is comparable across states, ...and increase accountability and transparency” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

The last example of an action taken by a stakeholder is the formation of a special committee. In 2008, the committee for improved measurement of high school dropout and completion rates, expert guidance on next steps for research and policy workshop” was formed. Two of its charges directly relate to this policy issue brief. Firstly, “to explore the strengths, weaknesses, and accuracy of available rates”, and secondly “to gather information on the state of the art with respect to constructing longitudinal student accounting systems for measuring dropout and completion rates” (Hauser & Koenig, preface ix).

The next section is a brief history of the emergence and chronology timetable of significant changes to the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Issue's History

Emergence

The wealthy families were by and large were the ones who enjoyed the limited educational opportunities. The first publicly supported secondary school in the United States was the Boston Latin School, founded in 1635. “In the nineteenth century, high schools were firmly elitist institutions. While many high schools claimed to be meritocratic, urban high schools accepted only a small minority and graduated a relative handful of students” (Dorn, 1993, p. 357). Their only mission was college preparation.

The American high schools soon replaced the Latin grammar schools. As a consequence, a dramatic increase in attendance ensued during the 20th century and beyond. As the shift occurred, i.e. public compulsory secondary education, so did the purpose of schooling. “In 1870, the earliest date on record, only 2 percent of 17-year-olds in the nation had a secondary-level education” (Swanson, 2010, p. 22).

In the nineteenth century, high school education was not universal and as such was not available to everyone. It was a firmly elitist system where few students were admitted and few graduated. By the mid-twentieth century, this had drastically changed. The perception permeated society that a high school education should be universal in the United States. “Where universal high school graduation was promoted in 1960, today we speak of universal college attendance, and preferably universal bachelor’s degree” (Hammack, 2004, p. 21). This push has raised the expectations of the credentials required for the point of job entry. A student that does not complete high school is even further behind economically today than in 1960.

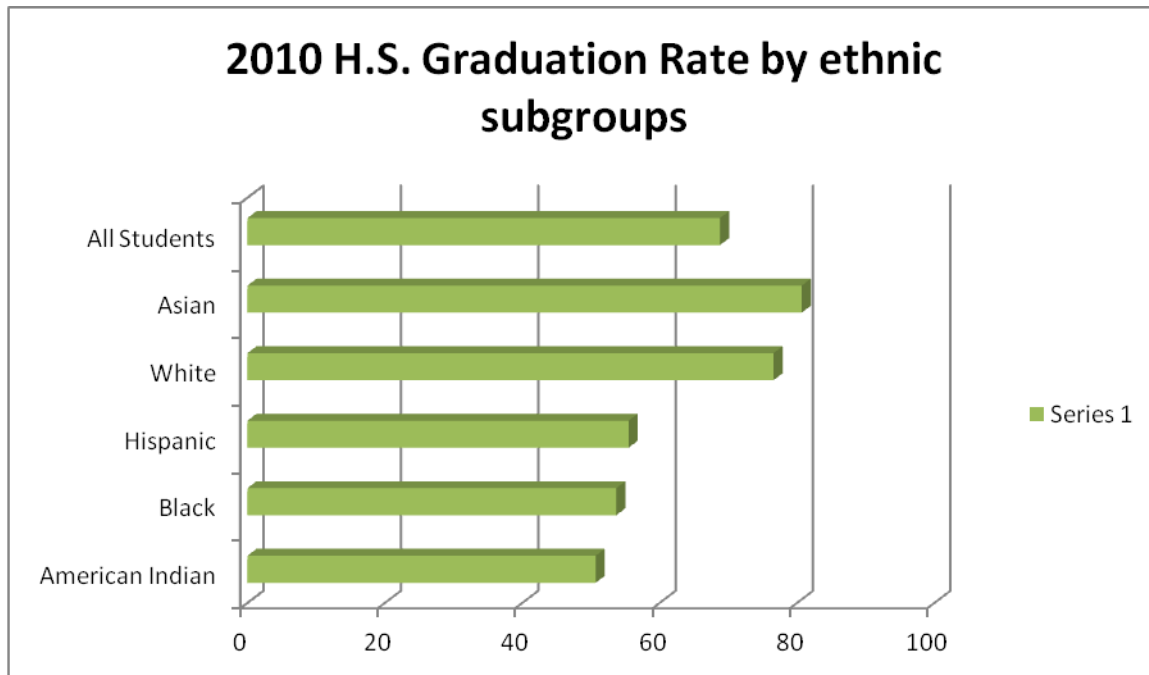
Societal changes demanded both work and college preparation. As early as 1905, there was a meeting to discuss helping youth obtain a better future. The purpose of the National Child Labor Committee's first annual meeting (1905) is stated below:

We are striving not only to save the children from the wrong kind of work at the wrong time and under wrong conditions, but at the same time to prepare them for the right kind of work at the right time and under right conditions that the citizens of tomorrow may work for and be worthy of the highest ideals of the republic. (Dillon, 1949, Foreword)

There is historical data that spans the life of the American secondary education system from birth, maturity, and pending obsolescence. When did the country begin to collect information about completion rates?

Historical data can be used to trace the nation's graduation rate well over a century into the past. In 1870, the earliest date on record, only two percent of 17-year-olds in the nation had a secondary-level education. The turn of the 20th century brought rapid social and economic changes, which ushered in a new age for education. In 1940, for the first time, half of all students finished high school, although graduation did not become an established norm until the 1950s. (Swanson, 2010, p. 22)

Figure 7.3: 2010 High School Graduation Rate (percentage) by ethnic subgroup



The average of all students for the graduation rate was 68.8 percent in 2010. Analyzing the data, found in Figure 7.3, minority groups (Hispanic, Black and American Indian) had an average graduation rate of 53.3 percent in 2010 (Swanson, 2010). This data cannot be compared to the 1940s. This would be an example of comparing statistics that are not comparable. In 1940, the statistics did not reflect the data disaggregated by ethnic subgroup. If so, the data would show an increase of graduation rates from all of the ethnic subgroups from the 1940's till 2010. Since the beginning, the construction of completion rates has had comparability and reliability issues.

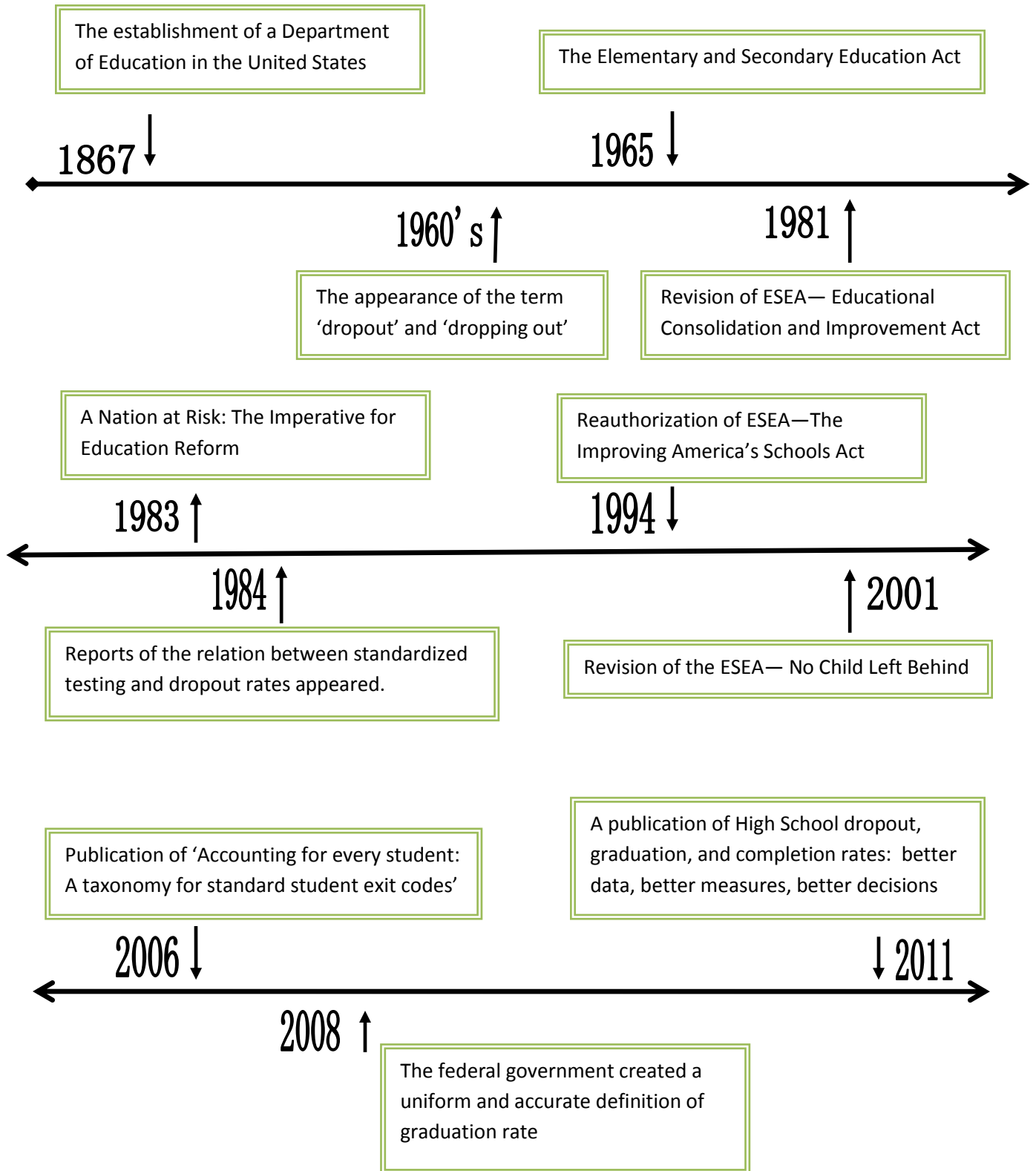
When and under what circumstances did the issue begin to become a concern? Despite the need for strong, sound, reliable measures of completion and non-completion rates, there has been and continues to be widespread disagreement among researchers, statisticians, and policy analysts about the “true” rates. Policy makers need to make decisions on how best to lower the drop out incidence in schools based on educational statistics provided to them. Understanding

both the size of the dropout problem and the trend over recent years is crucial to formulating policy on this issue. When were consequences attached to this policy issue? Who was primarily responsible for the public awareness of this policy issue to the public?

Chronology

Several important steps have been taken to determine a more accurate and reliable rate. Numerous strides are still necessary, and several research projects and organizations and government committees/taskforces have and continue to play an important part in formulating this policy issue. Key dates in the progression of the construction of the high school dropout rate are represented in the following timeline (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4: Timeline of important events in the construction of the high school dropout rate



1867: The establishment of a Department of Education in the United States for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several states and territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems and methods of teaching as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the United States. (U.S. Department of Education, 1994)

1960's: The term dropout and dropping out appeared prevalent in the literature and the public. (Dorn, 1993, p. 357)

1965: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which allowed an extensive infusion of federal funding was allotted to local educational agencies for the education of children of low-income families. This legislation is the building block of the axiomatic system of federal policy concerning the health of the public school system for all children.

1981: Revision of ESEA— Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA)
Major funding cuts are made by reducing financial categorical aid to states and schools under the pretense to save money and reduce the deficit. An important alteration was to deregulate control and give states block grants based on low-income or non-English-speaking or disabled pupils to states. Once the state received the grant from the federal government, the state then had the authority to delegate the money to the schools anyway they wished. The money did not have to then go to schools with high percentages of low-income, urban schools. This is exactly what happened. The funds bypassed students whose families and communities were politically weak.

- 1983:** After the de-regulation and de-funding of education programs took effect under the ECIA the administration issued a major-and extremely critical-report on the state of American education, “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform”. This report used standardized test scores to paint a depressing picture of performance levels in the schools and called for a nationwide system of standardized tests.
- 1984:** Reports of the relation between standardized testing and dropout rates appeared. A few schools began to admit that, even as test scores had increased, so had dropout rates. "For the first time, we are seeing high school dropout rates increasing," former state commissioner of education in Massachusetts, Greg Anrig, revealed. "Does this mean we are getting higher standards, or does the threat of tests encourage teachers just to get rid of kids who might not pass? In other words, are we having more push-outs? And doesn't that tend to hurt minorities?" By 1984, the high school dropout rate in Boston exceeded 40 percent of all students. "The dropout problem is an extremely serious matter," the *Boston Globe* reported, "particularly since most of those who quit do so during the freshman or sophomore year" (Ceglie, R. 2009).
- 1994:** Reauthorization of ESEA—The Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA)—required the secretary of education to report annually on dropouts from elementary and secondary schools. Title V, promoting equity has eight sections in part C, including “Assistance to address school dropout problems”. One of the four purposes is to “model systems for collecting and reporting information to local school officials on the number, ages, sex, race or ethnicity, and grade levels of the children not completing their elementary and secondary education and the reasons why such children have dropped out of school” (US

Department of Education, 1994). See Appendix F for the section of the legislation, “reporting” school dropout problems.

2001: Revision of the ESEA—No Child Left Behind (NCLB) —

Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Title I, Part H, School Dropout Prevention, “The program is a response to a national status dropout rates of about 11 percent over the past decade (with significantly higher rates in some regions and for some groups of students) and the poor labor market outcomes for those without a high school credential”.

Report annually to the U.S. Department of Education on the status of implementation activities and on dropout rates, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, for students at schools assisted by the grant program. In addition, grantees must report annual school dropout rates for the two fiscal years prior to receiving funds under the grant.

(US Department of Education, 2002)

Although, the dropout rate must be reported overall and by subgroup, it is not a part of the accountability formula. The centerpiece of the NCLB is the measuring of schools, districts, and states are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Dropout rates are not a criteria for determining AYP.

2006: Publication of “Accounting for every student: a taxonomy for standard student exit codes” — The National Forum on Educational Statistics, Exit Codes Task Force published this document which was funded by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education.

“In reviewing the existing literature about dropout and graduation rates, Forum members determined that there was a real need for a common format for reporting when students

transferred, completed high school, dropped out, or otherwise changed their enrollment status. In response to this need, in 2004 the Forum established a task force to develop such a standardized format. Standardizing the way data systems record changes in student enrollment—that is, developing common exit codes—is one of those areas”.

“The Task Force and Forum hope this guide will contribute to improving the quality and the usefulness of data collected for and about students in our nation’s schools” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2006, p. vi).

This guide’s potential went unfulfilled. As of 2010, only two states (Idaho and Oregon) have essentially adopted this framework for student exit codes at the state level.

2008: In October of 2008, the federal government created a uniform and accurate definition of graduation rate which is the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. Unfortunately, this regulation did not uniformly and accurately define all categorizations and codes of students. It also does not define how to calculate a dropout rate. Yet, it was a crucial development in beginning the conversation about how to construct rates that will be uniform, accurate, and comparable.

In 2008, most states were still using estimates and unreliable dropout data, since up to this point they could propose and the Department of Education accepted their own method of calculating rates which varied widely across states.

2011: A publication, “High School dropout, graduation, and completion rates: better data, better measures, better decisions” based on an initial workshop held in 2008 was published. The National Research Council (NRC) and the National Academy of Education (NAE) jointly worked on a project on improving and understanding rates, specifically to explore the strengths, weaknesses, and accuracy. This committee for

improved measurement of high school dropout and completion rates made recommendations about best practices in calculating and reporting dropout and completion rates (Hauser & Koenig, 2011).

Define the Issue

Problem

What is the current state of the construction of the high school dropout rate? The Ed data express website best states the variation that exists among states.

“Most importantly, there is variation in how states define and measure certain data elements. Student achievement data and graduation rate data are defined differently in each state, and, therefore, should not be compared among states” (Ed Data Express, 2011).

The problem with the construction of the high school dropout rate is cross-states and within states rates are not comparable due to a lack of meaningful and consistent definitions (defining who does count and who does not count). Several methodological issues exist in defining the numerator and denominator of the rates. Creating a taxonomy of student data exit codes and code categorization is paramount to solving these methodological issues.

A number of examples exist of the lack of consistency in defining who does or does not count. Does a student who is in the juvenile justice system or prison count as a dropout? Who decides if they should be exempt from the cohort? Is there a database capable of tracking a student during his/her incarceration time? What happens when they are released? Should all the states be mandated to categorize the student in the same way? This is one example of a problem that currently exists in the construction of the high school dropout rate.

More accurate rates would highlight the magnitude and racial disparity (by sub-group) of the non-completion factor of secondary school. Increasingly, the conflict between what is reported and what is more accurate, rests on the schools. In addition the issue of accountability

and severe consequences for reporting higher dropout rates and low graduation rates lies with the schools. If the schools were to be more honest, this could result in negative consequences of possible school closings and loss of employment. Who should be more honest? And why?

Extent

If no action is taken by the federal government to produce accurate rates, the public will remain ignorant as to the true size of the problem and the disproportionate figures affecting racial groups. If the estimates currently reported, suggest a state of crisis, then the new data would perhaps constitute an emergency situation.

Understanding the extent to which this problem occurs is to examine current trends. Solving this problem, would allow one to see accurate trends with respect to the health of the public school system. The public wants to know: are we doing a better job educating our youth? Are public educational policies and reforms making an impact on decreasing the high school dropout rate?

Action is needed now. Annually a significant percent of the youth have their education pipeline disrupted. Therefore concrete measures should be undertaken since all areas of their lives are connected to their education attainment level.

Public policy

This is a public policy issue because the institutions constructing and reporting the rates are the public secondary schools which provide educational opportunities to all students (who will become the citizens of tomorrow). The government has already taken action to standardize the definition of a graduate and should extend the definition further to include standardize exit codes and code categorizations. Government funds have been spent giving states the capacity to achieve longitudinal data systems. The future of accurate rates depends on knowing as best as

possible the educational outcome of each and every student. Accounting for all students should be one of the goals of public policy.

In identifying the gravity of the problem, Ana Sol Gutiérrez, Maryland state legislator, noted:

“Every year, across the country ... disproportionately high percentages of poor and minority students disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school.... Because of misleading and inaccurate reporting of graduation rates, the public remains largely unaware of this educational and civil rights crisis” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 20).

Monitor issue’s development

Trends: Organizations

There are trends throughout the nation that provide optimism in achieving better results on this issue. One trend is that several national organizations have focused on the data collection that is necessary in creating more accurate rates. These organizations have been concerned with this public issue policy. Most notable, has been the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Data Quality Campaign (DQC). The CCSSO provides “leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses its views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public” (Taylor, 2007, preface).

One of the issues the CCSSO responded to was the calculation of cohort graduation rates and the methods of implementing quality assurance practices in statewide accountability systems. In June 2007, the CCSSO published a report titled “Quality Assurance Practices Associated with Producing Cohort Graduation Rates”.

Another organization is the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) whose mission is to use student data to improve student achievement. It is a collaborative effort nationally to improve the collection, availability and use of high quality education data. The DQC encourages and supports state policymakers to improve the quality of education data and provides resources that help states implement and use longitudinal data systems. One of the ten essential elements of the longitudinal data system is its “Student-Level Graduation and Dropout Data”. They gathered their data for this element by surveying the states. The information provided to this organization is too general to assess the *quality* of the state student level dropout data.

As the issue of comparability and accountability rise, the trend will be that more organizations will provide expert advice as to how to improve the situation. One of the missions which is critical to improving the current policy issue is gathering political will to improve the construction of the rates. In November, 2005, the Data Quality Campaign began its efforts by focusing the first three years of the campaign “on building the political will for states to implement the 10 essential elements of a longitudinal data system” (Data Quality Campaign, 2011).

Trends: Task Forces

Throughout the years, national committees have been formed to discuss, research, and identify best practices, and current policy regarding constructing completion rates. As stated earlier in the chronology section, The National Forum on Educational Statistics, Exit Codes Task Force (2006) and National Research Council (NRC) and the National Academy of Education (NAE) (2011) have both published reports. The trend of awareness of this policy issue is growing, albeit slowly.

The urgency for solving this problem is absent. The DOE first reported the high school dropout rate (notwithstanding a deeply flawed methodology) in 1972. In December 2010, the

National Center for Education Statistics published a compendium report entitled: “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008”. They reported data gathered from 1972, event dropout rates, status dropout rate, status completion rate, and averaged freshman graduation rate. The actual figures are not comparable from this period, since all four of those rates are estimates (Chapman, C., Laird, A. & KewalRamani, A., 2010).

Most recently, technological advances allow for the widespread use of cohort dropout rates, based on individual student data. Moving forward, the trend is to recognize that the cohort data should be the primary way of configuring the dropout and graduation rates. “The most accurate rates are those based on longitudinal data that track students over the course of their schooling” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 2).

The evolution of the construction of the high school dropout rate policy varies directly with the public’s growing awareness of the dropout crisis problem and its determination to succeed. This policy issue is also tied to policymakers’ responsibility to create policies that improve the success rate of youth. The continuous dropout problem has forced too many youth/adults to end up without a regular high school diploma and more often than not, the students are disproportionately poor and usually members of a minority group.

Conclusion

The progress of this issue has to continue without fail, because as time passes, society changes, and so must our language and concept of who counts. No one definition or any one system can capture the true rate and be perfect. The dropout rate is first subjective and then it becomes an objective, statistical piece of data to improve an important area of concern in the educational system. There are strengths and weaknesses to all calculations of rates, yet the most accurate, consistent rate will show the percentage of how many students do or do not earn a

regular high school diploma. Finally, in an attempt to improve the accuracy of the construction of the high school dropout rate this policy issue brief ends with a summary of issues and recommendations for further action (see Figure 7.5).

The problem of reporting accurate dropout rates is pervasive throughout the educational system and at all levels. The need to highlight and correct the above problem is essential to protect/guard the integrity of a system that promises the best available educational experience for all. Strict accountability should be the ultimate goal at all levels in achieving accurate and reliable dropout rates.

To this end, the following principles should be put in place: 1) legislation, 2) increased available resources and 3) a hundred percent accountability at different levels--local, state and federal. To increase the educational system across the country it is essential to address the population of youths that are at risk of not completing school.

Figure 7.5: Summary of Issues and Recommendations for Further Action

- ❖ **Current:** Federal government has weak general guidance for defining relevant categories. No standardized exit code system exists.

Recommendation: Federal government must mandate universal definitions of overarching categories and a universal standardized exit code system.

Why? Without this the rates are not comparable.



- ❖ **Current:** States can decide who counts in what group and who should be exempt from Calculation, i.e. incarcerated youth.

Recommendation: A standardized, mandated formula, that defines who does and does not count in the numerator and denominator (code categorizations).

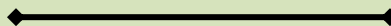
Why? Without this the rates are not comparable.



- ❖ **Current:** States report various methods for reporting rates such as event, status, and cohort.

Recommendation: The primary rate reported should be the cohort method.

Why? The other methods only show one year, or a cross-section of all students in one year, instead of over a four year time period for one class.



- ❖ **Current:** It is optional for states to report disaggregated results.

Recommendation: All rates should report disaggregation by categories: racial, ethnicity, economic, disability status, and English language proficiency.

Why? Disaggregated rates shows weak areas in the system for those groups that are particularly vulnerable and in need of assistance. It will also assist in understanding the intersection of gender, race, incarcerated youth, and school non-completion.



- ❖ **Current:** No database has current information on the state of data collection and methods for calculating rates.

Recommendation: There should be a federal database of current and ongoing methods of calculations by state.

Why? To track and make the states accountable to the following a) federal requirements, and b) the general public for their data and methods of calculations.



Chapter 8

Conclusion: Framing and Communicating the Dropout Rate

Introduction

This chapter will restate the principal function of the study that were interspersed in each of the previous body chapters and synthesize the findings. Firstly, it provides background information on the construction of the high school dropout rate (chapter four). Secondly, it reviews the main points of variations of state exit codes (chapter five). Thirdly, it describes a case study of one particular construction of the high school dropout rate (chapter six). Finally, it summarizes the policy issue, i.e. changes made by culminating regulations, and the hurdles that still remain (chapter seven).

This chapter brings all of the findings together and presents a coherent story. In addition, it frames this study as an issue of multiple importance: political, social and educational. It ends with a threefold discussion: what is being communicated, and why is it constructed this way, and who is accountable?

Findings

This section will first provide background information on the construction of the high school dropout rate. Secondly, it will go over the main points of the variations of state exit codes. Thirdly, it will describe a case study of one particular construction of the high school dropout rate. Fourthly, it will describe the policy issue brief. Finally, it will frame all of the stated findings as a coherent story.

Chapter Four

The construction of the high school dropout can be subjective. What is necessary to construct a high school dropout rate? The findings are the development of the conversation of

the abstract notion of constructing the high school dropout rate. It is crucial to define the essential elements that are subsequently put into a formula. Each of the three constructs: time frame, grouping and exit coding, are part of the general derivation for computing any dropout rate.

These constructs are necessary to create a high school dropout rate. My explanation of the essential elements was framed by using decision analysis as a conceptual tool. In addition, a formula must be defined for calculating the high school dropout rate. A critical review and subsequent re-structuring of the federal framework showed the necessity of code categorizations.

Findings:

- Time frame: Depending on the question asked, one can construct a rate to reflect either annual or cohort time frame. This study recommends reporting the primary statistics of dropout rate using a cohort time frame.
- Grouping: Depending on the combined student population, one can construct a rate to reflect either age, class, high school cohort or secondary cohort. The recommendation is to collect data so that all of the above rates can be accurately calculated. Grouping by age provides information necessary to compare the United States to other countries. Grouping by class allows resources to be targeted to a particular grade level if the data shows a disproportionate emphasis on one particular class. Grouping by secondary cohort gives information to the neighborhood and community as to the school's success in graduates/dropouts. Including middle school gives a more complete picture of the successes and failures. However, for accountability purposes, only the high school cohort grouping should be used.

- Exit Coding: All codes must be well-defined and standardized in order to construct comparable dropout rates. These codes must be easily recognizable and belong to the same code categorizations. The only over-arching categories should be 1) still enrolled 2) completer 3) dropout 4) transfer. ‘Othering’ should not exist. The only legitimate removal from the cohort should be deceased, which for accountability purposes, can be coded as a transfer. Transfers count as legitimate removals from their cohort.

Figure 4.5: The construct of exit coding

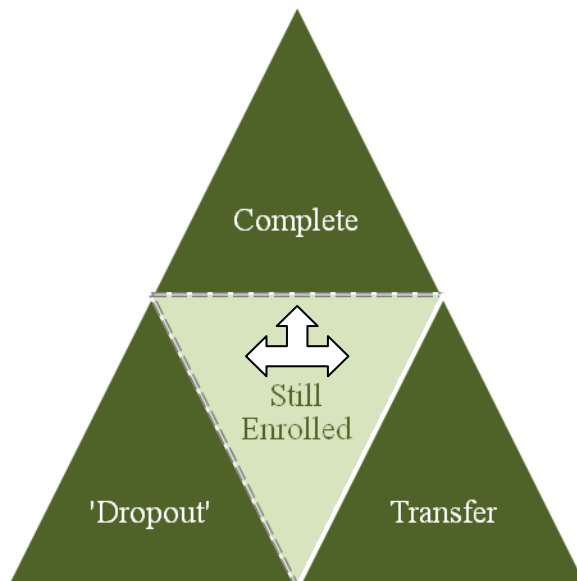


Figure 4.5 (above) shows an idealistic schema of overarching exit code categories. At the end of four years students should either a) complete (includes graduates) b) transfer (legitimately to another institution where they can earn high school credits) c) dropout (those who do not complete and are currently not enrolled). The ‘still enrolled’ category with the extension of time (see alternatives of the time construct), will ‘exit’ as either a) completer, b) transfer or c) ‘dropout’.

- The ‘federal framework’ moved the conversation forward, but there are still loopholes in their general guidelines. The abstract concept of having numbers represents over-arching

categories and letters to represent specific codes is simple, direct, and/or standardized.

This study recommends rethinking the general guidelines to allow for abandoning overarching categories five and six. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show a reframing of the federal framework categories five and six.

Federal Framework—Old	Comment	Recommended---New
5A	Reason for non-attendance is the same: students are not attending for disciplinary or other reasons*	Category 1D
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5B	Medical condition prevents them from receiving services	Category 1E
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5C	Students are still enrolled in a foreign exchange program	Category 1F
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5D	Students are still enrolled in an early admission college program	Category 1G
	Student re-enrolled	Category 1, 2, or 4
	Student did not re-enroll when they became eligible to enroll again.	Category 3
5E	n/a for school indicator rates for secondary schools	None

Federal Framework—Old	Comment	Recommended---New
6A	Student did not transfer but they ‘exited’. Student is no longer attending and is legitimately removed from the cohort. Note: This is truly an ‘other’ category, but for accountability purposes, if grouped under ‘transfers’ it allows the school to remove the student from the cohort. The ‘exiter’ neither completed nor dropped out. Furthermore, it avoids the creation of another Category of ‘other’ that potentially could have several codes that do not belong.	Category 2D* *exited
6B	<p>“Students have returned to school after receiving a completion credential and have subsequently exited school”, should have a temporary code of ‘still enrolled’. (federal framework, p.11)</p> <p>“Students have returned after they reached the age until which the state guarantees a free, appropriate public education and have subsequently exited school ” (federal framework, p.11) Comment: if the student is older than 21 years old, they should not be allowed to re-enroll in a secondary program, they should be referred to an adult educational setting (i.e. G.E.D. programs).</p>	1H None

- This study finds creating a) standardized student exit codes and b) code categorizations vital to the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Chapter Five

This chapter examines the relationship between state and district regarding the standardization of student exit codes. It also compares and contrasts the essential elements of constructing the high school dropout rate among a select group of states. It also observes variations of state student exit codes. The organization of the codes between states is strikingly haphazard. All fifty states and the District of Columbia student exit codes were gathered, coded and analyzed.

Findings:

- Even though a majority (71 percent) of states *require* districts to upload to their state system a standardized set of codes, many still *recommend* (not mandate) that the state codes be used in the local school system. This gives local school districts the latitude to add or modify without accountability. The relationship between New York State and New York City is one example of the complexity of the connection between district and state.
- The minimum number of days of consecutive unexcused absences varies between states. Some states allow a student to remain on the roster as a long term absence twice as long as other states. Colorado has a minimum of ten days and New York has a minimum of 20 days. Most states have a minimum number between ten and twenty. Virginia represents a state with fifteen.
- Indiana has an overarching category called “Student Mobility” which does not exist in any other state. It is a concoction of fourteen codes that do not count as a dropout. Some are legitimate: transferred, removed by parents, deceased, transferred out of state, and earned GED. Other codes in student mobility deserve a conversation as to whether they should be categorized as dropouts: poor health, missing, and religious beliefs. Student mobility is one example of a bizarre categorization, parallel to New York City’s categorization of discharges. It allows the exemption of students who should not be exempt. It is a mishmash of all of the overarching categories (still enrolled, transfers, died, dropouts) except graduates. Indiana’s student mobility code category is a prime example of non-standardization of which students are allowed to be exempt from being calculated as a dropout.

New York, California, Nevada, Florida, and Illinois were the five states with individual school systems that had the highest absolute number of dropouts. Many of the codes that appeared as possible threats to the validity of the dropout rate and other frequently occurring codes within the dropout category were analyzed. (See Table 19) Expulsion occurs in all of the five states. Incarcerated as its own separate code occurs in New York, California and Nevada, but not in Florida, and Illinois. Similarly, “transfer to an institution” occurs in New York and California, but not Nevada, Florida, or Illinois.

There is one code, court ordered, that does appear in four out of the five states (not in Illinois), but it appears in varying categorizations. New York codes a student who is court ordered as *other circumstance for ending enrollment*, California as a *transfer*, Nevada and Florida both code court order as a *dropout*. Court Order flows into different overarching categories depending on the state and individual school system.

Table 5.4: Common codes analyzed by existence and code categorization

	NY	CA	NV	FL	IL
‘court order’	Code 323, Other*	Code T165, Transfer	Code W3 (a) vi, Dropout	Code W13, Dropout	X
‘Incarcerated’	Code 8338, Other, Code 323, Other	Code T370, Transfer T380, Dropout ‘justice system’	Code W3(c) iii, Dropout	X	X
Transfer to an ‘institution’	Has 3 codes, code 153, code 323, code 8338	T370, Transfer T380, Dropout	X	X	X
Expulsion	Code 408, Dropout	E300, dropout T165, Transfer	Code W3 (c) I, Dropout	Code W21, Dropout	Code 08

Note: NY abbreviated “other” category equals “other circumstance for ending enrollment”

- Should religion be used as a basis for exempting a student who ends schooling without a high school diploma for religious purposes, from counting as dropout? Though Nevada was the only state of the five used in the analysis that had a code for religion, a few other states also have similar codes that exempt students from being counted as dropouts on that basis. If they choose not to follow the religious path of their parents, then they are put significantly behind educationally due to early withdrawal. This is an example of the complexity and overlapping of responsibilities, decision-making and accountability at different levels of policy making. Yes, the Supreme Court ruling allows for special cases, but they do not specify whether the withdrawal of these children be counted or not counted as dropout, withdrawal, transfer or other. In rethinking the construction of the high school dropout rate all students must be accounted for in the taxonomy of coding.
- New York’s categorization of discharges does not exist in any of the state withdrawal codes, including the state of New York. Due to its bizarre usage for accounting for students’ whereabouts, there are no corresponding words that are equivalent in connotation to *discharge*.
- Thirty states (59 percent) have a unique code containing GED and/or adult. Twenty-one states (41 percent) do not. This accounts for GED and/or adult being mentioned in the title of the code.
- Federal regulation does not identify GED recipients as graduates of a regular diploma. Massachusetts has two similar codes, “Transferred: adult diploma program, leading to MA diploma” (Code 24), and “Dropout: Enrolled in a non-diploma granting adult education program” (Code 30). Another state, New York, offers GED classes within

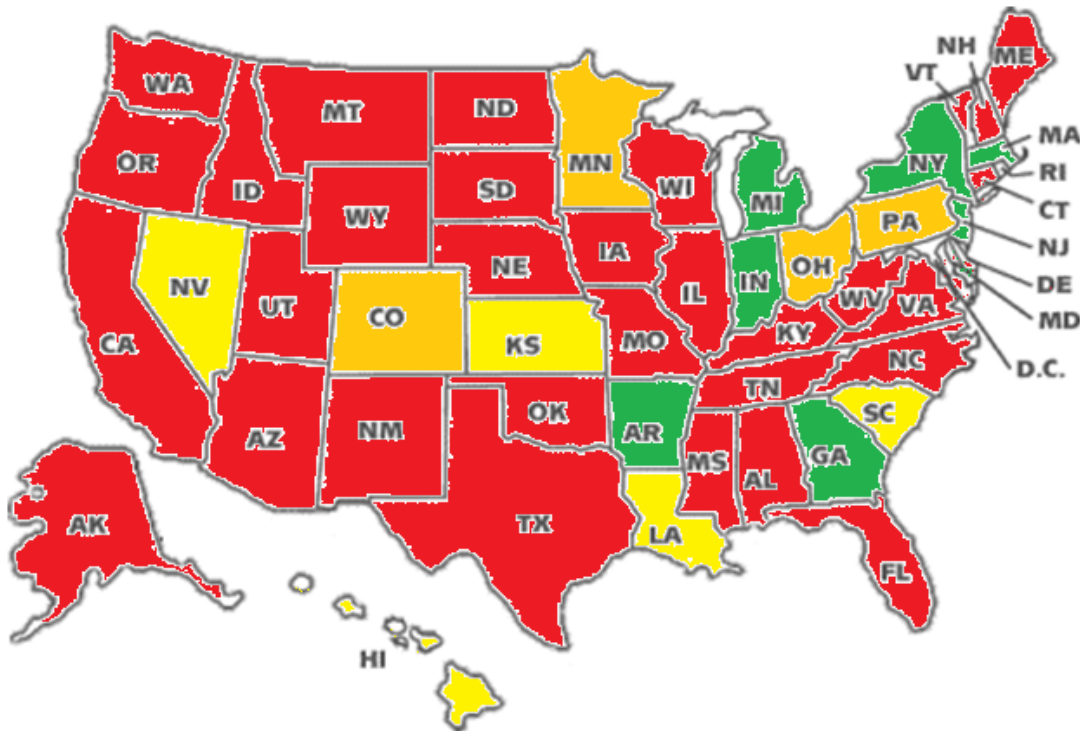
certain school systems during the day (Code 153 and 289). A blurring of adult and secondary school programs is evident in both Massachusetts and New York.

- Seventeen states (33 percent) have a form of incarceration as a unique code. Of the 51 states, thirty-four (67 percent) have no code that explicitly ciphers students who have been incarcerated. Both Table 5.6 and Figure 5.2 show the state by state analysis of the occurrence of the code incarcerated/incarceration.

Table 5.6: State by state analysis of the occurrence of the code ‘incarcerated/incarceration’

	‘incarcerated/incarceration’	Correctional institution/adjudication	Has at least two terms/codes	None
State	AR, DE, GA, IN, MA, MI, NJ, NY,	CO, MN, OH, PA,	HI, KS, LA, NV, SC Depending on age, 17 years, or programs with or without an educational program...	AL, AK, AZ, CA, CT, DC, FL, ID, IL, IA, KY, ME, MD, MS, MO, MT, NE, NH, NM, NC, ND, OK, OR, RI, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY
Total Number	8	4	5	34

Figure 5.2: Variation of the use or non-use of ‘incarceration’ exit code found in State Exit Code Systems, A State by State Comparison



- ◇ Green States = Incarcerated/ incarceration
- ◇ Dark Yellow States = Correctional institution/ adjudication
- ◇ Light Yellow States = Has at least two terms/codes
- ◇ Dark Red States = None

Chapter Six

This chapter de-constructed and re-constructed the high school dropout rate for the New York City School District. The data gathered was the most recent data available at the time of the research. Since, subsequent versions have been released. The entire document of the latest revision of the NYC transfer, discharge, and graduation code guidelines are always available on the attendance page of the principal’s portal.

The research combines primary sources from NYC school district and prior research. i.e. the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The findings are derived from three volatile, overarching themes which have substantial potential to invalidate NYC's calculation of the high school dropout rate. Each of the themes: discharges, GED, and incarceration, are characteristics of this case study, yet it represents a general overall problem of standardizing student exit codes.

Findings:

- Discharges: this word which in NYC accounting of students counts as an overarching category with multiple codes underneath it, does not exist at all in New York State's Ending Enrollment Code Definitions.
- Discharges: many disturbing things are found in this overarching category. If a student transfers to an adult program (full time), they are not counted as a transfer nor a dropout. This is blending the distinction between secondary and adult education. Yet, if the student transfers to a part-time program, they are coded as a dropout. This only requires registration, to be exempt from the dropout statistics. Actually attendance and completion are not considered for accountability.

Discharges: the usage of discharge codes is bizarre and unique to the New York City school system.

Table 6.4: Discharges (not counted as dropouts) re-classified

Discharges (not counted as dropouts)	Analysis Summary	Re-classified
Code 04: ‘Under Six Years Old’	n/a	n/a
Code 15: ‘Student Deceased’	Legitimate	Other
Code 18: ‘Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling’	DOE is not the granting agency	Completion Code
Code 21: ‘Over 21 Years Old’	Directly violates the state guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code
Code 36: ‘Enrolled in a Full-time High School Equivalency (GED) program outside of New York City Public School System’	Directly violates the federal guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code upon enrollment
		Completion Code upon completion
Code 79: ‘Expulsion’	With no option to return violates the federal guidelines for defining dropouts	Dropout Code

- The analysis of discharge rates for the Class of 2009 shows considerably variability depending on the school type. The analysis showed all schools that had a discharge count of more than half the number of graduates. The analysis revealed that citywide, 74 out of 371 high schools (20 percent) had exceptionally high discharge numbers. Thirteen discharged more students than they were graduating. In addition, 68 out of the 74 schools had a higher number of discharges than dropouts.

- We have in this case, a *discharge crisis* as well as a *dropout crisis*. The New York City school district refuses to report the discharge category (16979 for the Class of 2009) disaggregated by codes. So, of the discharges the public is unaware how many of the students should be re-categorized as dropouts. Dropout numbers pale in comparison to discharge figures. Almost 17,000 students were discharged, compared with almost 8200 students who dropped out all across the city. A serious concern is the lack of detail in non-reporting statistics of who counts as a discharge. Figure 6.2 shows the statistics for the class of 2009.
- In 2000, 2,886 students were discharged by the end of their first year of high school. By 2009, more than twice as many students (6,042) were discharged by the end of their first year.
- GED: the General Education Development (GED) award has less stature than a regular high school diploma. Should a distinction be made for a student who has completed requirements to earn a GED and a student who has registered for an alternative educational program that prepares one to take the GED? There is a blurring of secondary programs and adult programs. “Alternative” runs the gamut in terms of curriculum content. In the Fall of 2007, the NYC school system created District 79 Alternate Schools & Programs which constitutes some form of adult education (since components of it are to prepare one for the GED) that is offered during the school day to youth under the age of 21. It is unclear if these students in District 79 are removed from the adjusted cohort as discharges.
- Incarceration: if the youth is not registered in a program where they can earn credits that would transfer back to their home school, they should be coded as a dropout. Many take

educational courses, but at a basic level where they are not earning high school credits.

Youth are coded “transfer to an institution” if they are incarcerated. This code falls underneath transfers outside of the NYC DOE schools. Why should a student be exempt from being calculated in the dropout rate because they entered the justice system? They are exempt regardless if they re-enroll in a secondary school, if they receive a GED, or they drop out.

- Incarcerated youth are being streamed into GED programs while the opportunity to take high school credits is not encouraged. A high percentage of incarcerated youth are passing the GED exam (see Table 6.11). How many of these youth that pass the GED exam could have pursued and attained their high school diploma? The pass rates for the GED examination combined for OCFs, DOCS, county jails, and Rikers exceeds the total average for all GED test-takers in New York State.
- There is a correlation between gender, institutionalization and graduating/or not from high school. Eighty percent of all youth admitted in New York City are male. “Currently, the rate at which black males are being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement” (Holzman, 2010, p. 1). A black youth is approximately sixteen times more likely to be admitted than a white youth to the prison system in NYC. An Hispanic youth is approximately seven times more likely to be admitted than a white youth.
- The disappeared: signifies youths that we have not yet discussed, because they appear nowhere in the student exit code system. They include but are not limited to a) a peculiar New York State rule (the five month rule) b) no shows and c) summer dropouts. The

disappeared' is compilation of many circumstances in which students end up vanishing, and schools are not responsible for their educational outcomes. Who counts? Who has disappeared?

- Those students, disproportionately poor and youth of color, are most vulnerable to dropping out and these are precisely the ones who are most frequently counted as other and exempt from being calculated in the high school dropout rate.

Chapter Seven

This chapter is a policy issue brief on the quality of the construction of the high school dropout rate as a policy issue. Currently, there is a lack of accuracy and consistency at all levels, however the United States of America continues to discuss high school dropout rates and graduation rates as if they are comparable. After a discussion of stakeholders and a brief chronology review of this policy issue, Chapter Seven concludes with a summary of issues and recommendations for further action (see Figure 7.5).

Synthesis of Findings

The above findings tell a collective story of the current state of the construction of the high school dropout rate. Each chapter adds detail that when combined shows a more complex picture of the subjective nature of creating this one particular statistic. The story moves from the general (Chapter Four) to a state by state comparison (Chapter Five) to a specific case study (Chapter Six) to a to defining a national policy issue (Chapter Seven).

Who does not count? is vital to the construction of the high school dropout rate. Also vital is the necessity of creating standardized student exit codes, and code categorizations. There is a lack of consistency and accuracy resulting in a chaotic student exit code system between

states. This non-standardized method, used across the US to construct dropout rate calculations undermines the comparability and reliability of the dropout rate.

Discussion

What message is communicated about the magnitude of the problem? Who is aware of the inaccuracy of the construction of the high school dropout rate? How are dropout rates interpreted? Who is accountable for producing accurate, reliable rates?

This chapter seeks to extend the conversation regarding understanding the importance of accurate development of the dropout rate. Also included is a general reframing of how this educational policy under-serves the most vulnerable populations.

Communication

How are dropout rates communicated to various actors? The public is largely unaware of the discrepancies and the existing outrageous non-standardized practices of local school districts, and states. The federal government gives recommendations but does not mandate a uniform taxonomy of student exit codes or a standard formula for calculating rates. What is the message communicated to the public about the health of the public school system?

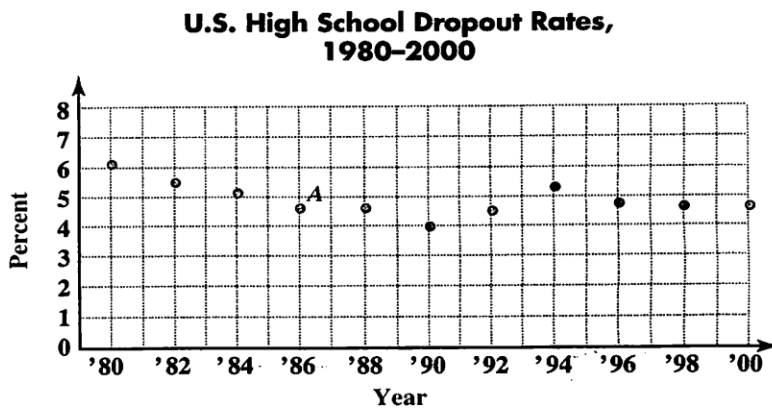
This study gives evidence of persons being aware that a problem exists, yet there is no immediate action taken (Duncan's statement, p. 16), and the doubling of ninth grade discharges (Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger's statement, p. 110), and the federal government knowing this information is not comparable state by state (government statement, p.165). In addition, the public consciously and unconsciously supports the statistical manipulation in favor of low dropout rates.

One example of the message communicated to the public is through mathematics textbooks. Impact Mathematics is a three year series of textbooks for middle school marketed as

a blend of reform and traditional curricula. The word problem below as shown in Figure 8.1 reaches many actors: 1) middle school students and families, 2) middle school teachers, and 3) professional developers.

Figure 8.1: Word Problem from Impact Mathematics textbook

9. Social Studies This graph shows the percent of U.S. students in grades 10–12 who dropped out of high school on even-numbered years from 1982 to 2000. The point labeled A shows that, in 1986, about 4.7% of students dropped out.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

- a. In which year was the dropout rate highest? In which year was it lowest?
- b. When did the percent of students who dropped out of high school first fall below 5%?
- c. About what percent of students dropped out of high school in 2000? About what percent of students stayed in high school in 2000?
- d. If the U.S. high school population was about 13,000,000 in 2000, approximately how many students dropped out that year?

(Education Development Center, 2004, p. 296)

This mathematical exercise interprets the U.S. high school dropout rate as 4.7 percent in 2000. The context of the problem is interdisciplinary with Social Studies as the dominant subject. One could interpret this rate as low, and not significant as a social problem. Normally, when annual rates are reported, it is a cross-section of all high school students in one year. The

authors of this math problem gathered data for tenth through twelfth grade, ignoring ninth grade dropouts. It is completely inaccurate to label the graph “US high school dropout rates” and not include first year students. It is also misleading to gather data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This data is only a crude estimate that uses aggregated data collected from all states that use all different criteria to define who does and who does not count as a dropout. Moreover, the institutionalized population is not counted in the statistics.

Lastly, all the sub-parts are poorly constructed. Sub-parts A and B implies that all students in high school are being accounted for which is not accurate. Sub-part C implies that if the student does not drop out then all the remaining students are still in school. This is inaccurate because some students transfer or are removed from the cohort for various reasons. Sub-part D implies that approximately 611,000 (4.7 percent of 13 million) high school students dropped out in 2000. If the age range for ninth to twelfth (which is legally 21-years-old) is expanded three years to represent 16 to 24-year-olds, then “In October 2000, some 3.8 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youths accounted for 10.9 percent of the 34.6 million 16- through 24-year-olds in the United States,” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000, p. 7). How could the data be so different?

This math problem above (see Figure XVI) exemplifies the confusion of seeing 4.7% representing high school dropout rate data and the interest in conducting this research. What is communicated to the public is inaccurate and confusing. This is the purpose of this study, to unpack, and begin again the conversation of who is counted and not counted in the construction of the high school dropout rate.

Artfully this word problem implicitly deals with social problems which create a story of misinformation. The content highlights the social and educational concern of high school non-completion. The numbers themselves are not wrong, it is the meaning attached to those numbers that are wrong. Taking this four percent and multiplying by four years and including the ninth grade class would come closer to most persons understanding of high school dropout rates. If one understood that this represents one year of collection and not four years of high school then it would not be so misleading. If it clearly indicated not including ninth grade which has the highest incidence of dropping out, then it would convey a better understanding of the dropout problem.

Another example is the movement towards incentives of lowering the high school dropout rate. The incentives are framed to be effective if they reinforce people's commitment to the goal, regardless of the actual outcome, what is important is the perceived outcome and contribution. (National Academies of Sciences, 2011) Communication of what is needed to fix a broken system is very simplified, short-sighted, and unrealistic.

Framing

How are high school dropout rates interpreted? Who is the audience? Why seek more accurate measures of high school completion? Who counts as a dropout? How does this interpretation guide the actions of dropout prevention programs and policies? What is at stake because of the reported dropout rate?

The meanings of dropout rates evolve within a society as time passes. There is a constant social stigma attached to dropping out. Two distinct yet related concepts exist of dropouts: the social world and the accountability sphere. In terms of accountability, only one definition must exist in the technical educational sphere in order to achieve accountability. However, in the

social sphere, no one definition can exist nor should it. How does one interpret a shared language or a common definition of what it means to drop out?

Defining Terms

The calculation of dropout rates varies according to how the concept is defined (Lehr, 2004, p. 9). Dropping out of what? Who defines when the label dropout is a problem? Is it possible to have one universal definition of dropout? Is it advisable to seek such a thing? Is it necessary? In what ways does the definition of dropout impact the construction of the dropout rate? This study seeks to explore, clarify, and synthesize methodological issues relating to definitions.

No universally accepted definition exists nor should it for defining dropout. In our society, there are multitudes of reasons why students end their enrollment in secondary school before attaining a diploma. As the society changes, so do the consequences of non-completion. Even though, the conception of a dropout varies in our society, for the purposes of school accountability, a consensus must be reached to uniformly create a definition. This constructed definition must strive to be inclusive of all students that have not attained a high school diploma and are currently not enrolled in an educational program leading to a high school diploma.

Little attention has been paid, or effort made to synthesizing previous research and terminology with respect to youth without a diploma. The socially constructed meaning of a word has great implications to the reality that youth and society face every day. To this end, to advance the conversation I offer a conceptual categorization of the myriad of ways youth can possibly fit the broad category of early school leaver. Following Ruglis's research, the umbrella of early school leaver includes: 1) school pushout 2) school leaver 3) school refuser (or resistor)

4) school force-out 5) school neglected 6) school denied. In conducting this research, other terms were found to describe youths without a high school diplomas such as: a) fade-out b) leftout c) stopout d) tune-out and e) near-dropout.

Essentially, fade-out, tune-out, and near-dropout are describing the characteristics of youth near the point of becoming official dropouts. These could all be combined to reflect a more coherent set of literature when describing someone who displays some early warning signs of becoming a dropout. Hence, adding only three additional terms to Ruglis's research would more completely clarify terminology found in the literature for early school leavers or dropouts: fade-out, left-out and stop-out.

It is the recommendation of this study that the term school dropout be replaced with early school leaver. Many countries use the term early school leaver. Moreover, the United States used the term early school leaver during the 1960s. A shift occurred after this time, perhaps ideologically, to label the population of youth who did not attain diplomas as dropout.

The cycle of stigma attached to this group of youths needs to be broken, interrupted, redefined, reconceived, and moved to a space where we respectfully think of them. This section has expanded, synthesized, and furthered our current understanding and thinking of the terminology regarding early school leavers.

Accountability

Who is accountable? Not one, but all share in the responsibility to hold each other accountable. It is unreasonable to believe that local school districts, and states will be accountable for themselves. The federal government must mandate stricter accountability. They have statements that acknowledge that one should not compare states, and that the federal government is aware of it, and that they should not be held accountable.

The current method of accountability is simply too low in standards to compute meaningful data. The federal government must play a larger role than simply recommending, and the states must mandate uniformity of standard exit codes to local school districts. The federal government and states are both aware of the problem and have both lagged in their efforts to correct glaring variations.

In 2006, The National Forum on Education Statistics published “Accounting for Every Student: A Taxonomy for Standard Student Exit Codes”. This document identifies special populations that are obstacles to comparability (p. 15):

- ✓ Special education students
- ✓ Migrant students
- ✓ Chronically truant students
- ✓ Expelled or imprisoned students
- ✓ Homeschooled students
- ✓ Students whose religious or cultural beliefs influence school enrollment decisions in an atypical manner

All of those special populations listed above (in addition to GED transfers) are not only comparability risks, but also accountability risks. These are the special population of youth that are sliding through the cracks of accountability. All of these issues and loopholes presented in this research must be resolved before one can say that the high school dropout rate is accountable to all students.

The federal government should play a more significant role in reducing the variability among the states exit codes that classify students’ enrollment status. “The political will must exist to create and implement a system that functions with valid and useful results” (Hauser &

Koenig, 2011, p. 91). Dropout, graduation and completion rates are part of the system used to hold schools accountable for the educational success of the youth they serve.

Dropout rates cannot be calculated without data. “The accuracy of the rates depends on the accuracy and the completeness of the data used for their calculation” (Hauser & Koenig, 2011, p. 92). It is the hope that state longitudinal data systems are able to a) track students accurately b) calculate accurate dropout and completion rates c) monitor students’ progress d) evaluate the effectiveness of school reforms and/or programs (Hauser & Koenig, 2011).

The lack of standardization for the essential elements of the construction of the high school dropout rate is a byproduct of the lack of a unified national education system. The current coding system leads to the possibility for gaming the system (Hauser & Koenig, 2011).

The current US educational accountability, NCLB, demands that schools and districts learn how to improve (by force) in a short period of time or “learn to manipulate their outcomes to counterfeit improvement” (Fruchter, 2007, p. 65), in order to escape punitive sanctions. Statistical manipulations can be easily misinterpreted, when no classification systems exist that are mutually exclusive and mandated.

Conclusion

This dissertation provides evidence for the following argument: the current system of coding and code categorization which in turn produces high school dropout rates (and graduation rates) which is a part of educational statistics and accountability measures belies the truth. It is haphazard and non-standardized due to the lack of oversight by the state. The current system of ending enrollment codes that districts now utilize remains a loosely regulated accounting system that is rife with loopholes. This coupled with an intense pressure to show improvement gains statistically might create incentives for reporting low dropout rates and high graduation rates.

Districts are pressured to construct rates in a favorable way to consistently and constantly show gains numerically.

Despite political pressure to show favorable educational statistics, one must caution against miracle gains in achievement. The following three statistical facts best demonstrate the need for a change to account for all students, especially minorities and poor youth:

1) 90 percent of the 11,000 youth in adult detention facilities have no more than a ninth grade education. (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001)

2) The US death rate for persons with fewer than 12 years of education is 2.5 times higher than for those with 13 or more years of education. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010)

3) African American males have the highest dropout rate of any racial and ethnic group. (Weatherspoon, 1998)

The plight of early school leavers once they have prematurely ended their public secondary school experience is one of dire concern. Comparisons of significant rates (non-completion of high school, high school graduation, college attendance, and college graduation) disaggregated highlight educational equity issues. The rates and statistics mentioned above are painful reminders of the ineffectiveness of schools particularly in economically depressed and racially isolated communities. (Reed, 1991) “What distinguishes the situation today is not the rate of dropping out, but the consequences of being denied a high school diploma” (Fine, 1991, p.31).

Ladson-Billings (2006) and Orfield (2004) identify our current situation with school dropouts in the US as a crisis. Comprehending accurate completion and non-completion rates at all levels (high school, college, and graduate) exposes the imperative to challenge the inequities

that are deeply embedded in systems of schooling and in society. Currently, the public schools “are accountable to no obvious constituency” (Fine, 1991, p. 194).

Every student should count and be accounted for. The process of accounting for every student is both complicated and complex. The task to do so is dynamic because of changing educational policies, school reforms, and student mobility. The ever-increasing demand for public school accountability and the relationship of educational data to success demands that this issue needs constant evaluation. Dropout rates can be used as an indicator to the health of the public school system only if these rates are comparable and accurate. There is a need to examine and evaluate the issue of school non-completion that is more informative, more insightful, more compelling and more humanistic (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Moving forward is a must; their lives depend upon it.

Who counts? These educational statistics should be a complement to other measures of holding our society accountable for the public welfare of our youth through the school system. The quality of a well-educated citizenry will determine our progress as a human society.

In conclusion, our society has increased our zest for assessments, and consequences of school indicators. This study showed variations in the construction of the high school dropout rate on a local, state, and national level. Creating a framework for the components necessary to derive a dropout rate found an important, missing link between exit codes and code categorizations. An explicit, standardized taxonomy of a student exit code system is mandatory to account for each and every student. Not doing so exempts the most vulnerable populations of youth to be counted in our quest to understand comparisons of the health of our public school system.

Appendix A: Graduation Rates within NCLB: A Uniform and Accurate Definition of Graduation Rate: The Four-Year Adjusted Cohort

Graduation Rate

An accurate method of calculating graduation rates that is uniform across states is necessary to improve high school accountability. Requiring school officials to obtain written confirmation before removing a student from a cohort will improve the accuracy of graduation rate calculations. Written confirmation will also ensure that students who have dropped out of school are not counted as transfers and will consequently hold schools accountable for dropouts and others who do not graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

The final regulations define the “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier (adjusting for transfers in and out, émigrés and deceased students—see below).

Students who graduate in four years include students who earn a regular high school diploma at the end of their fourth year; before the end of their fourth year; and, if a state chooses, during a summer session immediately following their fourth year.

To remove a student from a cohort, a school or district must confirm in writing that a student has transferred out, emigrated to another country, or is deceased. For students who transfer out of a school, the written confirmation must be official and document that the student has enrolled in another school or in an educational program that culminates in a regular high school diploma.

Source: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/uniform-grad-rate.pdf>

CATEGORY 4: Completed—A previously enrolled student who has exited the system and meets certain criteria

- CATEGORY 4A: Students completed an approved program of study and met all state or district requirements for a high school diploma
- CATEGORY 4B: Students completed an approved program of study for high school completion, but did not meet all state or district requirements for a diploma
- CATEGORY 4C: Students completed a program of study that did not address state diploma requirements and received a certificate of achievement or attendance [e.g., special education students in Individualized Educational Programs (IEP)]
- CATEGORY 4D: Students completed a vocational education program and earned a certificate recognized by the state or district
- CATEGORY 4E: Students passed an equivalency examination through an approved program, such as the GED; and met other state or district requirements for a high school equivalency certificate or diploma

CATEGORY 5: Not enrolled, eligible to return

- CATEGORY 5A: Students are not attending for disciplinary or other eligibility reasons, but are eligible to enroll at a later date
- CATEGORY 5B: Students have a long-term medical condition, or are in drug treatment or a rehabilitative center, that prevents them from receiving services, but are eligible to return to school
- CATEGORY 5C: Students are enrolled in a foreign exchange program, and are eligible to return to school in the United States
- CATEGORY 5D: Students are enrolled in an early admission college program but are eligible to return to graduate (such students often re-enroll and graduate on the same day)
- CATEGORY 5E: Students are under the age for compulsory school attendance and withdrawn from school (usually for reasons of immaturity), but are eligible to return

CATEGORY 6: Exited—Neither completed nor dropped out

- CATEGORY 6A: Students have died or are permanently incapacitated
- CATEGORY 6B: Students have returned to school after receiving a completion credential or after they reached the age until which the state guarantees a free, appropriate public education; and have subsequently exited school

Appendix C: State Responses to State Student Exit Code Taxonomy

State	E-mail	Answer
Alabama	peiland@ALSDE.edu	ATTACHMENT
Alaska	erik.mccormick@alaska.gov	Below is the link to the Handbook documents that contain the exit codes: http://www.eed.state.ak.us/forms/oasis/05-10-056.pdf http://www.eed.state.ak.us/forms/oasis/05-10-056a.pdf
Arizona	Robert.Franciosi@azed.gov	The description of the codes can be found at: http://www.ade.az.gov/researchpolicy/grad/GradRateTechnicalManual.pdf
Arkansas	Jim.Boardman@arkansas.gov	http://www.apscn.org/sis/hdr/sisman1112.pdf See STO320 on page 134
California	calpads-support@cde.ca.gov	Here is the link to our system documentation which includes exit codes. Please see the CALPADS Code Sets for definitions and the Valid Code Combinations for details. http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/systemdocs.asp
Colorado	Petro_J@cde.state.co.us	Those codes can be found at https://cdeapps.cde.state.co.us/studeoydataelem2011.doc
Connecticut	Kendra.Shakir@ct.gov	I have attached the Exit codes used for the Public School Information System (PSIS). One of these codes must be used when exiting a student in PSIS. These codes are from the 2010-2011 PSIS Record Layout. If you would to view this layout in its entirety, please visit our help site; http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/studentID ATTACHMENT
Delaware	dlong@DOE.K12.DE.US	See Exit Codes validation table from eSchool PLUS below.
District of Columbia	nancy.sharkey@dc.gov	In SY 2011/12, we are moving to a standardized exit code set, detailed here: http://newsroom.dc.gov/show.aspx/agency/seo/section/2/release/21267
Florida	Cyndi.Holleman@fldoe.org	The complete list of withdrawal codes used is provided in the database manuals online at http://www.fldoe.org/eias/dataweb/student_1011.asp in Appendix A.

Georgia	404.651.5546	http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_infosys_data.aspx?PageReq=PEAISD11SRR , Enrollment Level File Layout
Hawaii	Jan_Fukada@notes.k12.hi.us	ATTACHMENT
Idaho	Andy.Mehl@osbe.idaho.gov	Listed in the e-mail which got transferred to an ATTACHMENT
Illinois	CWISE@isbe.net	EXIT CODE INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED AT http://www.net/sis/default.htm
Indiana	mchamber@doe.in.gov	<p>Please review our state's file specifications for the Real Time (RT) data submission, which details Indiana's approved exit codes. All public and charter schools in the state must submit data on a weekly basis and are required to use the approved exit codes. Here is the file layout: http://www.doe.in.gov/stn/pdf/1011Layouts/RT.pdf</p> <p>Accredited non-public schools must submit the DM (dropout and mobility) report, which uses the same exit codes as the RT. Here is the file layout for the DM (this is last year's DM, but the exit codes for 10-11 will be the same): http://www.doe.in.gov/stn/pdf/0910Layouts/DM.pdf</p> <p>The DM was required for all schools through the 09-10 school year, but starting in the 10-11 school year it was replaced by the RT (required for public and charter schools).</p>

Iowa	Jay.Pennington@iowa.gov	The information can be found on the DE website under the EASIER collection system at this url. http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=44&Itemid=1261 You can find the detailed information in our data dictionary. This is the direct link to the download. http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=10136&Itemid=1507
Kansas	kgosa@ksde.org	the link to our student data collection file specifications is http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2508
Kentucky	dede.conner@education.ky.gov	Here is a link to it. http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/administrative+resources/finance+and+funding/school+finance/attendance+policies/pupil+attendance+manual.htm At the bottom of the above web site is the responsible contact for exit codes.
Louisiana	Brenda.Rivet@LA.GOV	Attachment: "Louisiana Codes, p.36"
Maine	Richard.Bergeron@maine.gov	http://www.maine.gov/education/gradrates/index.html
Maryland	jjohnson@msde.state.md.us	Listed below is the link to our exit codes on pages C9 through C11. http://www.msde.maryland.gov/NR/rdonlyres/FCB60C1D-6CC2-4270-BDAA-153D67247324/17625/2008_MD_Student_Records_Manual_808.pdf .
Massachusetts	data@doe.mass.edu	http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/sims/DataHandbook.doc Please refer to DOE12, Enrollment Status at Time of Data Collection, in the SIMS handbook for a complete explanation.
Michigan	HowellT@michigan.gov	The exit codes are collected in the Michigan Student Data System. Here is a link to our Website and student data collection user guides. http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-986_50502---,00.html

Minnesota	Cathy.Wagner@state.mn.us	<p>http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Accountability_Programs/Program_Finance/MARSS_Student_Accounting/MARSS_Instruction_Manual/Data_Elements-Definitions/index.html</p> <p>Go to the file on Status End Date on our Department Website.</p>
Mississippi	LGolden@mde.k12.ms.us	<p>I have attached a list of the 'exit' codes/ending enrollment/withdrawal codes and definitions.</p> <p>ATTACHMENT</p>
Missouri	leighann.grantengle@dese.mo.gov	<p>Here is the file layout districts use to report the data --></p> <p>http://dese.mo.gov/MOSIS/FileSpec_201106JuneCycleStudentEnrollmentandAttendance.html</p> <p>And a link directly to the code sets --></p> <p>http://dese.mo.gov/MOSIS/FilespecCodeSets_2011CodeSets.html#Exit_Codes</p>
Montana	aboehm@mt.gov OR SFurois@mt.gov	<p>ATTACHMENT OR</p> <p>The list of our enrollment end status codes is attached. http://www.opi.mt.gov/Reports&Data/AIM/index.html#gpm1_3 is a link to the file specifications for the statewide student information system (which includes this as Appendix B, and also has information on codes that have been added or deprecated). Codes in blue are “dropout” codes. The only “graduation” code is the 400 code; other “graduation” codes are non-standard graduations. We no longer use code 420 (other credentials).</p>
Nebraska	Marilyn.Peterson@nebraska.gov	<p>The enrollment codes are on pages 32-33 of the Student template instructions found at:http://www.education.ne.gov/nssrs/Docs/STUDENT_MANUAL_5_4_0.pdf</p>
Nevada	rsliva@doe.nv.gov	<p>The exit code document is attached.</p> <p>ATTACHMENT</p>

New Hampshire	Irene.Koffink@ed.state.nh.us	https://ww4.ed.state.nh.us/datadictionary/ElementDetail.aspx?ID=260 You may view the data dictionary for our student level data submissions at: https://ww4.ed.state.nh.us/datadictionary/
New Jersey	NJSMART@pcgus.com	ATTACHMENT
New Mexico	Joel.Nudi@state.nm.us	The exiting rules for students (which I assume you are looking for) and teachers is included in the STARS User Guide (Volume 1) and Reference Materials (Volume 2), available at this link: http://www.ped.state.nm.us/stars/documentation.html A search for 'Exit' in both documents should provide you the information you need.
New York	JBAKER@MAIL.NYSED.GOV	Our SIRS Manual (which contains the exit enrollment codes) can be found here: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/sirs/
North Carolina	KPond@dpi.state.nc.us	http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/accounting/manuals/sasa.pdf
North Dakota	fsnow@nd.gov	We have a locally developed State data collection system Exit codes are included when schools report enrollments Item 13 on this pdf list our exit codes http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/resource/STARS/layouts/student_data.pdf here is a help guide for schools to use when they import enrollments http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/resource/STARS/Reports/PupilMembershipFall.pdf
Ohio		
Oklahoma	barbara_roewe@sde.state.ok.us	ATTACHMENT
Oregon	doug.kosty@state.or.us	You can find all the information you need on our website: https://district.ode.state.or.us/

Pennsylvania	mhiester@state.pa.us	<p>In Pennsylvania, the Dropout Rate is calculated as follows for a specific School Year: (7-12 grade Dropouts) / (7-12 grade October 1 Enrollments).</p> <p>Both the October 1 Enrollment data and the Dropout data are collected via the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Enrollment data is captured via the October 1 Student Snapshot template. Each student is reported in this template with their Current Grade Level in field 10. · The specific dropout data is captured in the Student template, via field 65 (Graduation Status Code). · The PIMS User Manual Vol 1 describes the details of these templates and fields. This manual can be found on the PDE website. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Go to www.education.state.pa.us o On left side, click on the “Programs” link o Click on the “Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS)” link o On the left side, click on “PIMS Documents” o Choose “PIMS Manuals” <p>Open the “2010-2011_PIMS_Manual_Vol_1_V1.0” pdf</p> <p>Follow up: Please keep in mind, the withdrawal codes in the "School Enrollment Template" have no impact on the dropout data that the Pennsylvania Department of Education publishes.</p> <p>The dropout data is calculated using the Graduation Status code (field 65 of the "Student Template") data only.</p>
Rhode Island	Kenneth.Gu@ride.ri.gov OR Deanna.Raphael@ride.ri.gov	<p>here is the set of exit codes we require district to use in State reporting – https://www.eride.ri.gov/dataelements/CCDItemValues.asp?itemTblName=EXIT_TYPE. OR the list is located here: https://www.eride.ri.gov/dataelements/CCDItemValues.asp?itemTblName=EXIT_TYPE It’s the same.</p>

South Carolina	ACOLEMAN@ed.sc.gov	I am send you the link to a copy of the dropout data policies and procedures document http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Innovation-and-Support/Public-School-Choice-and-Innovation/Dropout-Data-and-Attendance/documents/2010DropoutPolicyandProcedures_1.pdf . In this document you will be able to review the state's exit code information and the dropout coding procedures.
South Dakota	Judy.Merriman@state.sd.us	ATTACHMENT
Tennessee	Lisa.Howard@tn.gov	The codes can be found in our Attendance Manual http://tn.gov/education/schapproval/attendance_manual/index.shtml in section E-104.
Texas	Patricia.Sullivan@tea.state.tx.us	The exit codes (called leaver codes here) are dictated to the districts. You can find a list of the codes on page 99 of the document found on page 99 of the attached document. ATTACHMENT
Utah	John.Brandt@schools.utah.gov	This link should provide with the information you are seeking. http://www.schools.utah.gov/data/Educational-Data/Graduation-Dropout-Rates.aspx
Vermont	Stacey.Murdock@state.vt.us	Please see the Forum guide to exit codes. NO ATTACHMENT 2 nd : I figured as a graduate student you would be able to find it on your own. What do they teach you in school? http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006804
Virginia	Bethann.Canada@doe.virginia.gov	You can find the codes here: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info_management/data_collection/student_record_collection/code_values/index.shtml
Washington	Robin.Munson@k12.wa.us	The withdrawal codes for Washington state can be found in Appendix M at http://www.k12.wa.us/CEDARS/pubdocs/2010-11CEDARSApPendices2010.pdf

West Virginia	sara.harper@access.k12.wv.us	the link is http://wveis.k12.wv.us/wveis2004/documents/StandardsforBasicStudentDemographicsandEnrollment_007.pdf . The entry withdrawal codes are found on pages 13 & 14.
Wisconsin		
Wyoming	lzimme@educ.state.wy.us	I've attached the technical file specification for our enrollment data collection and the guidebook which accompanies the collection. In Wyoming we have been very focused on on-time graduation rates instead of dropout rates. ATTACHMENT

TRANSFER,

DISCHARGE,

AND GRADUATION CODE

GUIDELINES

2007 - 2008



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SCHOOL & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

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TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Quick Reference Table

TRANSFER CODES		DISCHARGE CODES	
Transfers within NYC Department of Education Schools		For Students Who Have Dropped Out of School (and Other Types Of Discharges)	
CODE	DESCRIPTION	CODE	DESCRIPTION
00	Transferred to Another DOE School (Includes All Elementary, Middle and High Schools, Home Schooling, Full-Time Alternative Program, Home Instruction, District 75)	2	Obtained Full-Time Employment Certificate
38	Transferred to a Part-Time DOE GED Program	4	Under Six Years Old
43	Transferred to a Full-Time DOE GED Program	12	Address Unknown (Authorized by an Attendance Teacher)
48	Transferred to a YABC Program	15	Deceased Student
Transfers outside of NYC Department of Education Schools		18	Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling (High School Level)
CODE	DESCRIPTION	21	Over 21 Years of Age
06	Transferred to a NYC Parochial School	34*	Enrolled in a Business, Trade, Vocational, or other Training Program
08	Transferred to a NYC Private School	35	Entered Military Service
10	Transferred to an Institution (Non-DOE)	36	Enrolled in a Full-time High School Equivalency Program Outside the NYC Public School System (Includes GED Programs in Job Corps, Community Colleges, etc.)
11	Transferred to a School outside of New York City	37	Enrolled in Non-DOE Part-Time GED Program
20	Transferred into a College Early Admission Program	39*	Voluntary Withdrawal or Discharge after 20 consecutive days of non-attendance
-	Prior to Graduation from High School	41*	Voluntary Withdrawal Due to Pregnancy
45	Transferred to Life-Start Program (Pre-LYFE for New Mothers)	79*	Expulsion (For General Education Students Who are Over 17 Prior to the Beginning of the School Year)
GRADUATION CODES		*Student must have completed the school year in which he/she turned 17 years of age.	
CODE	DESCRIPTION		
22	Received Local Diploma (Special Education Only)		
23	Received High School IEP Diploma (Special Education Only)		
25	Proof of Receipt of High School Diploma		
26	Received Local High School Diploma		
27	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma		
28	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma with Honors		
29	Received at an Earlier Date a Local Diploma, IEP Diploma or High School Equivalency Diploma		
30	Received High School Equivalency Diploma (GED)		
46	Received High School Regents Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement		
47	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma		
60	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement		
61	Received Local High School Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement		
62	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors		

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Transfers within NYC Department of Education Schools

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
00	Transferred from One New York City Department of Education School to Another New York City Department of Education School	<p>This code is to be used when a student transfers from one Department of Education school or program to another. This includes all elementary, middle and high schools, District 75 programs, home schooling* and home instruction.</p> <p>For the transfer to occur, the student must be admitted to the receiving school, and the sending school must confirm the transfer out upon receipt of a "pending discharge" notification on ATS.</p> <p>*Students transferring into home schooling (a 444 school) must have a "letter of intent" on file at the central Home Schooling Office. A copy of the letter should be obtained from the central Home Schooling Office and filed in the student's cumulative record folder.</p>
38	Transferred to a Part-Time Department of Education High School Equivalency Program (GED)	<p>This code is used for students 18 years or older who have enrolled in part-time GED study in a Department of Education program. The sending school will receive a pending discharge on ATS.</p> <p>This code may also be used for students who have completed the school year in which they turn 17 years of age if the following conditions are true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o The student has fewer than 17 credits ANDo The parent/guardian gives written permission to transfer to a GED program. <p>OR</p> <p>The student who has completed the school year in which he/she turned 17 years of age demonstrates extenuating life circumstances such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Emancipated minor/head of household,o Parent,o Full-time employment <p>All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.</p>

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Transfers within NYC Department of Education Schools

continued

43	Transferred to a Full-Time Department of Education High School Equivalency Program (GED)	<p>This code is used for students 18 years or older who have enrolled in full-time GED study in a Department of Education program. The sending school will receive a pending discharge on ATS.</p> <p>This code may also be used for students who have completed the school year in which they turn 17 years of age if the following conditions are true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o The student has fewer than 17 credits ANDo The parent/guardian gives written permission to transfer to a GED program. <p>OR</p> <p>The student who has completed the school year in which he/she turned 17 years of age demonstrates extenuating life circumstances such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Emancipated minor/head of household,o Parent,o Full-time employment <p>All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.</p>
48	Transferred to a Young Adult Borough Center (YABC) Program	<p>This code is used when a student transfers to a YABC program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Students must be 17.5 years old.o Students must have 17 or more credits.o Students must already be enrolled in a NYC high school and must have attended high school for four years.o Students must have had an individual counseling session with the guidance counselor.

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Other Transfers

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
06	Transferred to a New York City Parochial School	<p>This code is used for students who transfer to a parochial school in New York City. Confirmation from the receiving school must be received prior to the transfer. The enrollment date, name of the receiving school, telephone number, and the name of the school official providing the information must be documented. The date of the transfer is the date of enrollment in the new school.</p> <p>Note: In addition to entering Code 06, the name of the parochial school must be entered on the ATS discharge screen.</p>
08	Transferred to a New York City Private School	<p>This code is used for students who transfer to a private school in New York City. Confirmation from the receiving school must be received prior to transfer. The enrollment date, name of the receiving school, telephone number, and the name of the school official providing the information must be documented. The date of transfer is the date of enrollment in the new school.</p> <p>Note: In addition to entering Code 08, the name of the private school must be entered on the ATS discharge screen.</p>
10	Transferred to an Institution (Non-Department of Education)	<p>This code is used for students who are residing in a full-time institutional setting. This includes students in Special Education programs who are placed in schools or facilities outside of New York City. Verification that the student resides at a Non-Department of Education facility outside or within New York City is required, i.e., Office of Children and Family Services facility, hospital, or foster care institution. Special circumstances where students are institutionalized within New York City require written approval from the Integrated Service Center's Senior Youth Development Director. The effective date of transfer is the date the student entered the institution.</p>

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Other Transfers

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
11	Transferred to a school outside of New York City	<p>This code is to be used for students who have left New York City and are currently residing elsewhere. The transfer of a student may be effectuated after it has been confirmed that the student has left New York City and (if the student has moved to a location within the United States) the school has obtained a new street address, along with the city and state of residence. For students who have moved outside the United States, confirmation of the departure, and city and country of the new location are required.</p> <p>This information must be entered on the ATS discharge screen and the student may then be discharged from the school register using Code 11.</p> <p>Confirmation of a move to a location outside of New York City includes one of the following: a request for records from the new school, an airplane ticket, documented telephone calls or mailings from the new location, or an attendance teacher's investigation confirming that the family no longer lives at the last known address. Verbal confirmation must be documented with the name, date and telephone number of the person spoken to.</p> <p>Note: If the student's residence outside of New York City is not confirmed within 10 days, an attendance investigation must be initiated to ensure that the student has moved.</p>
20	Transferred into a College Early Admission Program Prior to Graduation from High School	<p>This code is used when students are admitted to a college before they have received a high school diploma. Confirmation of admission to college is required. The effective date of the transfer is the date of enrollment in the college.</p>
45	Transferred to Life-Start Program (Pre-LYFE for New Mothers)	<p>The policy regarding transfer and attendance procedures for pregnant and parenting teens is presently under review. School personnel should contact the District 79 Office of Student Support Services (917-521-3600) prior to entering Code 45 for any student. Guidance counselors may also call the LYFE offices at District 79 (917-521-3600) for more information.</p>

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Graduation Codes

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
22	Received Local High School Diploma	<i>For students with disabilities</i> (IEP and/or 504 accommodations) who substitute Regents Exams with RCTs in any or all subjects. This is a non-Regents endorsed diploma.
23	Received High School IEP Diploma	<i>For students with disabilities only.</i> This code is used when students with disabilities, who have achieved the educational goals specified in their current IEPs, have been awarded IEP diplomas at the end of the school year in which they turned 21. Or upon application of the student or the student's parent at any time after the student has attended school or has received a substantially equivalent education elsewhere for at least twelve years excluding Kindergarten, and has achieved the educational goals of the current IEP. This is a non-Regents endorsed diploma.
25	Proof of Receipt of High School Diploma	This code is used when a student has documented proof that (s)he has completed high school within the United States or in a country outside of the United States.
26	Received Local High School Diploma	This code is used for general education students who have met the requirements according to NYC Chancellor's Regulation A-501 for a local diploma. Requirements vary according to the year in which a student enters 9 th grade. This diploma is available to students first entering 9 th grade in 2007 and prior only. This is a non-Regents endorsed diploma.
27	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma	This code is used when a student has been granted a Regents diploma according to NYSED guidelines.
28	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma with Honors	This code is used when a student has been granted a Regents endorsed diploma and achieved an average of at least 90% in the English, Global Studies and American History and Government Regents examinations according to NYSED guidelines and subjects selected in areas of concentration.
29	Received, at an Earlier Date, a Local Diploma, IEP Diploma, or High School Equivalency Diploma.	This code is used when a student, who has already been granted a Local Diploma, IEP Diploma, or High School Equivalency Diploma returns to school and leaves prior to being granted a Regents Diploma. Students have the right to obtain a regular high school diploma until the end of the school year in which they turn 21 years old.

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Graduation Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
30	Received High School Equivalency Diploma (GED)	This code is used when a student has been granted a High School Equivalency Diploma (GED).
46	Received High School Regents Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement	This code is used when a student has been granted a Regents Diploma and has completed a State approved Career and Technical Education program including the required technical assessment according to NYSED guidelines.
47	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma	This code is used when a student has been granted an advanced Regents Diploma according to NYSED guidelines.
60	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement	This code is used when a student has been granted an advanced Regents Diploma and has completed a State approved Career and Technical Education program including the required technical assessment according to NYSED guidelines.
61	Received Local High School Diploma with Career and Technical Education Endorsement	This code is used for students who have received a Local Diploma and have additionally completed a State approved Career and Technical Education program including the required technical assessment according to NYSED guidelines.
62	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors	This code is used when a student has been granted an advanced Regents Diploma and has achieved an average of 90% on all Regents exams.

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

Discharge codes are used in situations when students drop out of school, or leave a New York City Department of Education school without transferring to another school. All discharge confirmation documents must be kept in the school's discharge files (e.g., Form 407, proof of enrollment and intervention logs, etc.). For all discharges requiring a planning interview, the Planning Interview Form must be approved by the principal and a copy placed in the student's cumulative record folder, and in the school's discharge file. The original form is given to the student along with the Planning Interview Packet.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
02 (Dropout)	Obtained Full-Time Employment Certificate	<p>This code is used for 16 and 17 year old students who have obtained a pledge of employment indicating that they are to be hired to a full-time position.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students discharged under this code must have attended a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.○ Written parental consent is required. <p>Upon presentation of all appropriate documentation (required for issuance of employment certificate) students are issued a Full-Time Employment Certificate and may be discharged from school. A copy of the employment certificate is filed in the student's cumulative record folder.</p> <p>Students who are 18 years or older who wish to withdraw from school for reason of full-time employment are to be discharged using Code 39.</p>
04	Under Six Years Old	<p>This code is used for students who are under the compulsory school age when they are to be voluntarily withdrawn from school by a parent or guardian. The discharge is effective on the day of withdrawal provided there is documentation of the parent's request for withdrawal and a school staff member has seen the parent and child prior to the discharge.</p> <p>If there are concerns regarding the status of the child, an attendance teacher's investigation should be initiated. If there are questions concerning the safety and welfare of the student, The Administration for Children's Services must be contacted.</p> <p>Under-age students who are absent from school for 20 consecutive days without explanation, may be discharged after the 20th day under the following circumstances:</p> <p>An investigation conducted by an attendance teacher including an interview with the parent and child, has confirmed the safety and well-being of the child. <i>(continued)</i></p>

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
04 <i>continued</i>	Under Six Years Old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The parent is informed that the child will be discharged from school and that the parent is responsible for registering the child in school at the beginning of the school year in which he/she turns age six. <p>After all the procedures are completed, a registered letter informing the parent of the discharge must be sent to the home.</p>
12 (Dropout)	Address Unknown	<p>This code is used for students who cannot be located after an extensive investigation has been undertaken by an attendance teacher.</p> <p>An "Address Unknown" discharge may only be implemented by an attendance teacher following a complete investigation. The principal must review the steps taken to locate the students and must authorize discharges by signing Form 407 documenting the investigations. The effective date of discharge is the first day of absence following the last day students were marked "present."</p> <p>If a student is officially reported as missing or as a runaway, an "Address Unknown" discharge may be implemented if the following conditions are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The parent has reported the child as missing to the Police Department. o The attendance teacher is provided with a Police Department case number, which is then entered on the Form 407. <p>A follow up Form 407 is automatically generated through the ATS system 30 days after a Code 12 discharge has been implemented. The second 407 requires a re-investigation of the discharge to confirm the status of the student. All findings are documented on Form 407 which is then filed in the student's Cumulative Record folder. The Attendance Content Expert from the Integrated Service Center must review and approve all Code 12 discharges before they are effectuated.</p>
15	Student Deceased	<p>This code is used when a student has died. A Death certificate, copy of an obituary, or other types of proof must be on file. The effective date of discharge is the date of death.</p>
18	Satisfactory Completion of Home Schooling (High School Level)	<p>This code is used when a student has satisfactorily completed home schooling requirements in accordance with Section 100.10 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. Home schooled students are not granted a diploma from the Department of Education.</p>

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
21	Over 21 Years Old	This code is used for students who complete the school year in which they turn 21. Students who are discharged prior to the end of the school year in which they turn 21 should be discharged through an "Over 17" code (i.e., Code 39) and a planning interview must be held or scheduled.
34 (Dropout)	Enrolled in a Business, Trade, Vocational or Other Training Program	<p>This code is used for students who enroll in a non-Department of Education school or training program. The effective date of discharge is when the student enrolls in the new school or program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students must have completed the school year in which they turned 17 years of age.○ All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.
35 (Dropout)	Entered Military Service	<p>This code is used for students who are admitted into any division of military service including: Coast Guard, Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines. The effective date of discharge is the date when the student is admitted into Military Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students must be 17 years of age.○ All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.
36	Enrolled in a Full-Time High School Equivalency (GED) Program outside the New York City Public School System	<p>This code is used for students who are admitted to a full-time GED program outside the Department of Education. This includes GED programs in Job Corps and community colleges. Confirmation of enrollment in a GED program is required. The name of the GED program must be entered on the ATS discharge screen. The effective date of transfer is when the student is enrolled in the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students must have completed the school year in which they turned 17 years of age.○ All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
37 (Dropout)	Enrolled in a Part-Time High School Equivalency (GED) Program outside of the New York City Public School System	<p>This code is used for students who are admitted to a part-time GED program outside the Department of Education. Confirmation of enrollment in the part-time GED program is required. The name of the part-time GED program must be entered on the ATS discharge screen. The effective date of discharge is the date when the student is admitted into the part-time GED Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students must have completed the school year in which they turned 17 years of age.○ All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.
39 (Dropout)	Voluntary Withdrawal or Discharge after 20 Consecutive Days of Non-Attendance	<p>This code is used for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) students who are over the mandatory school age who wish to withdraw from school, or;2) students who are over the mandatory school age and are absent for 20 consecutive days, who do not attend a planning interview. <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Students must have completed the school year in which they turned 17 years of age.○ Students discharged under this code must have attended a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21; or must have been absent for 20 consecutive days and have been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.

continued

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
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39 Voluntary Withdrawal or
(Dropout) Discharge after 20 Consecutive
continued Days of Non-Attendance

If the parent and student fail to attend the planning interview and the student has been absent at least 20 consecutive days, a general education student who has completed the school year in which he/she turned 17 may be discharged in the same school year in which the absences occur. After outreach attempts to return the student to school have been unsuccessful and two letters have been mailed inviting the student and parent to attend the planning interview, informing the student of the right to re-enroll in school through the school year of his/her 21st birthday and providing information on alternative educational options that are available, the student is discharged. A Planning Interview Form must still be completed and the box marked "Parent and/or Student Did Not Appear for Planning Interview" must be checked off.

Upon completion of the planning interview, or if the student has been absent for 20 consecutive days and outreach efforts to invite the parent and student to a planning interview have been made, the student may be discharged.

One of the following codes indicating the reason the student is leaving school must be entered into ATS.

- A. Student is no longer interested in attending school.
- B. Student has completed all required credits to graduate, but is missing one or more Regents exams.
- C. Student has taken the GED examination and is awaiting results.
- D. No response from student and parent after notification of planning interview - student has been absent for 20 consecutive days. The effective date of discharge is the first day of absence following the last day the student was marked "present."

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES

Discharge Codes

continued

CODE	DESCRIPTION	USAGE
41	Voluntary Withdrawal Due to Pregnancy	<p>This code may only be used for pregnant students who have completed the school year in which they turned 17. Students discharged with this code must be provided with documented counseling and support interventions intended to prevent dropping out. Guidance counselors may call the LYFE offices at District 79 (917-521-3600) for more information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ This code is only used for students who have completed the school year in which they turned 17 years of age.○ All students discharged under this code must have attended, or been notified in writing of the opportunity to attend, a planning interview where their educational options were discussed and they were informed of their right to return to school through age 21.
79	Expulsion	<p>This code may only be used for general education students. Students discharged with this code must have completed the school year in which their 17th birthday occurred. The Office of School and Youth Development, Office of Mandated Responsibilities at (212) 374-6095 must be contacted to process the discharge.</p>

Appendix E: Substantial higher discharge count when compared to graduates by school

School	# Discharges	#Graduated	# Dropped Out
Lower East Side Preparatory HS	47	89	26
Chelsea Career and Technical Education HS	58	97	29
HS of Graphic Communication Arts	99	175	82
Humanities Preparatory Academy	14	9	4
Legacy School for Integrated Studies	32	50	12
Liberty HS Academy for Newcomers	37	67	27
Norman Thomas HS	87	157	75
School for the Physical City HS	20	30	8
Unity Center for Urban Technologies	27	27	8
Washington Irving HS	163	177	132
HS for Law Advocacy and Community Justice	38	68	4
Louis D. Brandeis HS	190	229	105
Manhattan Theatre Lab HS	36	48	0
Gregorio Luperon HS for Science and Math	45	62	13
Total: Manhattan (14)	893	1285	525
Community School for Social Justice	24	46	11
Foreign Language Academy of Global Studies	35	68	10
Adlai E. Stevenson HS	94	91	66
Bronx Guild	25	23	6
Felisa Rincon De Gautier Institute for Law and P	36	60	4
Gateway School for Environmental Research and Te	35	45	4
School for Community Research and Learning	34	57	13
Bronx HS of Business	42	70	24
Jonathan Levin HS for Media Communication	89	55	4
Leadership Institute	32	46	14
Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies	37	61	6
Urban Assembly Academy for History and Citizenship	24	46	9
Belmont Preparatory HS	30	58	10
Bronx HS for Law and Community Service	29	57	18
Fordham HS for the Arts	42	66	5

Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Tech	49	72	23
Grace Dodge Career and Technical Education HS	96	170	56
John F. Kennedy HS	326	311	38
West Bronx Academy for The Future	26	39	4
Bronx Health Sciences HS	31	59	3
Christopher Columbus HS	142	183	70
Harry S Truman HS	241	404	70
New World HS	46	44	0
Bronx Coalition Community HS	43	57	21
HS of World Cultures	55	84	5
Monroe Academy for Business/Law	35	43	20
Monroe Academy for Visual Arts & Design	39	49	9
New Day Academy	23	44	9
Peace and Diversity Academy	16	26	9
Total: Bronx (29)	1776	2434	541
Brooklyn HS for Leadership and Community	1	1	2
Freedom Academy HS	18	32	1
Automotive HS	81	123	16
Acorn HS for Social Justice	61	102	9
Cobble Hill School of American Studies	60	102	21
Secondary School for Law	33	64	2
Secondary School for Research	32	56	2
International Arts Business School	22	24	4
Canarsie HS	139	254	93
Samuel J. Tilden HS	87	149	45
South Shore HS	66	97	80
Franklin K. Lane HS	163	243	131
Franklin Delano Roosevelt HS	234	414	167
Abraham Lincoln HS	204	401	60
Lafayette HS	125	117	46
William E. Grady Career and Technical Education	77	132	29
Bushwick Community HS	11	15	72
Total: Brooklyn (17)	1414	2326	780
Newtown HS	279	466	166
Flushing HS	220	336	121
August Martin HS	148	193	90
Beach Channel HS	113	219	88

Jamaica HS	153	261	87
Business Computer Applications & Entrepreneurship	34	67	10
Newcomers HS	90	129	25
Total: Queens (7)	1037	1671	587
Career Education Center	38	29	86
Community Preparatory HS	4	2	10
Horizon Academy	22	6	14
Passages Academy	256	3	17
Phoenix Academy	17	6	15
Queens Offsite Educational Services	18	31	97
The Island Academy	202	64	191
Total: Alternative HS's and Programs (7)	557	141	430
Total All Schools & Programs* (74)	5677	7857	2863

*None in Staten Island

Appendix F: Section of the legislation, reporting school dropout problems

SEC. 2. ORGANIZATION OF THE ACT, TITLE V—PROMOTING EQUITY,
PART C—ASSISTANCE TO ADDRESS SCHOOL DROPOUT PROBLEMS,
SEC. 5307. REPORTS.

(A) Annual Reports—The Secretary shall submit to the Congress a report by January 1 of each year, beginning on January 1, 1995, which sets forth the progress of the Commissioner of Education Statistics, established under section 403(B) of the National Education Statistics Act of 1994, to implement a definition and data collection process for school dropouts in elementary and secondary schools, including statistical information for the number and percentage of elementary and secondary school students by gender, race, and ethnic origin who drop out of school each year, including dropouts—

- (1) throughout the Nation by rural and urban location as defined by the Secretary; and
- (2) in each of the individual States and the District of Columbia.

(B) Recommendations—The report under subsection (A) shall also contain recommendations on ways in which the Federal Government, States and localities can further support the implementation of an effective methodology to accurately measure school dropout and retention rates on the national, state, and local levels.

(US Department of Education, 1994)

Appendix G: Quick Reference Table for the Latest Revision of NYC TDG Code Guidelines,
2011-2012

TRANSFER, DISCHARGE, AND GRADUATION CODE GUIDELINES 2011-12	
Quick Reference Table 2011-12	
TRANSFER CODES	
<i>Transfers within NYC Department of Education Schools</i>	
CODE	DESCRIPTION
00	Transferred to another DOE school or program
38	Transferred to a part-time DOE GED program (D79 Only)
43	Transferred to a full-time DOE GED program (D79 Only)
48	Transferred to a YABC program
51	Transferred to a school or program for a limited time period
DISCHARGE CODES*	
<i>Discharges Out of NYC Department of Education Schools</i>	
CODE	DESCRIPTION
02	Obtained Full-Time Employment Certificate (age 16-17)
04	Under Six Years Old
06	Discharged to a Parochial School (in NYC or NY State)
08	Discharged to a Private School(in NYC or NY State)
10	Discharged to a Court Ordered Placement
11	Discharged to a School outside of New York City
12	Address Unknown (Authorized by an Attendance Teacher)
15	Deceased Student
20	Early Admission to a Four-Year University
21	Over 21 Years of Age
25	Already Received a High School Diploma Outside DOE at Time of Enrollment
29	Previously Discharged from DOE School with an IEP Diploma, GED or Dropout Code
35	Entered Military Service
39	Voluntary Withdrawal or Discharge after 20 Consecutive Days of Non-attendance
CREDENTIAL/GRADUATION CODES	
CODE	DESCRIPTION
23	Received High School IEP Diploma (Special Education Only)
30	Received High School Equivalency Diploma (GED)
<i>Diploma Granting Codes</i>	
26	Received Local High School Diploma
27	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma
28	Received High School Regents Endorsed Diploma with Honors
47	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma
62	Received High School Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors
*High schools: please refer to Appendix I (page 16) for information about how discharge codes affect graduation accountability	
New York City Department of Education Office of School and Youth Development 2011-12 1	

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