Educational Pipeline FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions about the Educational Pipeline

May 2006

1. What is the purpose of the Educational Pipeline?

The Educational Pipeline analysis conveys the importance of viewing student progress as a continuum leading from high school into postsecondary education and through to the completion of a college degree. The Educational Pipeline, rather than viewing K–12 schooling and postsecondary education as separate entities, estimates the state-by-state patterns of student progress from the 9th grade through four key transition points: (1) high school graduation within four years of entering high school; (2) enrollment in college the fall semester after receiving a high school diploma; (3) return for the second year of college; and (4) completion of an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling in college.

The Educational Pipeline enables states to compare patterns of student progress with other states and with national averages. States vary widely in these patterns: Many states that have similar results at the end of the pipeline (that is, in the proportion of students completing college) find that they lose students at different transition points along the way. The pipeline data assist states in designing interventions that address their particular educational challenges.

2. What information is used in constructing the Educational Pipeline?

Neither the federal government nor most states regularly track the progress of individual students through the four transition points that span K–12 and postsecondary education. The Educational Pipeline relies on national data that measure the success rates of young students at each of the four transition points for each state. Specifically, the Educational Pipeline relies on the following measures:[1]

- Public 9th graders' high school graduation rate within four years of entering high school;
- The college-going rate of recent high school graduates (public and private);
- The percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen at two-year and four-year colleges and universities who return for their second year; and
- The percentage of first-time, full-time students who attain an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling in college.

3. How do the data in the Educational Pipeline compare with other state-by-state estimates of student progress through the four transition points?

Student success rates at the first transition point—that is, high school completion—are the only data for which comparable national studies are available for making state-by-state comparisons. These studies confirm the patterns found in Educational Pipeline data. As shown in tables 1 and 2, the high school completion rates reported by different sources are within a relatively close range.[2]

Table 1

High School Completion Rates for the United States, by Source

Source	HS Completion Rate	Data Year
Educational Pipeline	68%	2002
Educational Testing Service	70%	2000
Manhattan Institute	71%	2002
National Center for Education Statistics	72%	2002
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	73%	2002
Postsecondary Education Opportunity	67%	2002
Urban Institute	68%	2001

Table 2

High School Completion Rates for Selected States, by Source

Source (Data Year)	CA	FL	IL	MI	NY	OH	PA	TX
Educational Pipeline (2002)	70%	53%	72%	70%	57%	70%	77%	64%
Educational Testing Service (2000)	69%	59%	72%	69%	65%	77%	77%	68%
Manhattan Institute (2002)	67%	59%	74%	78%	64%	78%	80%	68%
Postsecondary Education Opportunity (2002)	69%	56%	73%	75%	54%	71%	76%	65%
Urban Institute (2001)	69%	53%	75%	74%	61%	71%	76%	65%

4. Which students are not included in the Educational Pipeline?

The pipeline data do not include the following categories of students: those who take more than four years to graduate from high school; those who do not graduate from high school but later achieve a GED (General Educational Development) credential; those who delay college entry; those who are initially enrolled part-time in college; those who transfer from one college to another; and those who leave ("stop out" of) college and return several years later.

Current state-by-state data about these students are not collected systematically, which is a major shortcoming in this nation's system of collecting education information.

Some individual states do track students who transfer among in-state colleges and universities. Information from six states with the most reliable tracking systems suggests that if

transfer students were included, the six-year baccalaureate degree completion rates would increase by an average of 4.6%.

5. Are there studies whose results differ from the Educational Pipeline analysis?

There are some studies that provide results that differ from the Educational Pipeline analysis. These studies, however, are dated and do not provide state-by-state information. For example, one major survey, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 by the U.S. Department of Education, tracked a sample of students over time and showed more positive patterns of student progression.[3] Since this survey followed individual students, it included some categories of students who are not included in the Educational Pipeline analysis.

The students surveyed for the Longitudinal Study were 8th graders in 1988, completed high school in the early 1990s. The ultimate bachelor's degree completion rates reported for these students are confirmed by current Census figures on the baccalaureate degree attainment levels of citizens aged 25-29. But these students are now in their late twenties or early thirties. Considering the fast-changing student demographics and the widely acknowledged decrease in high school graduation rates throughout the 1990s, it is unrealistic to assume the same patterns of student progression today. In addition, the Longitudinal Study does not provide state-by-state information or reflect the varying patterns of student progression among the states.

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[1] Full source and methodological information can be found at www.highereducation.org/reports/pipeline/sources.shtml or at www.higheredinfo.org/analyses/Pipeline%20Article.pdf.

[2] The following sources are used in the tables:

Educational Testing Service (ETS): Paul E. Barton, *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities* (Princeton, NJ: Policy Information Center, ETS, 2005).

Manhattan Institute for Policy Research: Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002* (New York, NY: Center for Civic Innovation, Manhattan Institute, 2005).

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): *Digest of Education Statistics 2003* (Washington, D.C.: NCES, U.S. Department of Education, 2004), p. 134.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): *Education at a Glance* (Paris, France: OECD, 2004), p. 57.

Postsecondary Education Opportunity: "Adjusted Public High School Graduation Rates by State 2002" in *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, No.149. (Nov. 2004), p. 7.

Urban Institute: Christopher B. Swanson, *Who Graduates? Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001* (Washington, D.C.: Education Policy Center, Urban Institute, 2004).

[3] See the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Web site for the Longitudinal Study: http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88/.