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Article published Jan 3, 2007

Indiana releases graduation rates for '06 Indiana is one of first states to track a class.

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The Indiana Department of Education released school-by-school graduation rates for the first time using its new calculation formula Tuesday afternoon.

Overall, 76.5 percent of Indiana high school students graduated last year, which is a much lower percentage than the previous calculation method.

"The recent public scrutiny on high school graduation rates was a critical first step in understanding Indiana's dropout problem," said Suellen Reed, Indiana's superintendent of public instruction. "Now the challenge is for local communities to place the same degree of attention on ensuring not only that all students graduate, but that they receive the essential foundation Indiana's high school diploma represents."

According to the IDOE, the new formula begins by establishing a cohort (or class) of first-time freshmen that expands and contracts as students transfer in and out of school during the high school years that follow. Students can basically be tracked from school to school.

Indiana is one of the first states in the nation to calculate graduation rates based on student-level information. In previous years the state followed the calculation rate recommended by the National Center of Education Statistics.

That formula, according to the IDOE, takes the percentage of the class that did not drop out separately in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 and calculates based on the October enrollment in each grade.

All those percentages are then multiplied together. For example: .95x.96x.96x.95 equals a rate of 83.2 percent.

Another way graduation rates are often calculated is by dividing the number of graduates by that class's freshman enrollment.

"That kind of rate can be off the mark," said Jason Bearce of the IDOE, "especially in schools with a lot of mobility." Each of the South Bend Community School Corp.'s four high schools fared much better with the old state graduation formula. However, administrators acknowledged those figures were woefully inaccurate.

According to the old formula, South Bend's public high schools averaged a 94.75 graduation rate for the 2004-05 school year. The state average that year was 90 percent.

2006 graduation rates

The Indiana Department of Education released school-by-school graduation rates Tuesday. Below are graduation rates of area high schools:

School Grad rate Elkhart County

Public

Fairfield Jr.-Sr. 94.0
Jintown 77.1
Concord Community 80.7
Northridge 83.3
North Wood 82.7
Elkhart Central 58.9
Elkhart Memorial 66.7
Goshen 65.2

Private

Elkhart Christian Aca. 96.8
Crossing Ed Center 60.9
Bethany Christian 98.1

LaPorte County

Public

New Prairie 87.4
Westville 76.9
Michigan City 65.9
South Central Jr.-Sr. 85.7
LaPorte 73.7

Private

Marquette 83.0

Marshall County

Public

Culver Community 70.1
Argos Comm Jr.-Sr. 82.4
Bremen Senior 85.7
Plymouth 81.3
Triton Jr.-Sr. 85.1

Private

Culver Military and Girls Academy 96.7

St. Joseph County

Public

John Glenn 85.9
Penn 83.2
Mishawaka 54.5
Clay 71.8
Adams 69.4
Riley 65.9

Washington 70.0

LaVille Jr.-Sr. 74.4

Private

Marian 88.8

St. Joseph's 98.3

Starke County

Public

Oregon-Davis Jr.-Sr. 68.2

North Judson 73.4

Knox Community 72.3

School administrators have estimated in recent years that the actual rate for South Bend is closer to 50 percent.

The state's new calculation falls somewhere in the middle of the two extremes.

Of South Bend's public high schools last year, Clay boasts the highest graduation rate with 71.8 percent, followed by Washington at 70 percent, Adams at 69.4 percent and Riley at 65.9 percent. The corporation's central office was closed Tuesday; therefore, school officials were unavailable for comment. Many other local educators were also out of the office over the holiday break.

The only area public high school to reach the 90-percent rung was Fairfield Jr.-Sr. High, which is just south of Goshen in Elkhart County. Last year 125 students graduated from Fairfield for a rate of 94 percent.

Mishawaka High School has the area's lowest graduation rate at 54.5 percent. Elkhart Central was next lowest at 58.9 percent.

Rates for state accredited private high schools were also released.

St. Joseph's High School in South Bend led all area schools with a 98.3 graduation rate. Bethany Christian School in Goshen was close behind at 98.1 percent.

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