

Question: How do the Promoting Power, Cumulative Promotion Index, and Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate compare with TEA’s Graduation and Completion Rates?

Response:

Various groups, including the Education Trust and the Center for Social Organization of Schools, have asked for a method of calculating and reporting graduation rates that is more “accurate and transparent” than those currently used. It is believed that if these very conservative estimates are reported side-by-side with the commonly reported graduation rates, a truer picture of national graduation trends will emerge and officials will be able to identify which states most need to improve their individual reporting. It is hoped that reporting graduation rates in this manner also will allow educators to better target resources and instruction before students are lost to retention and dropout.

While the goal of developing a method of calculating graduation rates that is consistent from state to state is worthwhile, the notion that the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate, Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), or Promoting Power are “accurate” is debatable. Given high national rates of family mobility and the multiplicity of paths to a high school diploma, it seems that the most accurate methods for calculating graduation rates are those that require the careful monitoring of individual students’ movement within and across school districts and students’ individual progress toward graduation. Calculation methods that do not use student “leaver” data cannot accurately account for students who take either less than or more than 4 years to earn a diploma; those who leave to attend private schools; those who leave school briefly and then return; or those who earn a GED. Quite simply, school districts with high rates of student mobility and uneven grade level promotion rates are penalized by these simpler methods. The section below describes a variety of recently publicized rates, followed by an analysis of their strengths and limitations.

Methods that Consider Student Level “Leaver” Data

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Graduation Rate

The TEA Graduation Rate is calculated by determining the percentage of graduates in a given year from the cohort of first-time 9th graders who were enrolled four years earlier. Individual students are tracked over time and rates are adjusted based on specific student mobility in and out of the cohort.

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Completion Rate

The TEA Completion Rate portrays a more accurate picture of the final student status for those who were in the original 9th grade cohort. Each student who was enrolled as a 9th grader four years earlier can be classified as a graduate, a continuing student, a GED recipient, or a dropout. The new Completion Rate (*Completion Rate I*) does not include GED recipients as “completers.” The Completion Rate includes the Graduation Rate described above.

Additional Methods that Do Not Consider Student Level “Leaver” Data

Cumulative Promotion Index

The Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) is calculated by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center to represent “graduating from high school as a process rather than a single event.” This method to calculate graduation rates captures three grade-to-grade promotions and ultimately graduation.

The formula for CPI is as follows:

$$\frac{10^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2003}}{9^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2002}} \times \frac{11^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2003}}{10^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2002}} \times \frac{12^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2003}}{11^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2002}} \times \frac{\text{Diploma recipients, spring 2003}}{12^{\text{th}} \text{ graders, fall 2002}}$$

Promoting Power

The Promoting Power is the inverse of a simple attrition rate, based on a comparison of student enrollment between two grades. It is calculated by determining the percentage of 9th grade enrollment that is represented among 12th grade enrollment 3 years later.

Evaluation of the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), and Promoting Power (PP)

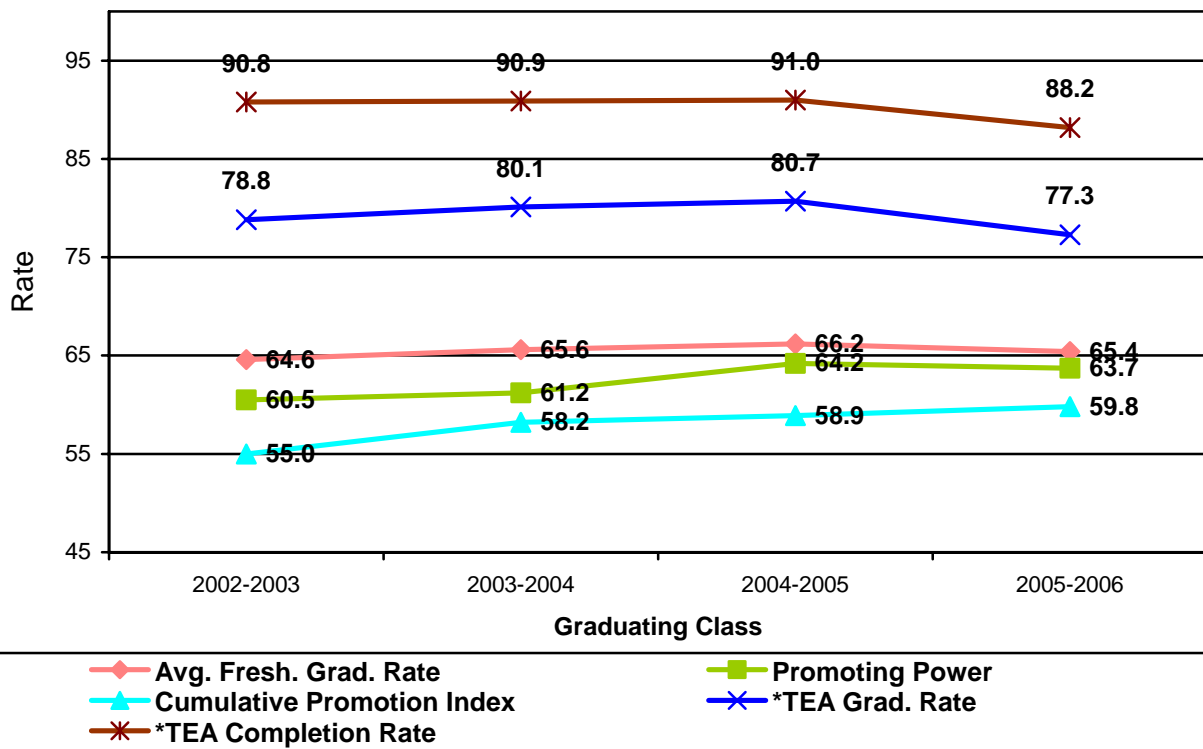
Strengths

The primary strength of the AFGR, CPI, and PP is, of course, their ease of calculation and their comparability across districts and states. While the PP does not account for the consistent phenomenon of 9th grade retention, the AFGR and the CPI do attempt to make some adjustment for normal changes in enrollment and student retention by incorporating enrollment counts at grades other than 9th.

Limitations

Although the AFGR, CPI, and PP are easy to calculate and allow for easy comparison across districts and states, they are only an estimate of the actual 4-year graduation rate. They cannot adjust for students who have left school because they have moved into private schools or other public schools (in or out of the state), nor can they account for those who may have entered home schooling, those who continue in school, or who enrolled in colleges and GED programs. The rates that are prepared by TEA account for these and other "leaver" reasons that, if not removed from the calculations, would otherwise lower the estimated graduation rates. Because they are all estimates, the AFGR, CPI, and PP are not the most accurate measures to use for holding schools and districts accountable for ensuring that students achieve on-time graduation.

Various Graduation, Completion, and Promotion Rates for Austin ISD, 2002-2003 to 2005-2006



*Note: TEA's Graduation and Completion Rates decreased in 2005-2006 due to a change in the reporting requirements for student leaver information. New methodology is more conservative, yielding lower completion and graduation rates.