

Chapter 1: Education

Americans respect education and put a high value on learning. Our society's deep-rooted belief in education led to the establishment of a system of universal K-12 schooling almost a century ago. That system is built on the firm belief that education can enable anyone to rise from the humblest beginnings to achieve their fullest potential. Education begets equity. It levels the playing field.

Education is also the key to renewing New York's economic vigor. The emerging "knowledge economy" will require workers who have critical problem-solving skills and the ability to master technology in the workplace. Even such traditional jobs as construction worker or hospital aide will increasingly reward workers with better education and training. Education is not only linked to personal success, but to continued economic growth and higher productivity in the labor market.

The Board of Regents, an independent body comprised of legislative appointees, governs New York's educational system from prekindergarten to graduate school (PreK-16) and sets the state's education policy, standards and rules. The Board of Regents oversees the State Education Department, which administers the state's educational system on a day-to-day level.

New York has always been more integrated into the global economy than most other states. Yet the Empire State faces its own set of challenges. New York, long home to a multitude of nationalities and myriad cultures, has seen immigrant populations increasingly spilling into communities outside of New York City that lack an infrastructure for assimilating their new arrivals. Across the state, school districts

that have few resources to train teachers, hire interpreters or provide professional development for staff are struggling to accommodate the influx of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

New York State's student population spans a vast spectrum. Poverty permeates rural upstate counties; low-income, Black, Hispanic and LEP students struggle in the big five cities of New York, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers; and the educational needs of emerging immigrant populations tax the financial resources of smaller cities such as Albany, Utica and Binghamton. At the same time, some of the best educated students in the United States come from New York schools of excellence such as the Buffalo City Honors High School, ranked number 4 in the nation by *Newsweek*.

New York is a state of educational haves and have-nots. The achievement gap continues to widen within large cities and small rural areas. Annual per pupil spending in New York is among the highest in the nation at \$13,826, and yet the state has not been able to close its achievement gap. *Education Week's Quality Counts 2006* reports a dismal New York high school graduation rate of 61% against a national average of 69%.

A high school student who has failed to graduate or drops out risks becoming disengaged and disconnected from the learning process, thus creating a frustrating and uncertain future. The promise of education to "raise the knowledge, skill and opportunity to all the people in New York" has not been able to provide that important inoculation against ignorance for too many of its young citizens.

Philanthropist Bill Gates recently commented that he is terrified for our workforce of tomorrow. “In math and science, 4th graders are among the top students in the world ... by 8th grade, they’re in the middle of the pack ... by 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring near the bottom of all industrialized nations.” The findings in this chapter reinforce Mr. Gates’s concerns. While many individual students have succeeded in New York’s public education system, students as a group show declining aptitude as they age. The implications for college readiness are obvious and alarming.

FINDINGS

Reading proficiency of fourth-grade students is good and improving over time. Seven out of ten fourth-grade students (70%) scored a 3 or 4 on the 2005 English Language Arts Examination, which means they can be considered proficient in basic reading skills. The share of fourth-grade students scoring below basic reading levels decreased by 7 percentage points over the past seven years while below-basic math scores have dramatically decreased from 36% in 1996 to 19% in 2005.

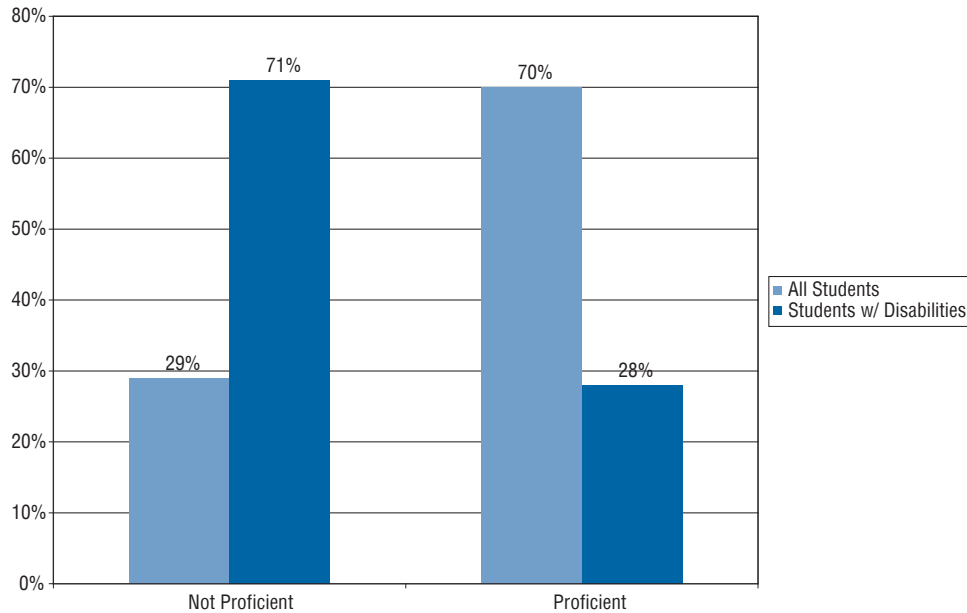
Eighth-grade students are almost one-third less likely to read at grade level than fourth-grade students. Fewer than half of all eighth-grade students (48%) scored a 3 or 4 on the 2005 English Language Arts Examination and can therefore be considered proficient in basic reading skills, compared to 70% of fourth-grade students. The number of students reading below grade level rises from 58,000 in fourth grade to 112,000 in eighth grade. The share of students with disabilities considered proficient in reading drops from 28% in fourth grade to 10% in eighth grade, a steep drop-off from an already low baseline.

The share of New York City students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) has decreased slightly in the last decade while areas outside of New York City have seen an increase in those students. Small and large cities across the state are faced with an inability to provide the services needed to help these LEP students succeed in school.

Student achievement is steadily rising. More and more students are graduating with a Regents Diploma (72% in 2005 compared to 40% in 1995) and student participation in Advanced Placement courses has grown by 50% in the last decade. Of all high school graduates ages 25-29, 37% have a Bachelor’s degree.

Large numbers of students are being left behind. The rate of 4-year graduation remains only slightly above 60%, 40% of Blacks and Hispanics are not completing high school in four years, and 8% of all teens are high school dropouts. In the Big Five cities, more students with disabilities (33%) are dropping out than receiving a diploma (25%). Students classified as having an emotional disturbance have the highest dropout rate of all students with disabilities. See Mental Health Chapter, page 35.

Fourth Grade Reading Performance



Elementary English Language Arts Levels — Listening, Reading, and Writing Standards	
Level 1	These students have serious academic deficiencies
Level 2	These students need extra help to meet the standards and pass the Regents examination
Level 3	These students meet the standards and, with continued steady growth, should pass the Regents examination
Level 4	These students exceed the standards and are moving toward high performance on the Regents examination

Definition: This chart compares the elementary level reading skills of two groups: all students and students with disabilities. The fourth grade English Language Arts examination assesses listening, reading, and writing skills, and shows the percent of students meeting the learning standards as shown above.

Significance: On the 2005 English Language Arts (ELA) Examination administered to fourth-grade students, 70% of all students were found to be reading at levels 3 and 4, which means they are reading at or above grade level. However, only 28% of students with disabilities were found to be reading at or above grade level. This sizable gap poses a serious challenge to New York’s mission to provide all students a high-quality education.

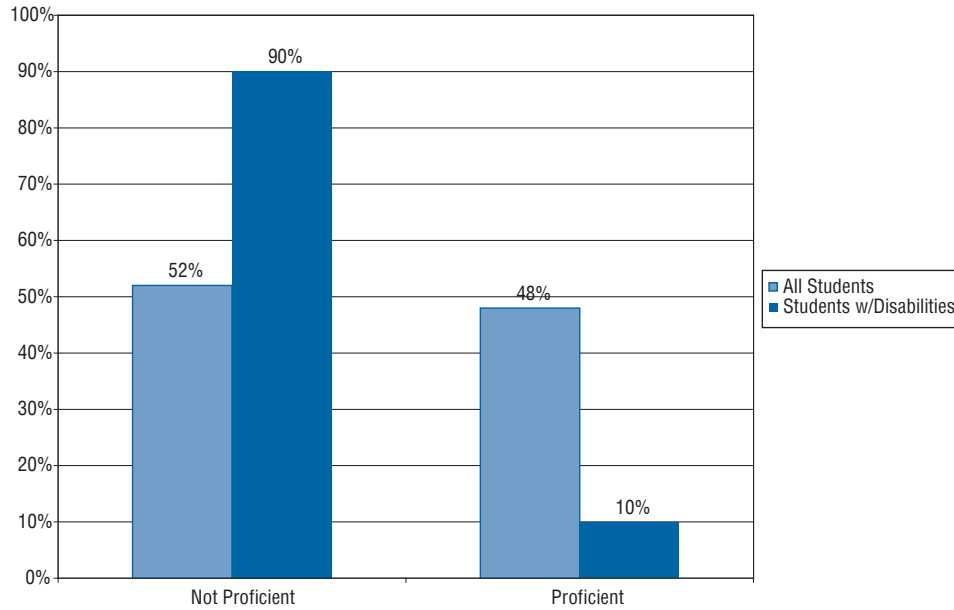
New York’s fourth-grade students have been making slow and steady progress on the ELA in recent years. Between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, the share of fourth-graders rated “proficient” in reading

jumped 7 percentage points to 70%. Over a longer period, the share of fourth-grade students rated proficient in mathematics rose from 64% in 1996 to 81% in 2005.

Source: *Results for Students and Individuals with Disabilities*, Report to the Board of Regents, May 2006, New York State Education Department.

Overview of Performance in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Analysis of Student Subgroup Performance, New York State Education Department, February 2006.

Eighth Grade Reading Performance



Middle Level English Language Arts Levels — Listening, Reading, and Writing Standards	
Level 1	These students have serious academic deficiencies
Level 2	These students need extra help to meet the standards and pass the Regents examination
Level 3	These students meet the standards and, with continued steady growth, should pass the Regents examination
Level 4	These students exceed the standards and are moving toward high performance on the Regents examination

Definition: Grade 8 English Language Arts Examination is a comparison of the reading skills of two groups of eighth graders: all students and students with disabilities. The eighth-grade English Language Arts examination assesses listening, reading, and writing skills at the middle school level, and shows the percent of students meeting the learning standards as shown above.

Significance: Eighth-grade students are 31% less likely to read at grade level than fourth-grade students. Reading proficiency relative to grade level appears to decline markedly between fourth and eighth grades, suggesting that many eighth-graders will not be fully prepared for the academic demands of high school.

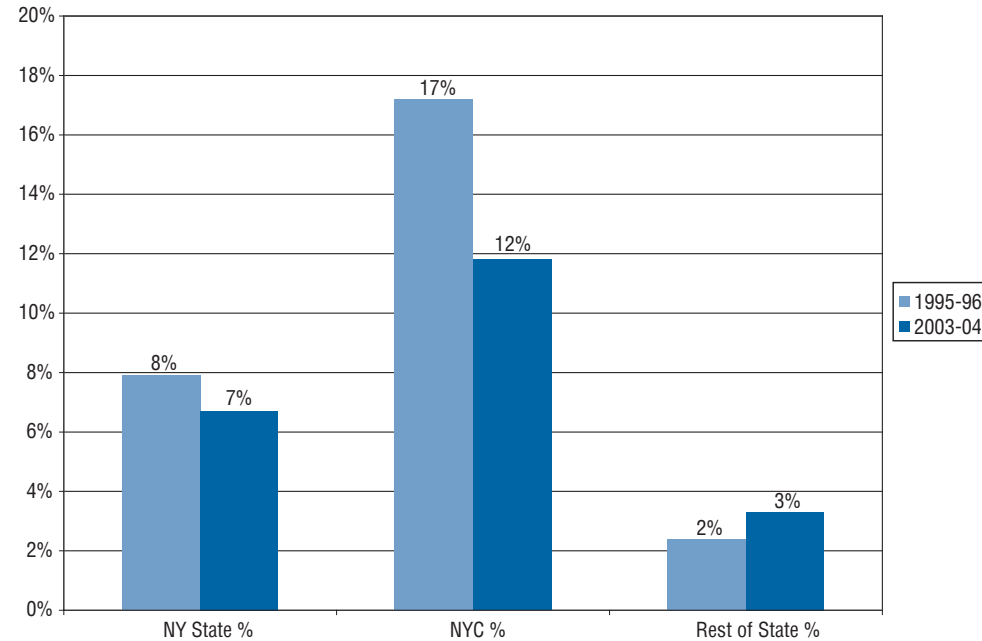
While 70% of fourth-grade students read at proficiency levels 3 and 4, only 48% of eighth-grade students do. The number of non-proficient students rises sharply between fourth grade and eighth grade, from 58,000 (out of 196,000) to 112,000 (out of 216,000).

In addition, the lagging literacy of fourth-grade students with disabilities falls even farther behind by eighth grade: 28% of fourth-grade students with disabilities show reading proficiency, but only 10% of eighth-grade students with disabilities are proficient.

Source: *Results for Students and Individuals with Disabilities*, Report to the Board of Regents, May 2006, New York State Education Department.

Overview of Performance in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Analysis of Student Subgroup Performance, New York State Education Department, February 2006.

Students with Limited English Proficiency



Definition: This chart shows percentages of students identified in PreK through grade 12 who come from a home where a language other than English is spoken and score at or below the 40th percentile on an English language assessment instrument in 1995-96 and 2003-04.

Significance: Limited speaking, listening, reading and writing skills will impair a student’s ability to benefit from education, and produce an achievement gap that often leads to frustration, dropping out, becoming disconnected and alienated from American life.

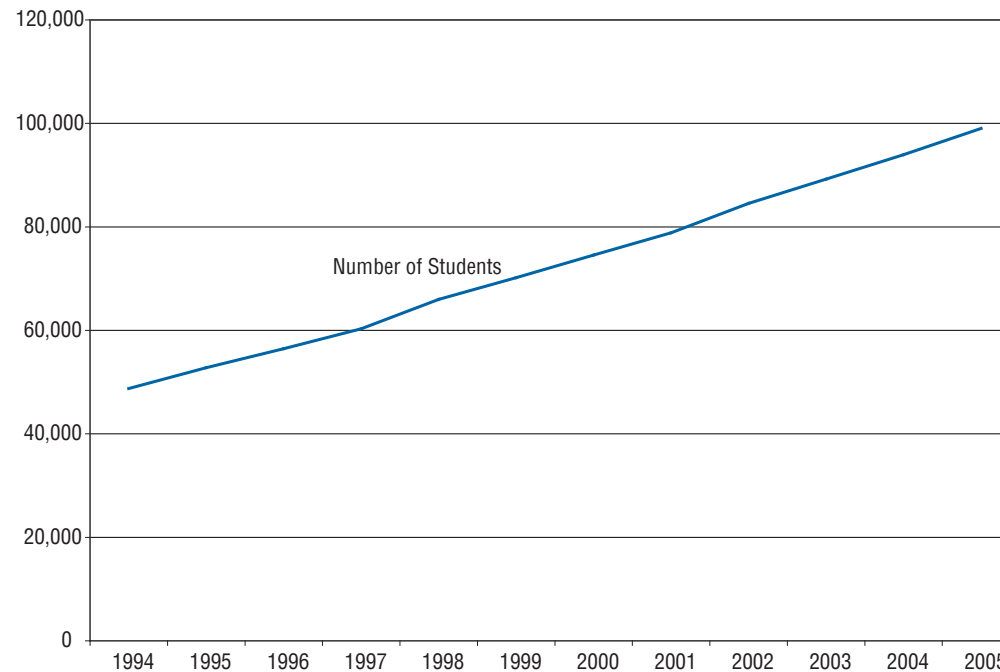
The share of students designated as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in New York City decreased from 17.2% in 1995-96 to 11.8% in 2002-04, still over three times their share (3.3%) in rest of state. Immigration experts suggest that the decrease results from an increase in overall

school enrollment, policy changes that restrict enrollment in the LEP instructional program to six years, and changes in testing approaches, rather than from a large decline in the population of non-English-proficient immigrants.

Smaller cities and communities in upstate New York report struggling with an influx of LEP students due to inadequate capacity to provide English-language instruction to this population.

Source: New York State Council on Children and Families, *NYS Touchstones/KIDS COUNT 2005 Data Book*.

Advanced Placement Program Participation



Definition: This chart shows the numbers of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in New York State. The AP curricula are college-level courses offered in high schools in the junior and senior years which give students a head start on college-level work.

Significance: The frenzied competition to master the college admissions process has caused many high school students to pack their schedules with Advanced Placement courses in an effort to win acceptance at the college of their choice.

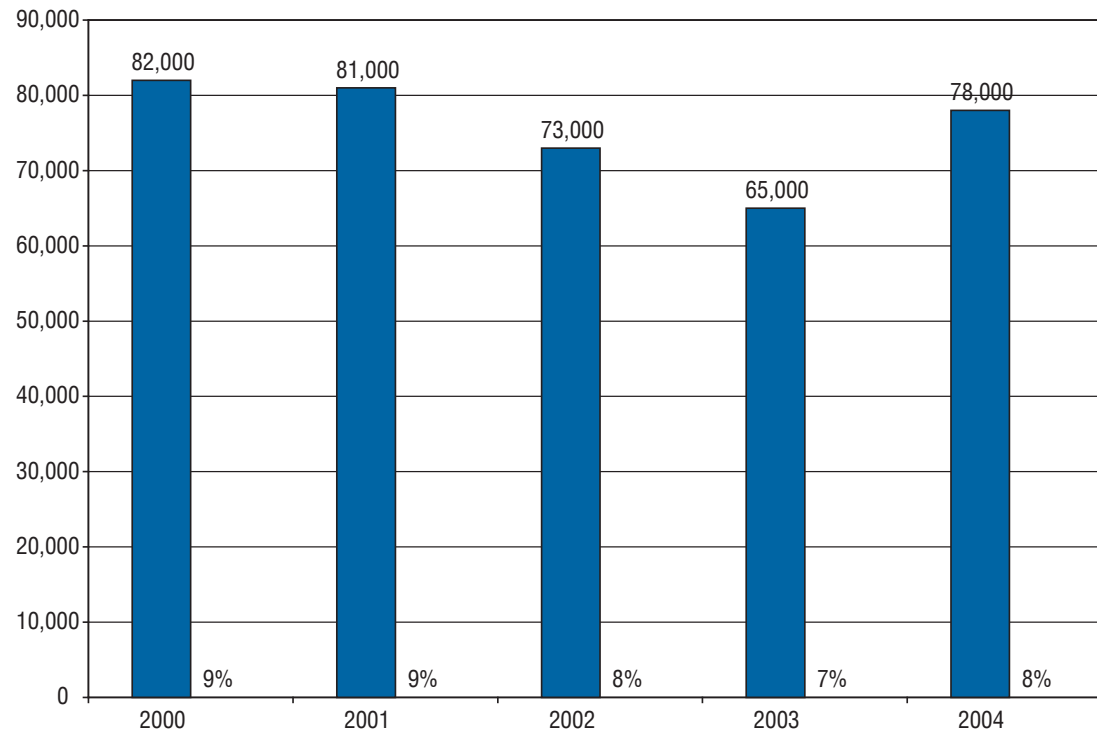
Students pursue AP courses for the competitive edge they gain in college entrance applications, as well as the opportunity to improve

writing skills and sharpen problem-solving techniques by tackling rigorous course work. Students achieving 5 on an exam graded from 1-5 are able to earn college credit at most of the nation's colleges and universities.

Since 1994, the number of students taking AP courses has more than doubled from 48,763 to 99,034 in 2005. AP offers 35 courses and exams across 20 subject areas.

Source: http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/exgrd_sum/2005.html.

Share of Teens Who are High School Dropouts



Definition: This chart shows number and percentage of teens between the ages of 16 and 19 who were not enrolled in school and not high school graduates in 2004.

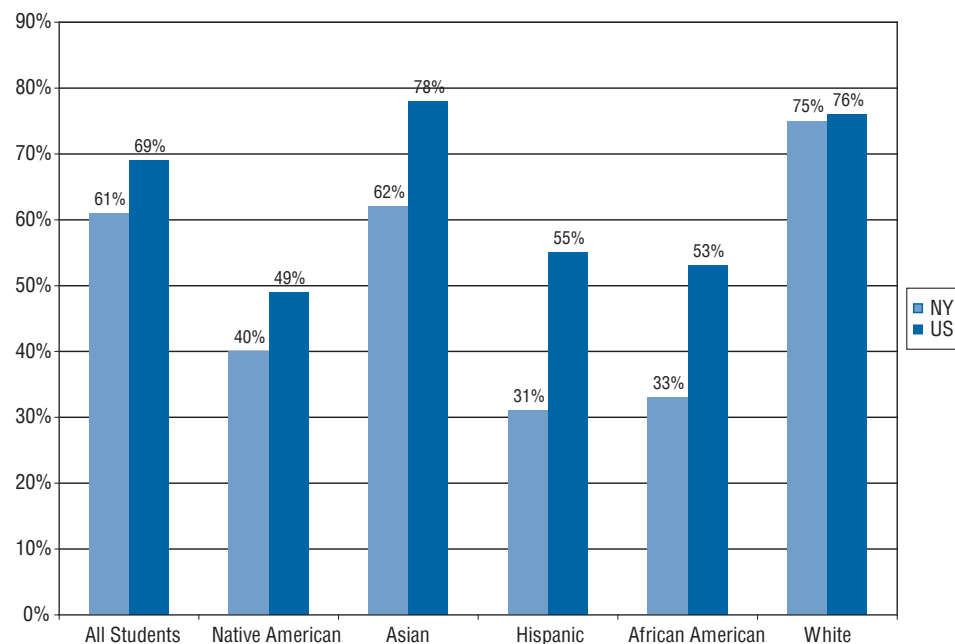
Significance: Approximately 8% of all teens were counted as high school dropouts in 2004.

Students at greater risk of dropping out are poor, male, Black or Hispanic, teen parents and children of single-parent families. Oftentimes, one or both parents dropped out or the family has moved frequently. Dropouts are prone to becoming part of a disconnected culture—alienated and vulnerable to substance abuse, unemployment, and incarceration. See disconnected youth chart on page 66.

The dropout rate may be even greater than the rate shown in this chart. While New York City reported a graduation rate of 54.3% in 2003, a recent report in *Education Week* estimated a 39% graduation rate for the same year. Whatever the exact number may be, it seems clear that some students transitioning from middle school are poorly prepared for the transition to 9th grade, and at risk of dropout. In fact, a recent *Education Week* report states that about 35% of students who fail to graduate nationwide fall off track during the ninth grade year.¹

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Databook Online, www.kidscount.org.

High School Graduation Rate by Race or Ethnicity



Definition: This chart shows the number of New York State high school graduates, by race or ethnic group, receiving a diploma in 2004 who entered high school in 9th grade and graduated four years later compared with the national average.

Significance: In 2004, the New York graduation rate was 61% after four years of high school, putting the state far below the national graduation rate of 69%. Three-quarters of all White students graduated in four years, while Blacks and Hispanics graduated at less than half that rate—33% and 31% respectively. Asian students graduated at a 62% rate.²

High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college and most skilled employment. Certain factors contribute to a student's decision to leave school. Repeating one or more grades, ongoing patterns of

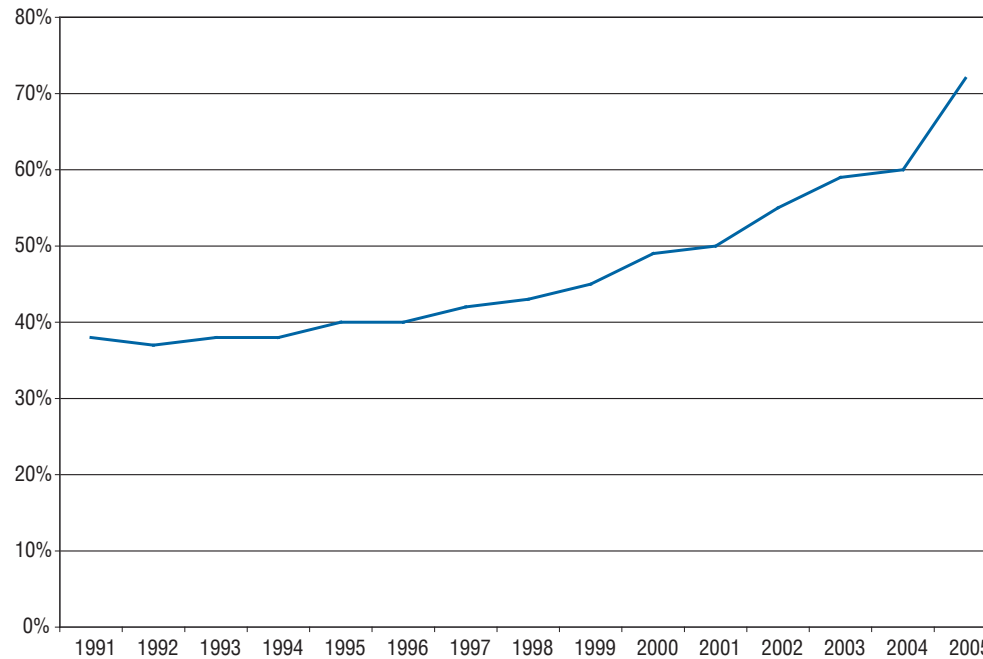
absenteeism, poor grades and poor achievement on tests are linked to dropping out. Youth who move frequently are more likely to drop out. Nationally, low-income students are six times more likely to drop out than high income students. Disconnected young adults who drop out of school are three times more likely to be unemployed or earn lower wages than those with a high school degree.

In 2005, the Board of Regents reported that high school graduation rates increased slightly to 64% after four years of high school and increased to 71% for those in high school for five years.³

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Databook Online, www.kidscount.org.

Call to Action: Follow-up to the New York Education Summit, The University of the State of New York, 2005.

Share of High School Graduates Awarded Regents Diplomas



Definition: This chart shows those graduates awarded Regents Diplomas by the New York State Department of Education who completed coursework in Regents level courses and passed a series of Regents examinations.

Significance: A Regents Diploma has historically signified rigorous effort and superior accomplishment. Students who entered 9th grade in September 2001 and beyond are required to earn 22 units of credit and score 65 or above on five Regents exams in English, mathematics, global history and geography, US history and government and science.

There has been a steady increase of students receiving Regents Diplomas from 40% in 1995 to 72% in 2005. Freshmen entering high school in 2008 must obtain a Regents Diploma to graduate. Once the

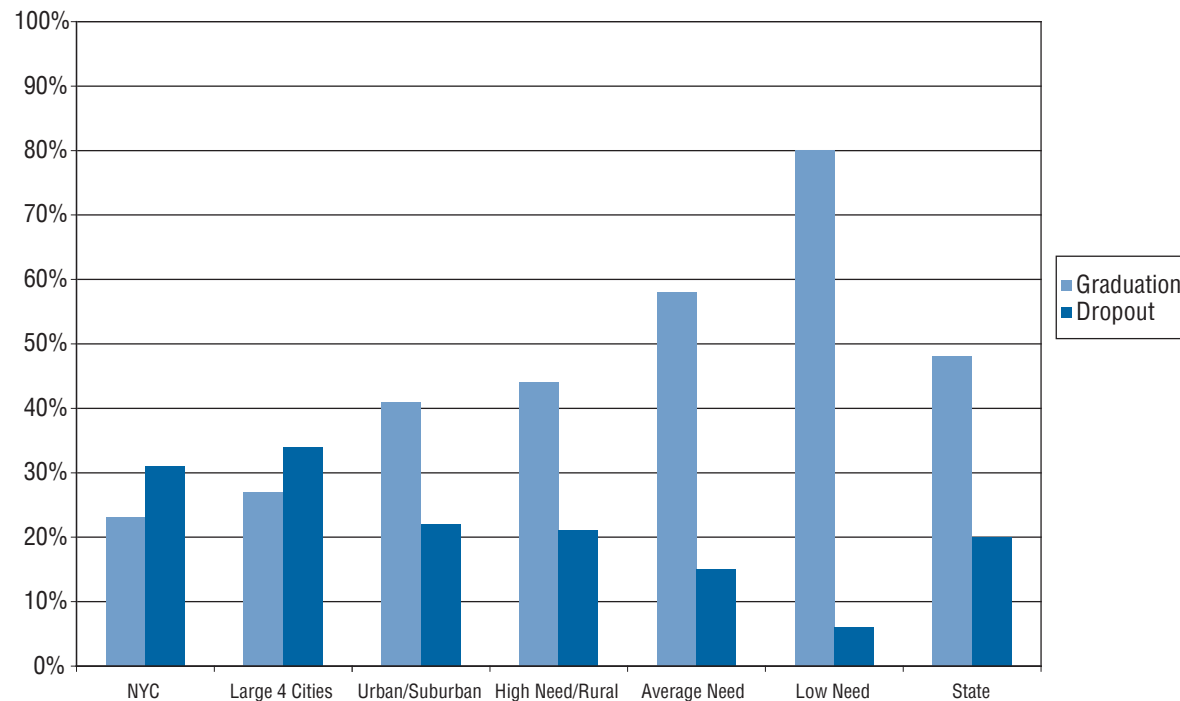
state completes phase-in of this “Regents-only diploma,” the measure of superior academic accomplishment will become the share of students who receive a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation, which will require the passing of eight Regents examinations.

Students with Disabilities are increasingly receiving Regents Diplomas. Of the 11,436 Students with Disabilities who graduated in 2005, 41% received Regents diplomas, compared to 24% in 2004.

Source: *New York State Total Public Report Card Comprehensive Information Report*, New York State Education Department, 2006.

Results for Students and Individuals with Disabilities, New York State Education Department, Report to Board of Regents, May 2006.

Students with Disabilities Graduation and Dropout Rates



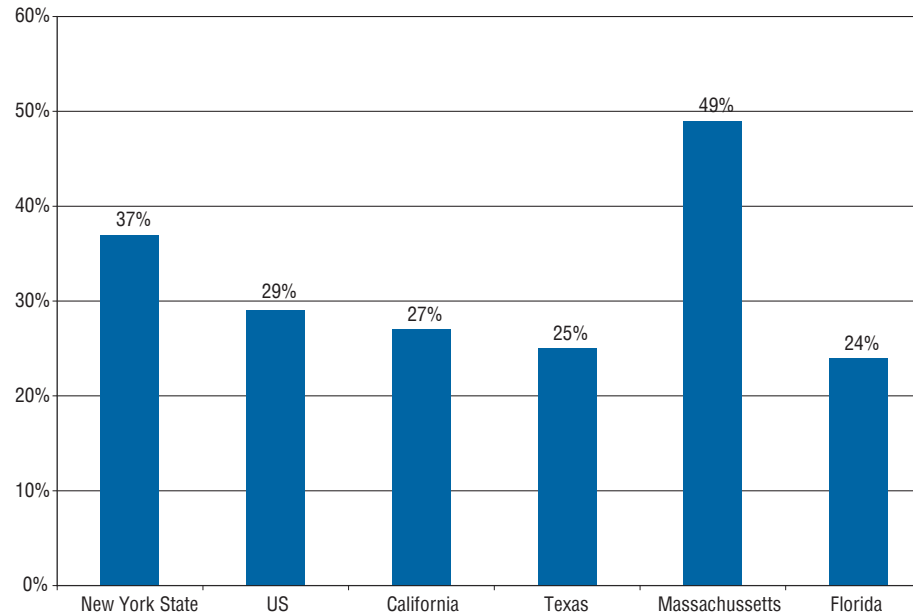
Definition: This chart shows achievement gaps for students with disabilities in graduation and dropout rates after five years. The chart looks at the 2000 total cohort of students with disabilities by need resource category of school districts. High-need school districts are those with low property wealth while low-need school districts have high property wealth.

Significance: After five years, one-third of big-city students with disabilities will drop out while one quarter will receive a high school diploma. In New York City, for example, a student with disabilities is one-third more likely to drop out than graduate. In 2004, 23% of students with disabilities graduated, while 31% dropped out.

Statewide, 48% of students with disabilities will graduate after five years and 20% will drop out. An additional 18% will enter Individualized Education Programs, while 5% will transfer to General Equivalency Diploma programs and less than 8% will still be enrolled. Students classified as having an emotional disturbance have the highest dropout rate of all students with disabilities.

Source: *New York State Education Department Results for Students and Individuals with Disabilities*, Report to Board of Regents, May 2006.

High School Graduates Who have Completed Bachelor's Degree



Definition: This chart compares high school graduates ages 25-29 by percentage who have completed a Bachelor's degree or higher in New York State, nationally and with other states from 2000 through 2004.

Significance: New York citizens who have completed a college or university baccalaureate degree have the skills to begin work in their degreed field, the opportunity for increased lifetime earnings, and the foundation for more specialized graduate degree programs.

In 2004, New York ranked third in the nation (37%), along with New Jersey, following Massachusetts (49%) and Connecticut (41%) in the share of high school graduates receiving bachelor degrees. New York ranks well ahead of the national average of 29% and significantly higher than large states such as Florida (24%), California (27%) and Texas (25%).

New York's higher college graduation rate results from several factors:

- the twenty-two units of rigorous Regents coursework leading to the Regents Diploma, now required of all general education students, and which has resulted in increased numbers of students receiving Regents diplomas,
- the availability and affordability of two- and four-year state colleges and universities,
- the Tuition Assistance Program, which provides grants to low and moderate income students for post secondary education.

However, there are major divides in achievement along lines of income, race and ethnicity, language and disability.

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Databook Online, www.kidscount.org.

Call to Action: Followup to the New York Education Summit, The University of the State of New York, 2005.