

High Schools in West Contra Costa Unified: A Status Report

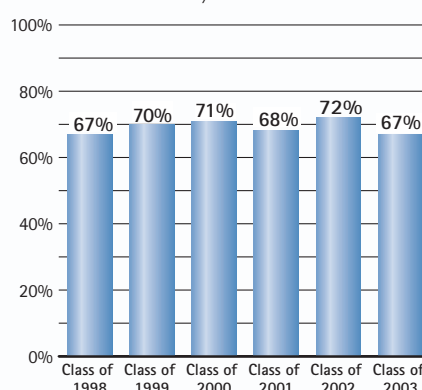
Improving high schools is an urgent priority for West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD). In this brief summary, we look at whether WCCUSD students are graduating, whether they are taking the right classes along the way to graduation and whether they are leaving high school with the skills they need to succeed. A more in-depth set of data about each of the district's high schools can be found in our "Raising the Roof" data tool at www.edtrustwest.org.

High School Completion Rate

Official graduation rate calculations from state and local agencies regularly understate the problem of high school dropouts, by counting students as not graduating only if a district reports that a student has actually dropped out. There is a more accurate way. Using methodology from the Manhattan Institute, we compare the number of graduates with the number of ninth graders who started high school four years before to see what percentage finished high school and what percentage dropped out.

Two-thirds of WCCUSD's high school students graduate.

9th graders who completed high school four years later

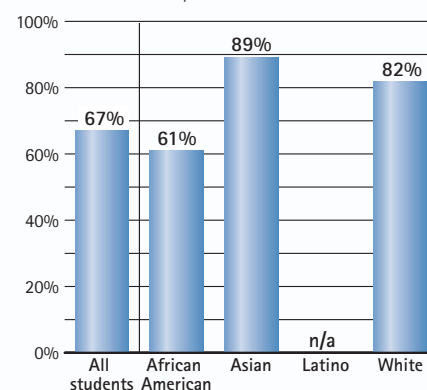


Note: Because of demographic changes in the district, it is not possible to accurately calculate a graduation rate for Latino students in the district.

Source: Education Trust-West analysis of California Department of Education data, using the Manhattan Institute methodology.

Graduation rates are lower for some groups.

9th graders who completed high school four years later, class of 2003



Offering Students the Right Classes

We developed an index to see whether enough courses are offered at each school for every student to take the full A-G curriculum — 15 courses that include four years of English, three years of math, two years of science and two years of history. An index of 1 means that enough courses are offered. An index of less than 1 means that not enough courses are offered. For instance, if a high school with 1,000 students offered

seats in A-G classes for 500 students to take the full sequence, it would have an opportunity index of 0.5. The district-level data presented here are weighted averages of the indices for all of the district's high schools. For a full explanation of the methodology used to calculate this index, see Appendix A to the full report, "Are California High Schools Ready for the 21st Century?" on our Web site at www.edtrustwest.org.

Not enough A-G courses are offered for all students.

A-G Opportunity Index by subject

All Subjects	0.82
Art	0.84
English	0.88
Foreign Language	0.73
Math	0.94
Science	0.85
Social Science	1

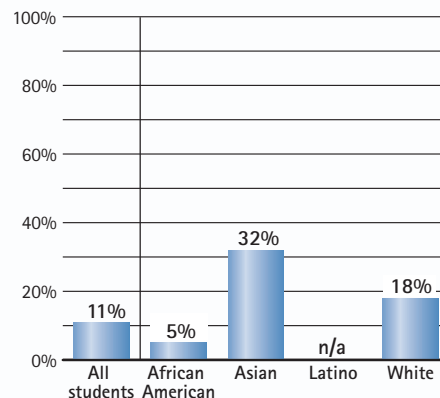
College-Ready Completion Rate

It is not just about opportunity to take A-G, though. For a high school to be successful, it must make sure students are both graduating and completing the entire A-G course sequence, earning a "C" or higher in all of the classes. Earning a "C" shows that students are having some success in these classes, and it is the only way students are eligible for admission to the UC and CSU systems. Here we measure the percentage of ninth graders that graduate four years later, having successfully completed the necessary courses.

Note: A-G mastery indicates that students have completed the full A-G course sequence with a "C" or better in each class. Also note that because of demographic changes in the district, it is not possible to accurately calculate a graduation rate for Latino students in the district.

Very few students graduate having succeeded in challenging courses.

9th graders who graduated four years later with A-G mastery, class of 2003



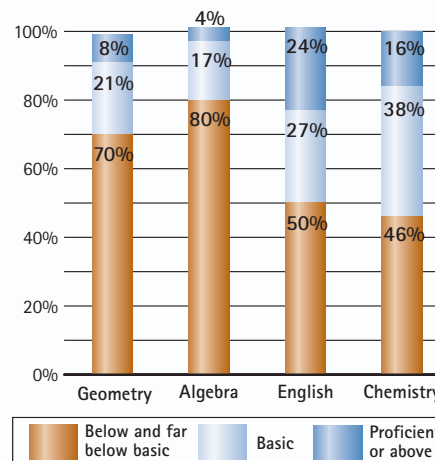
Source: Education Trust–West analysis of California Department of Education data, using the Manhattan Institute methodology.

Teaching the Basics

Taking the right courses is valuable only if students are actually learning the material they are supposed to learn. The California standards tests show that this is not always the case (top right). The CAT/6 reading test shows the magnitude of the gaps (bottom left). And the Academic Performance Index (API) shows that high schools in the district have seen much less improvement than elementary schools (bottom right).

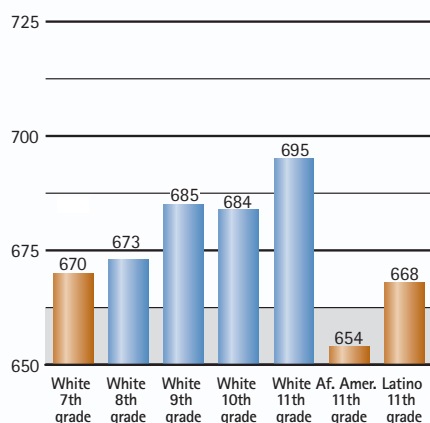
Fewer than 1 in 4 students are proficient.

Performance of students in grades 9–11 on California standards test, 2003



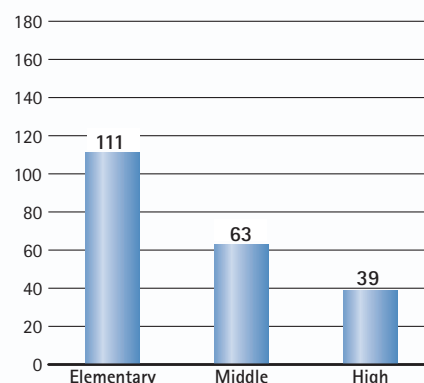
White 7th graders do better than African American and Latino 11th graders.

CAT/6 reading scores, 2003



High school progress is slow.

Total API point improvement by school level, 1999–2003



Source: Education Trust–West analysis of California Department of Education data.



To find out about a particular school or district, explore the data in our "Raising the Roof" online tool. For information on high schools at the state level, see "Are California High Schools Ready for the 21st Century?" Both are available at www.edtrustwest.org.