

# UC Berkeley

## EL Facts

### Title

Tenth Grade Dropout Rates by Native Language, Race/Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status

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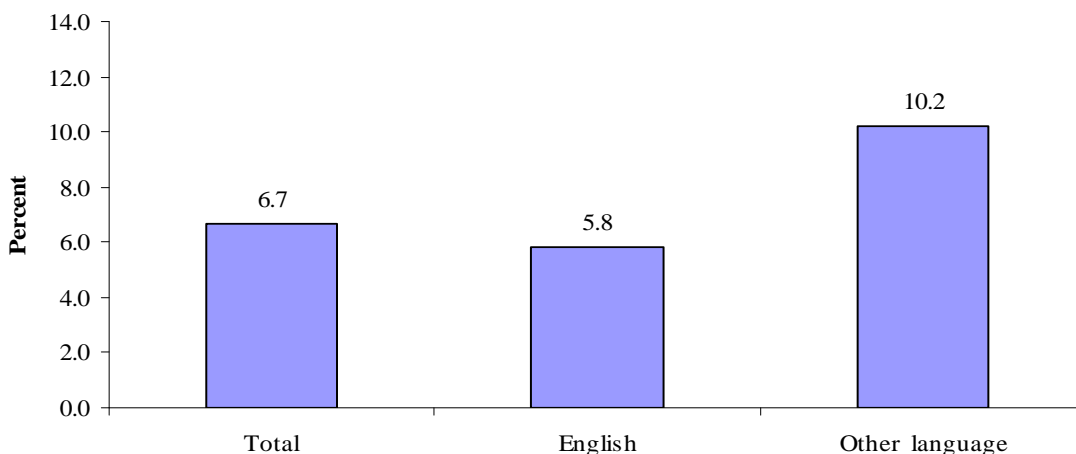
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One of the most important indicators of educational performance is the high school dropout rate. Reducing dropout rates and improving high school graduation rates are important goals for both educators and policymakers. Yet there is a great deal of controversy about how best to measure dropout and graduation rates.<sup>1</sup> This issue of EL Facts provides estimates of dropout rates for language minority students, racial and ethnic groups, and socioeconomic groups.

The estimates are based on data for the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), a longitudinal study of high school students conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The initial data collection was conducted on a sample of 15,362 tenth grade students attending 752 public, Catholic, and other private schools in the spring of 2002. A follow-up survey was conducted two-years later in the spring of 2004, when most students were seniors.<sup>2</sup> The present analysis is based on a sub-sample of 14,713 students who were interviewed in both the base-year and follow-up periods.<sup>3</sup>

The data show that 6.7 percent of high school sophomores in 2002 had dropped out of high school two years later (Figure 1). Another 1.2 percent of the students had completed high school without receiving a diploma,<sup>4</sup> and 1.5 percent of the students had dropped out of school during the two year period, but had returned by the time of the follow-up survey. Dropout rates for students whose native language was other than English were twice as high (10.2 percent) as students whose native language was English (5.8 percent). It should be kept in mind that these dropout rates only cover the last two years of high school—some students drop out before the spring of tenth grade—so these figures understate the total high school dropout rate.

**Figure 1**  
 Tenth Grade Dropout Rates by Native Language, 2002-04



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (N=14,713).

<sup>1</sup> See: Pinkus, L. (2006). *Who's counted? Who's counting? Understanding high school graduation rates*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education; Mishel, L. & Roy, J. (2006). *Rethinking high school graduation rates and trends*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

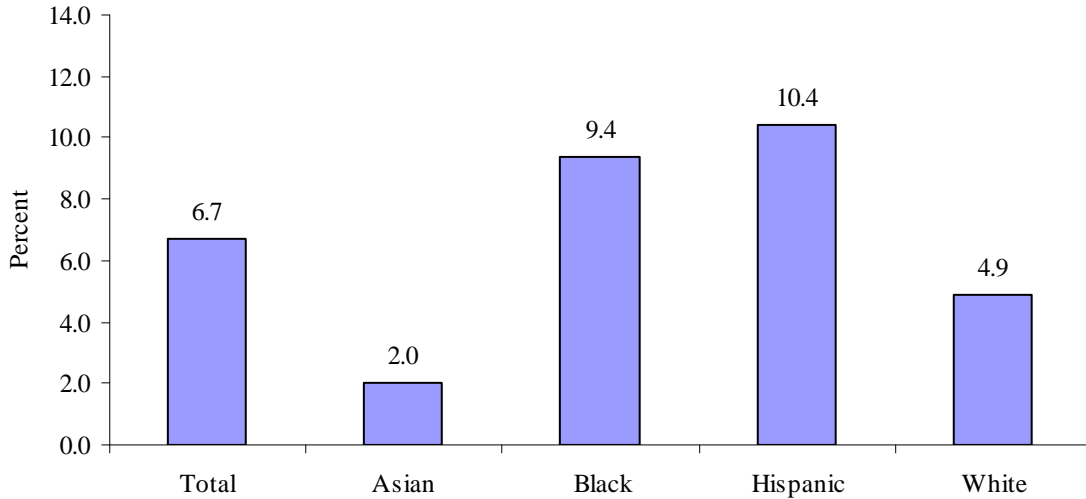
<sup>2</sup> Ingels, S.J., Pratt, D.J., Rogers, J.E., Siegel, P.H., and Stutts, E.S. (2005). *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002: Base-Year to First Follow-up Data File Documentation* (NCES 2006-344). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved September 14, 2006, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006344.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The estimates were weighted with the base-year/first follow-up panel weight (F1PNLWT).

<sup>4</sup> Students who complete high school without receiving a diploma could be considered dropouts, but previous NCES longitudinal studies have defined dropouts in the same manner as we do here. See: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1996). *A Comparison of High School Dropout Rates in 1982 and 1992*. NCES 96-893, by P. Kaufman, M. McMillen, and D. Sweet. Project Officer M. McMillen. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved October 19, 2006 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96893.pdf>

Dropout rates vary widely by race and ethnicity. Dropout rates for Black and Hispanic students were twice as high as those for White students, whereas dropout rates for Asian students were less than half the rates for White students (Figure 2).

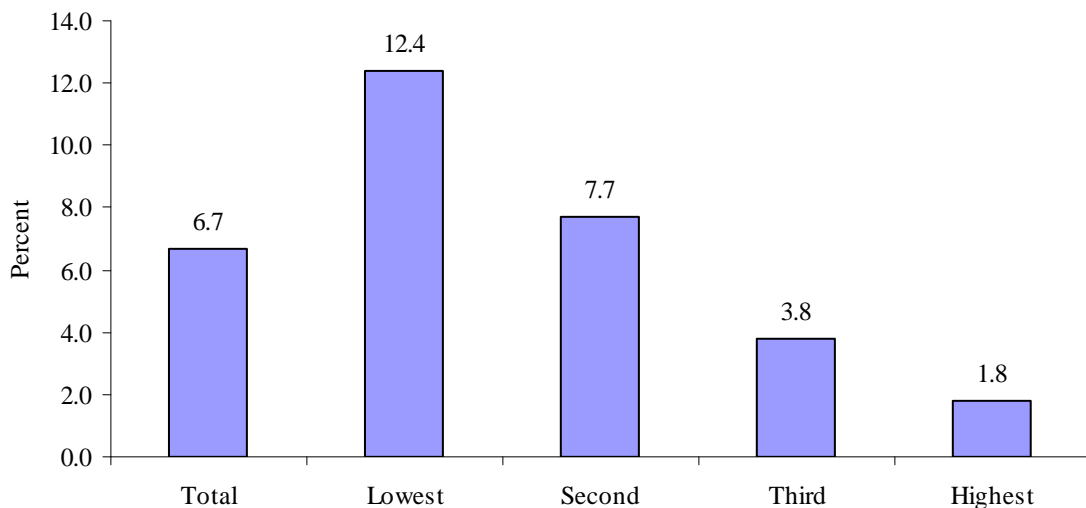
**Figure 2**  
Tenth Grade Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2002-04



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (N=14,713).

Dropout rates also vary widely by socioeconomic status (SES).<sup>5</sup> Dropout rates for students from the lowest SES quartile were seven times as large as dropout rates for students from the highest SES quartile (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
Tenth Grade Dropout Rates by Socioeconomic Quartiles, 2002-04



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (N=14,713).

<sup>5</sup> SES is a composite variable constructed from five variables: mother's and father's education, mother's and father's occupation, and family income. See: Ingels, S.J., Pratt, D.J., Rogers, J.E., Siegel, P.H., and Stutts, E.S. (2005). *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002: Base-Year to First Follow-up Data File Documentation* (NCES 2006-344). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, page C-13.