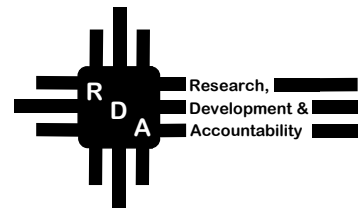


Albuquerque Public Schools

# Cohort Status Report

GRADUATION AND DROPOUT STATUS  
FOR  
STUDENTS IN THE CLASSES  
OF  
2001, 2002, 2003, 2004

Prepared by: Dolores Chavez de Daigle  
June 2005



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## **COHORT STATUS FOR THE CLASSES OF 2001, 2002, 2003, AND 2004**

### **Executive Summary**

APS voluntarily produces a cohort report of graduating classes. Although No Child Left Behind set an accountability requirement for graduation rates, this mandate is not in place until 2005. This report presents a four-year study of cohort status. Students who held ninth grade standing on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of the school year make up the cohorts in these studies. Ninth graders in 1997-1998 make up the 2001 cohort, 1998-1999 ninth graders are included in the cohort for 2002, ninth graders in 1999-2000 provided the cohort for the 2003 class, and ninth graders in 2000-2001 make up the 2004 cohort.

The cohort captures and presents six different statuses for students in ninth grade class:

- Graduation
- Still Enrolled
- Transferred
- Dropout
- Expulsions
- Deaths

The cohort studies presented in this report show a slight increase in graduation rates across the four groups. Graduation rates range from 51.4% to 52.9%.

The dropout figures for these studies show a decrease over the four cohorts, ranging from 30.6% in 2001 to 18.4% in 2004.

The overall trends remain the same for each ethnic group, but differences are seen in the rates for each group. Over the four years, Asian students show the highest graduation rates; African American and Hispanic students have the highest dropout rates. Rates for graduation range from 70% in 2004 for Asian students to a low of 36% for Native American students. Dropout rates range from a high of 39.5% in 2001 for the Hispanic cohort to a low of 11.9% for Anglo students.

The decrease in dropout over the three years is greater than the increase in graduation rates over the same period. This helps to demonstrate that the cohort dropout and graduation rates are not the inverse of each other.

The differences in these trends are partially accounted for by the steady increase in transfer students during the study timeframe.

The NM Open Enrollment Act, the NCLB transfer option, and charter schools may eventually have such a great impact on the stability of the high school enrollment that cohort reports would be minimally useful at the school level, but more helpful at the district level.

While rates fluctuate year-to-year with positive trends, schools' relative standing (high graduation, high dropout rates, etc.) does not seem to change. Research shows that family, community, school, and personal characteristics are factors associated with student success. School factors have not demonstrated a direct connection to dropout status, but the quality of teacher has a direct impact on student achievement. Achievement has been demonstrated to mitigate the impact of these non-school factors on dropout. Therefore, teacher quality and other successful school interventions are critical considerations in dropout prevention.

The stability of the graduation and dropout rates over the years suggests that powerful and bold interventions will have the greatest likelihood of strong impact on cohort status rates and also will result in sustained low annual dropout rates.

District initiatives support school based prevention efforts. Prevention and intervention programs that have a significant impact on the entering ninth grade class and that are sustained throughout the cohort's high school experience are the focus of the district efforts and successful school efforts.

## INTRODUCTION

Albuquerque Public Schools voluntarily produces a cohort status report of graduating classes. The federal and state regulations requiring the production of a cohort study do not go into effect until 2008. Even once all the states produce cohort data, these reports cannot be compared because different formulas are acceptable under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 based upon the individual needs of the district and the local community.

APS has produced a cohort status report since 1985. The original studies examined the status of a group of entering first-time ninth graders four years later, the year of their anticipated graduation. In 2000, APS expanded the traditional cohort study and attempted to contact individual students in the 1998-99 ninth grade class who had not graduated. The response rates did not provide sufficient data for a comprehensive study.

Since that effort, APS has confined its cohort study to the traditional four years. However, this study expands the initial cohort of first-time ninth graders to include students who are ninth grade repeaters with the graduating class. These graduation and dropout rates do not include students who transfer into APS after the ninth grade. The methodology used for this cohort study is not comparable to those used to calculate annual dropout rates or annual graduation rates for the state accountability report. These methods do provide different perspectives but are not comparable.

## METHOD

This study examines the cohort status for four groups of students:

- Cohort 1: Freshman in 1997-1998  
Graduating Class of 2001
- Cohort 2: Freshman in 1998-1999  
Graduating Class of 2002
- Cohort 3: Freshman in 1999-2000  
Graduating Class of 2003
- Cohort 4: Freshman in 2000-2001  
Graduating Class of 2004

Each group of 9<sup>th</sup> graders is divided into those enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade for the first time and those who also held 9<sup>th</sup> grade standing in the previous school year.

Enrollment histories are examined for the students who started in the cohort, and the last status the student was assigned is considered for the final report. Students who enroll and withdraw

multiple times during the four year period of one cohort are considered only once in the study. The student's last standing is the status that is reported. Consider the following example:

*A 9<sup>th</sup> grader in 1998 transfers out of APS to a new school district but returns to APS the following year. That same student drops out of school his second year in high school and then re-enrolls the third year and is still active in the district at the end of the fourth year. This student is considered to be "still active" and is included only in this category.*

#### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

- **RECORD KEEPING**

Whenever activity must be recorded over an extended period of time, there is opportunity for record keeping inaccuracies. Ongoing research by RDA reveals records that are kept at the school are actually more accurate than the computerized student information system. It is not unusual to find manually kept, cumulative records reflecting verified transfer status when computer records show student status as unknown (a dropout).

- **GRADE STANDING**

Student grade standing in the current computer system is automatically adjusted at the end of each school year. Students are promoted to the next grade on the computer system without regard to credits earned, thus resulting in students holding a class standing for which they are not eligible. This can impact the rates by grade level.

- **GED**

GED completion information is not readily available to districts. This information is gathered and maintained by the test-administering agency and the state Public Education Department. There is as much as an 18-month delay between successful GED completion and notification to districts.

- **HOMESCHOOLERS**

Home school students no longer register with the local district. The PED tries to keep LEAs updated on home school enrollment, but the lists lag behind actual enrollment/active status. This can result in some homeschoolers being classified as dropouts.

- **DUPLICATE RECORDS**

Students at risk for dropping out of school tend to have higher mobility rates than students who are not at risk for dropping out. Associated with this enrollment/re-enrollment process is the establishment of duplicate records. Returning students and/or parents do not always inform school personnel that the student has been enrolled in APS previously. Because there is not a readily available, easy-to-use strategy to check for duplicate enrollment records, sometimes a student is enrolled under a slightly different name and that enrollment generates a new student record (with a new identification number). Multiple records for multiple enrollments confound data accuracy efforts. In a situation where the student has multiple records, each record eventually shows up as a dropout.

- **PARENT INFORMATION**

Finally, there is some evidence that students and/or parents communicate to school personnel that a student is continuing his/her education in a different setting when in actuality that student is a dropout.

These documentation limitations do result in inaccuracies in the identification of students as dropouts. However, the district has in place a variety of mechanisms to help ensure that the records and student status is as accurate as possible for these types of studies. Each of these mechanisms to enhance accuracy has been applied to the cohort data before the analyses.

#### WHAT ARE THE COHORT OUTCOMES AND TRENDS?

The cohort captures and presents six different statuses for students in each cohort group:

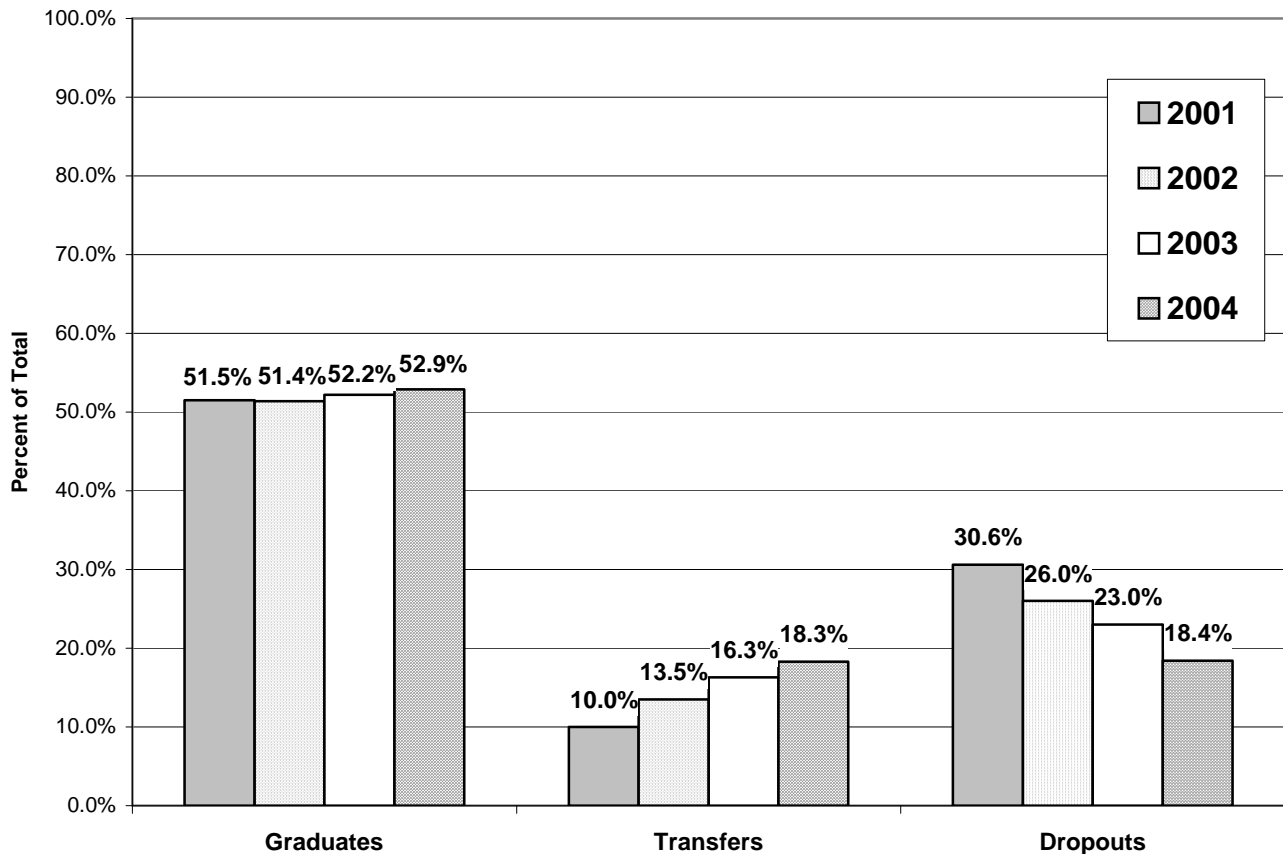
- Graduation
- Still Enrolled
- Death
- Transferred
- Expulsions
- Dropout

It is inaccurate to assume that the graduation rate subtracted from 100% yields a dropout rate. Students who have not graduated may be transfers or may still be enrolled in APS.

The four cohort studies presented in this report show a slight increase in graduation across the three groups. Graduation rates show that 51.4% to 52.9% of the four cohorts start high school at APS and graduate four years later from an APS High School. Cohort graduation for the last six years shows mild fluctuations in the rates, averaging about half of all entering ninth graders graduating from an APS school four years later.

From the first studies in 1985 to present, the cohort graduation rate has been between 47.9% to a high of 55.3%. These graduation rates do not mean that about half of all entering ninth grade students drop out. Keep in mind that non-graduates include students who transfer, who are still enrolled, or who are not in school due to expulsion or death in a few cases. In fact, these four studies show that the greatest increase occurs in the status of transfer, with verified transfers accounting for 18% of the 2004 cohort. These comparisons are readily seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 – Comparison of Graduate, Transfer and Dropout Rates For Four High School Cohorts**





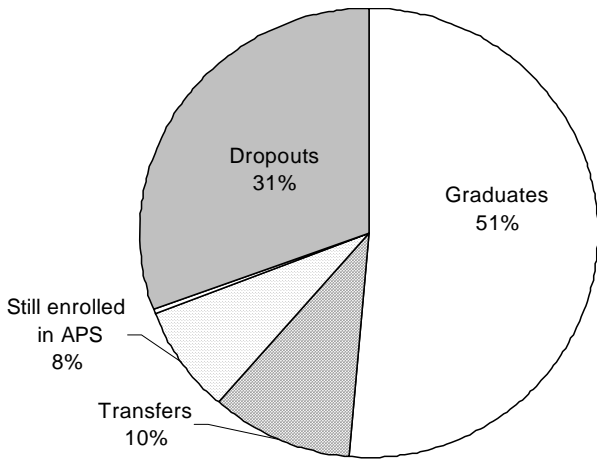
Conversely, the dropout figures for these studies show a decrease over the four cohorts, ranging from 30.6% in 2001 to 18.4% in 2004. The decrease in the dropout rate is greater than the increase in the graduation rate. Again, this demonstrates that the graduation rate and dropout rate are not the inverse of each other in a cohort study. Table 1 shows the cohort statuses for each of the classes of students presented in this study. Figures 2-5 show the proportion of students in each status for each cohort.

Table 1 - Cohort Status for First Time Ninth Graders in Comprehensive High Schools

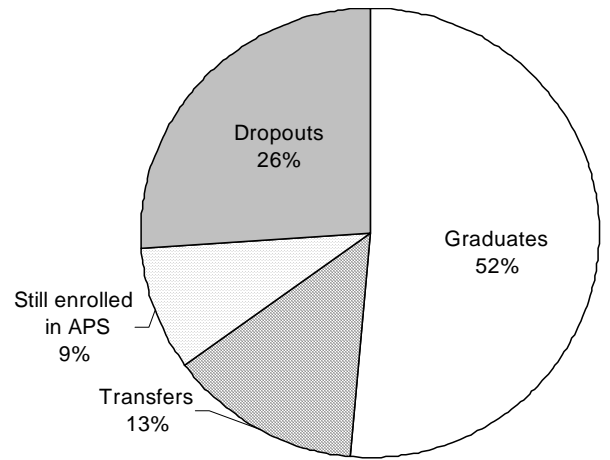
Status	Number of Students				Percent of Total			
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2001	2002	2003	2004
Graduated	3510	3442	3573	3492	51.5%	51.4%	52.2%	52.9%
Transferred out of APS	681	902	1117	1210	10%	13.5%	16.3%	18.3%
Still enrolled in APS	527	597	570	671	7.8%	9%	8.4%	10.2%
Expulsions	2	3	3	2	0%	0%	0%	0%
Deaths	7	8	6	9	.1%	.1%	.1%	.1%
Dropout	2085	1739	1574	1217	30.6%	26.0%	23.0%	18.4
Total students	6812	6691	6843	6601	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Figures 2-5. Percent of Students in Each Cohort Status for Four High School Cohorts**

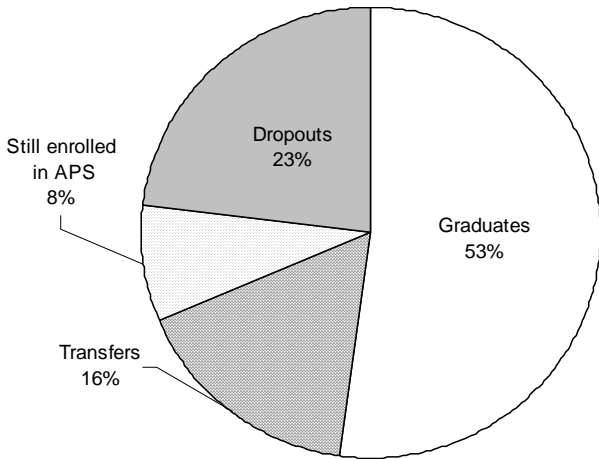
**Figure 2. Cohort 1 (1997 to 2001)**



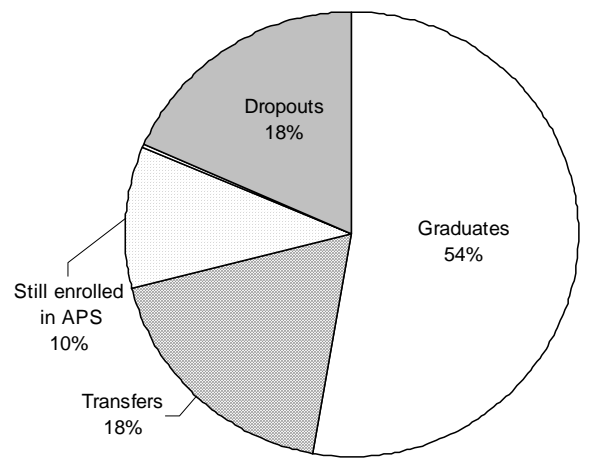
**Figure 3. Cohort 2 (1998 to 2002)**



**Figure 4. Cohort 3 (1999 to 2003)**



**Figure 5. Cohort 4 (2000 to 2004)**



Note: Expulsions and deaths represent less than .2% of the total number of students in each cohort.

**Table 2- Cohort Graduation Rates by School for First Time Ninth Graders**

School	Graduation Rate by Anticipated Graduation Year			
	2001	2002	2003	2004
Albuquerque	41.1	40.9	42.8	42.8
Cibola	60.0	59.1	62.0	62.3
Del Norte	47.6	51.4	53.0	48.7
Eldorado	63.8	65.8	63.9	66.1
Highland	42.9	39.2	38.7	40.0
La Cueva	74.0	73.9	77.3	75.6
Manzano	55.7	52.7	53.4	56.6
Rio Grande	41.4	35.5	36.9	39.6
Sandia	57.9	63.0	61.3	59.4
Valley	50.8	51.2	51.3	51.9
West Mesa	40.9	41.9	42.0	41.9
District	51.5	51.4	52.2	52.9

Table 2 shows the graduation rate for each comprehensive high school and the district overall graduation rate for each cohort. Table 3 shows the dropout rate for each comprehensive high school and the district overall dropout rate for each cohort. Keep in mind that the graduation rate subtracted from 100% does not yield the dropout rate. It is also important to remember that the graduation rate is depressed by transfer rates. Over the four-year study, the transfer rates increased notably. Over the ten years of data presented, the transfer rate is at its highest at 26.1% for Highland High School, with Albuquerque High School a close second at a transfer rate of 23.7%. These transfer rates are consistent with the mobility and stability rates for these schools over the same period of time.

The increased options of charter schools and the NM Open Enrollment Act is slowly showing a negative impact on the stability of the student body in our APS comprehensive high schools for

this cohort study. In fact, the open enrollment act coupled with the NCLB first choice transfer option could have such a significant impact on the enrollment at high school that cohort reports are minimally useful by schools but more useful at the district level. Transfer options increase the likelihood of students finding programs that meets their needs and results in high school completion. However, open enrollment increases the number of schools contributing to the students' graduation status. Is it accurate to contribute the success (or failure) of a student who attends 3 high schools to the one school at which he or she started 9th grade? In this case, the students' completion is significant to district planning but may not provide critical information to the individual schools these students attended

**Table 3 - Cohort Dropout Rates for First Time Ninth Graders**

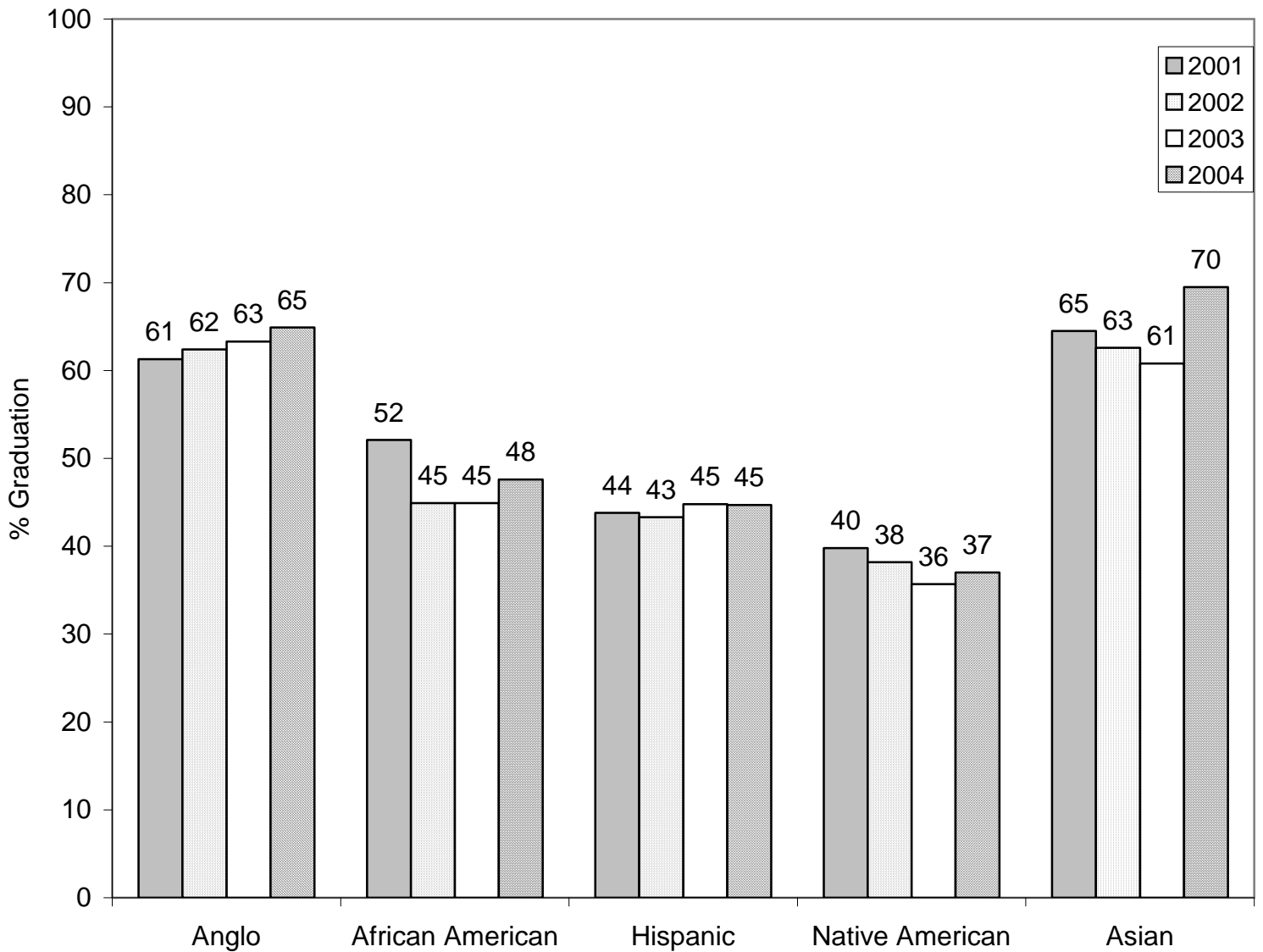
School	Dropout Rate by Anticipated Graduation Year			
	2001	2002	2003	2004
Albuquerque	42.2	33.4	31.6	23.1
Cibola	16.9	15.8	13.3	10.5
Del Norte	35.3	32.8	26.8	21.4
Eldorado	19.9	16.8	15.4	10.2
Highland	35.7	31.4	27.9	25.0
La Cueva	8.3	7.9	8.1	6.4
Manzano	24.8	23.6	18.5	14.1
Rio Grande	47.0	44.2	36.2	26.1
Sandia	22.9	18.3	16.8	18.3
Valley	34.2	25.6	25.7	20.7
West Mesa	38.9	30.8	28.3	25.6
District	30.6	26.0	23.0	18.4

Are there differences in rates among different student groups?

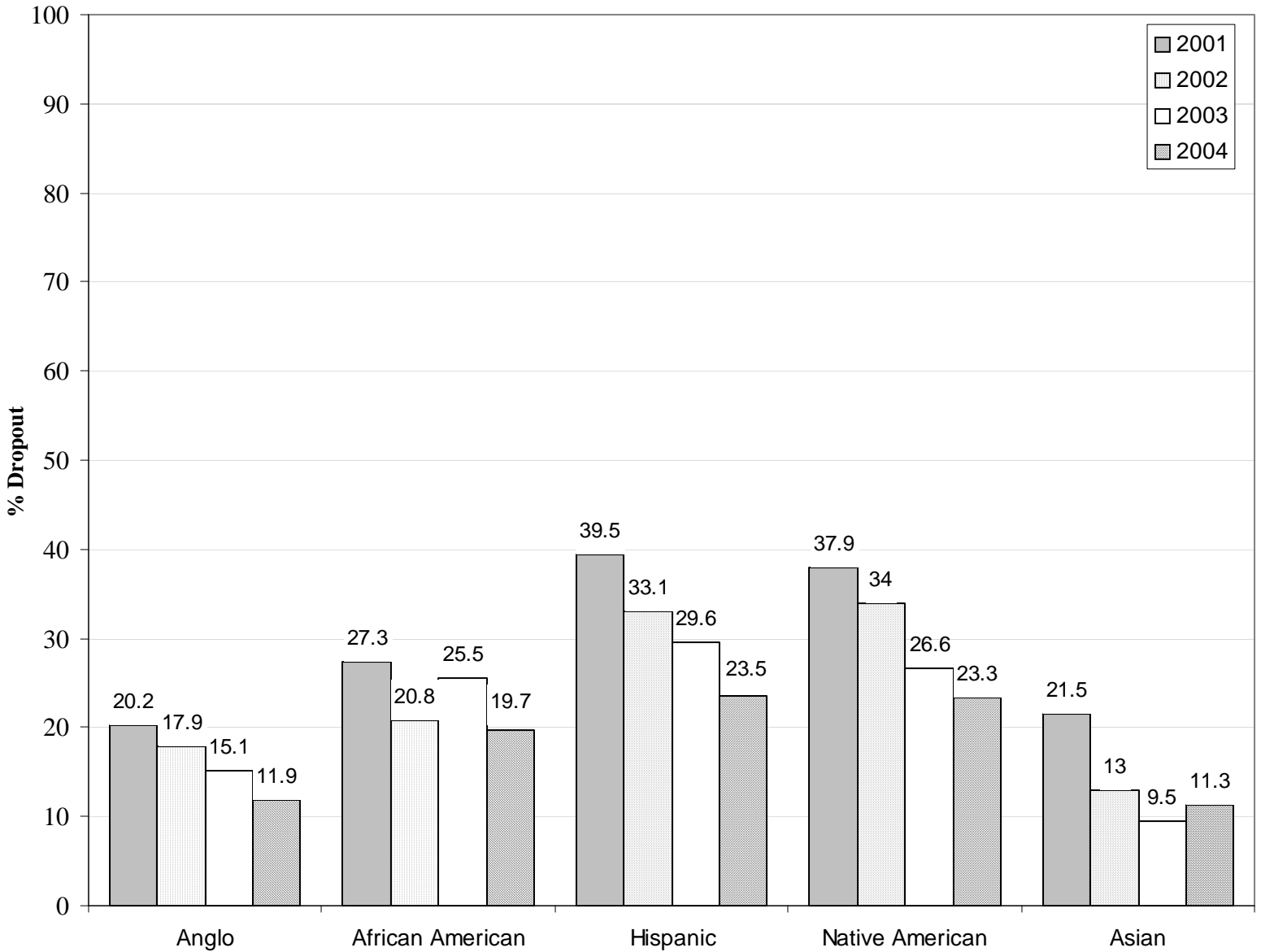
- Graduation and dropout rates do differ across the different ethnic groups.
- Across the four groups of cohorts, Hispanic students show the highest dropout rates, the lowest graduation rates and the least number of transfers.
- Because Hispanic students have the lowest transfer rates, the proportions of graduates compared to dropouts is much closer than for any other group.
- Hispanic graduation rates range between 43% and 45% for the four years while the dropout rates show a 16% decrease between 2001-2004 and range from 39.5 to 23.5%.
- Asian students consistently have the highest graduation rates ranging from 60.8% – 64.5%, while Anglo and Asian students have the lowest dropout rates among the ethnic groups.
- Dropout rates among African American students show the most fluctuation across the four years and may be due to small numbers of students.
- The strongest trends of decreasing dropout across the study are seen among Asian, Hispanic, and Native American students. The decrease in Hispanic dropout rates is nearly twice the decrease among Anglos.

Figures 6 and 7 show the graduation and dropout rates for each ethnic group. The appendix provides detailed information about the differences in graduation and dropout rates among students in each ethnic group.

**Figure 6 – Cohort Graduation Rate (Percent) by Ethnic Group**



**Figure 7. Cohort Dropout by Ethnic Group**



Two additional student groups were added to this year's cohort report: English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SpEd) Students (See Table 4). These two groups have special needs that require additional services from the district. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the performance of these groups is coming more to the forefront. The graduation rate for ELL students is 30% while the graduation rate for special education students is 40%. When comparing the percent of students in each status group, special education students

are closer to the rates seen in the comprehensive high school student population except for “still enrolled in APS.” SpEd students often times are enrolled in special programs that allow them to continue their education at APS until the age of 22. Many of these students end up graduating one to three years after their cohort has graduated. On the other hand, ELL students are experiencing a lower graduation rate, a higher transfer rate and a higher dropouts rate than the comprehensive high school student population as a whole. Often students who are ELL students in high school are students who have recently moved into this country and who have a great deal of catching up to do with regard to reading comprehension. This contributes to their inability to keep up with the demands of the high school curriculum and results in a higher dropout rate for these students. In addition, a high school education is beyond what is traditionally available in their home country, so dropping out of school at this level is a common occurrence. If the student returns to his country of origin, the status of dropout does not carry the same stigma or consequences that it does in the United States. The results of this cohort study show that the persistence of ELL students continues to be a challenge. ELL students have significantly higher transfer and dropout rates.

**Table 4 - Comparison of Cohort Status from Three Student Populations**

Status	Number of Students			Percent of Total		
	All Comprehensive High School	English Language Learners	Special Education Students	All Comprehensive High School	English Language Learners	Special Education Students
Graduated	3492	384	460	52.9%	29.2%	39.2%
Transferred out of APS	1210	388	231	18.3%	29.5%	19.7%
Still enrolled in APS	671	142	224	10.2%	10.8%	19.1%
Expulsions	2	1	0		.1%	0
Deaths	9	2	4	.1%	.2%	.3%
Dropout	1217	398	255	18.4%	30.3%	21.7%
Total students	6601	1315	1174	100%	100%	100%



#### WHY ARE EXPULSIONS COUNTED IN COHORT REPORTING?

The passage of the safe schools act set mandatory expulsion consequences for students bringing firearms to school. Because the district must follow these guidelines, expulsions are reported as a separate status. Suspensions are grouped into expulsions. Students with an actual suspension at the time of their graduation are not counted as dropouts, but students who have failed to return after a suspension will be considered dropouts.

#### WHY EXCLUDE REPEATING NINTH GRADERS?

The simplest answer is that students who were ninth graders for the first time in 1999-2000 should be considered part of the 2003 graduating class. Repeating ninth graders in 1999-2000 are considered part of the 2002 graduating class, because they were first time ninth graders the year before. These repeaters would have been reported in the 2002 cohort as “still enrolled” students.

Often times schools develop interventions for entering classes. The impact of those interventions is best evaluated for an identified population. For example, many high schools have instituted small learning communities for entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes; others have special programs for repeating 9<sup>th</sup> grades. Studying these groups separately is the most effective strategy for communicating the effects of these types of programs to schools. Cohort rates are typically used to demonstrate a district’s holding power. This helps the district and schools study and answer the following questions:

*How many years does the average student take to graduate?  
In which grade do school failure and outside pressures take  
their greatest toll on enrollment?  
How do we provide extra support at that point?  
What is unique about this cohort that will guide our support  
and prevention efforts?*

Including repeating ninth graders confounds this study and merges class variability. Research has demonstrated that variation in groups of students is the greatest contributing factor to yearly differences in outcomes. Therefore, using a true cohort is best for analyses and decision making. To evaluate the progress of students who have already been retained, the appendix shows cohort status for both first time ninth graders and repeaters.

WHY IS THE COHORT DROPOUT RATE SO DIFFERENT FROM THE ANNUAL RATE?

Two factors account for the differences in cohort and annual rates. The most obvious is that remarkably different calculation methods and different identification strategies are used. Annual rates include transfers into the district during the school year as part of the denominator for the formula. High numbers of incoming transfers inflate the denominator and can deflate rates. Also, a student's status as a dropout is counted only once in a year but counted every year that student enrolls and drops out for annual studies.

Secondly, initiatives instituted at the district level are more likely to have an immediate and short term impact on annual rates and less of an impact on the cohort rates. If an implemented intervention or prevention strategy makes a significant impact on the annual dropout rate, only ¼ of that impact is carried over to the cohort. A one-time, remarkable 4% reduction in an annual dropout rate could result in no more than a 1% reduction in the cohort rate (if that annual rate change is in the four-year cohort time frame).

The annual dropout rates associated with the four years of the 2003 cohort study were those reported for 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003. Table 5 shows the annual dropout rates reported for five years.

**Table 5 - Annual Dropout Rates for 2000-2004**

2000	7.0%	
2001	8.2%	Cohort freshman
2002	4.5%	Cohort sophomores
2003	3.3%	Cohort juniors
2004	3.7%	Cohort seniors

During the most recent years, APS has experienced a significantly smaller annual dropout rate than in previous years.. However, this annual rate reduction only has an impact on the third and fourth years of the 2004 cohort. This would have been mostly seniors and juniors, the classes for which the annual dropout is the lowest. Further, only less than ¼ of the annual rate is examining the same students as the cohort. The annual dropout rate of 8.2% occurred during the cohort's

freshman year. The group contributing the most to the annual rate of 8.2% was the freshman class. The second year of the cohort, the district had an annual dropout rate for 9-12<sup>th</sup> graders of 4.5%. Sophomores are typically the second greatest contributor to the annual dropout group. This was the cohort's sophomore year. The next year the district's dropout rate showed a significant decrease to 3.4%. However, most of the cohorts were juniors by this time; juniors have a very low dropout rate. So, the cohort of students was contributing very little to the annual dropout rate; therefore, the great decrease in the annual dropout rate contributes the least to the cohort dropout rate.

One of the lowest annual dropout rates of the four years of our cohort was the senior year. The dropout rate for our cohort's senior year is 3.7%. Our seniors contribute virtually nothing to this dropout rate when the cohort is in its senior year.

While this is a lengthy explanation it is helpful in understanding why a district may report a cohort dropout rate of 18.6% and an annual rate of 3.7%, as APS has done for 2004.

#### SUMMARY

Cohort dropout and graduation rates show some variability across the district and among schools. The variation in graduation has a slight trend upward but the dropout rate has a consistent downward trend. Most significant for the past four year's cohorts are that transfers are increasing on a yearly basis to a high in 2004 of 18%.

However, school's relative standing (high graduation rate/high dropout rates) does not seem to change. Research shows that family, community, school, and personal characteristics are factors associated with student success. School factors have not demonstrated a direct connection to dropout status, but the quality of teacher has a direct impact on student achievement. Achievement has been demonstrated to mitigate the impact of these non-school factors on dropout. Therefore, teacher quality and other successful school interventions are critical considerations in dropout prevention.

Critical to the long-range evaluation of dropout prevention is the consistency in calculation strategies and a collaborative effort throughout the district to provide accurate, readily understood information, which we all agree to use for baseline data and reporting. The stability of the rates suggests that powerful and bold interventions will have the greatest likelihood of strong impact on cohort status rates and also will result in sustained low annual dropout rates.

District initiatives support school-based prevention efforts. Smaller Learning Communities, credit recoup, one-call re-entry, mentorships and early diagnosis and intervention for academic improvement are available at every high school. Prevention and intervention programs that have a significant impact on the entering ninth grade class and are sustained throughout that cohort's high school experience should result in dramatic increases in cohort graduation and equally as dramatic reductions in cohort dropout rates.