

June 18, 2009

To: Kari Arfstrom

From: David Blaiklock

Re: High School Dropout Rates

This memo is being written to determine if the overall dropout rate (disaggregated by race) has increased or decreased over the past decade using analysis presented by government and non-government agencies. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the overall high school dropout rate was 6.2% in 1992 and 6.6% in 2004 demonstrating a slight increase in the high school dropout rate from one decade to the next. Separating this data by race shows a 12.3% decrease for Native American students (17% in 1992 and 4.7% in 2004), a 1% decrease for Asian/Pacific Islander students (4.2 % in 1992 and 3.2 % in 2004), a 1.9% increase in African-American students (7.9% in 1992 and 9.8% in 2004), a 0.9% decrease in Hispanic students (12.1% in 1992 and 11.2% in 2004) and a 0.2% decrease in White students (5% in 1992 and 4.8% in 2004). These rates were determined by the number of sophomores in a given year that had not graduated or received a high school equivalency diploma three years later (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The Child Trends Data Bank found different results using calculations from U.S. Census data and defining a dropout as anyone aged 16-24 who was not enrolled in school and did not have a diploma or equivalency. These results did not include information on Native American or Asian/Pacific Islander students but did indicate an overall decrease of 1.7% (12% in 1995 and 10.3% in 2004). The report showed a 2.1% decrease for White students (8.6% in 1995 and 6.7% in 2004), no change for African-American students (12.1% in 1995 and 12.1% in 2004), and a 6.2% decrease for Hispanic students (30% in 1995,

and 23.8% in 2004) (Child Trends Data Bank, 2008). While the direction of change in dropout rates of Hispanic, and White students is the same, the Child Trends data shows a higher rate of dropout particularly amongst the Hispanic students. There is a contradiction in the direction of change between the two data sets with the Child Trends data still showing a higher dropout rate than the NCES data. Both the NCES and Child Trends reports were obtained directly from their websites via google search.

This information would be important to a policy analyst as a starting point to determine if the current policies addressing the high school dropout rates disaggregated by race were appropriate. The first issue to focus on with these two sets of data is how to develop policies that will impact the dropout rate of African-American students, which is increasing in the NCES data and remaining the same in the Child Trends data. The fact that current policies are not impacting the dropout rate of African-American students shows an alternate policy may be effective by dealing with issues that are not being addressed in our current policies. The other issue is the disparity of the dropout rates between the two sets of data. While the definition of dropout is different the Child Trends data showed a much higher dropout rate particularly for Hispanic students. Having accurate information on high school dropout rates would be important for a policy analyst as that data may be helpful for determining future needs such as policies supporting adult education programs or funding that would help subsidize adults while they finish school. Therefore an accurate definition and measurement of the dropout rate is important in developing both current and future policies.

References

National Center for Education Statistics (2009). Late High School Dropouts: Characteristics, Experiences, and Changes Across Cohorts. Retrieved on June 17, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009307.pdf>.

Child Trends Data Bank (2008). High School Dropout Rates. Retrieved on June 17, 2009 from http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/pdf/1_PDF.pdf.