Texas Dropout Prevention and Recovery
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do I read in the media about reports containing conflicting dropout rates?

Dropout rates differ based on the purpose of the measure, the definition of a dropout, the availability and accuracy of the data, and the time period covered. Some rates, for example, cover only one school year; whereas, others cover multiple years. Some are based on actual student-level data; whereas, others use estimated student counts.

Texas calculates two dropout rates:

- a longitudinal dropout rate
- an annual dropout rate

Texas also calculates the attrition rate, which is not a dropout rate, but measures the difference between the number of students enrolled in grade 9 in the fall of one school year with the number of students enrolled in grade 12 in the fall three years later.

2. What is the longitudinal dropout rate?

To measure how many beginning ninth graders drop out before completing high school, the **longitudinal dropout rate** is used.

Individual student-level data are used to track students through the fall semester following their expected graduation date; each student then is assigned a final status of on-time graduate, GED recipient, continuing in high school, or dropout. A student is considered to be a graduate, continuer, GED recipient, or dropout from the school he or she last attended. A dropout is defined as a student who is enrolled in public school, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die.

Here is the formula:

$$\frac{\textbf{Dropouts}}{\textbf{On-time graduates + continuers + GED recipients + dropouts}}$$

If I am a high school principal, and I want to know how many students left my school without diplomas, I would use this longitudinal dropout rate.

The **graduation rate** from this calculation also tells me how many students graduated on-time. This rate shows the percentage of students from a cohort of first-time ninth graders who graduate by the expected graduation date four years later. The rate is based on individual

student-level data and is calculated from the same data used to calculate the longitudinal dropout rate.

Here is the formula.

$$\frac{\text{Graduates}}{\text{Graduates + continuers + GED recipients + dropouts}}$$

The four-year, on-time graduation rate for the class of 2009 was 80.6%. This was an increase of 1.5 percentage points from the class of 2008 (79.1%).

Note: The denominators of the graduation rate and the longitudinal dropout rate are the same and do not include students who left Texas public schools to enter other educational settings such as home schools, private schools, or schools out of state. Only Texas public schools are required to submit data to the Texas Education Agency. Thus, final statuses for students who enter other educational settings are unknown.

3. What is the most current longitudinal dropout rate for Texas?

For the class of 2009, the longitudinal dropout rate was 9.4%. This means that almost 29,000 students from the class of 2009 dropped out before receiving a diploma. The longitudinal dropout rate decreased from the class of 2008 (10.5%).

For more detailed information about longitudinal dropout rates, see TEA's annual report on Secondary School Completion and Dropouts at www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4080.

4. What is the annual dropout rate?

The **annual dropout rate** measures the percentage of students who drop out of Texas public schools in a single school year.

A dropout is defined as a student who is enrolled in public school, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die. The annual dropout rate requires only one year of data and can be calculated for any grade level. It produces the lowest rate of all the rates TEA calculates and is based on individual student-level data.

Here is the formula.

$$\frac{\text{Number of students who dropped out during the school year}}{\text{Number of students who enrolled during the school year}}$$

If I'm a high school principal and want to know how many of my students dropped out last year, I would use the annual dropout rate to tell me exactly how many students did not return and from what grades they dropped out.

5. What is the most current annual dropout rate for Texas?

In 2008-09, almost 41,000 students dropped out from grades 7-12; this represented 2.0% of all students in grades 7-12.

For more detailed information about annual dropout rates, see TEA's annual report on Secondary School Completion and Dropouts at www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4080.

6. What is the attrition rate? What is the most current attrition rate for Texas?

The **attrition rate** measures the difference between the number of students   enrolled in grade 9 in the fall of one school year with the number of students enrolled in grade 12 in the fall three years later. ***The attrition rate is not a dropout rate***. Unlike the annual and longitudinal dropout rates, the attrition rate does not track individual students. Instead, it is based on total counts of students.

Here is the formula.

Grade 9 enrollment in fall of year 1 – Grade 12 enrollment in fall of year 4

Grade 9 enrollment in fall of year 1

The attrition rate is an estimate that does not distinguish between attrition that results from dropping out and attrition that results from other reasons, such as students being retained, moving to other schools, or graduating early. This calculation produces the highest rate of the rates calculated by TEA.

Differences in growth rates across grade levels and between schools can distort the attrition rate. In fact, a negative attrition rate may result. If a school experiences a large increase in Grade 12 students because, for example, two schools consolidated or the school is in a high growth area of the city, the grade 12 count of students could be much larger than the grade 9 count of students three years earlier. This would result in a negative attrition rate.

In addition, small numbers of students and student mobility can result in disparities between the attrition rate and the four-year, on-time graduation rate for the same district.

The grade 9-12 attrition rate for Texas public schools for 2008-09 was 28.6%.

7. When would an attrition rate be used to estimate dropouts?

When student-level data are unavailable, or comparisons are needed among entities that do not collect student-level data, the attrition rate may be the only measure available. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) does not calculate longitudinal graduation rates based on student-level data. Instead, NCES uses aggregate enrollment and graduation counts to calculate the averaged freshman graduation rate for Texas and other states.

Because student-level data allow for the greatest level of accuracy in dropout reporting, Texas includes the annual and longitudinal dropout rates in the public school accountability rating system. *Since it is an estimate, the attrition rate is excluded from the accountability system.*

For more detailed information about attrition and averaged freshman graduation rates, see TEA's annual report on Secondary School Completion and Dropouts at www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4080.

8.   What is the dropout rate in Texas? Are we making progress?

Yes, Texas is making progress lowering the number of students dropping out of school. The data used to calculate the different dropout rates are reaching the same conclusion – *the overall number of dropouts is decreasing*.

Longitudinal rates

Out of 308,427 students in the class of 2009 Grade 9 cohort,

- 80.6%graduated,
- 8.6% continued in high school the year following their anticipated graduation,
- 1.4% received GEDs, and 9.4% dropped out

The four-year, on-time graduation rate (79.1%) increased from the class of 2008 by   1.5 percentage points while the longitudinal dropout rate (10.5%) decreased.

See the four-year, on-time graduation rate over time with concurrent changes in policy and definition at www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147483784.

Annual dropout rates

In 2008-09, almost 41,000 students dropped out from grades 7-12. The grade 7-12 annual dropout rate (2.0%) decreased from the prior year when more than 45,000 students dropped out.

For further information the dropout rate, see TEA's annual report on Secondary School Completion and Dropouts at www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4080.

You can find the dropout rate for your local school district or school at the data search at that link. Rates are also available on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/.

9.   When did the TEA begin using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of a dropout?

Districts began submitting information under the more rigorous NCES definition and procedures in 2005-06. Under the NCES definition, a dropout is a student who is enrolled in grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not

graduate, receive a GED, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die. TEA has been reporting annual and longitudinal dropout and completion rates using this definition for four years.

For further information about the NCES definition of a dropout, see TEA's annual report on Secondary School Completion and Dropouts at www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4080.

10. What is the difference between the National Governors Association (NGA) four-year, on-time graduation rate and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) dropout definition?

The NGA four-year, on-time graduation rate is a formula for calculating graduation rates. The NCES dropout definition defines who a dropout is for federal reporting purposes. TEA uses the NGA four-year, on-time graduation rate to calculate graduation rates and uses the NCES dropout definition to count dropouts when calculating dropout rates and graduation rates.

11. Why do students drop out and who are they?

Research indicates the chances of a student dropping out greatly increase when a student has poor grades in core subjects, has low attendance, fails to be promoted to the next grade, or has behavioral problems.

A disproportionate number of dropouts are economically disadvantaged, come from non-English speaking backgrounds, are African American or are Hispanic. Male students have higher dropout rates than female students.

12. When do most students drop out?

The majority of students drop out in high school. Grade 12 had the highest number of dropouts in the 2008-09 school year, and Grade 9 had the second highest number of dropouts.

13. How do Texas' dropout prevention policies compare to other states?

Texas is recognized by the National Governors Association (NGA) for creating policies that promote graduation and prevent dropouts.

- Texas ranks 7th nationally in four-year graduation rates among 26 states that were reported to use the NGA four-year, on-time graduation rate, which emphasizes using actual student data over estimates.
- The state's accountability system evaluates districts and schools based on their dropout and graduation rates.
- Texas employs cutting-edge strategies to recover students who have previously dropped out.
- State law requires students attend school until the age of 18, and they can continue attending until up to 26 years of age.

You can learn about some of the effective policies in place in Texas and other states by downloading the report *Achieving Graduation for All: A Governor's Guide to Dropout Prevention and Recovery* at http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF.

14. How do we hold districts and schools accountable for their dropout rates?

Because student-level data allow for the greatest level of accuracy in dropout reporting, Texas includes the annual and longitudinal dropout rates in the public school accountability rating system. Since it is an estimate, the attrition rate is excluded from the accountability system.

- Districts and campuses are evaluated on completion rates and annual dropout rates for ratings issued under the statewide accountability system (http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/).
- Districts and campuses are evaluated on graduation rates for adequate yearly progress under the federal accountability system (http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/index.html).
- District graduation rates are evaluated under the Performance-Based Monitoring (PBM) Analysis System, and district leaver data are examined under the PBM Data Validation system (http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/pbm/). School districts with performance concerns are subject to interventions and sanctions.

15. How do repeat dropouts affect a school's dropout rate?

Annual Rate. A student who quits in one school year, returns in a later school year, and quits again is counted as a dropout in the annual dropout rate for each year.

Longitudinal Completion and Dropout Rate. In the longitudinal completion rate, if, by the time a student's class is expected to graduate, the student has dropped out, then the student is counted once as a dropout, even if a student dropped out more than once. If the student returns to school and graduates by the time the student's class is expected to graduate, the student is counted as a graduate.

16. What proven strategies are being used to address the dropout problem?

As a recognized national leader, Texas implements proven research-based strategies to prevent dropouts. Texas has found that the most effective dropout prevention strategies include challenging and personalized learning environments, role models and mentors, academic support to help struggling students catch up, and using data systems to identify struggling students for early intervention.

For more on proven dropout prevention strategies, please visit TEA's Dropout Information Web site at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2147483783&menu_id=2147483659.

17. What role do college and career readiness strategies play in dropout prevention?

Texas has been recognized by Achieve, a national non-profit organization that helps states raise standards, as the *only* state in the nation to fully adopt a college and career readiness agenda. Research shows that strategies that improve the rigor and relevance of instruction to ensure students have the necessary skills to graduate and succeed in college and the workplace are effective in reducing dropouts.

You can read about Texas' progress on the college and career ready agenda in the Achieve report *2010: Closing the Expectations Gap* found at the following link: http://www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2010.

You can learn more about how rigorous and relevant instruction reduces dropouts in the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) Dropout Prevention Practice Guide at the following link: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf.

18. Where can I learn about Texas school districts successfully implementing proven dropout prevention strategies?

To read some Texas Success Stories, please visit http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147483778.

Several Texas Success Stories are also featured in TEA's *Best Practices Clearinghouse* at http://www.teabpc.org.

19. What dropout prevention funding, resources, and tools are available?

In the 2010 – 2011 biennium, TEA allocated approximately $270 million in state and $238 million in federal funding for targeted dropout prevention and recovery initiatives. The state additionally allocated $678 million in High School Allotment and approximately $6 billion in Compensatory Education Allotment funds to school districts. In 2010, approximately $321 million in federal funding also became available for the Texas Title I Priority Schools Grant. High schools with low graduation rates were one category of schools eligible for this additional funding to support school improvement efforts.

The table of dropout prevention and recovery initiatives (PDF) provides program information with corresponding funding amounts:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=2147490722&libID=2147484219

You can find out more about these resources and find links to national and regional dropout prevention organizations on the Dropout Information Homepage at the following link: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=3505&menu_id=2147483659