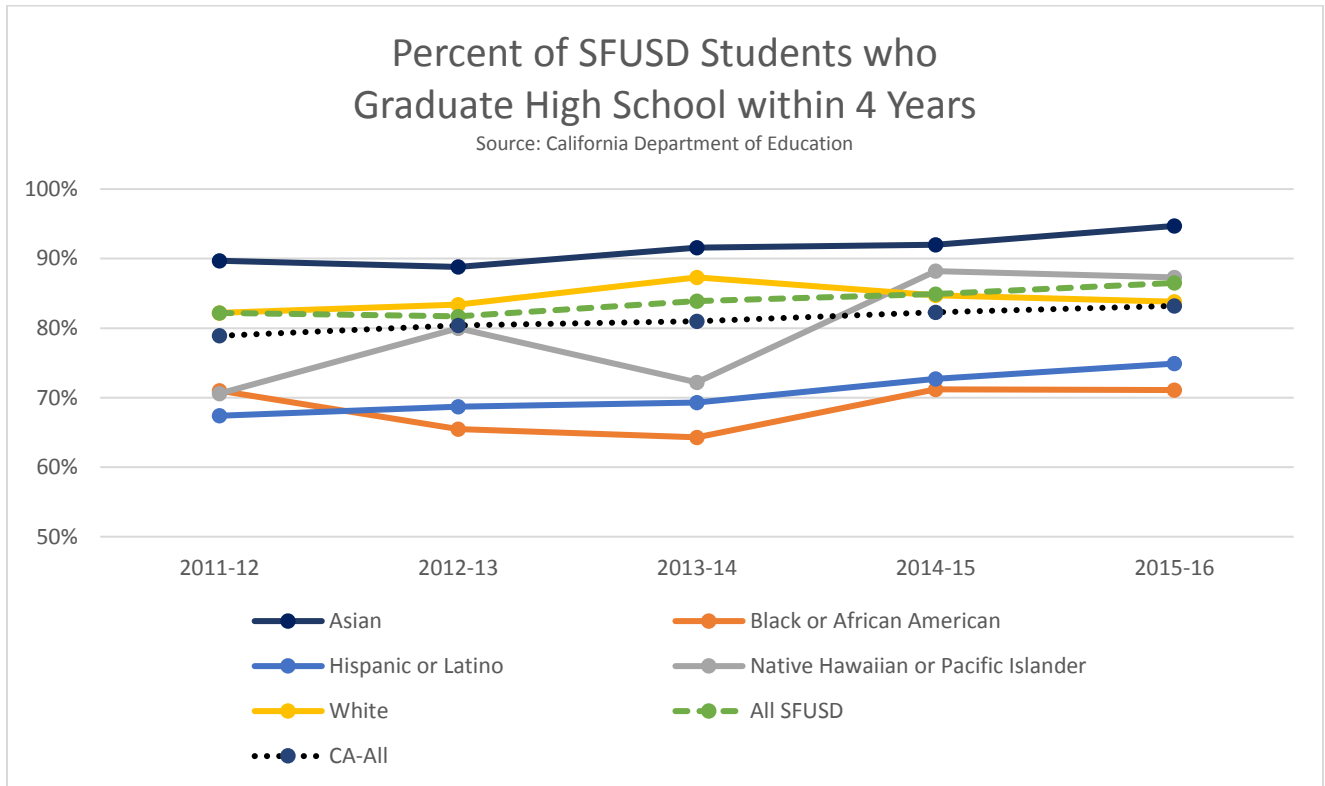


# Increase the percent of SFUSD Students who Graduate from High School within 4 years



The above chart outlines the rates of high school graduation within four years by race/ethnicity for students in the San Francisco Unified School District between 2011 and 2016. The line “CA-All” offers a State comparison.

## Data Definition & the San Francisco Trend line

Four year graduation rates are calculated as the percent of students in a 4-year cohort who graduated in four years or less with either a traditional high school diploma, an adult education high school diploma, or have passed the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE). Students who pass the General Education Development (GED) test, complete requirements necessary to obtain a special education certificate of completion, or remain enrolled in the 9-12 instructional system without a high school diploma are not considered either cohort graduates or dropouts. Rather, they are considered ‘cohort non-graduate completers’ or ‘students who are still enrolled’ and not included in the calculation of students who graduate within four years.<sup>i</sup>

The rate of students graduating from the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) within four years has steadily increased over the last five years (from 82% to 87%). Despite these increases in graduation rates, disparities persist. Historically, Asian students have consistently had the highest rates of graduation (95% in 2015-16), while African American students have had the lowest (71% in 2015-16),

closely followed by Hispanic/Latino students (75% in 2015-16). Interestingly, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander rates were amongst the lowest in 2011-12 (71%), yet saw a sharp increase to 87% in 2015-16. Additionally, the percent of youth who are still enrolled in school after four years has dropped from 11% in 2009-10 to 5% in 2015-16, while dropout rates have shown the same trend of decline: 11% in 2009-10 to 7% in 2015-16.

## Story Behind the Curve

### Policy and Practice Shifts in San Francisco

According to the California Dropout Research Project, "dropping out is more of a process than an event", a process that often begins in early elementary school. Poor academic achievement is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out. Grades are more consistent than test scores in predicting which students leave school without graduating. Attendance, delinquency and substance abuse are strong indicators as well. A stable home environment, supportive school environment and access to social and financial resources strongly influence the likelihood that a student will graduate.<sup>ii</sup> While it is clear that there are a large number of factors that impact high school graduation, this section focuses on local policy and practice shifts that are believed to have had a direct impact on high school graduation, particularly for middle and high school aged youth.

**Changes to Graduation Requirements.** To ensure that all students take college preparatory courses and have the option of applying to a wide range of colleges and universities, in December 2008, the San Francisco Board of Education approved a policy calling for the class of 2014 and all future classes to meet all California State University (CSU) graduation requirements, aligning high school graduation with A-G requirements (college preparatory courses students must complete with a C or better in order to be eligible to apply for UCs/CSUs).<sup>iii</sup> The policy required students to complete the courses with a D or better in order to earn a high school diploma. In 2008 only 31% of SFUSD graduates met all the A-G course requirements, compared to 60% in 2015.<sup>iv</sup>

In August 2015, the San Francisco Board of Education voted to amend SFUSD's graduation requirements, eliminating the need to also pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to receive a diploma. This action retroactively granted diplomas to students who received a Certificate of Completion in May 2015 instead of a diploma solely because they had not passed both sections of the CAHSEE. The Board's decision to cancel the administration of CAHSEE had the greatest positive impact on students of color, English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In October 2015, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill 172, which suspended the administration of the CAHSEE and the requirement that students pass the high school exit examination as a condition of receiving a diploma of graduation from high school and required local educational agencies to retroactively grant a diploma to any student who completed grade twelve in the 2003–04 school year or subsequent years and who met all other applicable graduation requirements.<sup>v</sup>

The state adjusted the calculation of the graduation rate beginning with the class of 2016-17 - due to new federal requirements - which resulted in a lower graduation rate than previous years' both for SFUSD and for other districts.<sup>vi</sup>

**Better Use of Data to Identify Off-Track Students.** SFUSD has introduced several initiatives to improve data collection, the use of data to identify off-track students and assessments of other indicators of student success.

In 2010, SFUSD began utilizing the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), a statewide K-12 data system created in response to federal requirements. CALPADS that stores individual-level longitudinal data on students and district/school certificated staff in California's public schools, including student demographic, program participation, grade level, enrollment, course enrollment and completion, discipline, and statewide assessment data. CALPADS is used by local educational agencies to collect, maintain and report information to better target resources and interventions to keep students in school and on track to graduate. More recently, SFUSD revised its reporting methods to improve the reliability of data reported to CALPADS, including graduation data. More reliable data collection and reporting can affect graduation rates, as a student who transferred out of the district and graduated elsewhere could have been previously deemed a dropout.

In the same year San Francisco received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to increase postsecondary completion rates under their Communities Learning in Partnership strategy. San Francisco's initiative was a partnership between the City, SFUSD and City College of San Francisco which became known as Bridge to Success. Through research conducted by the John W. Gardner Center, Bridge to Success developed an Early Warning Indicator (EWI) system which primarily relied on academic indicators in the eighth and ninth grades to identify students at risk of not graduating from high school with the intention of providing targeted interventions early enough in a student's academic trajectory to make a difference in their likelihood of graduating. In 2012-13 SFUSD created a system using EWIs to identify students who were not on track to graduate and provided additional targeted academic and social and emotional supports to students identified as having academic and/or behavioral challenges. Schools tracked student progress toward graduation over the following four years. Improved graduation rates in 2015-16 school year are credited in part to this system.<sup>vii</sup>

The district also began using an on-track/off-track reporting system that is updated as student's progress through high school, assigning one of five statuses (on-track; total credits, missing classes for graduation; off-track, up to one semester; off-track, up to one year; and severely off-track) based on credit counts and subject area graduation requirements.<sup>viii</sup>

In 2013, San Francisco and five other school districts in California were granted a waiver from the federal accountability system, No Child Left Behind. In its place, the six districts installed the School Quality Improvement System (SQIS). The SQIS measures multiple aspects of student success across academic, social-emotional, and school culture and climate domains that research has found to be significant indicators of college and career readiness. Indicators include student progress on Common Core (State standards that define what students should know in each subject in each grade)-aligned assessments and factors such as the elimination of racial disproportionality in school discipline, chronic absenteeism, and non-cognitive factors such as grit or resilience. School culture and climate are also measured. Districts participating in the SQIS Plan collect and share data on these indicators far beyond that necessary for federal accountability purposes in order to learn from each other about what is working and how to correct course when students or schools are falling behind.<sup>ix</sup>

**Targeted Supports for Students.** The use of data to identify off-track students, as noted above, has resulted in more targeted and rapid supports for students. Various SFUSD departments have collaborated to implement the processes needed to identify students who are off-track, require meetings between those students and counselors about credit recovery opportunities and provide a portfolio of credit recovery and earning options for high school students.

In addition, there have been a series of targeted supports for students who traditionally have lower rates of graduation in the past decade, including programs for Newcomer and English Learner, African American, Latino, and chronically truant students; one notable example is the recent expansion of a college-readiness program, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), for English language learners and African American students. SFUSD has also made a concerted effort to reduce the reliance on suspension (see Suspension Scorecard for additional information) and expanded the range and alternatives available to students to make up or gain additional credit.<sup>x,xi,xii,xiii</sup>

Finally, the San Francisco Wellness Initiative, which launched in 2000 and expanded to 19 SFUSD high schools by 2012, provides physical and emotional health services to students in their schools. The Wellness Centers counseling and other behavioral health services within schools have been found to provide supports needed to help students feel more connected to school and improve academic performance.

## What Works: A Selection of Best Practices to increase High School Graduation rates

While there is a wealth of information available about policies and practices to improve graduation rates, there is no single solution for increasing rates of graduation, or decreasing disparities. This section highlights six practices that have been proven in Chicago and are considered to be applicable to other school districts by experts in the field.<sup>xiv</sup> For a more thorough review of the SFUSD vision to prepare graduates to live, thrive, and succeed in San Francisco and beyond, see the district's plan for Vision 2025.<sup>xv</sup>

**Make use of Proven Early-warning Indicators.** Freshmen who are “on track” to graduate, earning no more than one F in a core course per semester and accumulating sufficient credits to advance to sophomore year, are four times more likely to graduate than students who are off-track.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Focus on Attendance Data.** Attendance is the precursor to engagement, learning, academic success and graduation. Research shows that each week of absence per semester in 9th grade is associated with a more than 20 percentage-point decline in the probability of graduating from high school.<sup>xvii</sup> Schools must work to help students and families understand the cost of frequent absences, closely monitor attendance, and provide support from teachers and staff to get students to class.

**Embrace Collective Responsibility for Academic Success.** Attendance improves when teachers take collective responsibility for the success of the whole school, not just their individual students. A school culture that stresses collective responsibility for absences and academic success might include team meetings around real-time attendance reports or shared outreach when students do not show up to class.

**Raise the Bar to "Bs or Better."** Ninety-five percent of students who earn Bs or better and have a GPA of 3.0 in 9th grade go on to graduate from high school. With a C average, however, the rate slips to 72%. For freshmen with a D average, only half will go on to graduate.<sup>xviii</sup> Conveying the importance of good grades and strong GPAs early in students' high school careers can keep them from scrambling to catch up when it might be too late.

**Foster Supportive Relationships to Ease Transitions.** The transition from the middle grades to high school can lead even good students to struggle, a dramatic drop in grades, attendance and academic behavior is a common warning sign of this strain. In high school, it's easier to skip class and harder to figure out how to get help with coursework. But high school doesn't have to be impersonal. Teachers, counselors, coaches, mentors, and friends can make a concerted effort to reach out to students when they show signs of falling behind or disengaging, find out why they are struggling and get them the academic or emotional support they need.

**Assess and Refine Disciplinary Practices.** African-American students, students with low test scores, and vulnerable students with a history of abuse and neglect receive out-of-school suspensions at higher rates than their peers. Out-of-school suspensions mean students lose class time, which can place them at greater risk of falling farther behind. When schools understand which of their students receive suspensions, they can develop targeted interventions for individual students and help keep them on track to graduate.<sup>xix</sup>

## **Selected References for more Information on the 'Story Behind the Curve' and highlighted 'Best Practices'**

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