



High school dropout and graduation rates in the Central Region



Summary



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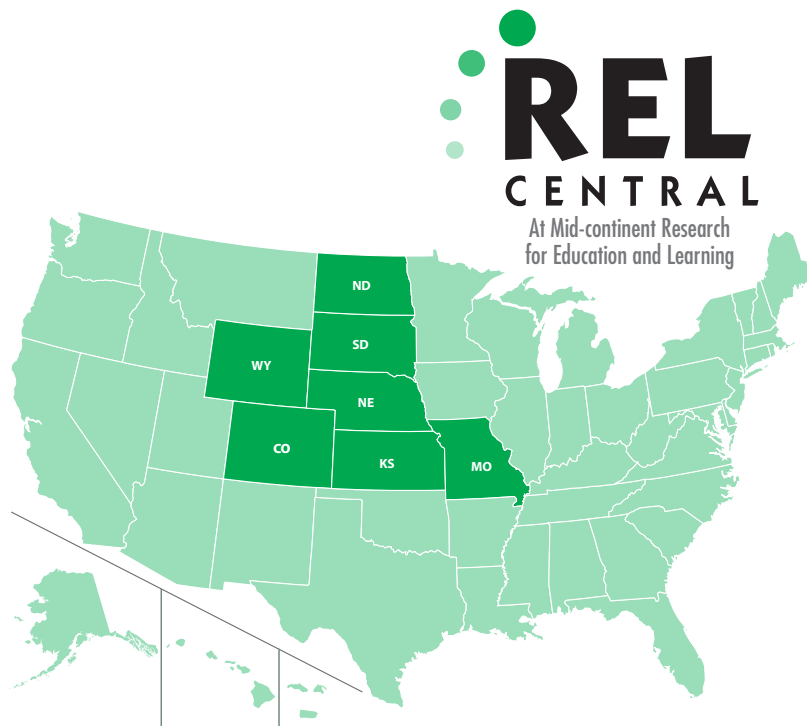
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High school dropout and graduation rates in the Central Region

This report presents comprehensive and detailed information on grades 7–12 dropout rates and on high school graduation rates in the Central Region. Dropout and graduation rates are presented for the region as a whole and for each state in the region, by gender, race/ethnicity, locale, and grade. The rates provide a comprehensive reference for state and local educators and policymakers on the student subgroups most at risk of not completing high school.

Failure to finish high school is troubling because individuals without a high school diploma have lower incomes and higher rates of unemployment and are more likely to be incarcerated than individuals with a high school diploma or its equivalent, such as a General Education Development certificate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Harlow, 2003). Almost 5 percent of high school students nationwide dropped out of school between October 2003 and October 2004, while approximately 75 percent of students who enrolled in grade 9 in 2000 graduated with a high school diploma in 2004 (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

In a recent survey principals and curriculum coordinators in the Central Region identified

improving high school students' outcomes as a critical issue (Gallup Organization, 2007). In the same survey middle school educators gave improving middle school student outcomes the highest rating ("very high priority"). Even more important, at a meeting of the region's chief state school officers the need for support for improving high schools was identified as critical. The state school officers requested assistance in examining their states' statistics on student dropout and high school graduation.

The current study was conducted to meet this regional need through a comprehensive and detailed analysis of dropout rates and high school graduation rates in the region. The results presented in this report provide much-needed assistance to the region, as few such data are currently available. For example, national reports of dropout and high school completion rates do not provide rates at state levels disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, locale, or grade. Further, the dropout and high school completion literature includes few, if any, reports that directly address states in the Central Region. Finally, few, if any, data are available on dropout rates among grades 7–9 students in the region.

This study used data from the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics to calculate dropout rates and

high school graduation rates. Dropout rates tell educators how many students left school in a single year. These rates are particularly useful for estimating the percentage of students leaving school in specific grades and for identifying grade levels in which dropping out is a greater risk. Graduation rates provide information about the percentage of students who complete high school on time and with a regular diploma and help educators understand progress toward an important indicator of adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act.

In the Central Region states, dropout rates for public school students in grades 7–12 ranged from 1.4 percent to 4.0 percent. Within the region as a whole and its individual states dropout rates were 0.3–0.9 percentage point higher for male students than for female students. Dropout rates varied greatly across ethnic groups, particularly when such rates are compared across states. The highest dropout rates by ethnic group exceeded 8 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students in South Dakota and for Hispanic students and American Indian/Alaska Native students in Wyoming. Dropout tended to be higher in urban areas and lower in rural locales. In

grades 7 and 8 dropout rates were typically less than 0.5 percent, both in the region as a whole and in its individual states. Dropout rates were higher in grades 9–12—ranging from 1.1 percent to 7.5 percent—and generally increased by grade level, with some exceptions.

On-time graduation rates (defined as earning a regular diploma in four years) ranged from approximately 76 percent to almost 85 percent in the Central Region states. In the region as a whole and in each of the seven states a higher percentage of female students graduated on time than did male students. Graduation rates varied markedly across ethnic groups in each state. The highest graduation rate was more than 95 percent (Asian/Pacific Islander students in Missouri and Nebraska); the lowest was approximately 32 percent for Black students in South Dakota. For students in large urban areas graduation rates were approximately 72 percent in Colorado and Nebraska and 58 percent in Kansas and Missouri. Graduation rates for students from rural areas ranged from 74 percent to more than 92 percent across states in the region.

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