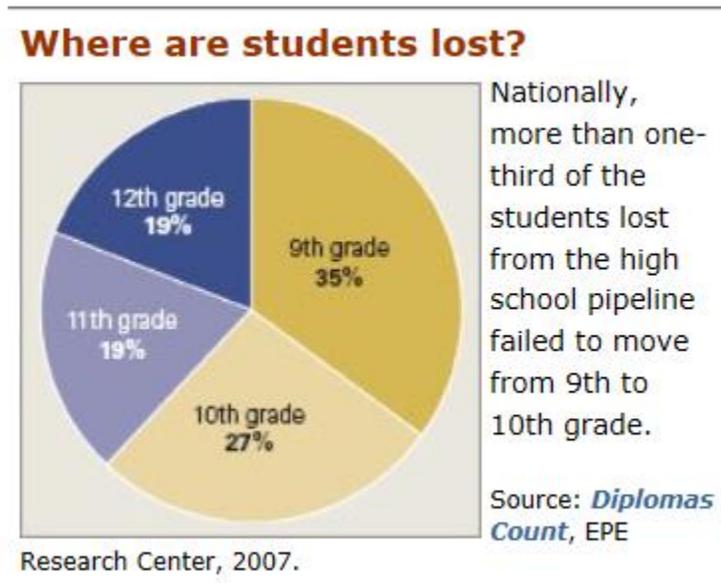


Ninth Grade is Key in Graduation Pipeline

By Sterling C. Lloyd

In 2007, an estimated 1.2 million students failed to earn high school diplomas with their graduating class. Given that high school graduates, on average, enjoy higher earnings and require fewer government services than non-graduates, the costs of dropping out are high for both individuals and the nation as a whole. As a result, effective interventions that help keep students in school are likely to pay significant dividends. This is especially true if they successfully target those most at risk of dropping out. This Stat of the Week examines the high school pipeline in order to find the point at which the most students are lost.

The 2007 edition of Education Week's annual Diplomas Count report analyzes the high school graduation process as a series of grade-to-grade promotions using the Cumulative Promotion Index. The CPI allows researchers to pinpoint where, in the high school pipeline, students are lost. The results show that the 9th grade is the leading source of student loss. **In fact, more than one-third of non-graduates, in the class of 2003-04, failed to make the transition from 9th to 10th grade.** This finding suggests that programs to increase graduation rates may need to help 9th graders get off to a good start in high school.



Understanding the causes underlying freshman-year loss could be crucial for improving the prospects of youth at-risk of dropping out. To that end, a July 2007 report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research identified four predictors of whether Chicago public high school students would graduate within four years. The researchers found that 9th graders were more likely to graduate on time if they: (1) remained on-track (by accumulating at least ten semester credits and earning no more than one semester "F" in a core academic course), (2) earned higher GPAs, (3) failed fewer semester courses, and (4) had fewer absences.

The report notes that, "for many students, freshman year is like a bottleneck" where sub par academic performance puts them so far behind that they are unable to catch up. This finding about the 9th grade underscores the importance of reform strategies designed to assist students early in high school. The Chicago

researchers suggest that interventions such as summer school and tutoring programs would be more effective by targeting students who fail one to four courses in the freshman year.

For more information on high school graduation policies and rates, see *Diplomas Count 2007* and the Education Counts database.