

# Campaign for Fiscal Equity

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## Compilation of Media Coverage

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## Gotham Schools

### Graduation rates vary widely at schools serving similar students

By Maura Walz

September 21, 2010

<http://gothamschools.org/2010/09/21/graduation-rates-vary-widely-at-schools-serving-similar-students/#more-46467>

City high schools that serve similar students graduate their students at wildly different rates, according to a report to be released today.

Among schools with the neediest students, one school graduated 90 percent of students in four years. Another graduated just 34 percent, the report found.

The report confirms that the city's highest-performing schools overwhelmingly enroll students who already had high test scores and attendance rates. But it also shows that even among schools serving the highest-need students, some do a much better job graduating students than others.

The report was prepared by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, the group that [successfully fought for an extra \\$5.4 billion](#) in 2004 for the city's neediest schools.

The study looked at ninth graders who entered high school in 2004. It separated high schools into peer groups based on the demographics and eighth-grade academic performances of that class. (Read the full report [here](#).)

Some of the report's conclusions will not come as a surprise. Schools whose students had higher eighth-grade test scores had higher graduation rates, for example. And eighth grade attendance was the strongest predictor of a high school's graduation rates, the report found.

Because high achievement and high attendance were strongly correlated with high graduation rates, selective schools and zoned schools in high-achieving districts performed much better than others. But even within school peer group, there were wide gaps in graduation rates.

The report reiterates [concerns](#) that impending higher graduation standards could have an outsized impact on city students. Just over 60 percent of the cohort that began school in 2004 graduated four years later. But only 42 percent earned a Regents diploma, the more rigorous of the state's diploma levels that will soon become the standard for most students. And among schools serving the highest-needs students, the rate of students earning Regents diplomas ranged from zero to 83 percent.

City officials said that the report's findings validate its move toward replacing large, struggling high schools with small ones. "This report confirms what a landmark study found in June—that, by creating hundreds of new, high quality options, our small school strategy is improving outcomes for our neediest students," said DOE spokesman Matt Mittenenthal, referring to [an MDRC study](#) that found that the city's small, non-selective high schools boost needy students' chances of graduating.



The report did find that among schools with the lowest-achieving incoming ninth-graders, schools with high graduation rates did tend to be smaller than schools with low rates. But many small schools posted low rates and many large schools posted high ones, prompting the study's authors to tentatively conclude that other factors like instructional strategy are critical to a school's success, whatever its size.

Figuring out exactly what those factors are will be the focus of CFE's next report, said Helaine Doran, the group's deputy director. By studying the schools with high-risk students that also posted high graduation rates, CFE hopes to identify best practices. "How do you share these practices that clearly some are figuring out?" Doran said.

CFE argues that schools that serve large numbers of needy students should receive a greater share of the funding won in the 2004 Contracts for Excellence settlement. But determining how schools should spend that money is equally important, Doran said.

"The resources have to be spent right," she said. "And as budgets are getting tighter, we have to disseminate best practices."



## New York Times' City Room blog

### Retirements May Mean Less Help for Home-Schoolers

By Sharon Otterman

September 21, 2010

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/21/retirements-may-mean-less-help-for-home-schoolers/>

When Karen Holmes decided to home school her daughter, Zoe, in the middle of 10th grade, she sent the required letter to her local school district. But there were problems, and Zoe ended up with “F”s in all of her classes, marked persistently absent instead of legally transferred from the school.

Ms. Holmes, who then lived near Rochester, reached out to a network of home-schooling parents, who advised her to contact an office in Albany, [the Office for Nonpublic School Services](#). An official there sent an e-mail to the district correcting its understanding of the law, and the matter was fixed.

Now home-schooling parents around the state are concerned that there will no longer be anywhere to go for similar mediation. All the professionals in the Albany office have retired, and the state education department has not yet told parents whether the office they staffed will still exist.

For the home-schoolers, the key contact was an official named Nancy Murray. She intervened when things got rough and worked with them to create a F.A.Q. for parents that is more clear-cut than the labyrinth of legal regulations.

“I really don’t know what we would have done if Nancy would have not been there for us,” Ms. Holmes said.

Elsa Haas, who lives in Staten Island and directs a volunteer network of home-school parents called the Partnership for Accurate Homeschooling Information, received a worrying e-mail from the office supervisor, Tom Hogan, before he retired last week.

“I regret to inform you that the senior management of this Department has advised that they will not replace Ms. Nancy Murray,” he wrote. “Therefore, there is no longer anyone on the staff here to deal with Home Instruction questions/issues.”

“In addition, as I will be retiring September 14, 2010; and the last remaining professional Mr. Jim Anderson on September 27, 2010, it is questionable if an Office for Nonpublic School Services will exist after September 27,” he added.

The office also deals with private and parochial school matters. Tom Dunn, a spokesman for New York State Education Department, said Tuesday that there was a plan in place, though he provided no details.

“The State Education Department will continue to provide services for non-public schools and home schooled students,” he said in a statement. “Due to the fiscal crisis, our agency is dealing with numerous retirements. However, non-public schools and parents of home schooled students will continue to have a point of contact here at SED as we all face budgetary challenges.”



## Reminders of Division

Two reports came out this week that reminded City Room of how segregated and stratified our area's school children remain, both by race and ability.

[The Campaign for Fiscal Equity](#), an advocacy organization that seeks equal financing and opportunity in schooling, released [a report](#) on Monday that found that the majority of children who are performing below grade level in middle school end up clustered in high schools dominated by other below-grade-level students. Helaine Doran, deputy director of the organization, called the finding an indication of “the re-stratification of our school system.”

With the ending of zoned high schools in most of the city and the opening of hundreds of new small high schools, “the whole idea is that there are options and choices,” Ms. Doran said. “Instead we see that the most challenging kids are going to highly and severely challenged schools, and the least challenged students are going to other schools.”

As the city [moves toward a 2012 deadline](#) when all seniors must earn a state Regents diploma in order to graduate, rethinking how the weakest students are distributed through the system is a matter of pressing concern, she said.

One idea would be reviving a concept that has become rarer in recent years — educational option schools, which are required to take certain percentages of below-grade-level (Level 1 and 2) and above-grade-level children (Level 4), Ms. Doran said.

“It just doesn't seem like a good strategy that some schools are 70 or 75 percent filled with level 1s and 2s,” she said.

Other findings in the report: Student attendance appeared to be the best predictor of a school's success in graduating students, and small high schools tended to do better with below-grade-level students than large high schools. That finding was lauded by Mr. Bloomberg's Department of Education, which has made creating small schools a focus.

By creating “hundreds of new, high-quality options, our small school strategy is improving outcomes for our neediest students,” said Matt Miententhal, a city schools spokesman. “Despite these gains, we still have more work to do and we welcome the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's focus on these important factors in student success.”

Separately, Harvard University researchers [released a report](#) this week that found that New York metro area schools are among the most segregated in the nation.

Eighty percent of black students would have to move in order to create equal racial distribution in [schools in the area](#), which includes the 19 million people living in New York City, Newark, Edison and surrounding suburbs.



The most segregated schools for black students in the nation by that measure (known as dissimilarity) are in Chicago and Milwaukee. For Hispanic students, Los Angeles and Springfield, Mass., were the most segregated systems. New York was third in both categories.



**WNYC**

## **Report Confirms: Best City High Schools Taking Best Students**

By Beth Fertig

September 21, 2010

<http://beta.wnyc.org/articles/wnyc-news/2010/sep/21/best-nyc-high-schools-also-take-best-students/>

A new report confirms what many educators and parents already suspect: the city's best students are disproportionately enrolled in just 30 public high schools with solid graduation rates.

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity conducted the study by looking at students who entered ninth grade in 2004 and examining their eighth-grade test scores. Fifty percent of the eighth graders that year enrolled in just 30 high schools, all of which required their own entrance exams or had their own screening systems. Those schools also had student bodies that were disproportionately white and Asian.

The study looked at a total of 281 high schools and 31 transfer schools.

Deputy director Helaine Doran says, conversely, her group also found high schools with low graduation rates drew kids from districts with the lowest eighth grade test scores and those students were overwhelmingly black and Hispanic.

"A better policy would be a blending of students," she says. "Should you have all of the most challenging students in one place? I don't think so."

Doran also says the study confirmed something else educators have long suspected: eighth grade attendance is the strongest predictor of graduation rates.

The study also found that, on average, high schools that took ninth graders with the lowest test scores had students who missed 27 more days of school than kids in schools that enrolled more high-achievers.

"So they're clearly doing policy and program and curriculum that engages kids and gets them there and keeps them there," says Doran, of those high schools that had higher attendance and graduation rates with struggling students.

Those schools that were more successful with the struggling learners tended to be small high schools. The city's Department of Education says the report confirms that it's strategies are working, because it's been opening more types of schools to give students more options.

Still, DOE spokesman Matt Miententhal says, "Despite these gains, we still have more work to do and we welcome the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's focus on these important factors in student success, which lie at the heart of our current reform agenda."

The CFE recommends revising the current school report cards to put more value on student attendance, since it's such a strong predictor of graduation rates. The group also wants to make sure elementary and middle schools that serve the largest percentages of disadvantaged students receive a greater share of state funds.



## WABC-Channel 7

### Diploma Dilemma: Keeping kids in school

By Art McFarland

September 21, 2010

<http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/education&id=7680864>

NEW YORK (WABC) -- Preventing dropouts is a battle educators face, and according to a new report, 8th grade may be the key year to keeping students in school.

April Rodriguez faced what experts call severe challenges to gaining a Regents High School Diploma, so she dropped out of school.

"Because I was having problems at home, so I wasn't motivated and I dropped out," she said.

"Without a radical intervention at this point, we're going to have tons of kids that aren't going to graduate," Helaine Doran, C.F.E. Deputy Director, said.

In a new report called Diploma Dilemma, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity studied the chances for challenged students to graduate from high school.

The study found that graduation rate comparisons are very different among schools with low achieving ninth graders. Regents diplomas ranged from zero to 83 percent at those schools. Attendance was a huge factor. Low achieving students missed 27 more days of school.

"I really needed help and none was helping me, so I figured why stay in school," program participant Oscar Rojas said.

Rojas, like April, is working on his G.E.D. at The Door, a successful youth development program.

The C.F.E. Study found that admissions policies, which determine which students go to the better schools, have increased academic imbalance.

"It's time now to kind of re-look at the question of how you deal with the lowest performing kids, because otherwise, we're writing them off - not just for high schools. We're really writing them off," executive director Geri Palast said.

The C.F.E. report includes the strong recommendation that education officials take a close look at the practices of the schools with high graduation rates, in spite of the fact that they have such 'challenged' students.



## Education Week

### Study Finds Wide Variations in Preparation, Graduation of NYC students

By Dakarai Aarons

September 21, 2010

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District\\_Dossier/2010/09/wide\\_variations\\_in\\_preparation.html?qs=campaign+for+fiscal+equity](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2010/09/wide_variations_in_preparation.html?qs=campaign+for+fiscal+equity)

A new report out this morning on graduation rates at New York City high schools finds that a student's 8th grade attendance rate was the strongest predictor of whether that student would later graduate with his or her peers.

The report, released today by the New York City-based [Campaign for Fiscal Equity](#), also found that students who are English-language learners, overage for their grade, had physical or learning disabilities, or scored poorly on 8th grade reading and mathematics exams were also less likely to graduate.

These students sometimes were clumped together in schools. The report notes, for instance, that 30 schools enrolling fewer than 10 percent of first-time 9th graders in 2004 attracted more than half of the students scoring at the lowest levels on state tests.

"Our report calls for an intensive concentration of resources on pre-high school remediation and on policy reform to reduce absenteeism and provide better school opportunities to students with academic challenges," CFE Executive Director Geri Palast said in a release.

"Absent meaningful change, it's conceivable that within a few years, New York City will have a school system in which the majority of students—and the overwhelming number of those who are disadvantaged—have, not just poor test scores, but no high school diploma and reduced life prospects," she continued.

One of the group's recommendations is that more funds be directed toward those elementary and middle schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged students. CFE is perhaps best known for winning a [landmark lawsuit](#) arguing that New York state chronically and unconstitutionally underfunded city schools.

The report also recommends a recalibration of the school-accountability system to put a higher focus on attendance and the expansion of "educational option" schools, a type of alternative school the district launched in the 1980s that CFE believes would provide more challenge for high- and low-achieving students alike.