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### **NC Releases First Four-Year Graduation Rate**

Sixty-eight percent of first-time high school ninth graders in 2002-03 graduated in four years or less, according to the first four-year cohort graduation rate presented to the State Board of Education today.

Since the fall of 2002, North Carolina public school officials have been keeping a careful accounting of each ninth grader as he or she moves through high school. The goal of this record keeping – a four-year cohort graduation rate – provides the state with its first actual count of how many students graduate with a diploma in four years. A fifth-year cohort graduation rate will be reported for this group this summer at the same time that the four-year cohort for the 2003-04 ninth grade group is reported.

North Carolina educators have been eager to have this information since 2002 when the federal No Child Left Behind legislation began requiring states to begin reporting the cohort rate. Today's report provided four-year cohort graduation rates for each of the state's 405 regular and charter public high schools, for each of the 115 school districts and for the state overall.

Results show a range of four-year cohort rates.

#### Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates by Student Subgroup

All Students	68.1 percent
Female	72.4 percent
Male	63.9 percent
Asian	74.1 percent
Black	60.0 percent
Hispanic	51.8 percent
Multi-Racial	65.2 percent
Native American	51.1 percent
White	73.6 percent
Economically Disadvantaged	55.3 percent
Limited English Proficient	54.6 percent
Students with Disabilities	49.9 percent

“High school graduation is a primary measure of school success,” said State Board of Education Chairman Howard Lee. “The high school graduation rate has been a long-standing problem in North Carolina and in the United States. Our rate is not where we want it to be, but we welcome today's information to help us clearly see the

challenges ahead and to affirm the importance of the high school reform agenda in North Carolina as we continue working toward a day when all North Carolina students will graduate from high school ready for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

While 68 percent is the current four-year cohort graduation rate, that does not mean that 32 percent of the students have dropped out of school. A total of 5,413 students were known to still be enrolled in high school at the end of the year and did not receive a diploma. Given that approximately 15 percent of ninth graders are retained each year, some of those students likely will graduate in five years or more.

North Carolina education policy provides a conservative definition of high school graduates. Students who leave public high school for a community college GED or adult high school program are counted as dropouts under state policy. Also, the cohort graduation rate does not capture students with disabilities who complete the 12<sup>th</sup> grade but do not qualify for a standard diploma and instead earn a Certificate of Achievement or Graduation Certificate. In addition, school officials are not allowed to tag a student as having transferred to another public or private high school until the receiving school requests the student’s records.

State Superintendent June Atkinson, who began her career as a high school teacher, said that there are many efforts underway to help strengthen the high school experience for all students. “We have not been waiting for the release of this number. We have known from earlier statistical estimates and anecdotes that our high schools need to be re-invented and that work is already underway.”

In fact, North Carolina has created and sponsored a number of new high school models to help boost curriculum rigor and relevancy and to better engage students. Thirty-three Learn and Earn/Early College high school programs are operating statewide with expansion planned for 40 more schools in the next few years. These programs are designed to provide students with the opportunity to pursue a rigorous five-year high school curriculum in which they can earn both a high school diploma and an associate’s degree or two years of college credit.

In addition, with the support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, North Carolina has created 25 New Schools Project high schools – designed to be more focused and rigorous and to create smaller learning communities for students and teachers. The goal is to have more than 100 New Schools Project conversions at some level of implementation by 2008.

Low-performing high schools have been targeted for assistance by high school turnaround teams. These teams, developed in 2005, provide assessment visits to high schools that have a history of low academic achievement and work with each school’s leadership and faculty in order to help the school make significant changes.

Last year, the state launched the 21<sup>st</sup> century middle school literacy coach initiative to ensure that students have the reading skills they need to succeed in high

school. The initiative has placed literacy coaches in the 100 lowest-performing middle schools across the state. Gov. Mike Easley and the State Board of Education have proposed adding coaches in 100 additional schools. They also, in partnership with the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education, created a high school performance audit that is looking at high school spending in every school district in North Carolina to see if schools are implementing cost-effective strategies to increase student achievement and graduation rates. Results are expected at the end of the 2006-07 school year.

Many efforts also have been initiated locally by school districts and high schools. These include ninth grade academies, special opportunities for students to “recover” credits, stronger career counseling programs and others.

To read the full report on the four-year cohort graduation rate as well as to access state, district and school results, please go to [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org) and look under News.

For more information, please contact NCDPI’s Communications and Information division at 919/807-3450.

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