



UPDATE

Fall 2012 | Social Determinants of Health

In 2012, North Carolina's high school graduation rate reached an all-time high of 80.4 percent. More than eight in 10 students who started ninth grade in 2008–2009 completed high school in four years or less. The cohort graduation rate

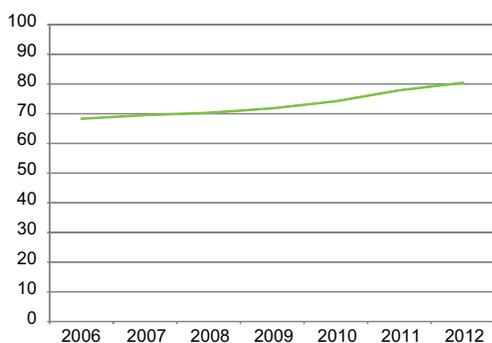
Subgroup	% Graduating in Four Years	% Graduating in Five Years
All Students	80.4	81.1
Male	76.5	77.8
Female	84.6	84.6
American Indian	73.7	72.1
Asian	87.5	90.3
Black or African American	74.7	76.4
Hispanic/Latino	73.0	74.1
Two or More Races	80.6	80.4
White	84.7	84.7
Economically Disadvantaged	74.7	76.3
Limited English Proficient	50.0	56.7
Students with Disabilities	59.9	64.1

Source: www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/cohortgradrate. Data table from N.C. Department of Public Instruction, revised data as of Sept. 5, 2012. For further information: NCDPI Communications and Information, 919-807-3450.

for the state has shown marked improvement over the past several years, up from 68.3 percent in 2006, 70.3 percent in 2008, 71.8 percent in 2009, 74.2 percent in 2010 and 77.9 percent in 2011 (see Figure 1). The greatest gains were seen in the American Indian and Hispanic/Latino populations, which each increased by over 20 percent to graduation rates of 73.7 percent and 73.0 percent respectively, and the black or African American population, which increased by 18 percent to a graduation rate of 74.7 percent (see Figure 2).

Innovative health programs and policies from a variety of state and local partners have helped to improve North Carolina's high school graduation

Figure 1: Four-year High School Graduation Rate in North Carolina



rate. Several communities in our state have focused efforts on addressing the risk of school dropout among pregnant and parenting teenagers. For example, Thomasville City Schools undertook a proactive approach to identify risk and protective factors in the local community and then to select effective curricula (either evidence-based or best practices) that addressed those factors. There are now health education components beginning with puberty education in grade five and ending with a peer-led program for high school juniors and seniors.

An example of such a program is the Teen Prevention Education Program (Teen PEP). It is an elective class for students at Thomasville High School where students gain content

HNC 2020 Objective	Baseline	Current	Target
Increase the four-year high school graduation rate.	71.8% (2008–2009)	80.4% (2011–2012)	94.6%

knowledge and facilitation skills to become widely respected reproductive health and safety experts in the school. Teen PEP students lead workshops on a variety of topics including pregnancy and STD prevention for younger students, and serve as role models and resources. They develop leadership and presentation skills and most importantly become advocates for issues they deem critically important to teens in their community. According to Mary Jane Akerman, Wellness Coordinator for Communities in Schools of Thomasville, “If you are serious about improving your graduation rate, you will implement an effective pregnancy prevention program.” Communities in Schools of Thomasville’s Adolescent Parenting Program and Teen PEP are funded by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives (TPPI). TPPI is a North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, initiative.

Spotlight: Caldwell County

Another example of a successful program is a partnership between a local health department and a local school district. In Caldwell County, the high schools developed a Teen Parenting Association (TPA). This monthly support group of teenage mothers promotes resiliency, enables socialization and connects mothers with each other. The club is facilitated by one nurse, two social workers and staff from the Caldwell County Department of Social Services. The mothers are presented with a norm and expectation of graduating from high school and are nurtured along the way. Although the TPA program initially focused entirely on mothers, at the request of young men in the schools, one of Caldwell’s high school principals recently created a TPA for teenage fathers. The ultimate goal of both groups is to promote academic success through peer connection while facilitators thoroughly assess the health and safety needs of their groups and their young families. The facilitators are committed to securing resources the students need to graduate. The repeat pregnancy rate among these students has declined and the graduation rate has improved. Among all Caldwell County teens ages 15–19, the repeat pregnancy rate decreased from 28.1 percent in 2009 to 20.7 percent in 2010. For school year 2010–2011, Caldwell County’s graduation rate was 84.6 percent, which was greater than the state rate of 80.4 percent.

Figure 2: Four-year High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2009 and 2012

