

Cohort Dropout Rate: How It Helps Us Focus High School Reform

Why is the cohort dropout rate higher than the annual event dropout rates previously used?

The cohort dropout rate is significantly higher than the annual event dropout rates previously used. The actual number of dropouts has not changed but the way they are reported has. This has required Maryland to reset its goals for dropout rates to account for the differences in calculations.

The major difference in the metric used for the "event" and "cohort" rates is the size of the **denominator**. In the annual "event" rate, the number of dropouts is divided by the entire high school enrollment - approximately 4 times the size of the denominator in the "cohort" rate (one grade level). This leads to the cohort rate being approximately 4 times larger than the annual "event" rate. In this table of fabricated data you can see that 2000 students dropped out of grade 9, 2000 dropped out of grade 10, 1700 dropped out in grade 11 and 1400 dropped out of grade 12 all in 2010. So in this example 7100 dropouts occurred across the four grades in one year. In the second row of data you can see how many students were in each grade that year which totaled 283,000. The Annual Event Dropout Rate is calculated by dividing the total number of dropout events by the total number of students giving us an Annual Event Dropout Rate of 2.5%

Annual Event Dropout Rate Calculation (example)

	Grade 9 (2010)	Grade 10 (2010)	Grade 11 (2010)	Grade 12 (2010)	Total (2010)
Dropouts (Numerator)	2,000	2,000	1,700	1,400	7,100
Total Students (Denominator)	80,000	72,000	65,000	66,000	283,000
Approximate Rate					2.5%

In the adjusted cohort dropout rate fabricated example, the top row of data represents the number of dropouts for the cohort group who entered 9th grade in 2007 and tracks that cohorts dropouts across the next four years. The total number of dropout events was 7100 for this cohort. The second row of data shows the number of students in the cohort adjusted by the number of transfers in, transfers out and deaths each year. The total number of students in the adjusted cohort group at the end of the four years is 69,000. The Adjusted Cohort Dropout Rate is calculated by dividing the total number of dropouts in the cohort by the total number of students in the cohort, in this case yielding a dropout rate of 10.3%

Adjusted Cohort Dropout Rate Calculation (example)

	Grade 9 (2007)	Grade 10 (2008)	Grade 11 (2009)	Grade 12 (2010)	Total
Drop Outs (Numerator)	2,000	2,000	1,700	1,400	7,100
Total Adjusted Cohort (Denominator)	70,000	70,000	69,000	69,000	69,000
Approximate Rate					10.3%

More information about adjusted cohort in the denominator can be seen in the tutorial "What are the adjusted cohorts?"

Although the major difference in "event" and "cohort" rates is the size of the denominator, there is also a change to how the number of dropouts, reflected in the numerator, is determined. While the event dropout rate gave an approximation of the rate students were leaving high school, the cohort dropout rate counts students as dropouts only if they drop out and do not return to obtain a diploma or a certificate.