

Workbook 2.

FIND OUT HOW YOUR DISTRICT STACKS UP

Public schools are accountable to the public. Period. But how can we hold school systems accountable if we don't do our homework? Fortunately, there's lots of information available to help us understand how well our schools are doing. We have a right to it, and a responsibility to use it.

Answer the following questions as you start attending your first school board meetings. Answer them on your own or with a group of friends. Just be sure to answer them with care, thoroughness, and rigor. You owe it to yourself, your community, and local students to get these answers right.

When you understand the data, you'll have a much clearer picture of your local high schools—where they're strong, where there's room for improvement. You'll ask better questions. And you'll know where your help is needed most.

To get the answers, consult publicly available data sources such as the ones listed below. If you don't find everything in one place, keep digging!

1. Of the 9th graders who entered our high schools five years ago, how many graduated with their class? How many didn't, both in numbers and percent?

Nationally, approximately 85% of American students graduate from high school.¹¹ Those who don't graduate have high unemployment rates and low wages.

In our district: _____

2. Of the students who graduated from our high schools last year, what proportion were proficient readers? What proportion were proficient in math?

Nationally, 37% of high school seniors are proficient in reading and 25% are proficient in math. On international examinations, our high school students rank 20th in reading and 31st in math.¹² Reading comprehension is critically important to most jobs; math performance is the single largest determinant of lifetime earnings.

In our district: _____

3. Of last year’s graduates, what proportion completed the courses necessary to be ready for college? How many completed the sequence of courses (at least three related courses) to prepare for a career? How many did neither?

Nationally, only about 8% of high school graduates complete the courses necessary to be ready for both college and a career. An additional 31% complete a college-ready course of study, and 13% complete a three-course sequence of courses in the same career cluster. Almost half (47%) of high school graduates complete no coherent course of study at all, and are thus ready for neither college nor the workplace.¹³

In our district: _____

4. How many of our recent graduates entered a 2- or 4-year college within a year of graduating from high school? Of those who entered, what proportion had to take remedial English or math?

Nationally, 67% of high school graduates enter college within a year of graduation. Of those who entered 2-year colleges 52% had to take remedial courses. For students in 4-year colleges, the share in remediation was 20%.¹⁴

In our district: _____

5. What is the racial/ethnic and economic composition of our high school student population? Are there significant differences on any of the above four measures by race/ethnicity or by family income?

Nationally, 49.8% of high school students are students of color and 17% are growing up in poverty. Because opportunities at school and at home are still far from equal,¹⁵ Black, Latino, and low-income students tend to complete fewer advanced courses and are more likely to graduate without the full preparation needed for college or careers.

In our district: _____

6. How many English learners are there in our high schools? If some are recent arrivals who haven't attended school previously in the US, are they getting the supports and services they need?

Nationally, approximately 1 in 20 high school students is an English learner.¹⁶ Some are new arrivals to the country; others were born here and educated in American schools since kindergarten.

In our district: _____

7. How many students in our high schools are receiving special education services? Are they getting the supports and services they need? How many are graduating with diplomas or alternative certificates?

Nationally, approximately 13% of public school students receive special education services. Of students ages 14–21 who received special education services and who exited school in 2014–15, 69% graduated with a regular high school diploma and 11% received an alternative certificate.¹⁷

In our district: _____

8. How many of our graduates took college-level courses (AP, IB, concurrent enrollment in local colleges) during high school? How many of those performed at a level high enough to earn college credit? Are all groups of students participating equally in these programs?

Nationally, nearly 4 in 10 (37.7%) students in the class of 2017 completed at least one AP course. And more than 1 in 5 graduates (22.8%) scored a 3 or better in at least one class -- the level typically necessary to earn college credit. While there is no good national data on the number of high school students taking one or more “dual enrollment” college-level courses, most experts place the number between 10% and 15% of high school students.¹⁸

In our district: _____
