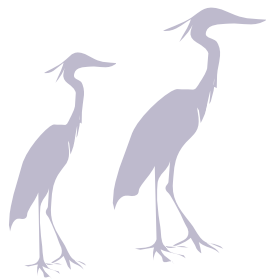


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# Education

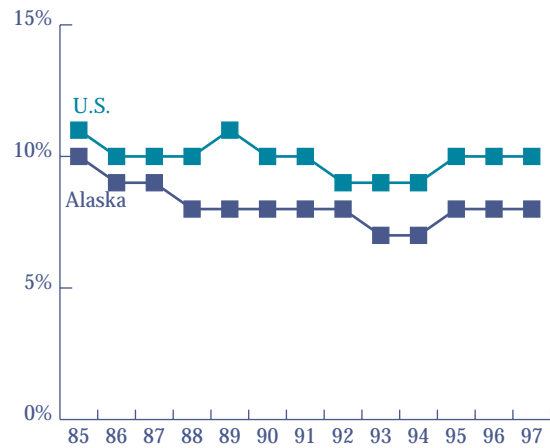
Teens Who Drop Out  
Teens Not In School and Not Working  
School Achievement



I heard a familiar cry—it was the sky music of sandhill cranes in migration . . . westward as far as the eye would take me . . . I guessed the flocks at five or six thousand . . . Words are inadequate to describe the flight . . . the alternate beating of wings and sailing, the beauty of the flocks in silhouettes against the white mountains and the blue sky and the exhilarating poetry of it all in this primeval wilderness country.

Adolf Murie, *A Naturalist in Alaska*  
New York: Devon-Adair Company, 1963

Percent of Teens Who are High School Dropouts  
Trend 1985-1997



Source: 2000 Kids Count Data Book

**DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The trend graph above is based on the national *Kids Count* definition of dropouts: the percentage of teenagers 16 through 19 who are not in school and who have not graduated from high school.

The dropout rates by race and region within Alaska are based on different definitions, depending on what information is available. The table showing dropout rates by race includes teenagers in grades 7 through 12, roughly ages 13 through 19.

The map showing dropout rates by region (page 36) includes teenagers in grades 9 through 12; some of these dropouts are younger than 16. The dropout rates in most regions are lower than the statewide figure in the trend graph, because the regional rates include students under 16, who are less likely to drop out of school.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development classifies students as dropouts if they (1) left school without graduating or completing an approved program; (2) moved out of the school district or state and are not known to be enrolled elsewhere; (3) enrolled in adult education programs or schools not approved by the district; or (4) were suspended or expelled from school and failed to return.

Dropouts often spend their lives in poverty, because their lack of education makes it difficult for them to get higher paying jobs.

Since 1985, the share of Alaska teenagers 16 through 19 who are not in high school and who have not graduated has declined somewhat, and it has consistently been smaller than the national average. In 1997, 8 percent of Alaska's 16-to-19 year olds dropped out of school, compared with 10 percent nationwide.

Alaska Native students (in grades 7 through 12) are the most likely to drop out of school in Alaska. They accounted for less than one quarter of all students but more than a third of dropouts during the 1998-99 school year. Black and Hispanic students also drop out of school at somewhat higher percentages than their shares of the total student population.

About 2,000 high-school students (grades 9 through 12) dropped out of Alaska schools during the 1998-99 year. That's 5.3 percent of the 38,400 high-school students that year.

Overall, the dropout rate was highest (roughly 9 percent) in the Interior and Southwest regions of the state and lowest in Anchorage (2.5 percent). The dropout rate in other regions varied from about 4.5 to around 6 percent.

**ALASKA DROPOUTS (GRADES 7-12) BY RACE, 1998-1999**

Ethnicity	Percent of Total Enrollment	Percent of Total Dropouts
White	65.3%	51.3%
Alaska Native*	22.3	34.5
Asian/Pac. Isl.	5.1	3.6
Black	4.2	5.5
Hispanic	2.8	3.9
Other	0.4	1.2

\* Includes other Native Americans.

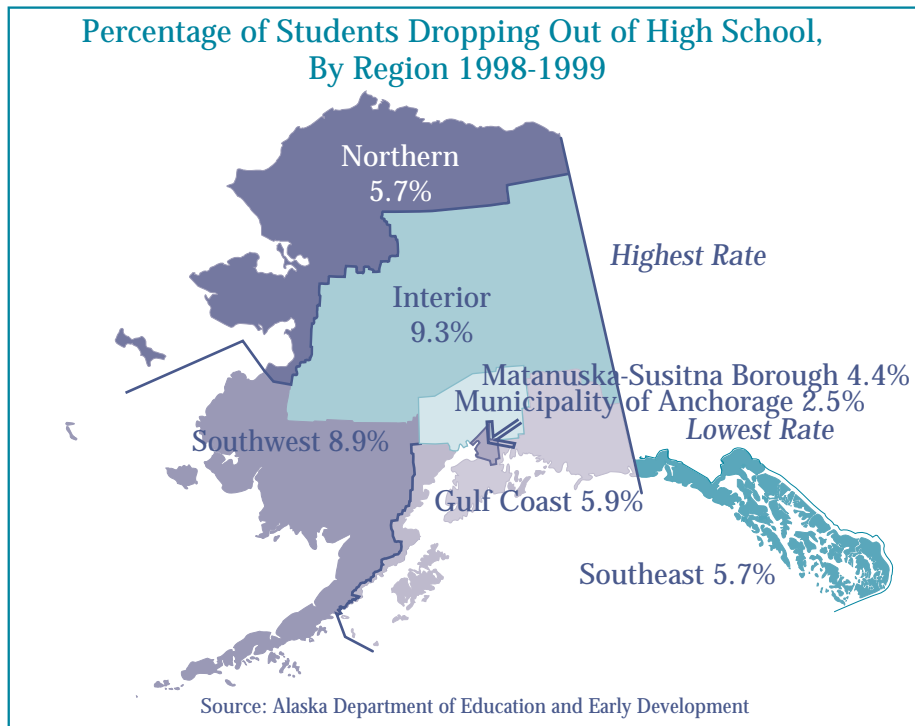
Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, *Report Card to the Public*, School Year 1998-99.

## TEENS WHO DROP OUT (CONTINUED)

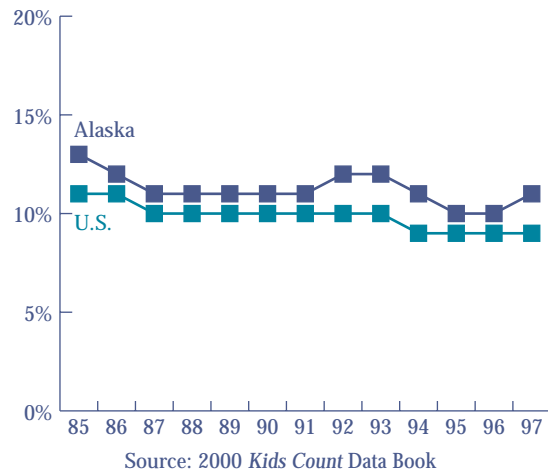
### PREVENTING DROPOUTS

Why do kids drop out, and how can we help keep them in school?

- Holding children back a grade increases the chances that they will drop out. The American Federation of Teachers reports that holding children back makes them feel alienated from school but does not increase their academic skills.<sup>1</sup>
- Teenagers who suffer continuous, severe bullying are more likely to have poor grades and to drop out of school.<sup>2</sup>
- Parents' attitudes toward education influence the dropout rate: Children with parents who expect them to graduate are significantly more likely to graduate.<sup>3</sup>
- Students who take part in extracurricular activities during their middle school or early high school years are more likely to stay in school and earn diplomas, according to a recent study.<sup>4</sup>
- Preventing or reducing the use of tobacco and marijuana among younger students could make them less likely to drop out when they reach high school, recent research suggests.<sup>5</sup>



Teens Not in School and Not Working  
Trend 1985 - 1997



Can we predict which children are at risk of being out of the work force and out of school when they reach their late teens?

- Children who don't read well, who aren't attached to school, and who are antisocial are more likely to be unemployed as teenagers and young adults.<sup>6</sup>
- Teenage boys who used alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine at early ages are more likely to be repeatedly fired or to quit their jobs.<sup>7</sup>
- Children who at age nine have problems in their relationships with other children tend to have difficulties throughout their schooling.

Those difficulties can reduce their educational opportunities and lead to later unemployment.<sup>8</sup>

## DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

This indicator measures the percentage of teenagers, ages 16 through 19, who are not in school, not working, and not in the military. It includes both high-school dropouts and those who have either high-school or General Education Development (GED) diplomas but are not working.

This is a measure of teenagers who are not doing anything productive during a critical period of development. Idle teenagers are establishing histories of unemployment and disengagement that may plague them as they get older.

About 11 percent of Alaska's teenagers 16 to 19 weren't in school or working in 1997—meaning that one in ten wasn't getting either education or work experience as they moved toward adulthood. Alaska's rate was above the 1997 national average of 9 percent, but it has fallen since 1985, when it was 13 percent.

# SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

## DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Scores on standardized tests compare school achievement of Alaskan students and of students nationwide. Students in Alaska take the California Achievement Test, 5th edition (CAT-5) in the 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. This widely-used test assesses reading, mathematics, and language arts skills.

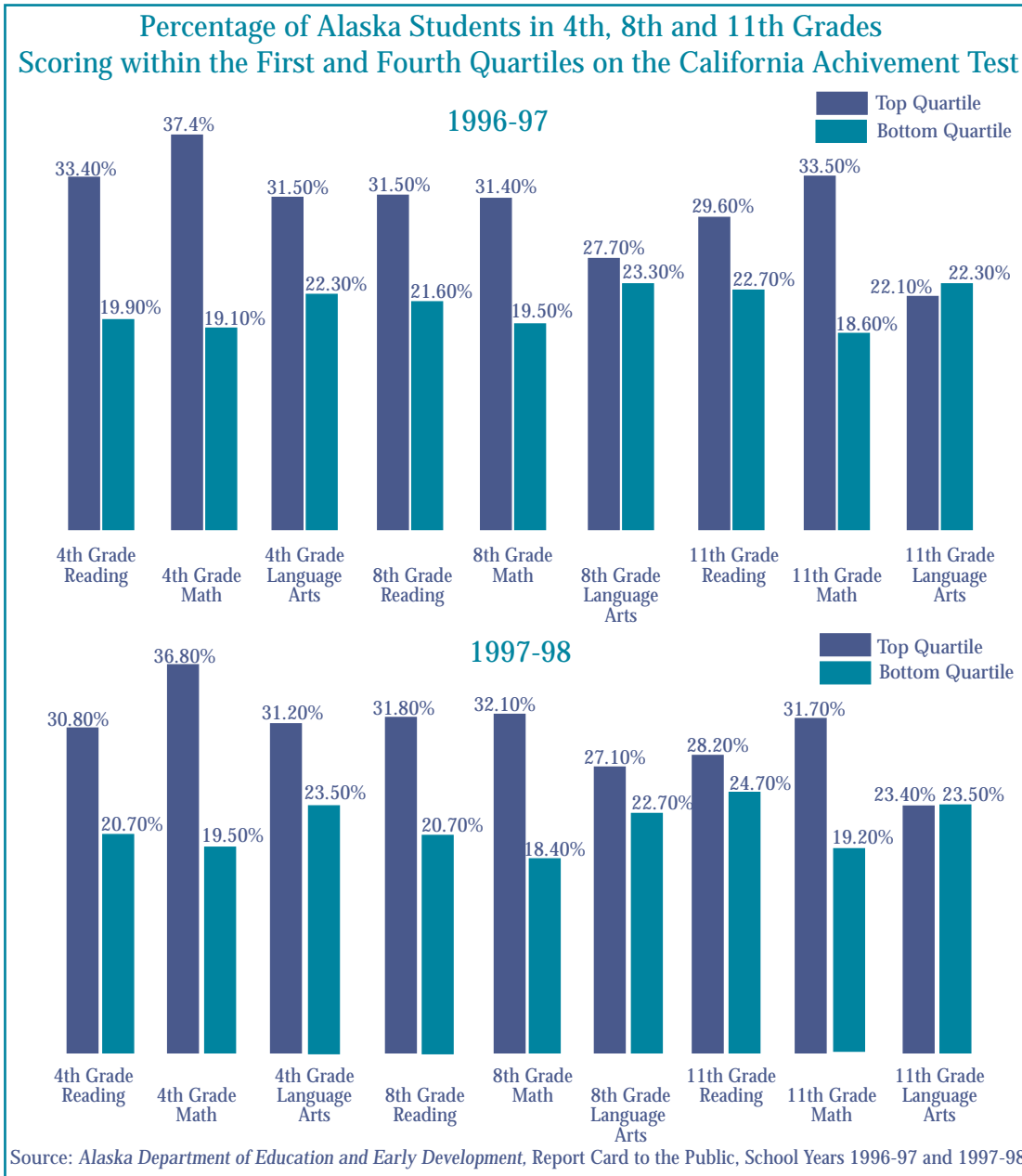
Among all school-age children, 25 percent normally score in each of four quartiles. So a state using the CAT-5 can compare the distribution of scores among its students to the normal distribution into equal quartiles.

If less than 25 percent of students in a given state score in the lowest quartile, and more than 25 percent score in the highest quartile, state officials can be reasonably confident that their students are receiving at least adequate instruction in the areas tested.

Alaska's 4th, 8th, and 11th graders scored above average in nearly all areas tested in both the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years (as the adjacent figure shows). The exception was 11th grade language arts, where fewer students than average scored in the top quartile.

Alaska's scores were consistently highest in mathematics at all grade levels, with 31 to 37 percent of students scoring in the top quartile and only 18 to 19 percent in the bottom quartile. Reading scores of Alaskan students were also above the national average, with 28 to 33 percent scoring in the highest quartile and 20 to 25 percent in the lowest quartile.

Scores on the language arts section of the test were above average among Alaskan 4th graders, but dropped to slightly below the norm among 11th graders.



## IMPROVING SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Various factors can affect how well children do in school. One of the most interesting such factors was cited in 1995 by the New Jersey School Board Association, which reported in its newsletter that:

The closest correlation to high scores on college entrance exams is not per-pupil expenditure for instruction, teachers' salaries, or textbooks. Instead, by a wide margin, it is the local tax dollars spent per pupil on library media centers.<sup>9</sup>

Other influential factors include having a strong start in school:

- Children who attend full-day kindergarten tend to have higher achievement scores throughout the elementary grades. These children are also less likely to repeat grades and tend to have better overall grades. Research has shown that attending kindergarten all day especially benefits children whose parents have low incomes or little education.<sup>10</sup>
- Children who have strong, enriching educational environments before they start elementary school have higher achievement scores in elementary school.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES FOR EDUCATION SECTION

<sup>1</sup> *Passing on Failure*: The American Federation of Teachers Report, Fall 1997. Cited in *Action for Better Schools*, Newsletter of the National Coalition of Education Activists. Vol. 5, No.4, Spring/Summer 1998.

<sup>2</sup> *Youth Clips*. The Alaska Youth Data Project. Vol 1, Issue 3.

<sup>3</sup> K. L. Alexander, D. R. Entwisle, and C. S. Horsey (1997). "From first grade forward: Early foundations of high-school dropouts." *Sociology of Education*, 70(2), 87-107.

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Mahoney and R. B. Cairns (1997). "Do extracurricular activities protect against early school dropout?" *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 241-253.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ellickson, K. Bui, R. Bell, and K. A. McGuigan (1998). "Does early drug use increase the risk of dropping out of high school?" *Journal of Drug Issues*, 28(2), 357-381.

<sup>6</sup> A. Caspi, B. R. Wright, T. E. Entner-Moffitt and P. A. Silva (1998). "Early failure in the labor market: Childhood and adolescent predictors of unemployment in the transition to adult." *American Sociological Review*, 63(3), 424-451.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Mijares (1997). "Early drug use and quits and discharges among adolescent males." *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 26(4), 439-458.

<sup>8</sup> L. J. Woodward and D. M. Fergusson (2000). "Childhood peer relationship problems and later risks of educational underachievement and unemployment." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(2), 191-201.

<sup>9</sup> New Jersey School Board Association *Newsletter*, quoting William Bainbridge, SchoolMatch President, March 21, 1995. Cited in *Libraries and Reading: Indispensable Partners*. Middle Grades Reading Network, Evansville, Indiana.

<sup>10</sup> Pennsylvania Partnership for Children (1999). *Learning to learn: Full-day kindergaren for at-risk kids*.

<sup>11</sup> L. J. Schweinhart and D.P. Weikart (1999). "The advantages of High/Scope: Helping children lead successful lives." *Educational Leadership*, 57(1), 76-77.

