

# EDUCATION

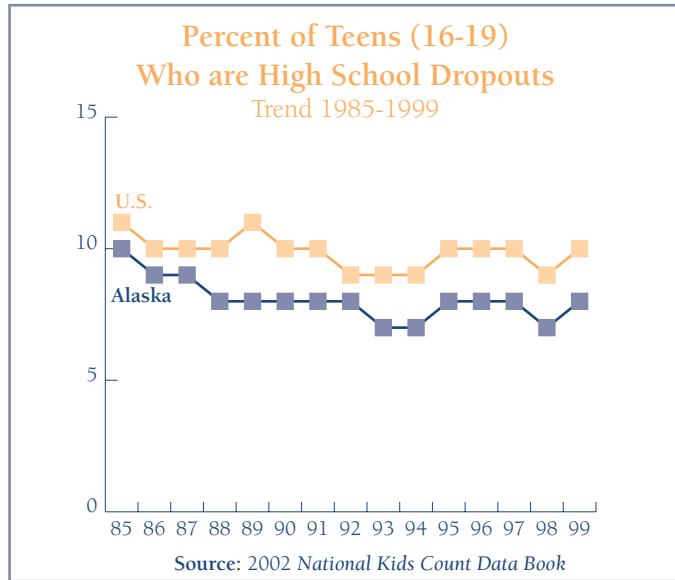


amaya



**Behind the Illustration: Story courtesy of Darla Siver, research technician with the Institute of Social and Economic Research**

In the early 1970s, Darla Siver and her family lived on Adak, in the western Aleutian Islands, where at the time the U.S. Navy had a large station. Adak is a very windy place, with average prevailing winds of 15 knots and gusts between 50 and 100 knots common. Darla's son attended second grade on Adak, and when Darla first visited the school at recess, she was puzzled by what she saw: the center of the schoolyard was empty, with all the children playing along the fence that circled the school. Then she realized why– “So they could grab the fence and keep the wind from blowing them off the playground!”



## DEFINITION

The trend graph 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.

Alaska's dropout rates by race and region are calculated somewhat differently, based on available information, and therefore differ from the trend figures. The map shows dropout rates by region, among those in grades 9 through 12. The figure shows dropout rates by race for those in grades 7 through 12, roughly ages 13 through 19.

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 didn't return.

## SIGNIFICANCE

In recent decades, lack of education has made it increasingly hard for people without high-school degrees to make a living. A national organization that provides help for teenagers in trouble recently reported some grim statistics for dropouts: they can expect to earn, in a lifetime, about \$200,000 less than high-school graduates and \$800,000 less than college graduates; nearly half the households on welfare are headed by high-school dropouts; and half the inmates of U.S. prisons are dropouts.<sup>1</sup>

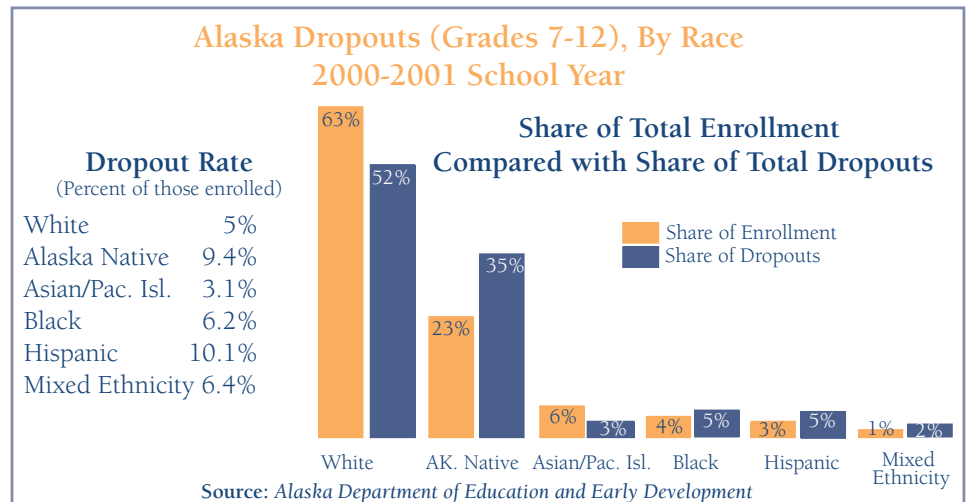
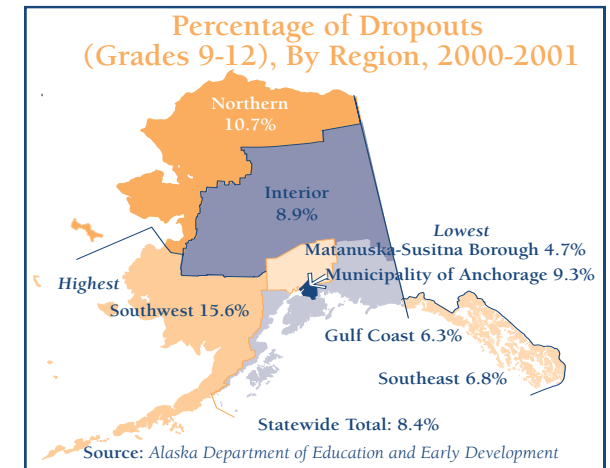
## DATA

The share of Alaska teenagers 16 to 19 who aren't in high school and haven't graduated has been below the national average since 1985. In 1999, 8 percent of Alaska's 16-to-19 year olds dropped out, compared with 10 percent nationwide.

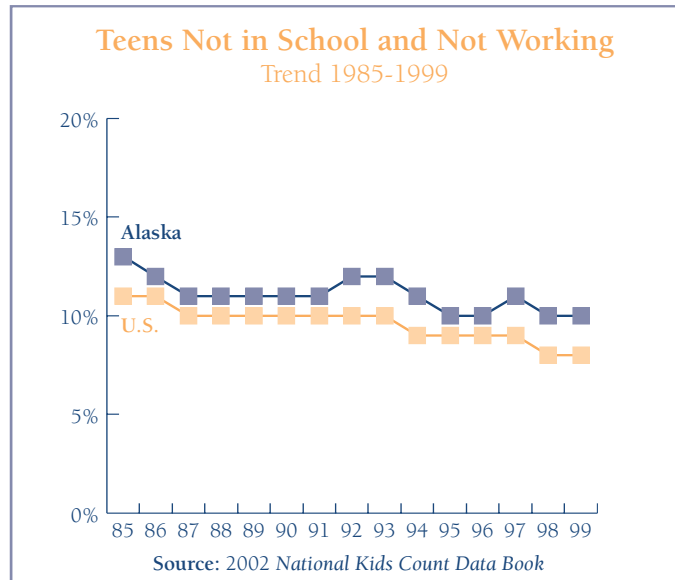
The dropout rate among Alaska students in the 2000-2001 school year varied sharply by race and region. About 1 in 10 Hispanic students dropped out; Hispanics are also the most likely to drop out nationwide, with 1 in 4 leaving before graduating.<sup>2</sup> The rate among Native students was close to 1 in 10—higher than the rate among Black students, nearly double the rate among White students, and triple the rate among Asians.

About 3,300 high school students (grades 9-12) dropped out of Alaska schools during the 2000-2001 school year—8.4 percent of the nearly 39,000 students enrolled that year.

The dropout rate was highest (15.6 percent) in the Southwest region and lowest in the Mat-Su area (4.7 percent). The dropout rate ranged from about 6 to 11 percent in the other regions.



# TEENS NOT IN SCHOOL AND NOT WORKING



## SIGNIFICANCE

A big share of these idle teenagers are dropouts, who face the same kinds of problems described in the previous section. And while the trend graph does include some teenagers with GED diplomas, recent information shows that in general they are much more likely to be in the labor force and to earn more than high school dropouts.<sup>3</sup>

Statistics show that students attending school in large cities are twice as likely to drop out as are students in smaller communities.<sup>4</sup> There are also many signs of what makes teenagers more likely to drop out and to then face problems in the job market. Those include coming from low-income families, being held back a grade, changing schools frequently, using alcohol or drugs, and becoming pregnant.<sup>5</sup>

## DEFINITION

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 high-school dropouts as well as 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 their lives. Idle teenagers are establishing histories of unemployment and disengagement that may follow them as they get older.

## DATA

About 1 in 10 Alaska teenagers 16 to 19 were not working or attending school in 1999. That, compared with the U.S. average of 8 percent, places Alaska 38th on this indicator. The share of Alaskan teenagers not working and not in school fluctuated somewhat over the last decade, but did drop during the 1990s.

## CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TEST

Scores on standardized tests help show how Alaska's students are doing academically, by comparing their school achievement with that of students nationwide. Students in Alaska take the California Achievement Tests, 5th edition (CAT-5), in the fourth and seventh grades. This is a widely used test that assesses skills in reading, math, and language arts.

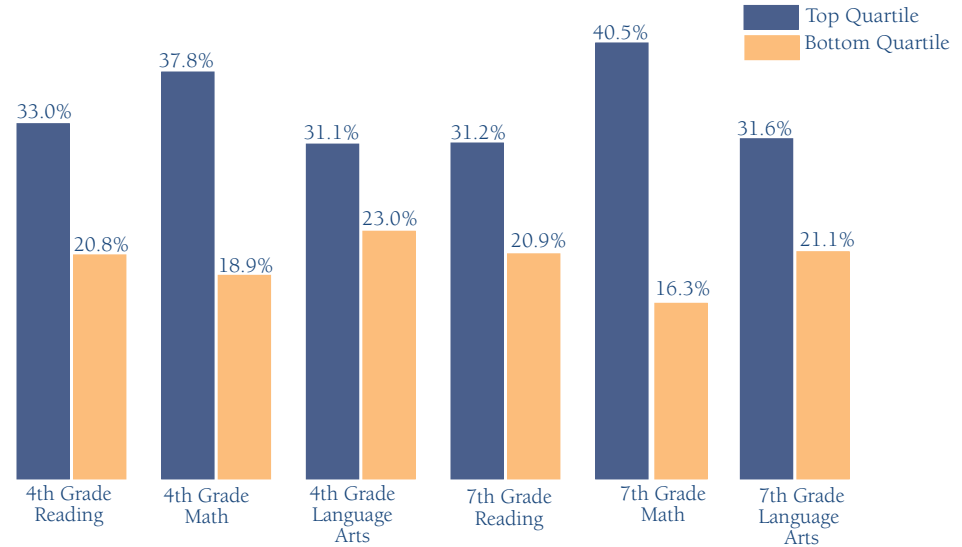
The test scores of all school-age children nationwide are divided into four quartiles—so 25 percent score in the top quartile, 25 percent in the bottom, and 50 percent in the two middle quartiles. A state using the CAT-5 can compare the distribution of scores among its students to the distribution nationwide. In any given state, if more than 25 percent of students score in the top quartile, and less than 25 percent score in the bottom quartile, students in that state are doing better than the national average. Stated another way, relatively more students are scoring higher and fewer are scoring lower.

Alaska's fourth and seventh graders scored well above the national average in all three areas tested during the 2000-2001 school year. Alaska's math scores were strongest at both grade levels, with 38 to 41 percent of students scoring in the top quartile and only 16 to 19 percent in the bottom quartile.

Reading scores of Alaskan students were also above the national average, with around 32 percent scoring in the highest quartile and 21 percent in the lowest quartile in both fourth and seventh grades.

In language arts, about 31 percent of fourth and seventh graders scored in the top quartile, while 21 to 23 percent scored in the bottom quartile.

Percentage of Alaska Students in 4th and 7th Grades Scoring within the First and Fourth Quartiles on the California Achievement Test (CAT-5)  
2000-2001 School Year



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Report Card to the Public, 2000-2001 School Year

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Focus Adolescent Services, *Youth Who Drop Out*. Available at: [www.focusas.com/Dropouts.html](http://www.focusas.com/Dropouts.html). See also discussion in 2002 *Kids Count Data Book*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, pages 34-35.

<sup>2</sup>National Center for Education Statistics (2001). *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NCES 2002-114, November 2001.

<sup>3</sup>See note 1.

<sup>4</sup>See note 1.

<sup>5</sup>See notes 1 and 2.

