

# Cities in Crisis

A Special Analytic Report on High School Graduation

**Christopher B. Swanson, Ph.D.**

Director  
Editorial Projects in Education Research Center

Prepared with support from America's Promise Alliance  
and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

April 1, 2008



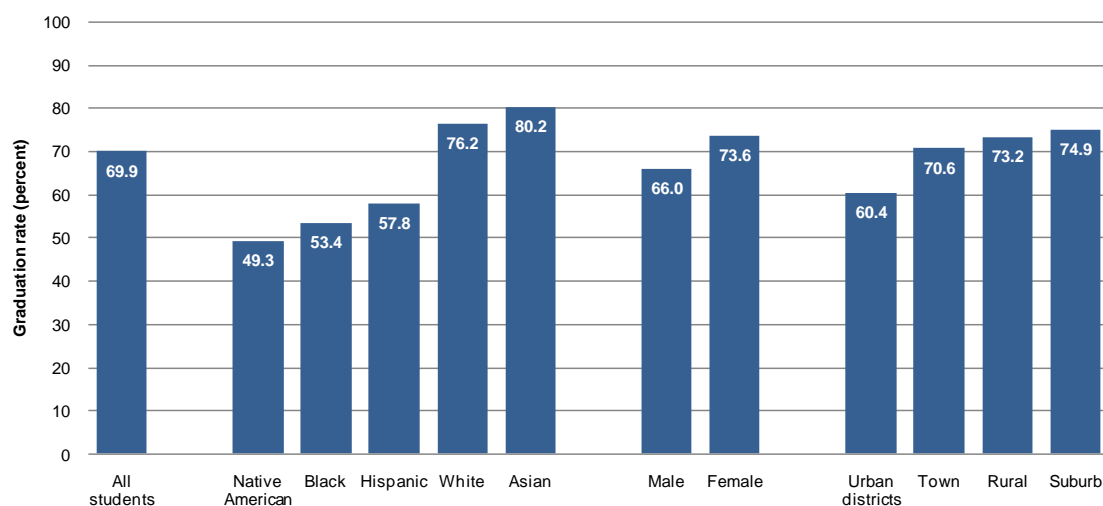
## Introduction

Graduation rates have become a prominent feature in the landscape of high school reform and within the larger world of educational policy. Studies conducted over the past several years have repeatedly demonstrated that far fewer American students are completing high school with diplomas than had previously been realized. Whereas the conventional wisdom had long placed the graduation rate around 85 percent, a growing consensus has emerged that only about seven in 10 students are actually successfully finishing high school. Graduation rates are even lower among certain student populations, particularly racial and ethnic minorities and males.

That same conventional wisdom also suggests that the type of community in which a student lives and attends school will exert a strong and pervasive influence on a variety of educational outcomes. This connection between place and performance applies to both the experiences of individual students and the collective performance of schools and school systems. Striking differences between schools situated in urban and suburban environments, for instance, have frequently been documented in the area of tested achievement. An analysis by the EPE Research Center also shows that high school graduation rates are 15 percentage points lower in the nation's urban schools when compared with those located in the suburbs. Despite the acknowledged importance of such contextual factors, apart from attention to broad national-level patterns, there has been limited detailed investigation into the connection between where a young person lives and his or her chances of graduating from high school.

This report takes a geographically-informed approach to the issue of high school completion. Specifically, we examine graduation rates in the school districts serving the nation's 50 most-populous cities as well as the larger metropolitan areas in which they are situated. Results show that graduation rates are considerably lower in the nation's largest cities than they are in the average urban locale. Further, extreme disparities emerge in a number of the country's largest metropolitan areas, where students served by suburban systems may be twice as likely as their urban peers to graduate from high school.

**Figure 1: National High School Graduation Rates, 2003-04**



SOURCE:  
EPE Research Center, 2008

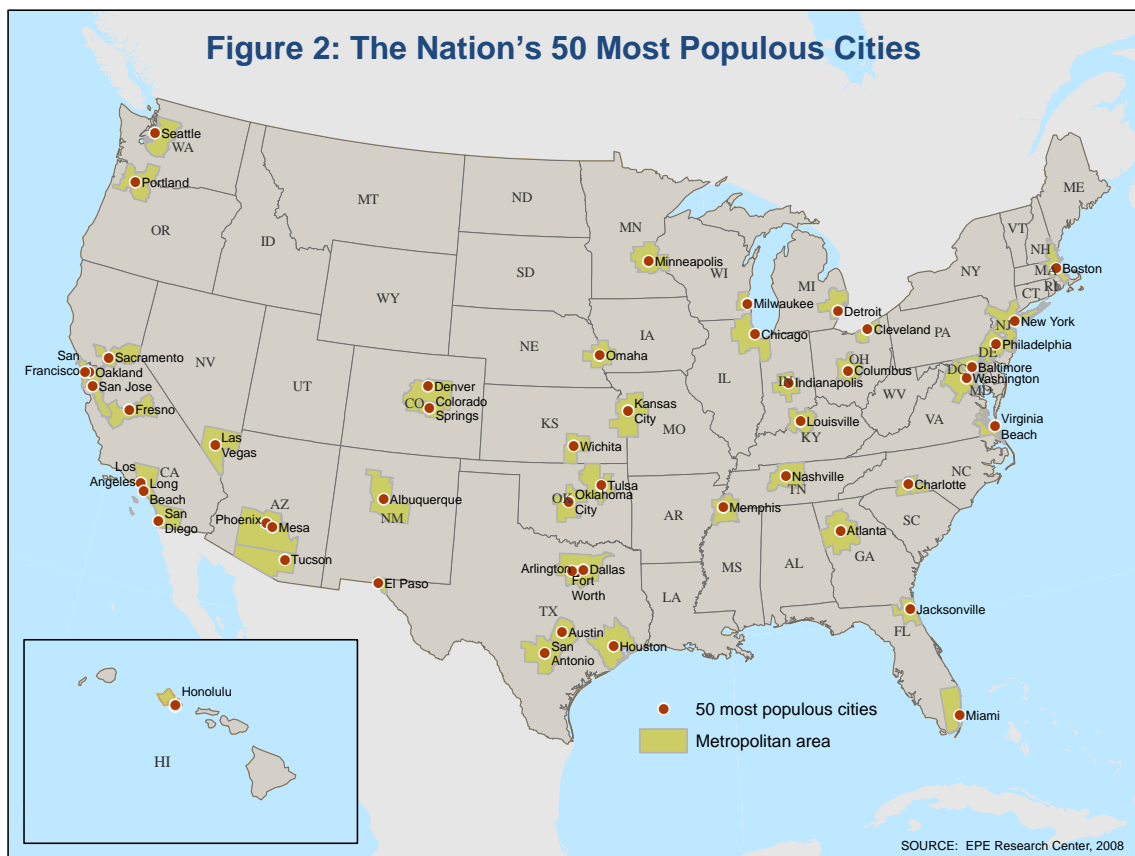
# The Geography of Public Education

## The Nation's 50 Largest Cities

This report concentrates on the performance of America's largest cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas. The 50 most heavily populated cities in the nation were identified using 2006 data from the U.S. Census Bureau. With a population of 8.2 million, New York is by far the largest city in the country. Los Angeles and Chicago follow with 3.8 and 2.8 million residents respectively. Wichita rounds out the top 50. With a population of about 358,000, the leading city of Kansas is less than one-twentieth the size of New York City.

These urban centers are widely distributed across the nation, with top-50 cities scattered across 29 states and the District of Columbia. But we note especially heavy concentrations of these cities along the East Coast (with six major urban centers arrayed between Virginia and Boston), in Texas (with seven), and on the West Coast. California alone is home to eight of America's most-populous cities.

For this study, the EPE Research Center singled out the school districts serving the nation's largest cities using information from the Common Core of Data (CCD), the U.S. Department of Education's annual census of public schools and local education agencies (school districts). Specifically, the CCD contains directory information indicating the physical location of the district's central office. Organizational configurations within the public education sector vary dramatically from place to place across the nation. In some states, local education agencies span entire counties, whereas in other regions school districts may be arranged along township or even-more-localized lines. About half of the nation's largest cities are served by a single regular school district (a category that excludes, for example, supervisory unions without student enrollment and charter school agencies). However, other cities are home to as many as 13 separate districts (e.g., San Antonio, Texas).



**Table 1: The 50 Largest Cities in the U.S. and Their Principal School Districts**

Top-50 Cities					Metropolitan Areas in which the 50 Largest Cities are Located		
Rank by pop.	City	Population	Principal School District		School Districts in Metro. Area (total)	High School Students in Metro. Area (total number)	HS Students in Metro. Area Served by Focal District (percent)
			Largest/most central district serving city	(type)			
1	New York, NY	8,214,426	New York City Public Schools	(urban)	352	713,410	36.5%
2	Los Angeles, CA *	3,849,378	Los Angeles Unified	(urban)	72	626,670	30.0
3	Chicago, IL	2,833,321	City of Chicago School District	(urban)	132	429,658	23.0
4	Houston, TX	2,144,491	Houston ISD	(urban)	63	257,389	18.8
5	Phoenix, AZ ▲	1,512,986	Phoenix Union High School District	(urban)	52	143,771	16.6
6	Philadelphia, PA	1,448,394	Philadelphia City School District	(urban)	114	219,730	25.5
7	San Antonio, TX	1,296,682	San Antonio ISD	(urban)	39	94,516	15.0
8	San Diego, CA	1,256,951	San Diego Unified	(urban)	22	145,376	24.9
9	Dallas, TX †	1,232,940	Dallas ISD	(urban)	107	242,247	16.3
10	San Jose, CA	929,936	San Jose Unified	(urban)	13	73,054	12.9
11	Detroit, MI	871,121	Detroit City School District	(urban)	99	204,220	19.5
12	Jacksonville, FL	794,555	Duval County School District	(urban)	5	53,303	63.0
13	Indianapolis, IN	785,597	Indianapolis Public Schools	(urban)	49	68,945	13.7
14	San Francisco, CA ‡	744,041	San Francisco Unified	(urban)	40	165,446	11.6
15	Columbus, OH	733,203	Columbus Public Schools	(urban)	52	74,482	20.8
16	Austin, TX	709,893	Austin ISD	(urban)	27	61,013	33.1
17	Memphis, TN	670,902	Memphis City School District	(urban)	13	55,133	51.7
18	Fort Worth, TX †	653,320	Fort Worth ISD	(urban)	107	242,247	8.3
19	Baltimore, MD	631,366	Baltimore City Public School System	(urban)	7	114,882	19.9
20	Charlotte, NC	630,478	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	(urban)	9	64,307	47.8
21	El Paso, TX	609,415	El Paso ISD	(urban)	9	45,519	38.7
22	Boston, MA	590,763	Boston Public Schools	(urban)	126	160,651	11.6
23	Seattle, WA	582,454	Seattle School District	(urban)	44	120,463	12.1
24	Washington, DC	581,530	District of Columbia Public Schools	(urban)	21	233,852	5.0
25	Milwaukee, WI	573,358	Milwaukee Public Schools	(urban)	36	73,889	34.0
26	Denver, CO	566,974	Denver County School District	(urban)	26	106,661	16.3
27	Louisville/Jefferson Co., KY	554,496	Jefferson County School District	(suburban)	21	50,037	52.3
28	Las Vegas, NV	552,539	Clark County School District	(suburban)	1	68,734	100.0
29	Nashville-Davidson Co., TN	552,120	Nashville-Davidson Co. School District	(urban)	13	55,521	31.5
30	Oklahoma City, OK	537,734	Oklahoma City Public Schools	(urban)	42	38,112	23.7
31	Portland, OR	537,081	Portland School District	(urban)	45	94,284	13.3
32	Tucson, AZ	518,956	Tucson Unified District	(urban)	16	37,869	44.9
33	Albuquerque, NM	504,949	Albuquerque Public Schools	(urban)	10	36,513	72.4
34	Atlanta, GA	486,411	Atlanta City School District	(urban)	36	221,586	5.9
35	Long Beach, CA *	472,494	Long Beach Unified	(urban)	72	626,670	4.5
36	Fresno, CA	466,714	Fresno Unified	(urban)	21	55,432	41.5
37	Sacramento, CA	453,781	Sacramento City Unified	(urban)	23	102,394	13.9
38	Mesa, AZ ▲	447,541	Mesa Unified District	(urban)	52	143,771	6.6
39	Kansas City, MO	447,306	Kansas City School District	(urban)	78	87,007	9.3
40	Cleveland, OH	444,313	Cleveland Municipal City School District	(urban)	67	96,259	18.7
41	Virginia Beach, VA	435,619	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	(urban)	14	79,427	29.4
42	Omaha, NE	419,545	Omaha Public Schools	(urban)	41	39,833	33.0
43	Miami, FL	404,048	Dade County School District	(suburban)	3	227,808	47.5
44	Oakland, CA ‡	397,067	Oakland Unified	(urban)	40	165,446	7.3
45	Tulsa, OK	382,872	Tulsa Public Schools	(urban)	43	27,080	35.4
46	Honolulu, HI	377,357	Hawaii Department of Education	(suburban)	1	53,471	100.0
47	Minneapolis, MN	372,833	Minneapolis Public Schools	(urban)	74	119,718	10.4
48	Colorado Springs, CO	372,437	Colorado Springs School District	(urban)	17	30,610	32.5
49	Arlington, TX †	367,197	Arlington ISD	(urban)	107	242,247	6.9
50	Wichita, KS	357,698	Wichita Public Schools	(urban)	30	29,249	45.8
	<b>50-City Total</b>	<b>46,311,58</b>			<b>2,125</b>	<b>6,099,531</b>	<b>27.6%</b>

\* Los Angeles and Long Beach are part of same metropolitan area.

▲ Phoenix and Mesa are part of same metropolitan area.

† Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington are part of same metropolitan area.

‡ San Francisco and Oakland are part of same metropolitan area.

Note: Population statistics for the 50 largest cities are based on 2006 data from the U.S. Census Bureau. School district data are from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data 2003-04. School district locations are determined by the physical location of local education agency office.

SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2008

The analyses presented below required the identification of the predominant school district serving a particular city, which we term the *principal district*. In situations where multiple education agencies were associated with a single city, the principal district was defined on the basis of size and centrality. In several cases, the cities ranking among the nation's largest represent only one of the municipalities served by an expansive countywide or statewide education system. Examples, respectively, include Miami (part of the Dade County School District) and Honolulu (which falls within the jurisdiction of Hawaii's statewide school district).

## Metropolitan Areas

This study also examines graduation-rate patterns for the broader metropolitan areas in which the nation's 50 largest cities reside. In most instances, a single city represents the dominant urban core of its respective geographical region (e.g., Albuquerque, Atlanta, or Las Vegas). However, there are also a number of cases where a single metropolitan area encompasses more than one major urban center. Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington (all top-50 cities) are located within the same metropolitan area in Texas.

Much as was the case for individual cities, the numbers of school districts associated with particular metropolitan areas vary tremendously. In southern Florida, for example, Miami is part of a metropolitan area that contains just three large countywide school districts. It is common, though, for several dozen districts to occupy the same metropolitan area. But in a handful of places, metropolitan areas may contain more than 100 school districts. The New York City region, an extreme example, is home to more than 350 school systems spanning three states. Many of those districts are quite small, owing to the extremely localized nature of public schooling in parts of Long Island and northern New Jersey.

## Terminology

**Metropolitan Area** – As used in this report, the term *metropolitan area* refers to a Core Base Statistical Area (CBSA) as employed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and defined by the Office of Management and Budget. CBSAs include both Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas. A Metropolitan Statistical Area has at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties. Micropolitan Statistical Areas are similar but smaller geographies, containing at least one urban cluster with a population between 10,000 and 50,000. Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas are defined in terms of whole counties (or equivalent entities) and may span state borders.

**Principal City** – Within each metropolitan or micropolitan area, the largest city is designated a *principal city*. Other cities that meet specified criteria related to population and employment may also qualify for this designation. By convention, the title of each Metropolitan Statistical Area includes the names of up to three of its principal cities and the name of each state into which the Metropolitan Statistical Area extends.

**Principal School District** – For each of the 50 largest cities in the nation, the EPE Research Center identifies a principal school district. This is the largest or most central local education agency serving the city. A district's location is determined by the street address of its central office.

**Urban and Suburban School Districts** – The U.S. Department of Education classifies the service area of a school district based on the locales (e.g., urban vs. suburban) of schools within the district. Urban districts, as defined in this report, serve a principal city of a metropolitan area. Suburban districts serve regions of a metropolitan area other than principal cities.

Illustrations of Metropolitan and Educational Geography

Figure 3: New York City

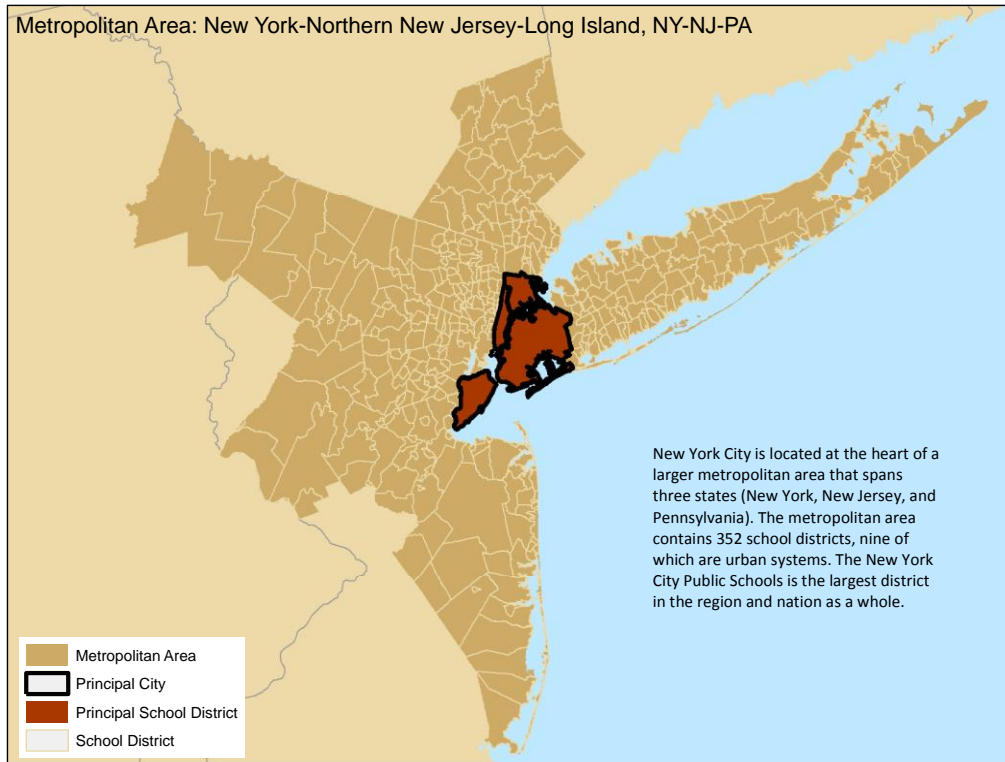
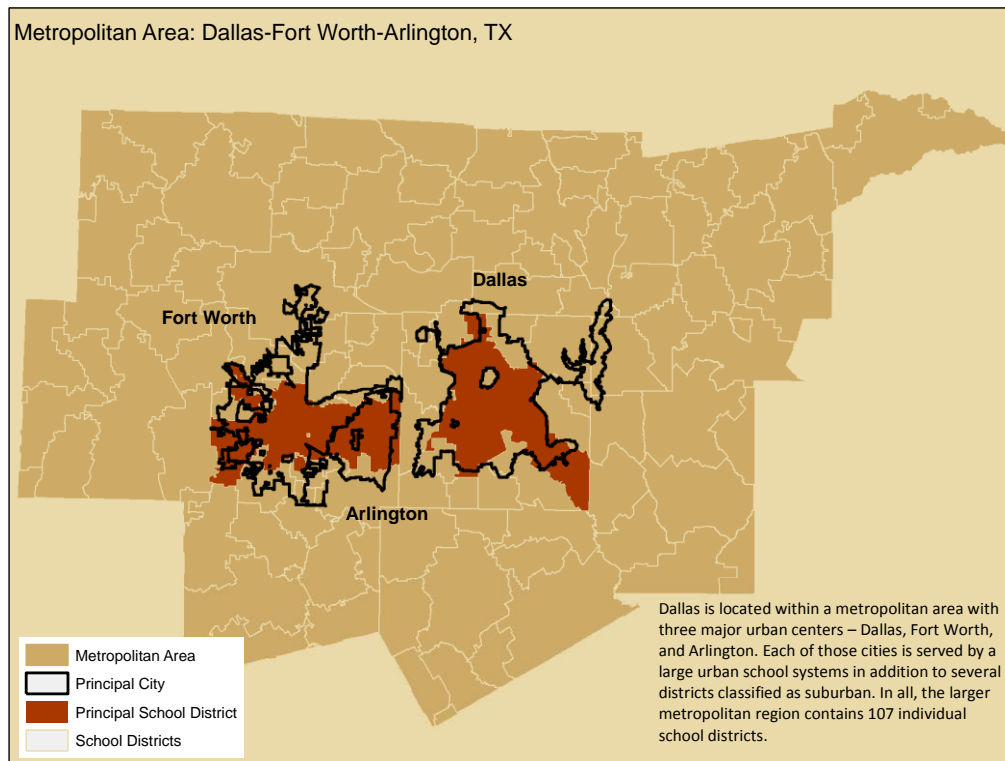
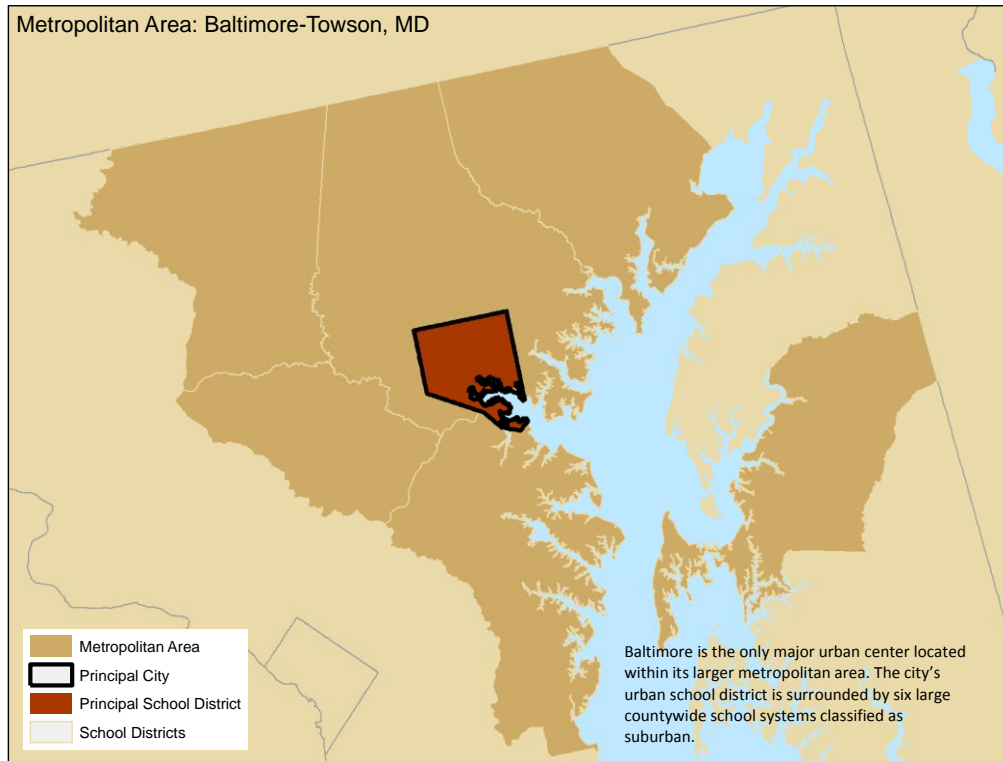


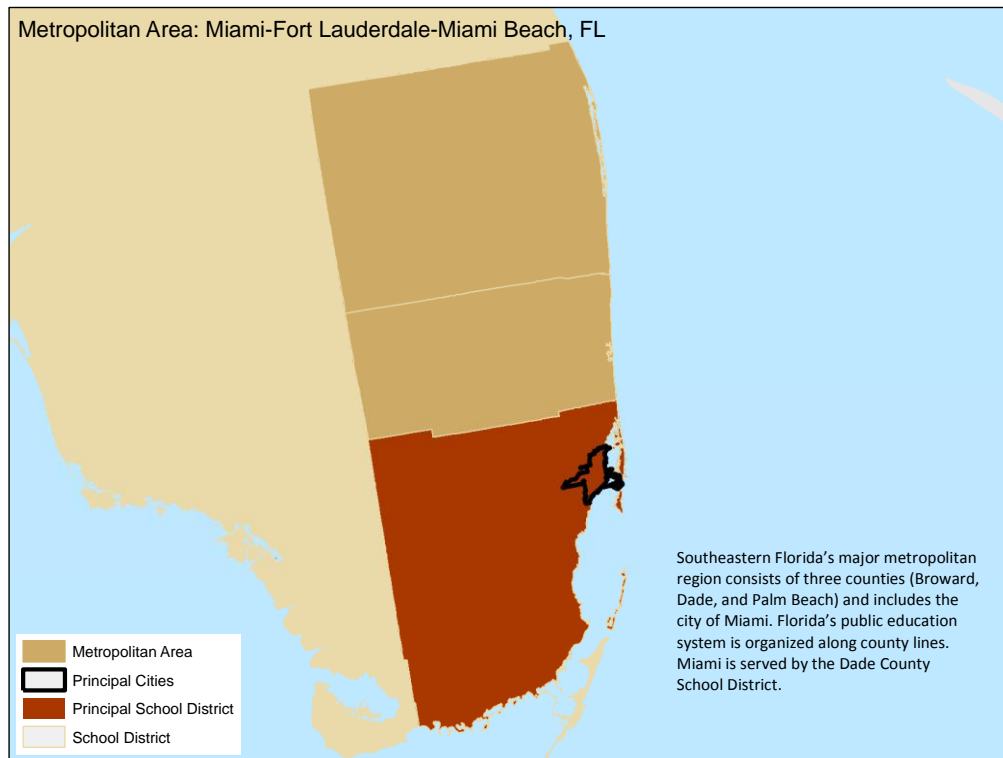
Figure 4: Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington



**Figure 5: Baltimore**



**Figure 6: Miami**



## Calculating Graduation Rates

The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center uses the **Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI)** method to calculate graduation rates. The CPI represents graduating from high school as a process rather than a single event. Namely, it captures the four key steps a student must take in order to graduate: three grade-to-grade promotions (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and ultimately earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation).

The equation below illustrates the CPI formula for calculating graduation rates. The class of 2003-04 is used as an example.

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{\text{10th graders, fall 2004}}{\text{9th graders, fall 2003}} \times \frac{\text{11th graders, fall 2004}}{\text{10th graders, fall 2003}} \times \frac{\text{12th graders, fall 2004}}{\text{11th graders, fall 2003}} \times \frac{\text{Diploma recipients, spring 2004}}{\text{12th graders, fall 2003}}$$

By multiplying grade-specific promotion ratios together, the CPI estimates the likelihood that a 9th grader will complete high school on time with a regular diploma, given the schooling conditions prevailing during a particular school year. The CPI counts only students receiving standard high school diplomas as graduates, following the definition of a graduate adopted by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

We can use a simplified example to further demonstrate the way we calculate the CPI. Let us suppose that a particular school district currently has 100 students enrolled in each grade from 9 through 12. We will also assume that 5 percent of students currently in grades 9, 10, and 11 will drop out of school this year, and that 5 percent of seniors will fail to earn a diploma at the end of the year. So, for example, we would count 100 9th graders at our starting point but only 95 10th graders the following fall.

$$\text{CPI} = \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} \times \frac{95}{100} = .815$$

Carrying out the calculation shown above, we arrive at a graduation rate of 81.5 percent for this district. Given conditions in this hypothetical school system (an effective 5 percent annual attrition rate for students at each grade level), only about 82 out of every 100 9th graders would be expected to finish high school with a diploma.

The CPI can be calculated for public school districts that have students enrolled in the secondary grades (9 through 12). Statistics for larger geographical areas – the nation, states, metropolitan areas – are generated by aggregating the district-level data upward.

The EPE Research Center calculates graduation rates using data from the Common Core of Data (CCD), an annual census of public schools and school districts in the United States conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. Detailed methodological descriptions of the CCD can be found in technical documentation published by the National Center for Education Statistics (available online at [nces.ed.gov/ccd](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd)). For the 2003-04 school year, diploma counts for New York and Wisconsin were not reported to the CCD. The EPE Research Center obtained those data from the respective state education agencies.



## Cities in Crisis

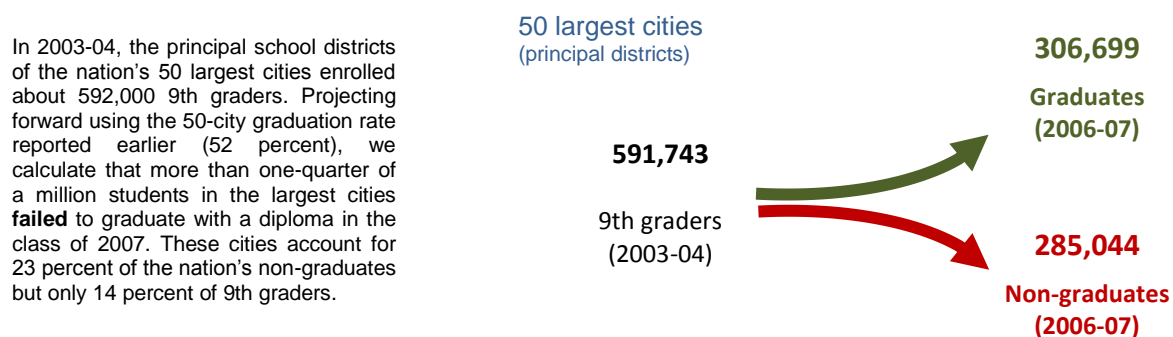
Using data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data and the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) methodology, we calculated graduation rates for all school districts in the nation's largest cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas. This analysis examines graduates from the 2003-04 school year. National and state results for the graduating class of 2004 were published in *Diplomas Count 2007: Ready for What?*, a special issue of *Education Week* (available online at [www.edweek.org/go/dc07](http://www.edweek.org/go/dc07)). District-level data on graduation rates as well as customized, downloadable reports for every school system in the country can be accessed using EdWeek Maps ([maps.edweek.org](http://maps.edweek.org)). This online data and mapping service also allows users to create and navigate local maps of graduation patterns anywhere in the country.

Our analysis finds that graduating from high school in the America's largest cities amounts, essentially, to a coin toss. Only about one-half (52 percent) of students in the principal school systems of the 50 largest cities complete high school with a diploma. That rate is well below the national graduation rate of 70 percent, and even falls short of the average for urban districts across the country (60 percent). Only six of these 50 principal districts reach or exceed the national average. In the most extreme cases (Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, and Indianapolis), fewer than 35 percent of students graduate with a diploma.

Further analysis demonstrates that the extremely low graduation rates for these large school systems contribute disproportionately to the nation's graduation crisis. The principal school districts of America's 50 largest cities collectively educate 1.7 million public high school students – one out of every eight in the country. However, these 50 education agencies account for nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of the 1.2 million students nationwide who fail to graduate with a diploma each year.

It should be noted that these findings capture the likelihood that the *average* student in the nation's largest cities will successfully complete high school. In past analysis of state and national data, we have found that certain demographic groups graduate at rates much lower than the student population as a whole. Male students, on average, have graduation rates eight percentage points lower than females. The gaps between whites and historically disadvantaged minority groups can reach as high as 25 percentage points nationally. If those patterns hold for the nation's largest cities, it is possible that graduation rates for certain subgroups in these communities may fall even lower than those presented in this report.

**Figure 7: Fueling the Graduation Crisis**



SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2008

**Table 2: Graduation Rates for the Principal School Districts  
Serving the Nation's 50 Largest Cities**

City	Principal School District	Graduation Rate (2003-04)	Rank (by graduation rate)
Mesa	Mesa Unified District	77.1%	1
San Jose	San Jose Unified	77.0	2
Nashville-Davidson Co.	Nashville-Davidson Co. School District	77.0	3
Colorado Springs	Colorado Springs School District	76.0	4
San Francisco	San Francisco Unified	73.1	5
Tucson	Tucson Unified District	71.7	6
Seattle	Seattle School District	67.6	7
Virginia Beach	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	67.4	8
Sacramento	Sacramento City Unified	66.7	9
Honolulu	Hawaii Department of Education	64.1	10
Louisville/Jefferson Co.	Jefferson County School District	63.7	11
Long Beach	Long Beach Unified	63.5	12
Arlington	Arlington ISD	62.7	13
Memphis	Memphis City School District	61.7	14
San Diego	San Diego Unified	61.6	15
Albuquerque	Albuquerque Public Schools	60.8	16
El Paso	El Paso ISD	60.5	17
Charlotte	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	59.8	18
Wichita	Wichita Public Schools	59.6	19
Phoenix	Phoenix Union High School District	58.3	20
Austin	Austin ISD	58.2	21
Washington	District of Columbia Public Schools	58.2	22
Fresno	Fresno Unified	57.4	23
Boston	Boston Public Schools	57.0	24
Fort Worth	Fort Worth ISD	55.5	25
Omaha	Omaha Public Schools	55.1	26
Houston	Houston ISD	54.6	27
Portland	Portland School District	53.6	28
Las Vegas	Clark County School District	53.1	29
San Antonio	San Antonio ISD	51.9	30
Chicago	City of Chicago School District	51.5	31
Tulsa	Tulsa Public Schools	50.6	32
Jacksonville	Duval County School District	50.2	33
Philadelphia	Philadelphia City School District	49.6	34
Miami	Dade County School District	49.0	35
Oklahoma City	Oklahoma City Public Schools	47.5	36
Denver	Denver County School District	46.3	37
Milwaukee	Milwaukee Public Schools	46.1	38
Atlanta	Atlanta City School District	46.0	39
Kansas City	Kansas City School District	45.7	40
Oakland	Oakland Unified	45.6	41
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	45.3	42
New York	New York City Public Schools	45.2	43
Dallas	Dallas ISD	44.4	44
Minneapolis	Minneapolis Public Schools	43.7	45
Columbus	Columbus Public Schools	40.9	46
Baltimore	Baltimore City Public School System	34.6	47
Cleveland	Cleveland Municipal City School District	34.1	48
Indianapolis	Indianapolis Public Schools	30.5	49
Detroit	Detroit City School District	24.9	50
<b>50-City Total</b>		<b>51.8%</b>	

Note: Graduation rates are calculated using the Cumulative Promotion Index method with data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data. Rankings are based on non-rounded statistics.

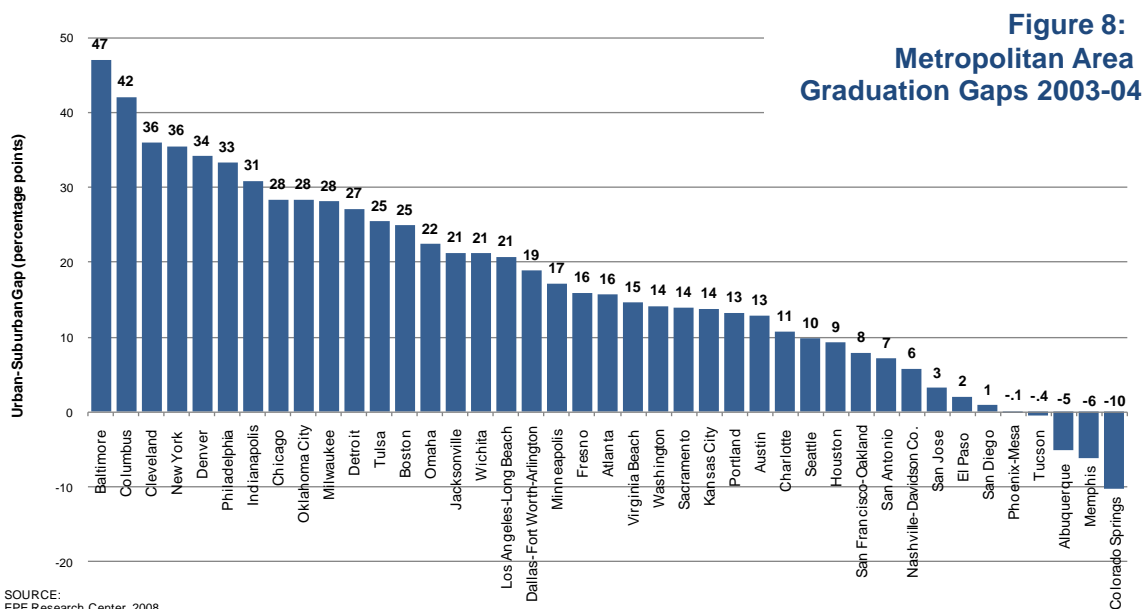
SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2008

## The Urban-Suburban Divide

An investigation limited to the principal school districts serving America's most-populous cities may overlook critical dimensions of the nation's graduation crisis. We know, based on results presented earlier, that a major city may be served by more one than school district. And dozens, in some cases even hundreds, of local education agencies may revolve around the more extensive metropolitan orbits of these urban cores. In fact, the principal school districts of America's 50 largest cities generally account for a relatively modest share of the students enrolled within their larger regions (28 percent on average). Forty-four out of 50 principal city districts educate fewer than half of the students in their respective metropolitan areas. The final analysis conducted for this study examines high school graduation patterns within the larger metropolitan regions of America's largest cities. Specifically, we are concerned with the potential for significantly different, even disparate, graduation rates for the urban versus suburban segments of the same metropolitan area.

Taking the metropolitan areas of the 50 largest cities as a whole, the 17-point urban-suburban graduation gap for these locales closely mirrors the 15-point gap found for the nation as a whole. About 58 percent of students served by the urban districts within the largest metropolitan areas graduate, compared with 75 percent in nearby suburban communities. In a small number of cases, graduation rates in urban districts approach or even surpass those of the metropolitan area's suburban schools. The more typical situation, however, is characterized by sharply lower rates of high school completion for the city districts.

The metropolitan locales with the most severe urban-suburban disparities (more than 25 percentage points) display a marked regional patterning. Three-quarters (9 out of 12) of those metropolitan areas are located in either the Northeast or Midwest. The largest urban-suburban gaps emerge in the vicinities of Baltimore, Maryland, and Columbus, Ohio, where graduation rates among urban students are more than 40 percentage points lower than their suburban neighbors. Students in the suburban portions of these regions are more than twice as likely to complete high school with a diploma.



**Table 3: Graduation Rates in the Metropolitan Areas of the Nation's 50 Largest Cities**

	Metropolitan Area Total	Within Metropolitan Area		Urban-Suburban Gap	
		Urban Districts	Suburban Districts	Suburban minus Urban	Rank (by gap size)
Baltimore	72.2%	34.6%	81.5%	47.0%	1
Columbus	74.2	40.9	82.9	42.0	2
Cleveland	69.6	42.2	78.1	35.9	3
New York	68.3	47.4	82.9	35.5	4
Denver	72.5	46.8	80.9	34.1	5
Philadelphia	73.1	49.2	82.4	33.3	6
Indianapolis	70.7	49.7	80.5	30.9	7
Chicago	75.7	55.7	84.1	28.4	8
Oklahoma City	69.1	52.9	81.2	28.3	9
Milwaukee	70.2	54.5	82.5	28.1	10
Detroit	64.5	47.9	75.0	27.1	11
Tulsa	66.8	50.6	76.0	25.4	12
Boston	76.9	58.1	83.0	24.9	13
Omaha	74.0	65.0	87.3	22.4	14
Jacksonville	58.1	50.2	71.5	21.3	15
Wichita	71.0	59.6	80.8	21.2	16
Los Angeles Long Beach	64.8	57.1	77.9	20.7	17
Dallas Fort Worth Arlington	66.1	55.8	74.7	18.9	18
Minneapolis	76.6	63.5	80.7	17.2	19
Fresno	68.5	60.3	76.2	15.9	20
Atlanta	60.7	46.1	61.8	15.7	21
Virginia Beach	63.6	59.2	73.9	14.6	22
Washington	76.9	63.9	78.2	14.2	23
Sacramento	76.6	65.7	79.7	14.0	24
Kansas City	76.9	68.4	82.2	13.8	25
Portland	71.1	62.1	75.4	13.3	26
Austin	71.2	64.7	77.5	12.9	27
Charlotte	65.4	59.8	70.5	10.7	28
Seattle	64.2	57.6	67.4	9.8	29
Houston	67.4	61.6	71.0	9.3	30
San Francisco Oakland	78.2	73.2	81.2	7.9	31
San Antonio	65.2	62.9	70.2	7.2	32
Nashville-Davidson Co.	81.0	77.0	82.8	5.8	33
San Jose	81.3	80.9	84.1	3.2	34
El Paso	66.2	66.0	68.0	2.1	35
San Diego	70.9	70.4	71.3	0.9	36
Phoenix Mesa	70.4	70.5	70.4	-0.1	37
Tucson	65.8	66.0	65.6	-0.4	38
Albuquerque	59.5	60.8	55.9	-5.0	39
Memphis	58.7	61.7	55.5	-6.2	40
Colorado Springs	80.7	83.7	73.5	-10.2	41
Louisville/Jefferson Co. *	69.4	—	69.4	—	—
Las Vegas <sup>▲</sup>	53.1	—	53.1	—	—
Miami <sup>†</sup>	53.6	—	53.6	—	—
Honolulu <sup>‡</sup>	64.1	—	64.1	—	—
<b>50-Metro Area Total</b>	<b>68.9%</b>	<b>58.0%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	

\* The Louisville-Davidson County metropolitan area is served by combination of suburban and rural school districts.

▲ The Las Vegas metropolitan area coincides with Clark County, Nevada, which is served by a single school district classified as suburban by the U.S. Department of Education.

† The Miami metropolitan area is served by three countywide school districts, all classified as suburban by the U.S. Department of Education.

‡ Honolulu's metropolitan area includes all of Hawaii and is served by a single statewide school district, classified as suburban by the U.S. Department of Education.

Note: Graduation rates (2003-04) are calculated using the Cumulative Promotion Index method with data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

SOURCE: EPE Research Center, 2008

Illustrations of Metropolitan Graduation Patterns

Figure 9: New York City

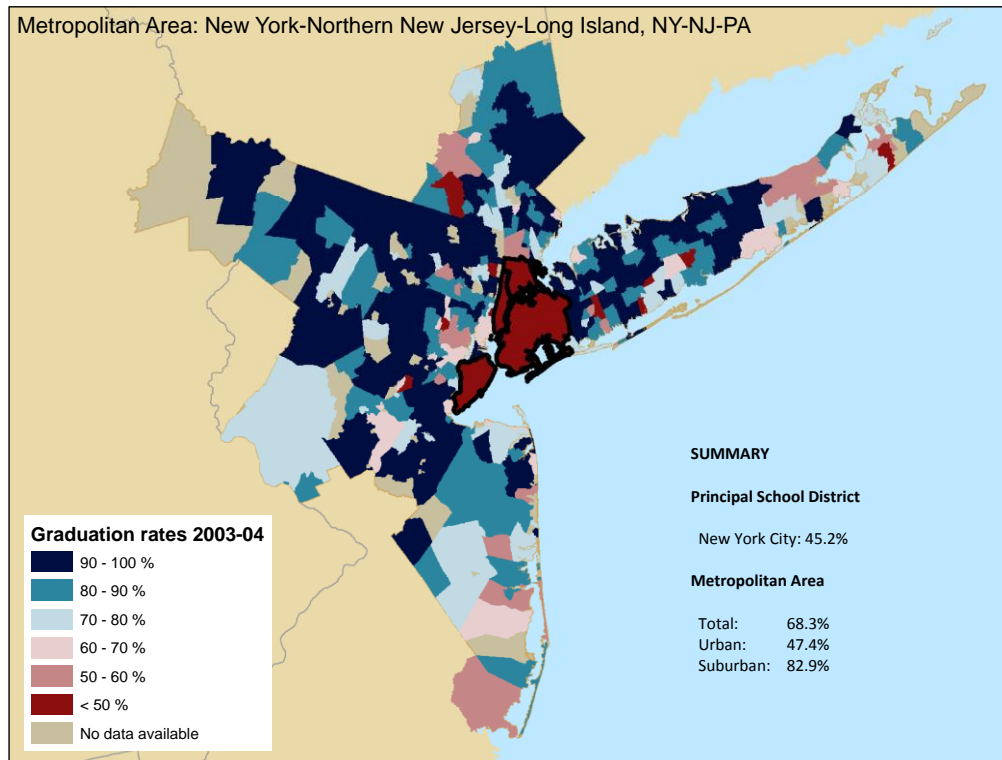


Figure 10: Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington

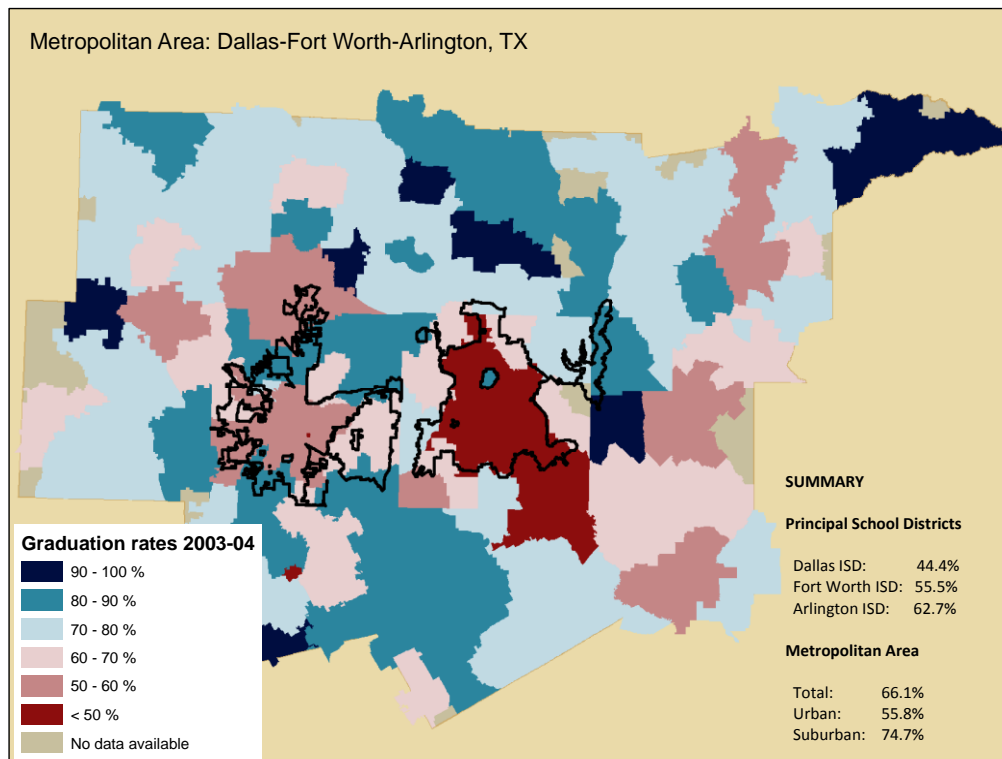


Figure 11: Baltimore

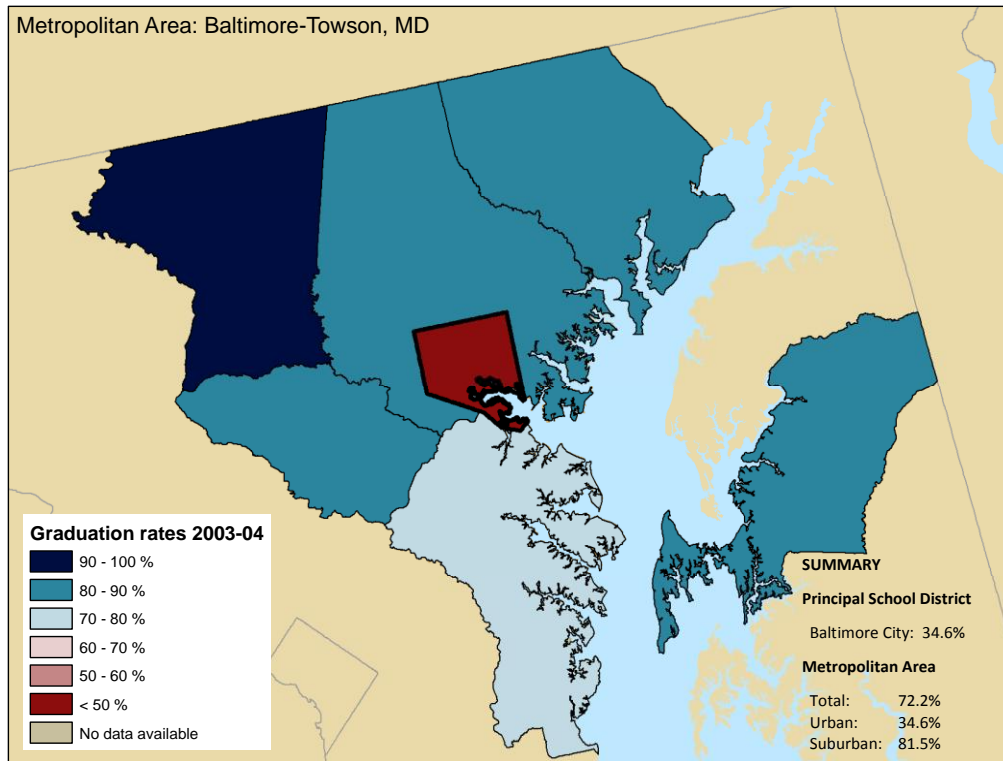
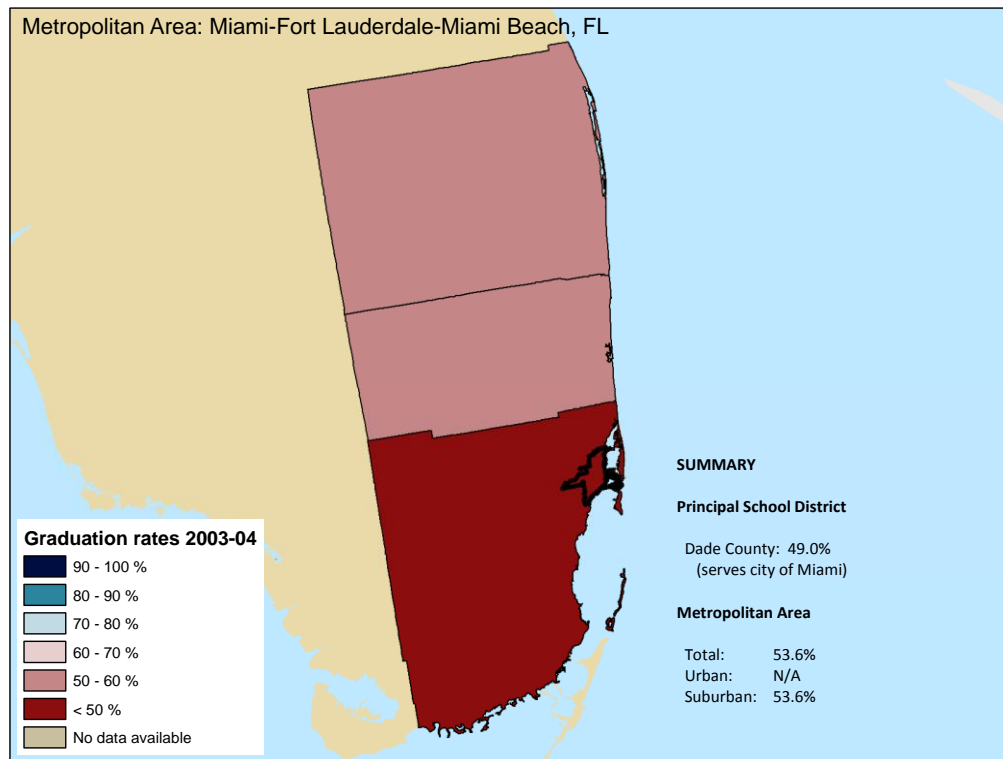


Figure 12: Miami



## Conclusion

---

When they are not being labeled “obsolete,” America’s high schools have often been described as existing in a state of crisis. As this report has demonstrated, that observation is particularly apt for the school systems serving the nation’s very largest cities. A significant share of recent public debate in education-policy circles has revolved around the challenges we face as a nation ensuring that all students graduate from high school, diploma in-hand and well-equipped to face the world and excel in their adult lives. This is an aspiration that would apply whether an individual student’s path from high school leads to further education, occupational training, or immediately into the world of work.

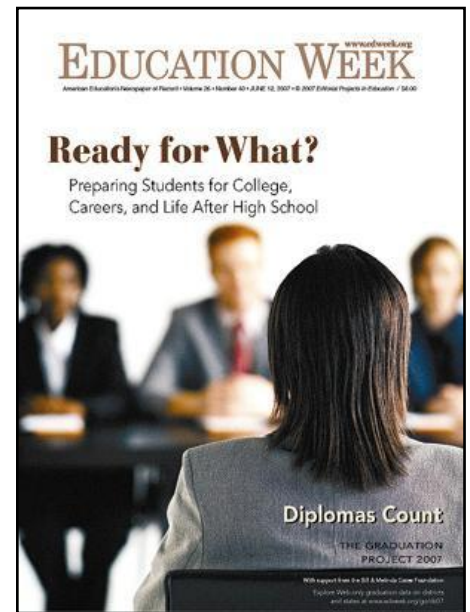
If three out of every 10 students in the nation failing to graduate is reason for concern, then the fact that just half of those educated in America’s largest cities are finishing high school truly raises cause for alarm. And the much higher rates of high school completion among their suburban counterparts – who may literally live and attend school right around the corner – place in a particularly harsh and unflattering light the deep undercurrents of inequity that plague American public education.

It is often remarked that knowledge is power. The good news is that a movement is afoot to better arm educators, policymakers, and the public with the information they need to more accurately assess the nature and severity of the graduation crisis in their communities and around the country. Innovative efforts to turn around low-performing high schools are also underway. The bad news, however, is that the challenges we face may be more grave than many had suspected or that some are still willing to acknowledge. And when it comes to providing every student with a high-quality education, we have not come as far or moved as fast as most of us would like.

In forging a way ahead, it will be essential that we not lose sight of the disparities highlighted in this report, which portray two very different worlds that exist within the nation’s public education system. As efforts to understand and combat the graduation crisis advance, this movement must proceed hand-in-hand with a fundamental commitment to creating a public education system in which earning a high school diploma is the norm for all students in every community, and where dropping out is a rare exception.

## Diplomas Count 2007: Ready for What? Preparing Students for College, Careers, and Life After High School

- **Diplomas Count 2007** – This report, produced with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, explores what it means to ensure that high school students graduate prepared for both higher education and the workplace. An original analysis drawing on two national databases shines a spotlight on “jobs with a future” nationally and for each state. *Diplomas Count* also examines state policies for college and work readiness and provides an updated analysis of graduation rates for the nation, states, and 50 largest school districts.
- **EdWeek Maps** – This powerful online tool allows users to create interactive maps and download a special graduation report for any school district in the country that includes comparisons to state and national statistics. Online at [maps.edweek.org](http://maps.edweek.org)
- **Policy Briefs** – The EPE Research Center has also produced a series of online-only briefs focusing on specific state policy issues: *What It Takes to Graduate for the Class of 2006-07*, *High School Assessments 2006-07*, and *Graduation Rates Under NCLB*.



Visit *Diplomas Count* at [www.edweek.org/go/dc07](http://www.edweek.org/go/dc07)

### About Editorial Projects in Education

**Editorial Projects in Education (EPE)** is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education Inc. publishes *Education Week*, America’s newspaper of record for precollegiate education, [edweek.org](http://edweek.org), *Digital Directions*, [teachermagazine.org](http://teachermagazine.org), *Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook*, and the Top School Jobs recruitment marketplace. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The **EPE Research Center** conducts annual policy surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in the *Quality Counts*, *Technology Counts*, and *Diplomas Count* annual reports. The Center also produces independent research reports, contributes original data and analysis to special coverage in *Education Week* and [edweek.org](http://edweek.org), and maintains the Education Counts and EdWeek Maps online data resources. Online at [www.edweek.org/rc](http://www.edweek.org/rc)