

Grade Retention in Massachusetts Public Schools 2007-08

In the 2007-08 school year, there were 868,428 students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools in grades one through twelve. Out of this total, 20,989 students, or 2.4 percent, were repeating the grade they were enrolled in the previous school year.

Table 1: State Retention Trends 1999-00 to 2007-08

	School Year								
	2000	2001	2002	2003 ¹	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Enrollment	877,768	888,329	883,911	890,862	887,175	882,956	879,050	874,637	868,428
Number Retained	22,424	22,562	22,428	23,551	23,098	22,834	21,676	20,896	20,989
Retention Rate	2.6%	2.5%	2.5%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.5%	2.4%	2.4%

Table 2: Annual Retention Rates by School Type 2003-04 to 2007-08

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Regular/Comprehensive Academic Schools (1702)²	2.6%	2.5%	2.5%	2.3%	2.4%
Vocational-Technical Total (39)	2.7%	2.8%	2.2%	2.2%	2.3%
City/Town (10)	7.5%	7.4%	5.1%	4.7%	5.2%
Regional/County/Independent (29)	1.4%	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%
Charter Schools (61)	2.7%	4.1%	3.3%	5.3%	3.5%
Schools Located in Cities³ (752)	4.3%	4.4%	4.1%	4.0%	4.1%
Schools Located in Towns³ (1050)	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.3%

The state retention rate masks the disparity in individual school retention rates. Therefore, it was important to include the distribution of school rates in this report. Out of the 1,755⁴ schools that had at least 75 enrolled students in grades one through twelve, almost seventy five percent had retention rates less than the state rate.

Tables 3 and 4: Retention Rates Among Schools: 2007-08

Retention Rate	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Below the state rate (under 2.4%)	1,296	73.8%
Equal to the state rate (2.4 %)	12	0.7%
Above the state rate (Above 2.4 %)	447	25.5%

Retention Rate	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
0.0	321	18.3%
0.1 – 2.5	1,002	57.1%
2.6 – 5.0	234	13.3%
5.1 – 7.5	87	5.0%
7.6 – 10.0	41	2.3%
10.1 – 15.0	38	2.2%
15.1 – 20.0	14	0.8%
20.1 – 25.0	6	0.3%
25.1 – 30.0	7	0.4%
30.1 – 40.0	4	0.2%
40.1+	1	0.1%

¹ Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, the Department calculated student-level information on retentions from data submitted via SIMS, in previous years retention data were collected at the aggregate level

² Represents the number of schools in the category in the 2007-08 school year.

³ As defined by the incorporation status within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Charter and vocational schools located in cities were considered to be city schools.

⁴ Because retention rates for schools with low enrollments were overly sensitive to small variations in the number of retained students, the analysis for the distribution of retention rates excludes 47 schools with a grade one through twelve enrollment fewer than 75 students.

Annual Retention Data for Selected Demographics: 2007-08

Table 5: Retention Data by Grade

Grade	Total 1-12 Enrollment	Number Retained	Retention Rate	Percent of all 2007-08 Retentions
1	71,066	2,352	3.3%	11.2%
2	70,786	1,195	1.7%	5.7%
3	70,495	820	1.2%	3.9%
4	71,439	507	0.7%	2.4%
5	70,721	366	0.5%	1.7%
6	71,581	789	1.1%	3.8%
7	73,097	1,058	1.4%	5.0%
8	73,306	871	1.2%	4.1%
9	79,558	6,076	7.6%	28.9%
10	75,371	2,879	3.8%	13.7%
11	72,278	2,285	3.2%	10.9%
12	68,730	1,791	2.6%	8.5%

Table 6: Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Grade

Grade	Race/Ethnicity						
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	Native American	Native Hawaiian	White
1	0.0%	6.5%	7.1%	4.1%	7.7%	1.5%	2.2%
2	0.9%	3.6%	3.4%	1.6%	3.7%	0.0%	1.2%
3	0.4%	2.7%	2.5%	1.6%	1.9%	0.0%	0.7%
4	0.5%	1.7%	1.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%
5	0.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%
6	0.6%	3.5%	2.7%	0.3%	2.4%	2.7%	0.6%
7	0.8%	0.5%	3.6%	0.8%	3.7%	2.5%	0.8%
8	0.9%	2.6%	2.6%	1.2%	1.4%	1.6%	0.8%
9	6.0%	15.7%	16.2%	8.1%	9.7%	15.2%	4.7%
10	3.0%	8.2%	9.3%	4.1%	6.9%	2.1%	2.4%
11	2.4%	6.9%	9.0%	7.1%	4.7%	7.2%	2.1%
12	2.4%	6.4%	5.4%	2.5%	5.2%	1.4%	1.6%

Retention Rate Trend Analysis

Table 7: Retention Rates by Grade: 2003-04 to 2007-08

Grade	School Year				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
1	4.1%	3.8%	3.8%	3.5%	3.3%
2	1.9%	1.7%	1.8%	1.7%	1.7%
3	1.6%	1.5%	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%
4	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%
5	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%
6	1.0%	1.2%	1.2%	1.0%	1.1%
7	1.8%	1.7%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
8	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%
9	8.0%	8.1%	7.9%	7.9%	7.6%
10	4.2%	4.2%	3.9%	3.8%	3.8%
11	3.1%	3.2%	2.9%	2.9%	3.2%
12	2.1%	2.2%	2.5%	2.2%	2.6%

**Table 8:
Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity⁵: 2003-04 to 2007-08**

Race/Ethnicity	School Year				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Asian	2.4%	2.3%	1.9%	1.7%	1.7%
Black	5.8%	5.9%	5.6%	5.5%	5.5%
Hispanic	5.9%	6.0%	5.7%	5.3%	5.4%
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	-	-	2.3%	2.3%	2.5%
Native American	3.6%	3.3%	3.7%	2.9%	4.3%
Native Hawaiian	-	-	4.4%	1.4%	2.8%
White	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.5%

Table 9: Retention Rates by Gender: 2003-04 to 2007-08

	School Year				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Female	2.1%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%
Male	3.1%	3.0%	2.9%	2.8%	2.8%

⁵In compliance with the federal Office of Management and Budget standards for classifications of federal data on race and ethnicity, the Department's race/ethnicity reporting codes changed to reflect seven race/ethnicity categories instead of five in the 2005-06 school year. The revised codes enable agencies to select one or more races when reporting student information.

Table 10: Retention Rates by Special Populations 2003-04 to 2007-08

		School Year				
		2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Low Income	Non-Low-Income	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
	Low-Income	5.0%	5.2%	4.8%	4.6%	4.6%
Limited English Proficient	Non-Limited English Proficient	2.4%	2.4%	2.3%	2.2%	2.3%
	Limited English Proficient	5.7%	6.3%	5.7%	5.0%	5.0%
Special Education	General Education	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%	2.0%	2.0%
	Special Education	5.1%	5.2%	4.7%	4.5%	4.5%

Retention and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

Competency Determination

For the classes of 2003-2009, the Department required students to meet or exceed the “Needs Improvement” threshold of the ELA and Mathematics sections of the grade ten MCAS to receive a Competency Determination (CD) in order to graduate from high school with a diploma. For the report this standard applies to the classes of 2008 (grade twelve) and 2009 (grade eleven).

Please note beginning with the class of 2010 (grade ten) students must meet or exceed the “Proficient” threshold in ELA and Mathematics or score “Needs Improvement” and fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan to earn a CD. In addition, students must meet or exceed the “Needs Improvement” threshold in one of the Science and Technology/Engineering exams. Students retained in grade ten are required to meet the class of 2010 CD requirements and due to the increased standards for retained tenth grade students the analysis was not included in this report.

Students who did not obtain a CD had the opportunity to pass through re-test opportunities before their scheduled graduation date. In grades eleven and twelve, a higher percentage of students retained in the 2007-08 school year had earned a CD by the end of the 2007-08 school year (the year the students are repeating a grade) compared to the end of the 2006-07 school year.

Table 11: Retained Students and CD Attainment Rates

Grade	With a CD	
	2006-07	2007-08
11	69.4%	79.7%
12	67.2%	74.0%

Reading/ English Language Arts (ELA)

Across all grade levels, excluding grade ten⁶ that the Reading/ELA tests were administered in both 2007 and 2008⁷:

- 29.7 percent received a higher performance level in 2008 than 2007
- 8.9 percent received a lower performance level in 2008 than 2007
- 61.4 percent received the same performance level in both the 2008 and 2007 school years

Table 12: Grade 3 Reading
(N = 484)

		2007-08			
		Proficient +	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Proficient +	0.0%	0.4%	0.6%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.4%	3.1%	1.0%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	0.2%	12.2%	27.1%	4.3%
	Warning	0.4%	3.3%	20.2%	25.6%

Table 13: Grade 4 ELA
(N = 287)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	0.7%	2.1%	2.4%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	0.3%	5.2%	30.0%	2.4%
	Warning	0.3%	2.1%	26.5%	27.9%

Table 14: Grade 5 ELA
(N = 218)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	0.5%	2.7%	3.7%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	0.5%	9.6%	27.1%	3.2%
	Warning	0.0%	2.3%	14.7%	29.8%

⁶ The Department does not require retained grade ten students to take the regular administration of the MCAS for the year they are retained. Therefore, grade ten MCAS results are not included in this section of the report.

⁷ In both subject areas for a retained student’s MCAS performance level to be compared in both years, the student’s grade for the October 1st reporting period must be the same as the grade that the student was assessed in both 2007 and 2008 school years. Students without MCAS performance levels results could be due to a number of factors including: the student was promoted to a higher grade after the October 1st 2008 reporting period, the student transferred to an out of state or private school, or the student did not take the exam.

Table 15: Grade 6 ELA
(N = 560)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.3%	9.1%	2.5%	0.5%
	Needs Improvement	0.4%	14.6%	28.9%	5.2%
	Warning	0.0%	1.3%	14.3%	21.8%

Table 16: Grade 7 ELA
(N = 778)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	0.1%	17.1%	5.8%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	1.4%	12.5%	28.7%	5.8%
	Warning	0.0%	0.8%	9.9%	17.7%

Table 17: Grade 8 ELA
(N = 597)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.0%	26.6%	5.7%	1.2%
	Needs Improvement	0.0%	13.2%	21.9%	3.5%
	Warning	0.0%	1.5	8.4%	16.8%

Mathematics

Across all grade levels, excluding grade ten that the Mathematics tests were administered in both 2007 and 2008:

- 35.8 percent received a higher performance level in 2008 than 2007
- 3.5 percent received a lower performance level in 2008 than 2007
- 60.6 percent received the same performance level in both the 2008 and 2007 school years

Table 18: Grade 3 Mathematics

(N = 495)

		2007-08			
		Proficient +	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Proficient +	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	3.2%	3.4%	1.4%	0.2%
	Needs Improvement	3.2%	10.9%	7.7%	0.8%
	Warning	1.4%	11.3%	29.3%	26.9%

Table 19: Grade 4 Mathematics

(N = 289)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	1.7%	8.7%	19.7%	3.1%
	Warning	0.0%	4.2%	30.4%	29.4%

Table 20: Grade 5 Mathematics

(N = 219)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.4%	2.7%	0.9%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	2.3%	9.6%	8.2%	2.3%
	Warning	0.0%	2.3%	22.8%	47.0%

Table 21: Grade 6 Mathematics

(N = 554)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	0.5%	2.9%	0.2%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	0.7%	8.7%	8.5%	2.7%
	Warning	0.4%	2.3%	24.9%	47.8%

Table 22: Grade 7 Mathematics

(N = 772)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	0.6%	3.9%	1.0%	0.0%
	Needs Improvement	0.3%	7.0%	12.7%	3.0%
	Warning	0.3%	1.3%	13.6%	55.7%

Table 23: Grade 8 Mathematics

(N = 579)

		2007-08			
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Warning
2006-07	Advanced	0.9%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
	Proficient	1.2%	3.5%	0.7%	0.2%
	Needs Improvement	0.2%	6.6%	11.7%	3.1%
	Warning	0.0%	1.6%	15.5%	54.7%