

More Fresno Unified students are graduating high school

By Hannah
Furfaro



Fresno High School students line up during the 2014 commencement ceremony.

MARK CROSSE — Fresno Bee Staff Photo [Buy Photo](#)

Here's some good news coming out of Fresno Unified School District high schools: Seniors are graduating at higher rates and fewer are dropping out, new data show.

Districtwide, the number of graduates last school year jumped by 3.1 percentage points, Superintendent Michael Hanson said during a news conference Monday. The state's official report on graduation rates is expected to be released Tuesday, California Department of Education spokeswoman Tina Jung said. The last reported state graduation rate, which tracked 2013 graduates, was 80.4%.

The district's graduation rate now stands at 79.3%, a vastly different picture from five years ago when just 69.2% of seniors received diplomas. The dropout rate is now 14%, Hanson said, down from 15.6% in the 2012-13 school year. The difference between the graduation and dropout figures can be explained by a small number of students who take a fifth year of high school, are enrolled in a non-degree special education program or earn their GED through an adult education school.

"We're celebrating," Hanson said. "I would love to see a three, four, five (percentage-point) gain every year. Do I think that's doable? We just demonstrated one."

The leap can be explained in part by several changes the district made since 2012, when administrators and community members formed a task force and delved into why so few students were graduating.

The recommendations that came from that report are responsible for the improvement, Hanson said.

Among the recommendations were keeping a closer eye on student attendance, creating a texting service for parents to monitor their child's grades, and getting more students interested in after-school clubs and sports.

The most recent figures show graduation rates are moving up among minority students. Hispanic students improved 3.8 percentage points in one year, with 77.6% graduating last school year. The number of Asian students who graduated jumped by 3.1 percentage points, with 86.7% graduating.

There were smaller gains among both white and black students. About 81.6% of white students graduated last year, a 1.6 percentage point jump. Black students, who graduate at the district's lowest rate, improved 0.1 percentage points, to 73.1%.

Other local districts

Graduation rates dropped slightly in Sanger Unified, Superintendent Matt Navo said, though the number of students who graduated from Sanger high schools increased from the 2012-13 to 2013-14 school year since enrollment there is going up. About 92.2% of high schoolers earned diplomas last school year compared to 96.8% the year before.

"I'm always going to want us to be better than the last year. For us as a district, to have our grad rate go down, no we're not pleased to see that," Navo said.

It's tough to pin down why there was a decline, he said. Students could have dropped out, moved out of state or the country, or transferred to a private school. Navo said students who don't earn enough credits to graduate — but take a fifth year of high school to get their diploma — are technically counted as dropouts by the state.

Rates improved slightly in Central Unified from 79.6% to 81.1%, in line with the 1-1.5% increase the district has seen in each of the past five years. Dropout rates ticked down to 10.5% from 11.8%.

Superintendent Mike Berg said the most notable improvement was among seniors who are English language learners. Their graduation rate went from 60% to 71.9% from 2012-13 to 2013-14, he said. One explanation: the state now gives more money to districts with high numbers of English language learners, which Berg said has gone toward more teacher training and hiring academic counselors.

Clovis Unified's rate remained unchanged at 92.1%, spokeswoman Kelly Avants said. The district's dropout rate was .8% in the 2013-14 school year, she said.

Contact Hannah Furfaro: hfurfaro@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6412 or [@HannahFurfaro](https://twitter.com/HannahFurfaro) on Twitter.