

Study finds students are taking more time to graduate from high school

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The new trend is for high school students to take longer than four years to graduate.

(Phys.org) —Much like college students who sometimes exceed the four-year-plan, the new trend is for high school students to also take longer to graduate, especially boys and minority students, according to a Rutgers study.

The new research, published by School of Social Work assistant professor Myungkook Joo and associate professor Jeounghee Kim in *Education and Urban Society*, finds a growing trend of [high school](#) students graduating well after their 18th birthdays, and some as late as age 24. Although both men and women have shown overall declines in on-time [graduation](#), men have experienced a much sharper decline than

women. For minority groups, even fewer are graduating on time nationally.

"This is a national issue and the findings are significant because we used longitudinal data, unlike previous studies, and the result is a more true measurement of what age students are actually graduating. Our conclusions highlight the importance of considering the timing of graduation when measuring the national graduation rate," Kim says.

This study found that while graduation rates by age 18 declined, the rate by age 24 remained constant at around 80 percent, and that males and minorities take more time to obtain a high school degree among the more recent birth cohorts. On-time graduation for all students remained below 70 percent and declined in general over the study period, with more individuals found to be graduating from high school between the ages of 19 and 24 in recent decades.

Men have showed a steep decline in their on-time graduation rate, as compared to women, according to the study. From the 1945-1949 to the 1980-1984 birth cohorts, men's on-time graduation rate declined from 66.63 percent to 60.76 percent.

Minorities were also found to be taking more time to graduate. When graduation rate was measured by age 18, the racial difference was pronounced. For the 1980-1984 birth cohort, 71.1 percent of caucasian students graduated, 56.50 percent of African-American students, and only 42.21 percent of Hispanic students.

One bright spot from the research is that although students are taking longer to graduate, fewer are dropping out completely. The rate of "permanent dropouts," individuals who drop out of high school and never obtain a GED, has gone down.

"We see students taking longer to graduate, or dropping out and then coming back into high school and graduating later. Also, the rate of people who go on to obtain their GED has doubled. This combines to reduce the permanent dropout rate, which is a positive result," says Joo.

One possible explanation for later graduation is that academic requirements for graduation have become more stringent, lengthening the time for many high school students. Frequently students are also subject to high school exit examinations. By 2006, two-thirds of the country's [high school students](#) were required to pass exit exams to receive a [high school diploma](#).

"In the early 1980s, states began to increase the number of courses required to graduate from high school. At the same time, academic requirements for college admission have gone up higher for most college-bound students," says Kim.

Currently the Department of Education calculates national [graduation rates](#) through the use of Common Core of Data (CCD) and Current Population Survey (CPS). Both data sets have limitations. CCD assumes that most graduates obtain a high school diploma by age 18 and is limited to public school [students](#). CPS counts GED holders as regular high school graduates, although research has found that GED is not a true equivalent of a regular high school diploma.

Joo and Kim used longitudinal data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which provides demographic information and respondents' educational history. SIPP, a survey collected by the U.S. Census, makes it possible to observe the age respondents obtained a high school diploma and distinguishes GED holders from regular [high school graduates](#).

Provided by Rutgers University

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