

## 23% Of HS Grads Finished College In 6 Years

BY **Melissa Bailey** | MAR 7, 2013 1:41 PM

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MELISSA BAILEY FILE PHOTO

Sound School's Gratz (at left): The numbers don't tell full story.



New data detail the scope of a problem on which the city's school reform drive has yet to make progress: Many kids either don't enroll in college or end up dropping out.

The data emerged in reports from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#), a national not-for-profit the New Haven public schools hired to start tracking how its students fare after graduation.

The reports provided a basis [for the annual grading, or "tiering"](#) of all city schools, which this year had a special emphasis on college persistence. The reports were generated in November; the school district released them Tuesday, one month after the Independent filed a records request.

[Click here](#) to read the district-wide report on college persistence; scroll to the bottom of the story for individual reports for schools. (The data does not include public charter schools.)

The data show major hurdles for the school district's goal of boosting college persistence and completion: Six years after graduating from New Haven public high schools, 22.8 percent of students—or 198 kids—

earned college degrees. (A “college degree” is an associate’s, bachelor’s, or higher degree from a 2-year or 4-year institution.) That number stayed flat for the class of 2005 and 2006, according to the reports.

A third of the Class of 2006 enrolled in college, then dropped out over the course of six years without a degree; another 28 percent never enrolled at all. The figures included in the reports capture 94 percent of kids enrolled in over 3,300 public and private, not-for-profit and for-profit colleges and universities; kids who don’t have social security numbers are not counted.

The reports showed stagnation on a more short-term measure the city has begun closely monitoring: The so-called college “persistence” rate. Of the 912 kids who graduated from New Haven public schools in 2009, 62 percent enrolled in college right away in the fall, and 46 percent stuck with college for a third semester the following year. Those numbers remained flat for the Class of 2010, after the first year of Mayor John DeStefano’s school reform drive.



THOMAS MACMILLAN PHOTO

College persistence is “a key challenge for us, and one that is worthy of important focus,” said Garth Harries (pictured), the city’s assistant superintendent in charge of school reform and a leading candidate to succeed retiring Superintendent Reggie Mayo.

“For kids to be successful in college, career and life, they need a higher level of skill than we are sometimes graduating them from high school with,” Harries said. He said the stagnation on college persistence does not “ring alarm bells,” because changing college outcomes will take more than one year of school reform. College success stems all the way from

skills kids learn in kindergarten and 1st grade, he said. “We need to be accelerating and deepening the skills that students have,” including cognitive skills like problem-solving and thinking critically, as well as “character assets” like persistence and resilience, which “enable kids to confront the challenges of independence after high school.”

Harries and top school officials placed more emphasis on these numbers this year in the annual effort to grade all city schools into three “tiers” based on student performance. College persistence—as measured by the number of kids enrolling in a third semester of college two years after finishing a given high school—emerged this year as a major basis for the school-by-school grades.

Mayor DeStefano set college-going as one of the main goals of reform because a college degree has been shown to vastly increase a person’s lifelong earning potential. He argues that the more kids earn higher degrees, the more money they’ll bring back to the city as taxpayers.

The emphasis on college brought some surprises on the school report cards: the district [downgraded Sound School](#), the city’s top-performing high school, not because students didn’t perform well in high school, but because not enough enrolled in college. The ratings brought newfound accountability to individual schools for how their kids fare years after they leave the school system.

The emphasis raised the question of how many New Haven public schools graduates should be expected to complete college, and whose responsibility that is.

### **The Numbers**

Here’s what the data show:

- Of the 868 kids in the Class of 2006, 198, or 23 percent, ended up with a college degree by the fall of 2012. Harries did not have a national average to compare that to, nor did the Clearinghouse have one easily available. The closest comparison available: 46.1 percent of adults aged 25 to 34 in Connecticut hold an associate's degree or higher, according to U.S. Census data.
- Most of those students, 159 of them, got a 4-year degree. Another 39 kids got a 2-year degree. Some hung in for a longer-term plan: In their sixth year out of high school, 10 percent of the Class of 2006 was still enrolled in college.
- Gateway Community College is by far the most common first stop for New Haven public school grads seeking in higher ed. The next most-common choice is Southern Connecticut State University, followed by the University of Connecticut and the University of New Haven.

As the data trickle down to principals, school staff are working with a new wealth of information on how their graduates fare in college—which schools they enroll in, if and when they drop out, and how long it takes them to earn degrees.

### College “Culture”

Hill Regional Career High School emerged as one of the top-performers when it comes to college persistence: 66.2 percent of graduates from the Class of 2010 enrolled in a second year of college within two years of graduating. That was 20 points higher than the district average and just shy of the national average. It's lower than the statewide average: Statewide, 79 percent of high school graduates in the Class of 2010 enrolled in college right after finishing high school, according to a [the U.S. Department of Education](#).

Based in part on that data, the district upgraded Career from a middle-ranked Tier II to a top-ranked Tier I school.



MELISSA BAILEY FILE PHOTO

Career High Principal Madeline Negron (pictured), who returned to the school last fall as principal after 10 years in another district, gave two hypotheses for the college-going success. First, culture: “From the moment the kids are walking in, there is an expectation that once you graduate, you are going to go to college,” she said. Second, Negron said, scores on AP exams are rising, a sign that kids are academically prepared to handle college courses. “I think the kids are ready when they do step forward on a college campus,” she said.

In recent years, two new initiatives, [College Summit](#) and [New Haven Promise](#), have sought to boost college-going culture by helping kids apply to college and giving them some help paying tuition.

Priscilla Maldonado, who graduated from Career High in 2011 with a Promise scholarship, agreed that her alma mater has a strong college-going culture. She said three high school teachers in particular pushed her to work hard in high school and helped her apply to college. The culture remained after high

school, she said: While some of her peers joined the U.S. Army, most of them entered college. They keep in touch, through social media such as Facebook and in person.

“I feel like every time I run into somebody, they say, ‘how’s school?’ They help motivate me,” Maldonado said. “If they’re trucking along, so can I.”

Maldonado, who’s 19, is pursuing a four-year degree at Quinnipiac University. She said her father, a factory worker, has been out of work for years due to a disability stemming from an injury on the job. Her mom has an associate’s degree and works as a secretary. To pay for college, she works as a hostess at Cracker Barrel.

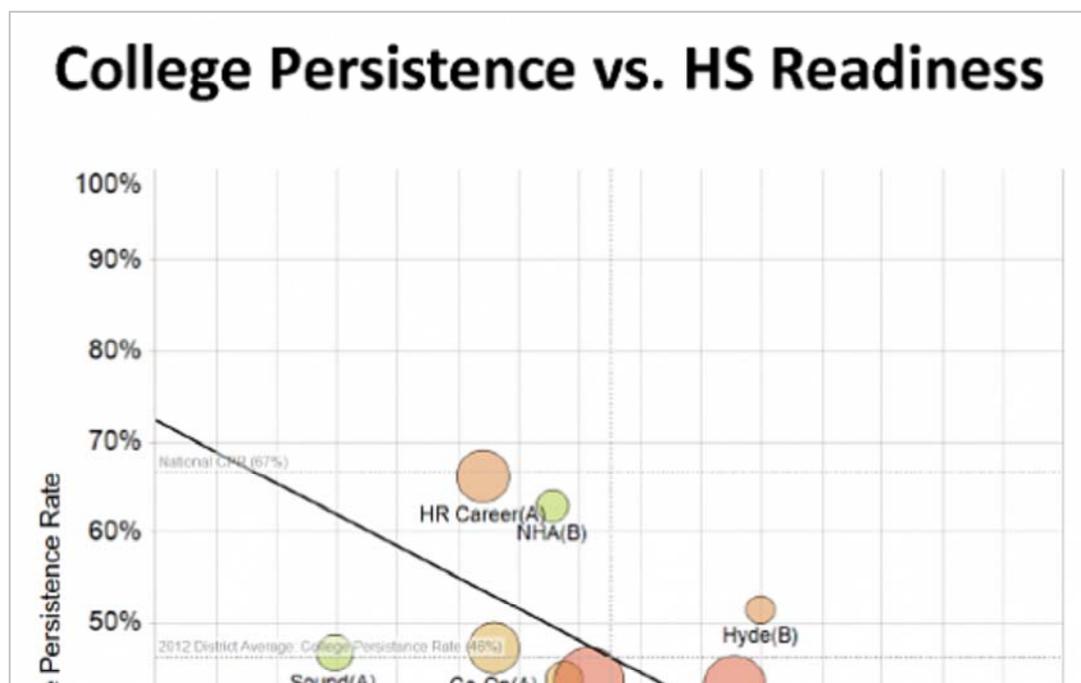


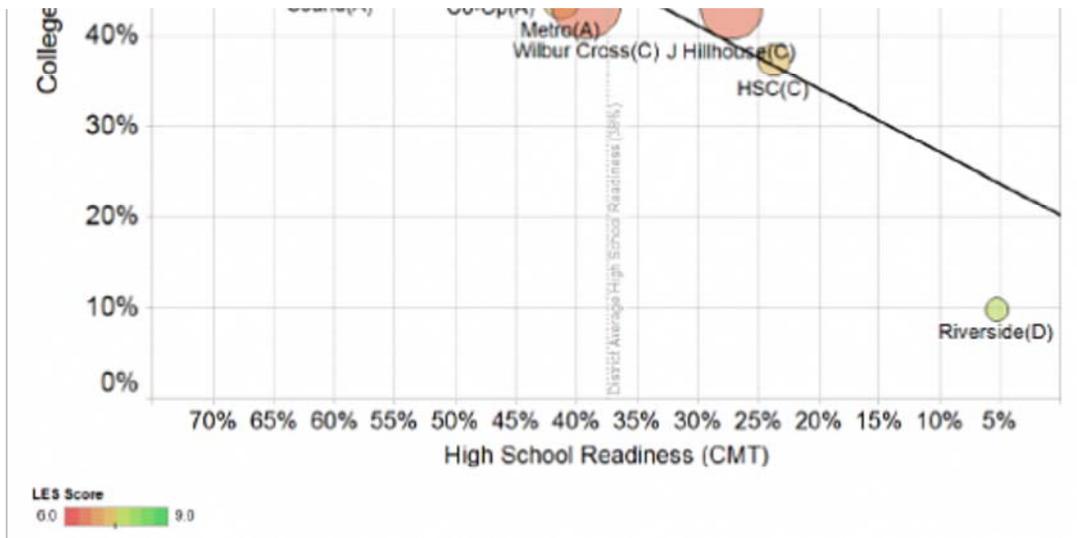
Maldonado (pictured) said juggling her job, classes, and extra-curriculurs has been “a little tough.” But she has managed to make the dean’s list each semester. Because of credits she racked up at Career, she’s now on track to finish college in three years.

“Ideally, I’d like to graduate next May, because I’ve worked really hard to get everything in line,” she said. After college, she aims to get her master’s in social work.

### Define “Persistence”

Sound School, an interdistrict magnet school with top test scores, got downgraded from Tier I to Tier II because of college persistence: 58 percent of students (53 total kids) enrolled in college right after graduating, and 47 percent enrolled for a third semester within two years leaving Sound. There were





College persistence vs. High School Readiness. Source: New Haven Public Schools.

The grades take into account how prepared kids were upon entering high school, based on the Connecticut Mastery Test. Sound had better-prepared kids, but fewer college enrollees, than the district average—check the chart to see how each school fared.

Sound School Principal Rebecca Gratz said those numbers don't tell the full story.

The National Student Clearinghouse also offers another way of calculating “persistence”: Of the kids who choose to go to college, how many stay on for sophomore year.

“That, to me, is persistence – once you start something, you continue it,” Gratz said.

By that measure, Sound School fared well: 81 percent of kids who chose to go to college stayed on for a third semester. That's higher than the district average of 75 percent.

By that yardstick, Career did well, too: 86 percent of college freshmen stayed on to sophomore year.

Gratz said the measure New Haven is focusing on is really about not about persistence, but college enrollment—a path some of her kids are not headed down.

College is a good choice for many kids—“but that may not be the choice for every student,” Gratz said. Sound School focuses on vocational aquaculture. Students “are not kids who want to go on to higher education in a traditional way.” Some kids go on to study boat-building or yacht restoration at schools that don't award higher degrees, she said. She said she just heard from a former student who graduated 10 years ago. Now he's a licensed ship captain running a Boy Scouts seascape program in Florida. He called to ask if any of her kids needed summer jobs.

That alum is living a successful life, she said, though he never went to college.

“We don't expect every kid to go to college,” Harries later responded. “Our goal is for every kid to be ready and able to go to college. We know that some will choose not to. But that said, it's very clear in national data, research data, that lifetime earnings are significantly tied to post-high school education.”

He defended the district's measure of “persistence”: “The key effects of the K-12 education system tend to show up by the 3rd semester of post-high school education,” Harries said. “If kids have made it to there, they're likely to make it through.” That definition of persistence is commonly accepted across the country, he said.

“The core question is not how well do those who go to college do,” he said, but “how well-prepared are graduates for college.”

"It is true that at Sound, those who go to college tend to stay," Harries said. "But there are a significant number that also don't go to college."

Harries said the school report card "pushes the conversation around where are those students going, what are they doing?"

Gratz said her school has been doing just that. Even before the tiering, she said, staffers discussed how well they prepare their graduates for college. As part of state VoAg center compliance procedures, Sound School already collects five-year follow up data on all graduates. Gratz said she recently added to that effort by sending a survey to alumni asking them how prepared they were for success after high school.

She said the tiering has provided a healthy conversation and helped staff focus on kids' long-term success.

"We need to do a better job in high school of the planning process," she said, to help them come up with "a viable five-year plan."

Harries said at the suggestion of the school board, the district has been searching for ways to track kids who don't go to college. If a student enters the U.S. Military or joins the workforce on a clear career path, he said, "that would be a good outcome as far as we're concerned." So far, that data has proved elusive, however. "We've been on the hunt and have not found good ways to track those sorts of kids."

### **Job-Ready**

Kermit Carolina, principal of Hillhouse High School, agreed that for some students, the workforce may be a better choice than college.

At Hillhouse, 17 percent of graduates got a college degree within six years. Forty-three percent of the Class of 2010 enrolled in a second year of college within two years after graduating, which is on par with the district average. Carolina noted that only a quarter of kids arrive at Hillhouse "high-school ready," about 10 percent fewer than the district average.



MELISSA BAILEY FILE PHOTO

Carolina (pictured) said the cost of college is one major obstacle facing his graduates. Affordability is the number one reason students drop out of college, according to the Institute for Higher Education Policy. It is one major factor that is widening the gap in college completion between the rich and poor, a vexing trend that observers say threatens the ability of the nation's higher education system to perform its historic role as an instrument for upward mobility.

Carolina pointed to some recent trends he believes will improve his students' odds: More kids are taking and passing Advanced Placement exams, high school classes that can carry college credit if kids pass standardized final exams. Before Carolina became principal, in the spring of 2010, only nine kids passed AP exams. That number grew to 27 last year, according to data his school provided. The school had about 400 students in the

11th and 12th grades, the age when students typically take the tests.

And more kids are taking college courses, according to Carolina: 53 kids are enrolled at Gateway Community College through a new "middle college program."

Carolina said Hillhouse aims to focus on other options besides college, including forming new partnerships with Yale and Yale-New Haven Hospital to help kids prepare for the workforce.

"The one place that we probably fall short as a district is we need to do more to work with employers to make sure that our kids are job-ready," he said.

Click on the names below to read each school's individual report:

- [Cooperative Arts & Humanities High](#)
- [Dixwell New Light](#)
- [Hill Regional Career](#)
- [James Hillhouse](#)
- [High School in the Community](#)
- [Hyde Leadership](#)
- [Metropolitan Business Academy](#)
- [New Horizons](#)
- [New Haven Academy](#)
- [Polly McCabe](#)
- [Riverside](#)
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**Tags:** [National Student Clearinghouse](#), [college persistence](#)

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### **Comment**

**posted by: robn on March 7, 2013 2:08pm**

The comparison to national averages is really the gist and should be in the first paragraph. It would be interesting if the chart also charted the CPR for more specific demographics for comparison like:

- 1) Urban school districts
  - 2) Rural school districts
  - 3) Regional (NE, SE, SW, West coast, etc)
  - 4) By census median income in districts
- and if it charted just basic enrollment