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Report: New method for calculating Va. high school drop out rates likely will make them appear higher

STAFF REPORTS • MARCH 17, 2009

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CHARLOTTESVILLE — The upcoming release of dropout rates from Virginia's public schools, to be issued this month by the Department of Education, likely will raise questions, according to researchers from the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service demographics and workforce group.

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The new way of calculating the dropout rate, when compared with results of the prior approach, will make the rate appear more than four times higher in 2008 than in years past. However, that is not the case, explains U.Va. demographer Michael Spar.

Spar has written a paper, "Counting Virginia's High School Dropouts: Understanding the New Methods & the Bigger Numbers," published by the Cooper Center this month, to explain the differences in results and the reasons for changing the methods.

"By using this new method, the Virginia Department of Education will be reporting dropout statistics in a way that makes sense to most

people — that is, they will answer the question: 'How many students who entered high school in 2004 graduated in 2008?'" Spar said. "The new method also matches those used for calculating the other side of the coin, cohort high school graduation rates, which VDOE released last fall."

The previous method for calculating rates, the single-year method, reported the number of dropouts in one year among the students enrolled in all four high school grades. The cohort method, in contrast, follows one class of students for the four years they are in high school and reports how many drop out (and do not return) over those four years.

Both methods report data accurately, but they report different aspects of the dropout scenario, Spar said, adding that all states now use cohort methods to calculate on-time graduation rates. Using the same method to calculate dropout rates makes the data comparable.

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champx wrote:

I guess my bigger point is, how hard does i really need to be. take all the numbers and add them up. Look that easy. no formula needed. How can you possibly over complicate that, unless your trying to justify a job. And you can draw whatever concussion from my errors you want to if it makes you sleep better and feel like some kind of great person, I don't really care. Facts are facts and math is math. JUST DO THE ADDITION.

3/17/2009 1:41:44 PM

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renostreet7 wrote:

I'm not sure I understand your comment. Mark Twain popularized the saying, "there are lies, there are damn lies, and then there are statistics." The point is there are multiple ways of presenting the same information and while they may not be mathematically incorrect they don't present a true picture or may actually be misleading. The Department of Education is attempting to present an accurate picture of the dropout rate.

Now I could get petty and point out the two grammatical errors and one misspelling in your post and wonder about your education, but really...what purpose would that serve. Just like your comment - it serves no purpose.

3/17/2009 11:10:27 AM

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champx wrote:

I guess taking all the drop outs and adding them together was to hard for a bunch of educators that they need a new formula. Remind me again whats wrong with our schools.

3/17/2009 7:00:14 AM

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