STATISTICAL BRIEF 8   February 2008
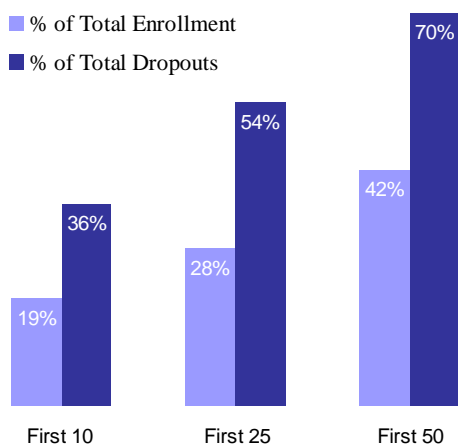
Which California School Districts Have the Most Dropouts?
By Susan Rotermund

California's high school dropouts are concentrated within relatively few school districts. In 2005-2006, 531 school districts in California enrolled students in the 9th through 12th grades. The 10 districts with the highest number of dropouts accounted for 36% of all the dropouts in California and the top 50 accounted for more than 70% of all the dropouts in the state (see Figure 1). The annual district dropout rate in California was 3.5% in 2005-06. One-hundred-twenty districts had dropout rates higher than the state average that year and 45 districts had dropout rates higher than twice the state average. Dropout rates for districts vary widely, from districts with no dropouts to those with 50% or more. Figure 2 shows the distribution of districts according to dropout rate. It should be noted that districts enroll different types of students, so district dropout rates, by themselves, do not reveal whether a district is effective or ineffective in retaining students or helping them graduate.

Figure 1
California Districts with Highest Number of Dropouts, 2005-2006

- % of Total Enrollment
- % of Total Dropouts

Source: California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) [Electronic Version]. Retrieved October 2, 2007 from http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/studentdatafiles.asp

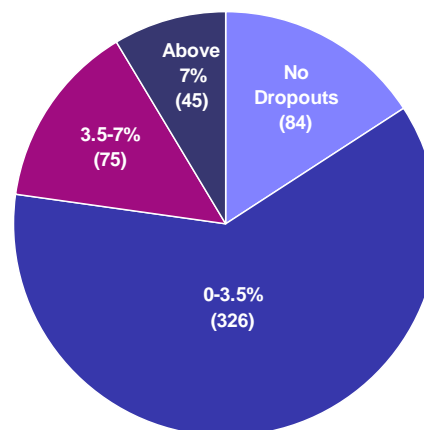### Traditional and Non-Traditional High Schools
Most districts include two types of schools: regular comprehensive high schools (traditional high schools) and non-traditional schools, which include charter schools, continuation schools, community schools, California Youth Authority schools and a variety of other alternative schools. Although the majority of districts include both types of schools, 17 districts include only traditional schools and 110 include only non-traditional schools. The latter are primarily county offices of education that run a variety of alternative schools, such as community day schools, which serve special populations. Districts with both types of schools vary widely in the proportion of students enrolled in non-traditional schools: 196 districts enroll fewer than 6% of their students in non-traditional schools; 165 districts enroll between 7% and 17% of their students in non-traditional schools, and 42 districts enroll more than 18% of their students in non-traditional schools. (See Figure 3)

Differences in Dropout Rates
Within districts, there is a noticeable difference in dropout rates for traditional and non-traditional schools (see Table 1). The average district dropout rate for traditional schools is 1.1% while the average district dropout rate for non-traditional schools is 12.1%.

Figure 2
Distribution of Districts by Dropout Rate

N= 531

SOURCE: Ibid, See Figure 1

Table 1
School Districts with the Highest 9th-12th Grade Dropout Rates, 2005-2006

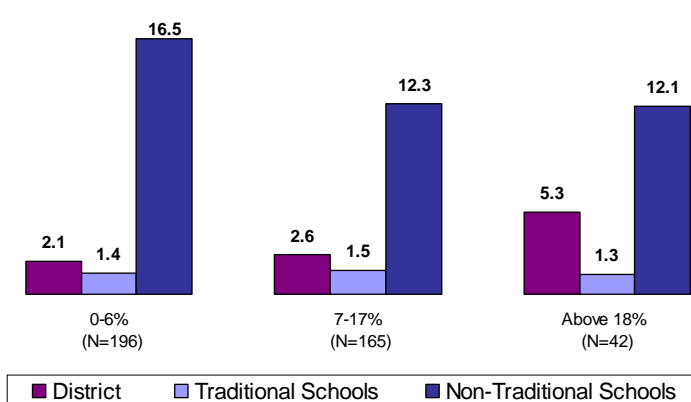| Districts	Number of Schools	Enrollment	Percent of Total CA Enroll	Dropouts	Percent of Total CA Drop	Average Dropout Rate
All Districts (531)						
Traditional Schools	1,037	1,739,883	88%	35,421	51%	1.1%
Non-Traditional Schools	1,425	234,762	12%	34,192	49%	12.1%
Total	*2,462*	*1,974,645*	*100%*	*69,613*	*100%*	*3.3%*
First 10 Districts						
Traditional Schools	142	328,473	17%	12,429	18%	4.1%
Non-Traditional Schools	176	51,746	3%	12,866	18%	50.7%
Total	*318*	*380,219*	*19%*	*25,295*	*36%*	*25.4%*
First 25 Districts						
Traditional Schools	216	476,277	24%	18,209	26%	4.1%
Non-Traditional Schools	262	80,348	4%	19,703	28%	37.7%
Total	*478*	*556,625*	*28%*	*37,912*	*54%*	*15.5%*
First 50 Districts						
Traditional Schools	341	726,875	37%	25,181	36%	3.8%
Non-Traditional Schools	378	108,074	5%	23,382	34%	29.8%
Total	*719*	*834,949*	*42%*	*48,563*	*70%*	*10.5%*

SOURCE: Ibid, See Figure 1

One reason districts create non-traditional schools is to provide more appropriate settings for students not well served in traditional schools. Such a policy suggests that districts with non-traditional school options would have lower dropout rates because non-traditional schools would help keep at-risk students in school. Yet an analysis of the enrollment and dropout rates for the districts with both traditional and non-traditional schools shows that the higher the percentage of students in non-traditional schools, the higher the district dropout rate (correlation = .320) and the higher the dropout rate in traditional schools (correlation = .14). Moreover, districts with high traditional school dropout rates also have high non-traditional school dropout rates (correlation = .322).[1]

Los Angeles Unified School District
Districts in California range in size from one school to 168 schools. The majority of these school districts are small, with 85% of districts in the state having fewer than five schools. Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is a major exception in terms of district size—it has 168 schools and enrolls more than 200,000 students, 10% of all the students in California. It is five times larger than any other district in the state. Simply as a function of its size, Los Angeles Unified also has the highest number of dropouts in the state, with 10,588 dropouts, accounting for 15% of the dropouts in the state of California. Although these figures seem high, LAUSD's overall dropout rate is 5%, and the district ranks 72nd when districts are sorted by their overall dropout rate.

Figure 3
Average District Dropout Rate by Percent of Enrollment in Non-Traditional Schools

	0-6% (N=196)	7-17% (N=165)	Above 18% (N=42)
District	2.1	2.6	5.3
Traditional Schools	1.4	1.5	1.3
Non-Traditional Schools	16.5	12.3	12.1

SOURCE: Ibid, See Figure 1

For a list of all California school districts enrolling 9th through 12th graders that can be sorted by county, district, school, enrollment, number of dropouts, and dropout rates, visit:
http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/sb8table.php

---

[1] All correlations are statistically significant at the .01 level of probability.