

**Graduation Rates and Federal  
Policy: The Changing  
Landscape of Reporting and  
Accountability Since 2001**

By

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# This presentation will cover:

- The need for graduation rate reporting and accountability;
- The evolution of federal policy around graduation rates and issues needing resolution;
- Recommendations.

# The Problems

- An Underreported Graduation Rate Crisis
- Disenrollment – NY Settlements
- Test-Driven Dropouts
- GED Distortions
- Misguided Grade Retention Policy
- Overemphasis on Tests Versus Diplomas (and other factors) For Evaluating Education Reform
- Racial and Socio-economic Inequality

# Misleading Completion Rates Were the Norm in 2001

- Dropout and completion data were inaccurate and definitions inconsistent.
- Confusion around counting GED enrollees and recipients, and the value of the GED.
- Mixed policies around expelled or incarcerated youth, and students who leave the district.
- Failure to use more reliable enrollment data (tied to funding).

# Graduation Rate Calculations

- **Estimate** based on enrollment
- Based on NCLB definition
- No GED or alternate certificate
- Common Core of Data
- Not a function of dropout data.
- **Need for longitudinal tracking.**

# National Graduation Rates by Race and Gender

(CPI Estimate Method: Class of 2001)

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Nation</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
American Indian	51	51*	47*
Asian/PI	77	80*	73*
Hispanic	53	59	48
Black	50	56	43
White	75	77	71
All	68	72	64

# Disaggregated National Rates Mask Over Lowest States

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> <b>National</b>	<b>Worst State</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>
Hispanic 53	NY 32	MA 36
Black 50	NY 35	OH 40
American Indian 51	OH 22	MO 23
White 75	FL 58	NV 62
All 68	SC 51	FL 53

**Graduation Rates Were Added to the  
Definition of “Adequate Yearly Progress”  
when the ESEA was reauthorized as the  
NCLB in 2001**

- Adequacy
- Yearly progress
- Disaggregation

# A Technical Amendment

- Cohort based
- Graduation rate rather than dropout or completion rate
- No controversy
- Made a required part of AYP, not just for reporting

# NCLB Does Define Graduation Rates

The statute says the *definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP)*

- “... includes graduation rates for public secondary school students (*defined as* the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years).” *Emphasis Added.*
- --20 U.S.C. § 6311((b)(2)(C)(vi); 115 STAT.1447

# NCLB Implementation Time-line

**The No Child Left Behind Act - Signed into law, January, 2002**

**Final Consolidated State  
Plan Requirements  
May, 2002**

**Final Regulations for  
State Plans  
December, 2002**

**All State Plans Were  
Approved as of June 2003 although  
Many Were Incomplete**

# State Consolidated Plan Requirements, May 2002

## **Graduation is 1 of 5 NCLB *Performance Goals***

- # 5 “All students will graduate high school.”
- “The percentage of students who graduate from high school each year with a regular diploma—**disaggregated** by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency and status as economically disadvantaged— *calculated in the same manner as used in NCES reports on Common Core of Data.*”
- **In 2002 NCES did not have an official “graduation rate.”**

# The Federal Regulations, *December* *2002*

- (a) Each State must use the following other academic indicators to determine AYP:
- (1) High schools. (i) The graduation rate for public high schools, which means--
- (A) The percentage of students, measured from the beginning of high school, who graduate from high school with a regular diploma (not including an alternative degree that is not fully aligned with the State's academic standards, such as a certificate or a GED) in the standard number of years;

# Federal Regulations Continued

- *or*
- (B) *Another definition*, developed by the State and approved by the Secretary in the State plan, that **more accurately measures** the rate of students who graduate from high school with a regular diploma *as defined in paragraph (a)(1)(i)(A) of this section*.
- (ii) In defining graduation rate, the State must avoid counting a dropout as a transfer.

# The Federal Regulations

- Said disaggregated graduation rates were only required for reporting, not accountability;
- Failed to clarify how state plans should show “yearly progress” on graduation rates.
- As implemented, allowed for numerous rates that neither uses the required cohort analysis nor were more accurate.

# **Will Graduation Rate Accountability Be Seriously Monitored By The Federal Government?**

- Comment of Christine Wolfe, the director of policy for the Undersecretary of Education: "There are many folks who would have liked a national definition in the statute," but congressional lawmakers didn't believe such a definition was appropriate.

*Education Week, **May 2003***

# All State Plans Were Approved

- **39 had “soft” accountability standards – if short of the goal, the slightest improvement over the prior year gets the educational agency “off the hook.” (as of January 2004).**
- **Example: California’s 500 Year Plan (based on 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1 percent).**
- **40 failed to hold schools or districts accountable for the low graduation rates of subgroups by race. (Were not required to do so).**

# Illinois

- 65% Floor
- Disaggregated by major racial/ethnic groups
- Annual improvement required for every subgroup until 85% in 2014
- Among the best state accountability systems on paper, yet still had serious flaws.
- Major flaw: Calculation based on dropouts not enrollment. (Dropouts, plus Diplomas = Cohort).
- Secondary flaw: Integrity of data and reporting systems at district level.

## Problems

## Examples

School District  
Rules, Forms,  
and  
Instructions  
(Chicago)

School district instructions are ambiguous and create exceptions that are inconsistent with law or best practice.

Incarcerated students can be counted as transfers.

Some alternative schools are not counted in system-wide graduation calculations.

Monitoring  
and  
Enforcement

No effective school or state monitoring and enforcement.

“The state has no way to verify [the graduation and dropout rate data].”  
State Superintendent  
Schiller

Source: Donald Moore, Designs for Change.

# Issues in Texas

- Graduation rate based on longitudinal student data.
- Policy around the cohort calculation inflated the reported graduation rates.
- Conservative corrections demonstrated that the official rate had at least a 10% point distortion.

# How to Calculate The Graduation Rate

- The number of students from the Class of 2005 who earned a diploma “on time.”
- Divided by all the students in the Class of 2005 (add transfers in, subtract legitimate transfers out).

## The Texas Graduation Rate was a Straightforward Calculation....Helped By a Miracle

- Class of 2005 Cohort:
- 325,263 1<sup>st</sup> Time in Grade 9 in 01-02
- +24,121 Transfers Grades 10-12
- Total 2005 Cohort
- = **349,384.**
  
- **A miracle happens here!**
  
- Total Texas Cohort Used to Calculate Graduation Rate
- = **271,218**
- Total graduates with diplomas Class of 2005 = **227,755**
- **Divide 227,755 by 271,218 = 84 %**

# How Texas 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Longitudinal Cohort Changed

- **THE MIRACLE WORKER:** Subtract from 349,384:
  - 65,511: All Leavers;
  - 12,655: All Data Errors

**Total: = 78,166 Subtracted Students**

## Why did 78,166 students leave the cohort?

- **10,408** Transferred to another public school in the state, but had no confirmation of transfer.
- **9,763:** Enrolled in GED but no record of receiving a GED
- **8,527:** Underreported = ERROR. They had record of enrollment, but no final record.
- **4,885:** Met all the course requirements, but failed the TAAS (HS exit exam).
- **3,766** Sent to an alternative school, expelled, incarcerated, school denied entry b/c immunization or residency issues
- **91** Transferred to another school within the district, but soon stopped attending.
- **360** Received a GED while in school or got their GED and then reenrolled.
- **Sub-total = 37,800**
- **Most of the remaining 40,366 were unverified transfers, home schooled students, or errors**

# The CORRECTED Texas Graduation Rate

- **ADD BACK UNJUSTIFIABLE REMOVALS**
- Official Cohort to Calculate Graduation Rate = **271,218**
- **271,218**
- **+ 37,800 UNJUSTIFIED REMOVALS**
- **= 309,018 THE CORRECTED TEXAS COHORT**
- Total graduates Class of 2005 = **227,755**
- Divide 227,755 by 309,018 = **73.7 %**
- **CORRECTED TEXAS = 73.7%**

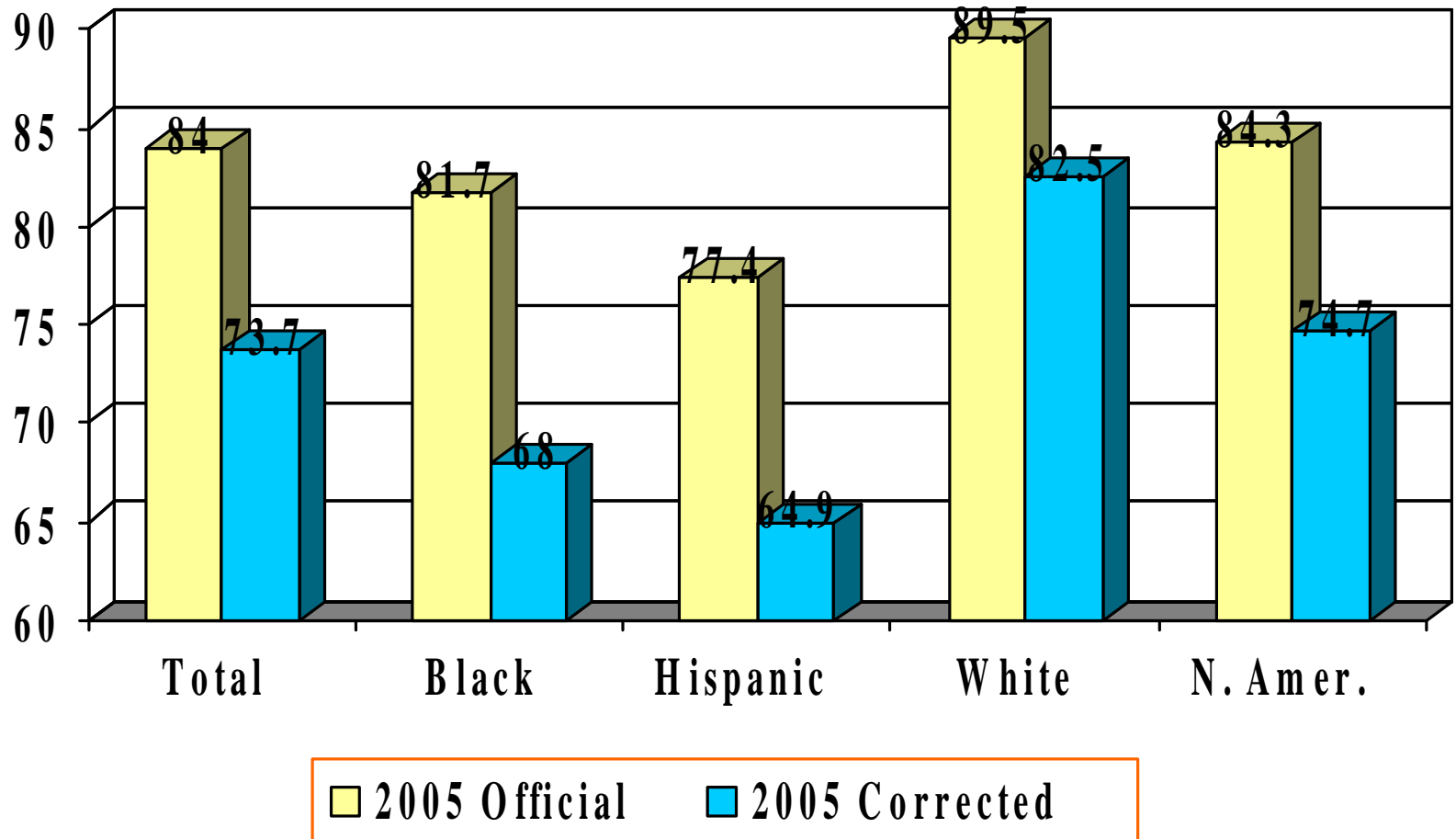
# There Must Be 20 Ways to Leave The Cohort

- Lose your data on the bus ....Gus
- Take the TAAS and Fail.....Dale
- Don't tell em where you went.... Kent
- Just set your cohort free.....
- Study at home....Noam
- Don't tell' em when you go... Joe
- Enroll for a GED .... Lee
- Leave the counting to me....

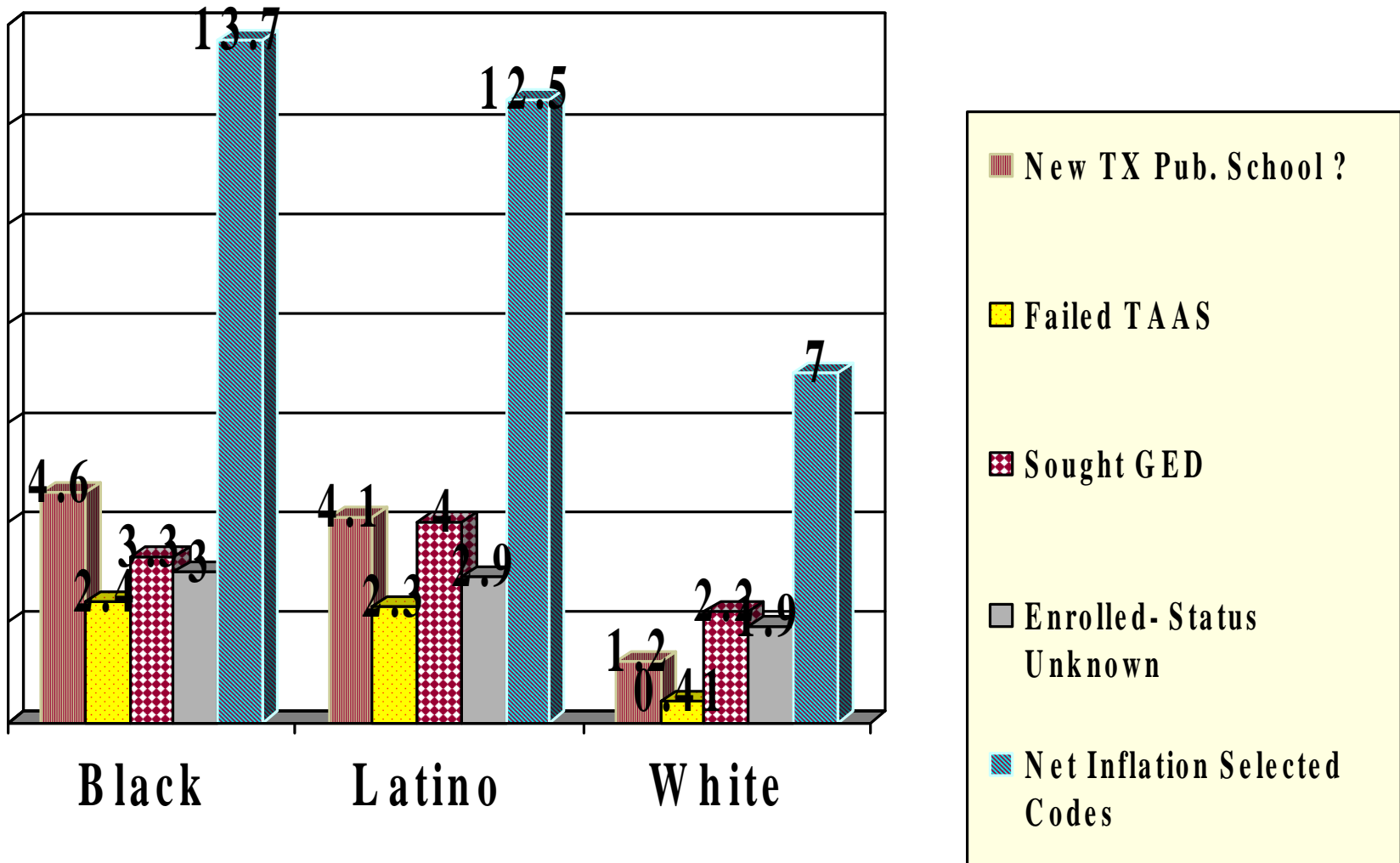
# Corrected Texas: A Conservative Estimate

- Conservative Reconstruction
  - 40,366 Additional leavers not corrected for despite serious concerns about large numbers of:**
    - **Student ID Errors** (erased all)
    - **Home-schooled Leavers** (unconfirmed)
    - **Left to Attend Private School** (unconfirmed)
    - **Returned to Home Country** (unconfirmed)
    - **Left to Attend School Outside Texas**(unconfirmed)
- Reveals Rates for Blacks and Latinos Most Inflated
- From: Correcting the Graduation Rate Crisis in Texas, by Losen, Orfield and Balfanz, available at [http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/dropouts/texas\\_10-17-06.pdf](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/dropouts/texas_10-17-06.pdf)

## Conservative Corrections Demonstrate Inflation by Racial Group

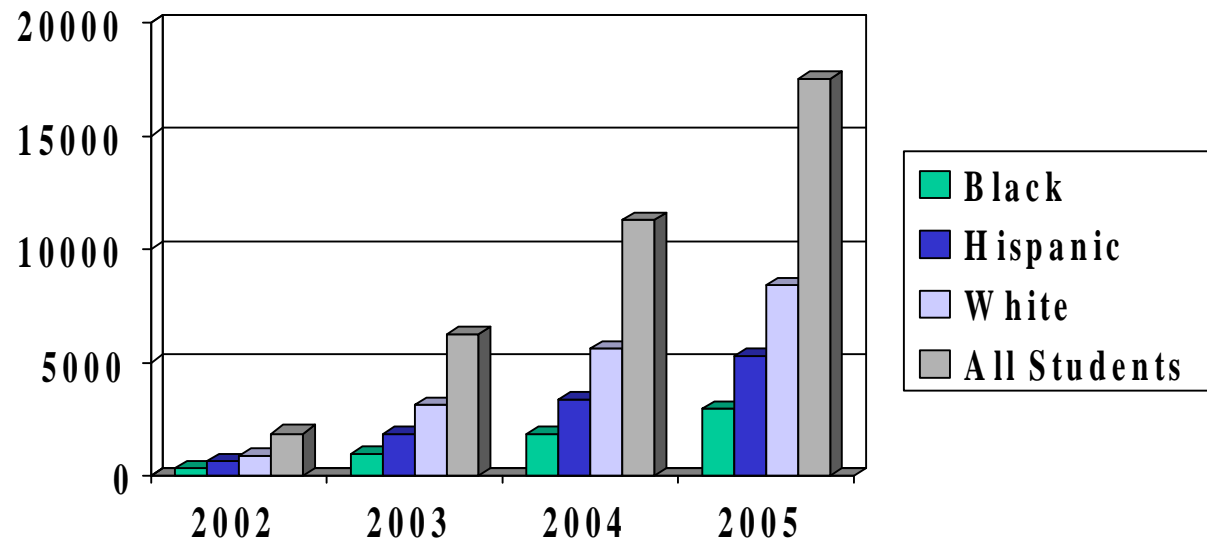


## Percentage Points of Graduation Rate Inflation From Unjustifiable Removals By Racial Group 2005



# Out of State Transfers Have Increased Since 2002

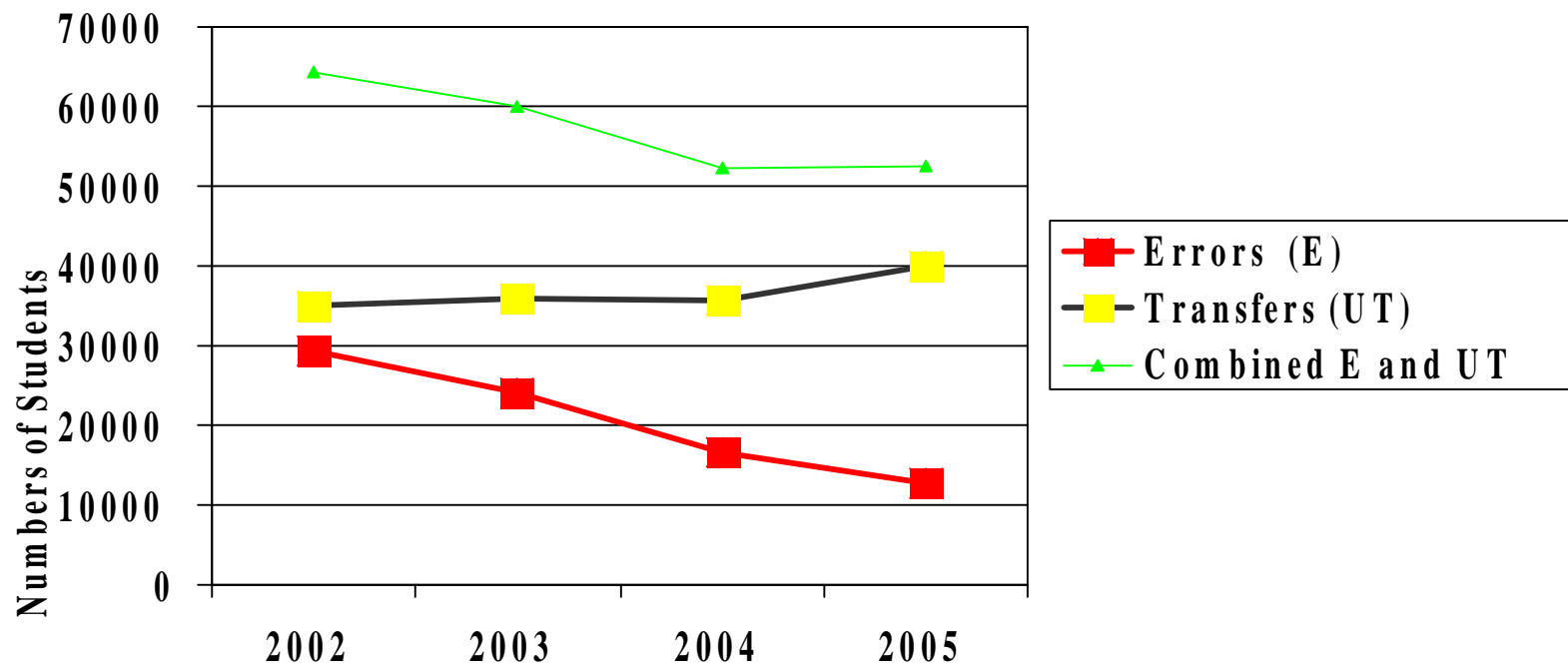
Numbers of Students Removed From Cohort Based on Intent to Transfer Out of State



# Data Errors and Unverified Transfers Over Time

DL1

As Errors Fell - Unverified Transfers Rose



Slide 31

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DL1

Sources Table 8 of Secondary School Completion and Dropouts 2004-05 page 19 Table 8  
Data errors combine Student Identification Errors and Underreported Students. Unduplicated and racially disaggregated counts that were provided by TEA in response to a FOIA request matched the data provided in the aggregate tables in the 2004-2005 report.

Dan Losen, 9/27/2006

# Draft Federal Regulations Issued in 2008

- Call for longitudinal data, but provide no resources.
- Address some of the data collection and reporting issues.
- Introduce problematic “cohort reassignment.”
- Call for disaggregated reporting and accountability.
- Lack specific AYP goals.
- Leave unresolved systemic NCLB accountability issues that complicate the use of graduation rates.

# Graduation Rate Reporting and Accountability Recommendations

- Require and fund individual student tracking systems and the training and maintenance that will be needed.
- Ensure reporting is accurate and transparent.
- More resources to ensure that struggling students can meet high academic standards *and* earn a diploma.
- Employ dropout interventions sooner (respond to early warning signs).
- Create a more balanced and reasonable system of reporting and accountability, not primarily driven by test scores.