

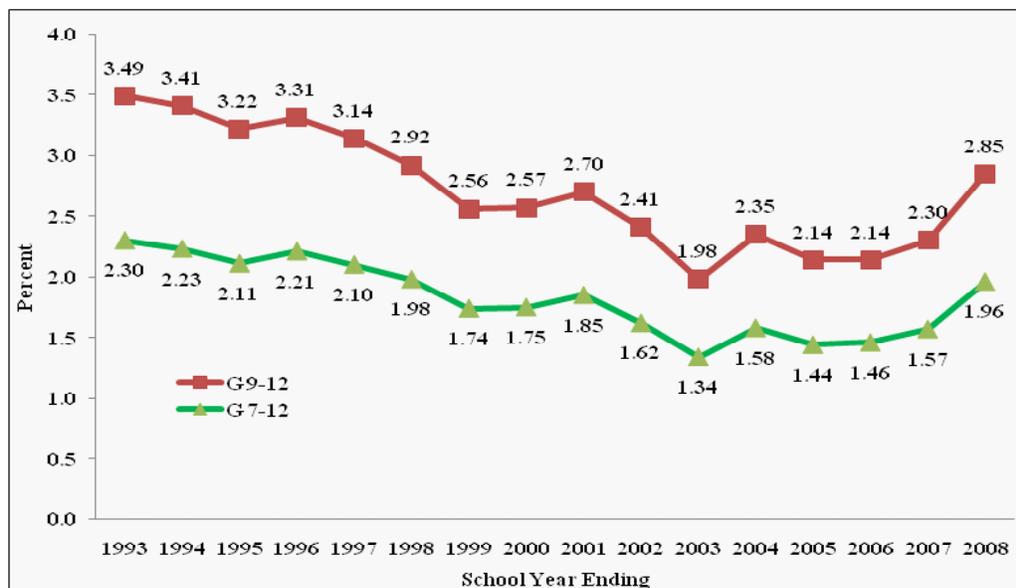
CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTRICTS WITH NO DROPOUTS

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Iowa is one of the five states in the Nation that has a low dropout rate. Iowa's dropout rates have been less than 2 percent for grades 7-12 and less than 3 percent for grades 9-12 (see Figure 1) since 1998. However, each year the total number of dropouts was over four thousand from grades 7 through 12 in Iowa. The current study seeks answers for the following questions: Are students more likely to drop out from some schools than others? Is a zero dropout rate possible for a school district? Are same dropout rates for students in different demographic groups? The main focus of this paper is the characteristics of the districts with no dropouts. Iowa data support two facts: 1) a zero dropout rate is possible and, 2) Iowa has 20 to 30 percent of the districts with a zero dropout rate in each of the last eight years.

State Trend—In the last 16 years, the lowest dropout rates for grades 7-12 and grades 9-12 are in 2003. The Iowa Department of Education (IDE) followed the federal guidelines of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to report the students who left high school to earn a General Educational Development (GED) or adult education diploma as dropouts. This is one of the main reasons for the dropout rate increase for 2004. In 2008, an extra effort was made by the IDE to follow-up the missing students between data collections (for example, to follow-up the schools with missing students from fall to spring and from grades 9 to 10). This is likely one of the main reasons for the 2008 dropout rate increases.

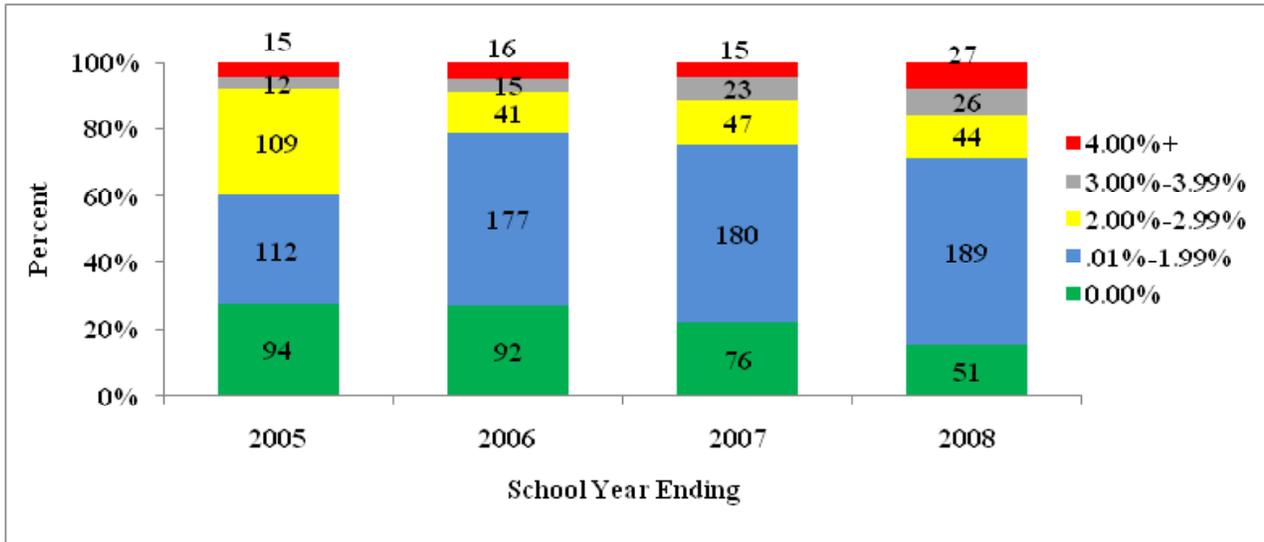
Figure 1—Dropout Rates



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) and Project EASIER Dropout files.

High School Dropout Rate Distribution—In the last four years shown (Figure 2), the best dropout rate distribution was in 2006, 21 percent of the districts had a dropout rate of 2 percent or more, and 27 percent of the districts had zero dropouts. In 2005, more than 27 percent of the Iowa districts had no high school dropout, at the same time about 40 percent of the districts had dropout rates of 2 percent or more. The 2008 distribution is better than the one in 2005 and worse than the one in 2006. Over 71 percent of the districts had high school dropout rates less than 2 percent, 15.1 percent of the districts had no dropouts, and about 29 percent of the districts had a dropout rate of 2 percent or more in 2008.

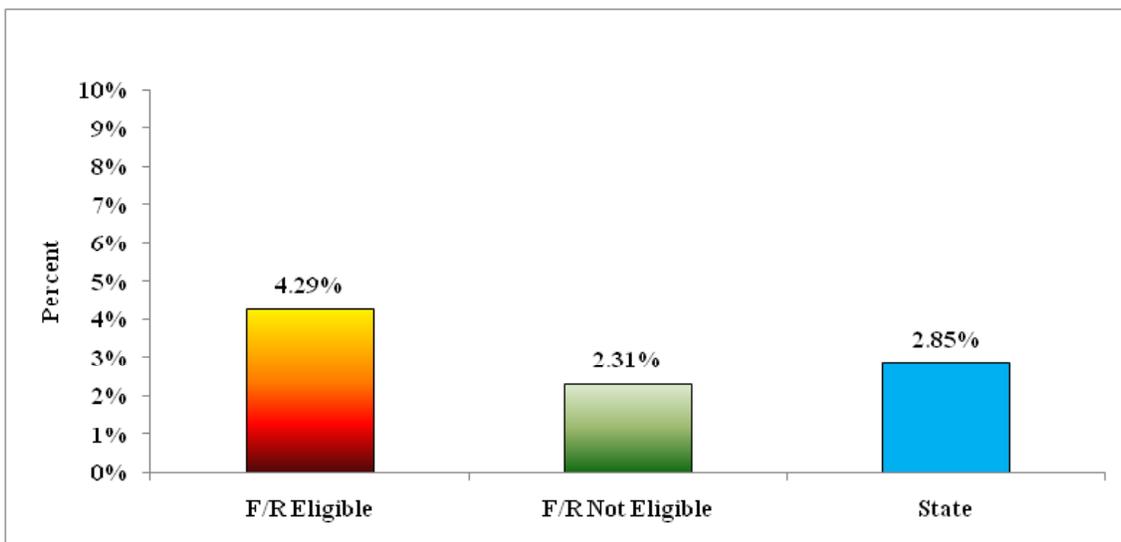
Figure 2—District Dropout Rates (Grades 9-12)



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) and Project EASIER Dropout files.

Challenges—Challenge 1: There are higher dropout rates for the students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (F/R Eligible) than the students who are not eligible (F/R Not Eligible, See Figure 3).

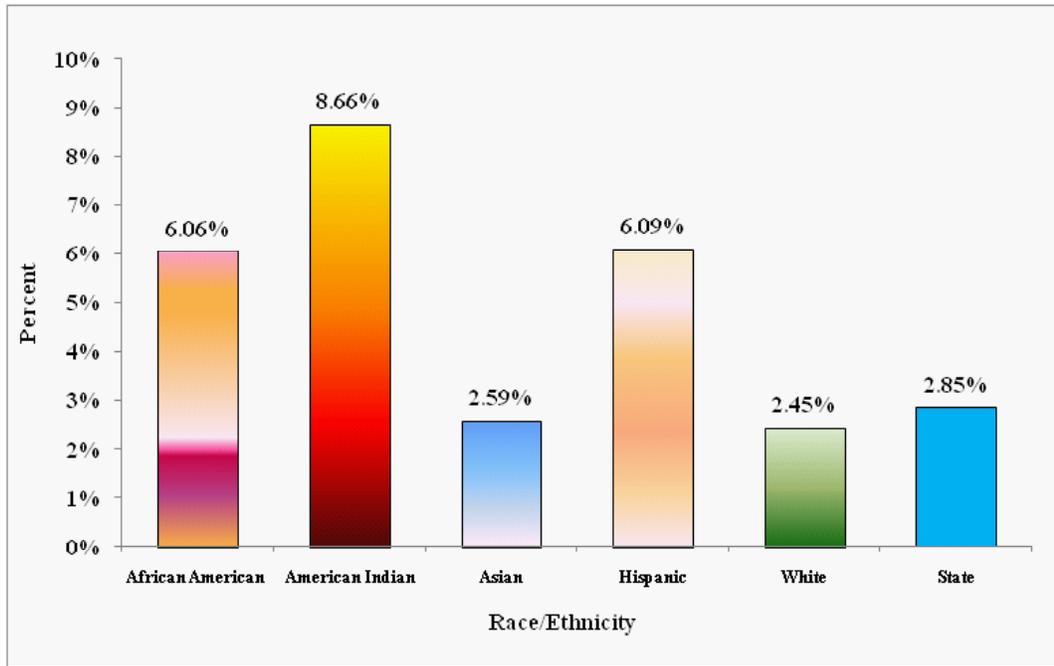
Figure 3—Dropout Rates by Free/Reduced Price Lunch 2007-2008



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) and Project EASIER Dropout files.

Challenge 2: There are higher dropout rates for some minority students such as African American, Hispanic and American Indian than White and Asian students (Figure 4).

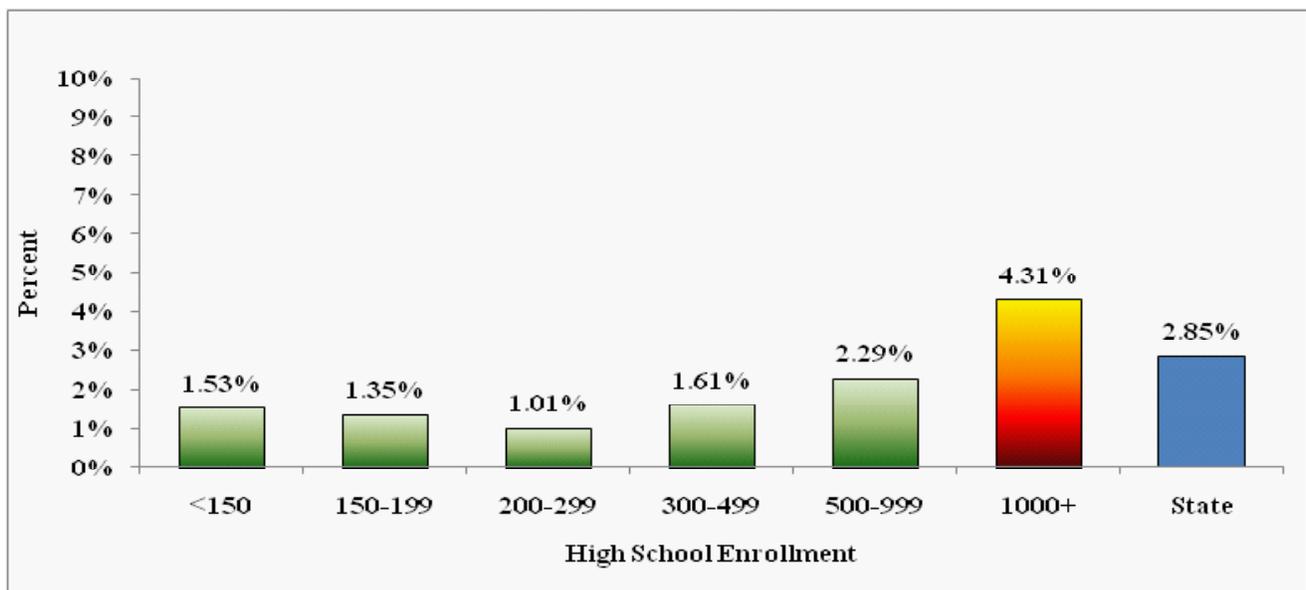
Figure 4—Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity 2007-2008



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) and Project EASIER Dropout files.

Challenge 3: There are higher dropout rates for the districts with a high school enrollment 1,000 or more than the districts with less than 1,000 high school students (Figure 5).

Figure 5—Dropout Rates by High School Enrollment 2007-2008



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) and Project EASIER Dropout files.

The characteristics of the districts with no dropouts and zero dropout rate vs. the characteristics of the districts with high dropout rates.

Table 1—District Characteristics - 2008 Data

- A1. Number of districts with 3+ percent of dropouts all four school years: 10 districts, high school (HS) enrollments at district level were 1,000+ for nine districts and 300+ for one district.
- A2. Number of districts with zero dropouts all four school years: 12 districts, district high school enrollment <300
- B1. Number of districts with 3+ percent of dropouts at least once in the last four school years: 81
- B2. Number of districts with zero dropouts at least once in the last four school years: 166 districts.

District Category		Average Percent White	Average Percent F/R	Average Percent ELL	Average High Sch. Enrollment	Minimum Enrollment	Maximum Enrollment
All Districts (367)*		94.20%	25.14%	2.86%	462	29	9,198
A1.	All 4 Years High Dropout Rate Districts (10)	73.30	41.81	5.78	2,577	307	9,198
A2.	All 4 Years Zero Dropouts Districts (12)	97.48	26.31	0.87	148	33	286
B1.	At Least 1 Year High Dropout Rate Districts (81)	79.72	36.44	3.99	851	29	9,198
B2.	At Least 1 Year Zero Dropouts (166)	96.21	21.77	0.51	213	29	1,679

Source: Iowa Department of Education, Project EASIER files.

Note: *The Number of districts in 2005 was 367.

Table 1 presents characteristic comparisons between districts with no dropouts and the districts with high dropout rates. Comparison A, the 10 districts with 3 percent or more high school dropouts in each of the four years compared to the 12 districts that had zero dropouts from 2005 to 2008. The former 10 districts are very large and have fewer White students and more English language learners (ELL). More students in these 10 districts are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The later 12 districts are small and have more White students. In these districts, fewer students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The study goes further, Comparison B, the 81 districts that had 3 percent or more dropout rates at least one year from 2005 to 2008 compare to the 166 districts that had zero dropouts at least one of the four years between 2005 and 2008. The Comparison B results are very similar as the ones from Comparison A.

Reasons to drop out of school—

Many surveys show that the top four reasons of students to drop out of school are:

- classes were not interesting, were not motivated to work hard;
- missed too many days to catch up;
- poorly prepared by their earlier schooling; and
- left to get a job, to take care of someone.

Based on the top four reasons associated with dropping out, the author of this study has interviewed ten Iowa school teachers, principals, consultants, counselors and superintendents. Here are the things they do to keep their students in school.

Effective strategies/right things to do for dropout prevention—

To build and develop:

- success center - help is available from teachers, counselors and principals;
- safe learning environments (warm environments);
- relationships and personal recognition (photos and certificates), family engagement (letters to home);
- alternative schooling;
- individualized instruction (Individual Education Plan);
- school-community collaboration (high school - middle school collaboration); and
- make career and technology education (CTE) available for students.