Excerpt from: 2008 Proceedings of the Graduate! Greater Louisville High School Dropout Solutions Summit

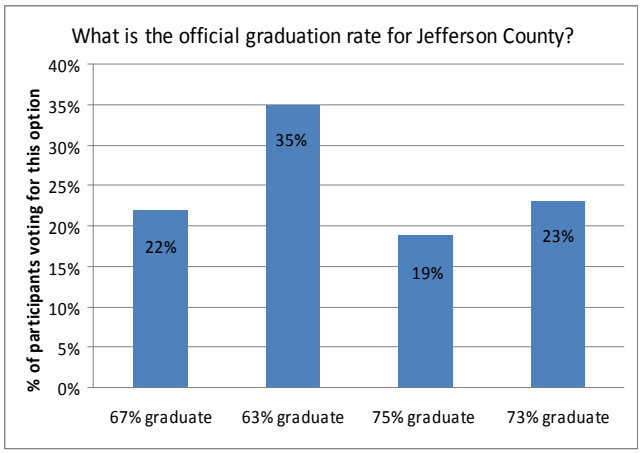
The local data

For Louisville, as for most other communities, "getting a handle" on the data around dropout rates, high school completion rates, and determining who is most likely to drop out of school is challenging. Prior to the summit, a committee spent months reviewing available data. For them, particularly telling was data from an in-depth study of dropouts where JCPS "looked back" at 1,755 students who dropped out during the 2006-07 school year. JCPS researchers examined the school careers (in elementary, middle and high school) of these students, comparing them with youngsters who had not dropout out. They looked into number of student absences, how they performed academically, how often they moved between schools, and how often they had been suspended.

This 2006-07 data became the base of the local data presentation portion of the summit, and for large charts that were posted in the breakout rooms. Dr. Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), was chosen to present local data during the summit. KYA is the non-profit organization that gathers data for the Casey Foundation publication *Kids Count*.

Perception versus reality. Rather than present charts and graphs to demonstrate the local scope of the dropout issue, in an effort to make the presentation interactive, the summit planners used a "press voting system" owned by the school system. Dr. Brooks asked participants to select the "right" answer to questions posted on a large screen. Summit participants used handheld voting devices to select the correct answer to multiple choice questions. The handheld vote was tallied and shown on the screen – then the correct answer was revealed. Press voting proved to be an intriguing way to present the data. Most of the people in the room – largely human service, education and public policy professionals – were surprised to see that they often did not know the correct answers to the data questions. *If their perceptions were in error, they thought, what about the general public?*

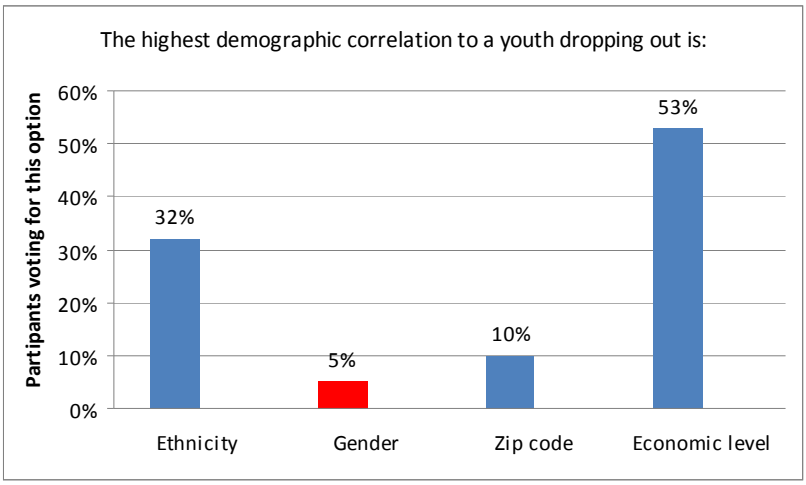
Number of dropouts. Dr. Brooks began his presentation by telling participants that on average about 1,800 students drop out of JCPS each year – and that data compiled by JCPS regarding dropouts during the 2006-07 school year largely mirror the national picture. During that year, 1,755 Jefferson County Public Schools students in grades 9-12 dropped out – roughly 50 every week of the school year.



Graduation rates. *Participants were asked to select the official 4-year graduation rate for Jefferson County.* When asked this question, participants' answers ranged across the board. Dr. Brooks explained that the answer depended on which group

measured the rate and how the rate was calculated. For instance, in 2004 the National Center for Education Statistics figured the rate at 67 percent, the Education Research Center at 63 percent, the Kentucky Department of Education at 75 percent, and the US Department of Education at 73 percent. In this sense, no one answer was correct. His "takeaway" for the group mirrored Mayor Abramson statement in the opening session: whether it is 67 percent (one in three is too many) or 75 percent, the highest graduate rate calculated, ***one in four is too many!***

Demographic correlates. *Dr. Brooks asked Summit participants to choose "the highest demographic correlate to a youth dropping out." The possible answers were: ethnicity, gender, zip code, and economic level.* Again, though most (53 percent) chose "economic level," gender most closely correlated with dropping out.



Gender. *Participants also were asked to select the demographic that most correlated with a youth dropping out – and all but 5 percent chose the wrong answer. A*mong dropouts in 2006-07 – the year of the JCPS in-depth study, boys significantly outnumbered girls.

Comparison of students who dropped out in 2006-07 school year to JCPS District average

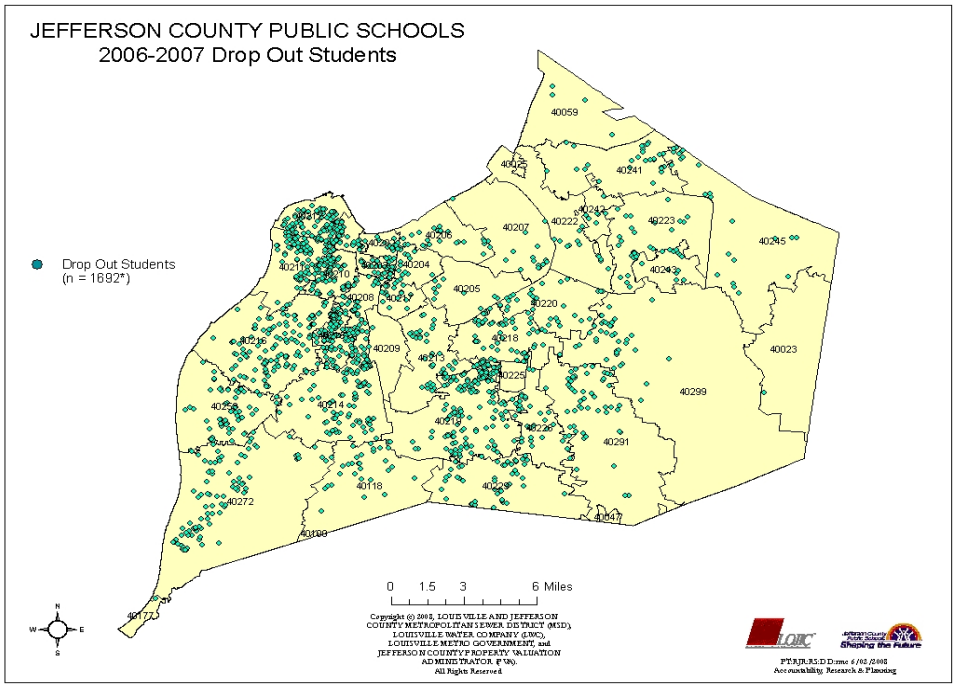
		Dropouts	District
Ethnicity	African American	38.50%	35.10%
	White	53.40%	58.20%
	Hispanic	4.80%	3.10%
	Other	3.30%	3.10%
Gender	Male	59.80%	50.50%
	Female	40.20%	49.50%

While whites outnumbered blacks in absolute terms, the drop-out rate is disproportionately highest among African-American and Hispanic males. Over-aged males and those lacking the credits to graduate are more likely to drop out than those students at age-appropriate grade levels of either gender.

Ethnicity. In addition to a disproportional number of males versus females dropping out, the data from the 2006-07 study also looked at ethnicity. Indeed, a greater percentage

of non-white students dropped out than the general JCPS population of students. The chart at the right gives a break-down of students who dropped out in 2006-7 by ethnicity and gender, and compares dropout rates to the JCPS district as a whole.

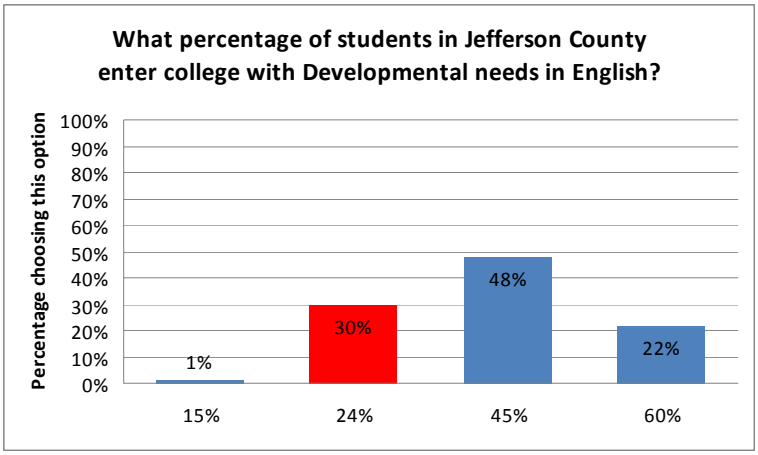
Zip code.
As the adjacent map shows, no zip code area is immune, but in Louisville, as nationally, the problem is concentrated in economically distressed urban neighborhoods in the western portions of the community.



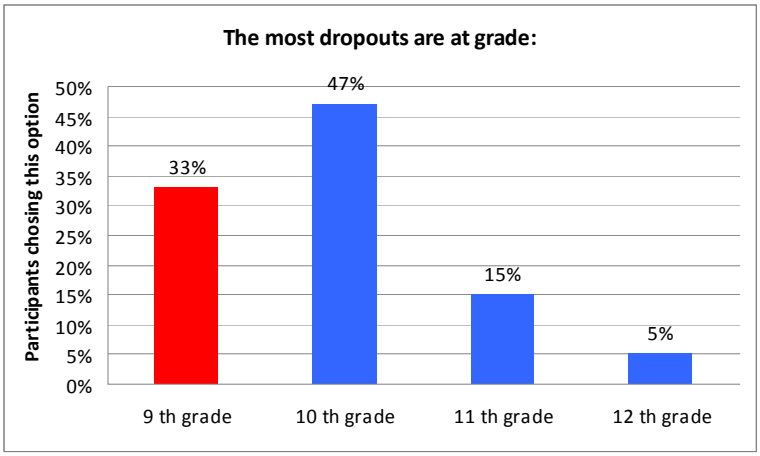
Socioeconomic status. In the 2006-7 study group, those students qualifying for free or reduced lunches account for 55.4 percent of all high school dropouts. Those who are receiving or have received ECE services sometime in their schooling account for 23.8 percent of all high school dropouts and LEP qualified students account for 6.5 percent of high school dropouts. More dropouts take place from January to May, 54.1 percent, than from August to December, 45.9 percent.

Academic performance. Low income levels correlate with higher dropout rates, but academic performance is also important. Examining student achievement among the 2006-07 study group on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) in reading shows that those scoring at the lowest level, novice, account for 25.3 percent of dropouts. Those scoring apprentice account for 41.5 percent of the dropouts, while those scoring proficient/distinguished account for a combined total of 14 percent. Those receiving "no score" for submitting incomplete tests or not having taken the test at all account for 19.2 percent of all high school dropouts. Thus some students who have average or even high achievement need personalized approaches. Others who do not fare as well need academic help to build self esteem and confidence.

College ready. Another measure of academic performance is the number of students entering college in need of remediation in core subject matter. *The summit participants were asked to choose the percentage of students who enter college (Jefferson Community and Technical College) with developmental needs in English.* While most participants (48 percent) chose 45 percent of students needing remediation in English, the correct answer was <u>24 percent needing remedial help</u>.



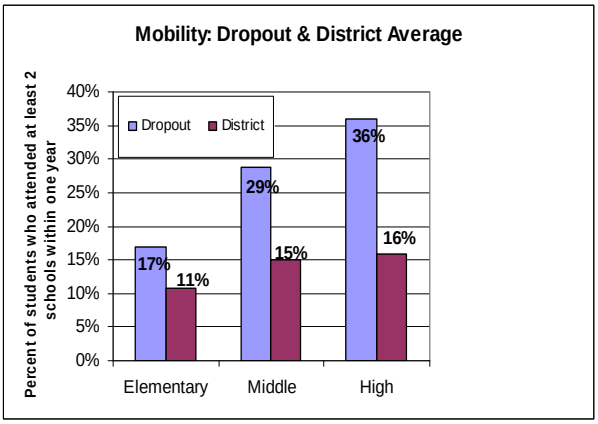
Grade level. *When asked at which grade most dropouts occurred, most participants selected the incorrect answer.* Regardless of their grade, students ages 15, 16, and 17 account for the greatest number of dropouts. <u>In grade nine, these ages account for 91.3 percent of all dropouts</u>.

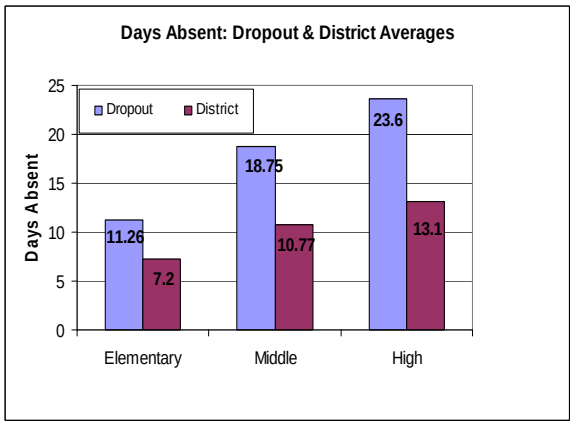


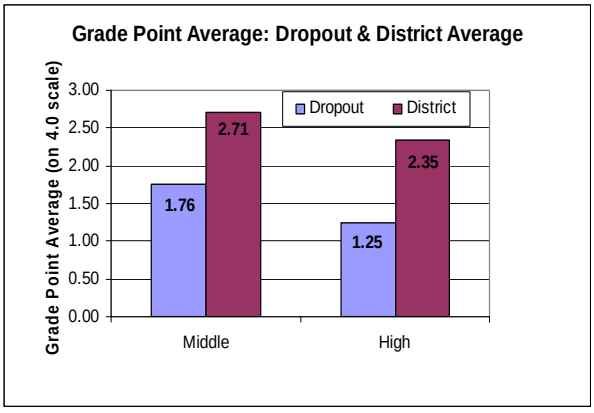
Over age/under credit. As confirmed in the 2006-07 study, students who were "over age" for their grade are in greater danger of dropping out. (We often call these students "over-age/under-credit".) An examination of the data should begin by looking first to the ninth grade, where the grade where most dropouts occur nationally. A third (33 percent) of ninth grade dropouts in the 2006-07 study were 15-year-olds, while 38.5 percent were 16-year-olds, 19.8 percent were 17-year-olds and 3.2 percent were 18-year-olds. In accordance with Kentucky State Law, a student who has reached his or her sixteenth birthday may legally drop out of school. Over-age ninth graders – ages 16 and 17 – have been retained at least one, if not two, years. The likelihood of a 17-year-old ninth grader progressing to graduation is small without intense supports such as credit recovery programs and personal mentoring. Even with those supports the student faces immense personal and social challenges in his or her attempt to complete high school.

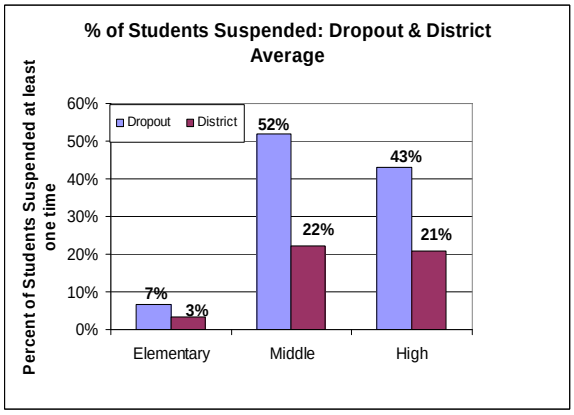
School structure. – In the 2006-07 study group, 86.1 percent of JCPS students were enrolled in "regular" schools and 13.9 percent in "alternative" schools. Relative to their proportion those attending alternative schools were more likely to drop out. When examining the school structure as related to high school dropouts, those enrolled in regular school settings account for 54.3 percent of the total, while those enrolled in state agency placements or in alternative school placements, whether for behavior and/or adjudication, account for 45.7 percent of all high school dropouts. Clearly, students drop out from all types of schools. About half drop out from "regular" schools and the rest – disproportionately to enrollment – drop out from "alternative" schools.

Risk factors. Again, in the in-depth study of dropouts from the 2006-07 school year, where JCPS "looked back" at 1,755 students' school careers, JCPS researchers examined a number of variables among these students in elementary, middle and high school and compared them with district averages for youngsters who had not dropout out. As a group, the dropouts of 2006-7 were more likely to have had excessive absences, fallen behind academically, been retained or suspended, and moved between schools. These patterns became apparent as early as elementary school, suggesting a role for early intervention.









Student typology. It is important to note, that while dropouts overall share some of the same risk factors, different types of students need differing approaches. Adapting methodology from an article by M. Janosz, "Predicting different type of school dropouts: A typological approach with longitudinal samples" published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1992), JCPS researchers looked closely at the 1755 students who dropped out in the school year 2006-07. The table below shows how those student dropouts fell into the typology categories described in the article.

Typology of students who dropped out of JCPS in 2006-07 (N = 1755)

Type		N	%
Quiet	▪ No evidence of school misbehavior ▪ Good attendance ▪ Average achievement	37	2.1%
Disengaged/ Absent	▪ Average-low level of misbehavior ▪ Low attendance ▪ Average-good achievement	147	8.4%
Low Achiever	▪ Low-average level of misbehavior ▪ Average attendance ▪ Low achievement	350	19.9%
Maladjusted	▪ High level of misbehavior ▪ Low attendance ▪ Low achievement	365	20.8%
Disengaged/ Absent	▪ Average-high level of misbehavior ▪ Average attendance ▪ Low-average achievement	445	25.4%

Note: Misbehavior measured by out of school suspensions*; Attendance* measured by days absent; *Achievement* measured by GPA.

JCPS also looked at the gender and ethnicity of this group of dropouts from 2006-07. The table at the right shows that white females who are slotted as "Quiet" or "Disengaged/Absent" are most likely to dropout, while white males who are "Low Achievers" and minority males who are "Maladjusted" or "Disengaged/Absent" are most likely dropouts.

Type/Gender/Ethnicity of 1755 JCPS student dropouts in 2006-07

Type by Ethnicity	White		Minority		%
Type	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	
Quiet	10.8	**40.5**	24.4	24.3	100%
Disengaged/Absent	26.5	**44.8**	10.8	17.6	100%
Low Achiever	**30.5**	24.8	24.3	20.3	100%
Maladjusted	29.4	11.7	**43.6**	15.6	100%
Disengaged/Absent	31.0	15.1	**35.0**	18.8	100%

Note: 12.5% missing; 10.9% does not fit into typology