

Student Absenteeism

Headline

In 2005, Asian/Pacific Islander students in grades four and eight were the least likely to have missed three or more days of school. American Indian students were most likely to have missed three or more days of school and Hispanic, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic white students fell in the middle. ([See Figure 1](#))

Importance

School attendance is a critical factor for school performance among youth. Studies show that higher attendance is related to higher achievement for students of all backgrounds.¹ Students who attend school regularly score higher on achievement tests than their peers who are frequently absent.²

Many factors can lead to student absenteeism. Family health or financial concerns, poor school climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems and differing community attitudes towards education are all conditions that can affect whether or not a child is attending school.³

Chronic truancy (regular unexcused absence), in particular, is a predictor of undesirable outcomes in adolescence, including academic failure, school drop out, substance abuse, and gang and criminal activity.^{4,5} In one study, truant eighth graders were four and a half times more likely to smoke marijuana than their peers.⁶ As adults, truant youth are more likely than those who regularly attend school to have poor physical health and mental health, lower lifetime earnings, greater reliance on welfare, children with behavioral problems, and a greater likelihood of being incarcerated.⁷

Most states have compulsory attendance laws,⁸ with truancy as a status offence (an act that is illegal due to the offender's age).⁹

Trends

From 1994 to 2005, there was no significant change in the percentage of fourth grade students who reported that they were absent from school for 3 or more days in the last month (from 18 percent in 1994 to 19 percent in 2005). However, among eighth grade students this percentage declined slightly from 22 percent in 1994 to 20 percent in 2005. ([See Table 1](#))

The percentage of eighth grade non-Hispanic black and Hispanic students who reported missing three or more days of school decreased significantly from 1994 to 2005 (from 27 percent in 1994 to 24 percent and 23 percent, respectively, in 2005). Attendance among fourth grade students in these groups remained stable from 1994 to 2005. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Race/ Ethnicity

In 2005, both fourth and eighth grade American Indian students were more likely than Hispanic, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic white students to have missed three or more days of school in the last month (25 percent versus 21, 21, and 18 percent, respectively in fourth grade and 29 percent versus 23, 24, and 19 percent, respectively, in eighth grade). In both grades, Asian/Pacific Islander students were the least likely to have missed three or more days in the past month (13 percent in fourth grade and 12 percent in eighth grade). Between American Indian and Asian/Pacific Islander students the attendance gap averaged 14.5 percentage points. ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Disability

Students classified as having a disability are more likely than students without a disability to have missed three or more school days within the past month. In 2005, 29 percent of eighth graders with a disability reported missing three or more school days within the past month, compared with 20 percent of students without a disability. ([See Figure 2](#))

Differences by Percentage of Students in School Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Students attending schools where more than 75 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch are more likely to report missing three or more days of school than students attending schools with a 10 percent or lower eligibility rate. In 2005, 25 percent of eighth graders and 22 percent of fourth graders at schools with greater than a 75 percent eligibility rate reported being absent from school for more than three days in the past month. In comparison, 17 percent of eighth grade students and 16 percent of fourth grade students reported missing three or more days in schools where 10 percent or fewer students were eligible. ([See Figure 3](#))

State and Local Estimates

NAEP Data Explorer. 1994-2005 Reading Assessments.
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/>

International Estimates

International estimates are available from the Trends in International Math and Science Study publication, *How Serious are School Attendance Problems? School Contexts for Learning and Instruction*:

http://timss.bc.edu/PDF/t03_download/T03_M_Chap8.pdf (See Exhibit 8.6)

National Goals

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law in January 2002, provides increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools as well as more flexibility for states

and local agencies in how they use federal education dollars. The Adequate Yearly Progress measures hold elementary and middle schools accountable for student attendance.

For more information visit: <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>

Definition

From 1994 to 2000, students responded to the question, “How many days of school did you miss last month?” After 2001, students responded to, “How many days were you absent from school in the last month?” Accommodations were not permitted in 1994.

Data Source

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. “Student Absenteeism.” *The Condition of Education 2006*. (24-2006). Table 24-2. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/table.asp?tableID=480>

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Assessments (NAEP), 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2005 Reading Assessments. Accessed through the NAEP data tool at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/>

Next Update

2007

¹ Epstein, J.L. and Sheldon, S.B. (2002). “Present and Accounted For: Improving Student Attendance through Family and Community Involvement.” *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95.

² Ibid.

³ Teasley, M.L. (2004). “Absenteeism and Truancy: Risk, Protection, and Best Practice Implications for School Social Workers.” *Children and Schools*, 26(2): 117-128.

⁴ McCluskey, C.P., Bynum, T.S., Patchin, J.W. (2004). “Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: An Assessment of an Early Truancy Initiative.” *Crime and Delinquency*, 50(2), 214-234.

⁵ Baker, M.L., Sigmon, J.N., and Nugent, M.E. (2001). “Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School.” *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. US Department of Justice. <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/188947.pdf>

⁶ Halfors, D., et. al., “Truancy, Grade Point Average, and Sexual Activity: A Meta-Analysis of Risk Indicators for Youth Substance Use.” *Journal of School Health*, Col. 72, No. 5, May, 2002, p. 205-211.

⁷ Baker, M.L., Sigmon, J.N., and Nugent, M.E. (2001). .

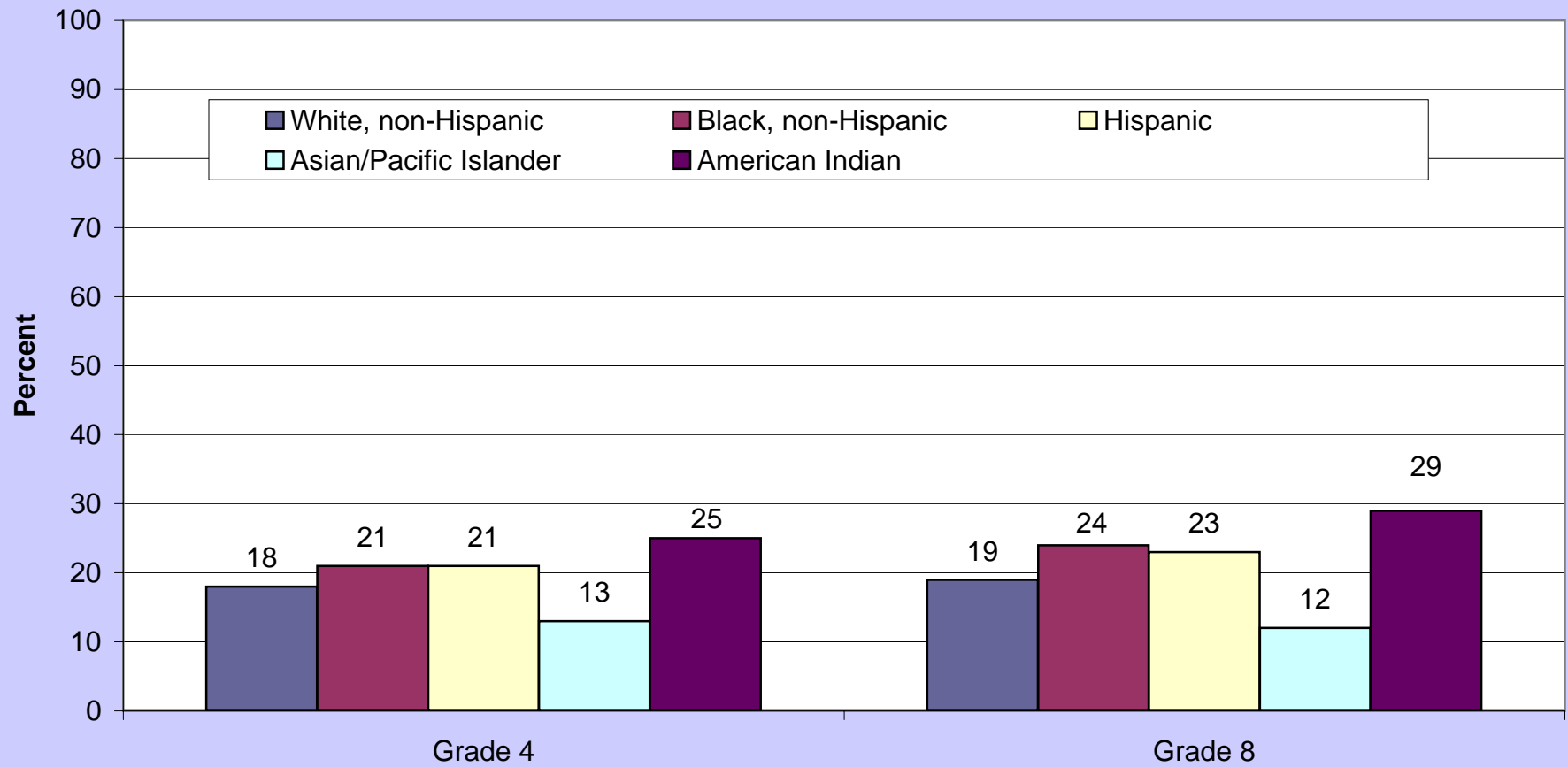
⁸ “Compulsory Attendance Laws by State.” National Center for School Engagement. Colorado Foundation for Family and Children.

<http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/15.pdf>

⁹ “Truancy Fact Sheet.” National Center for School Engagement. Colorado Foundation for Family and Children.

Figure 1

Percentage of Grade 4 and Grade 8 Students Who Reported Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month, By Race/Ethnicity¹, 2005



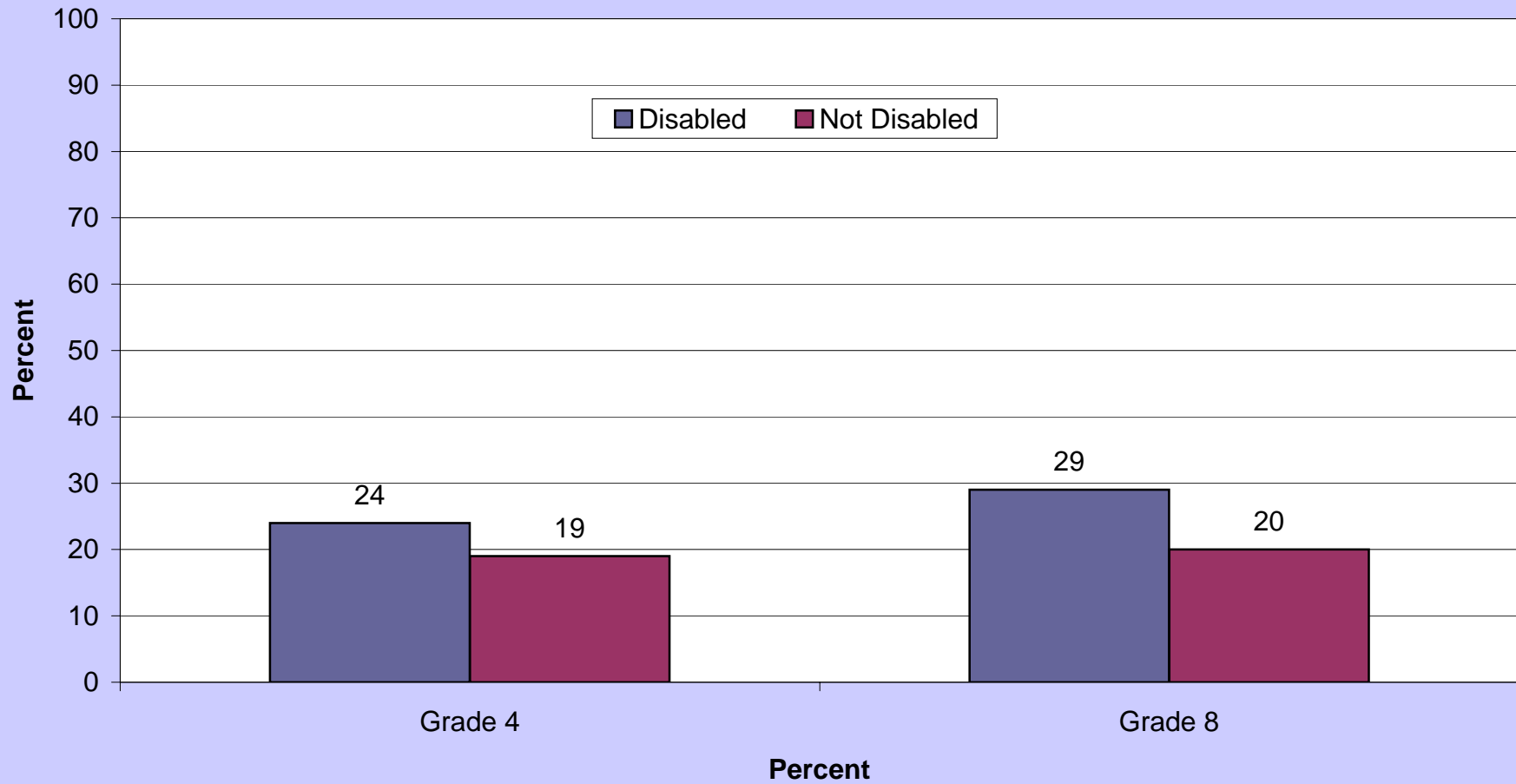
¹Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian, and American Indian includes Alaska Native.

SOURCE: Student Absenteeism. The Condition of Education 2006. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/2006/condition2/index.asp#4>



Figure 2

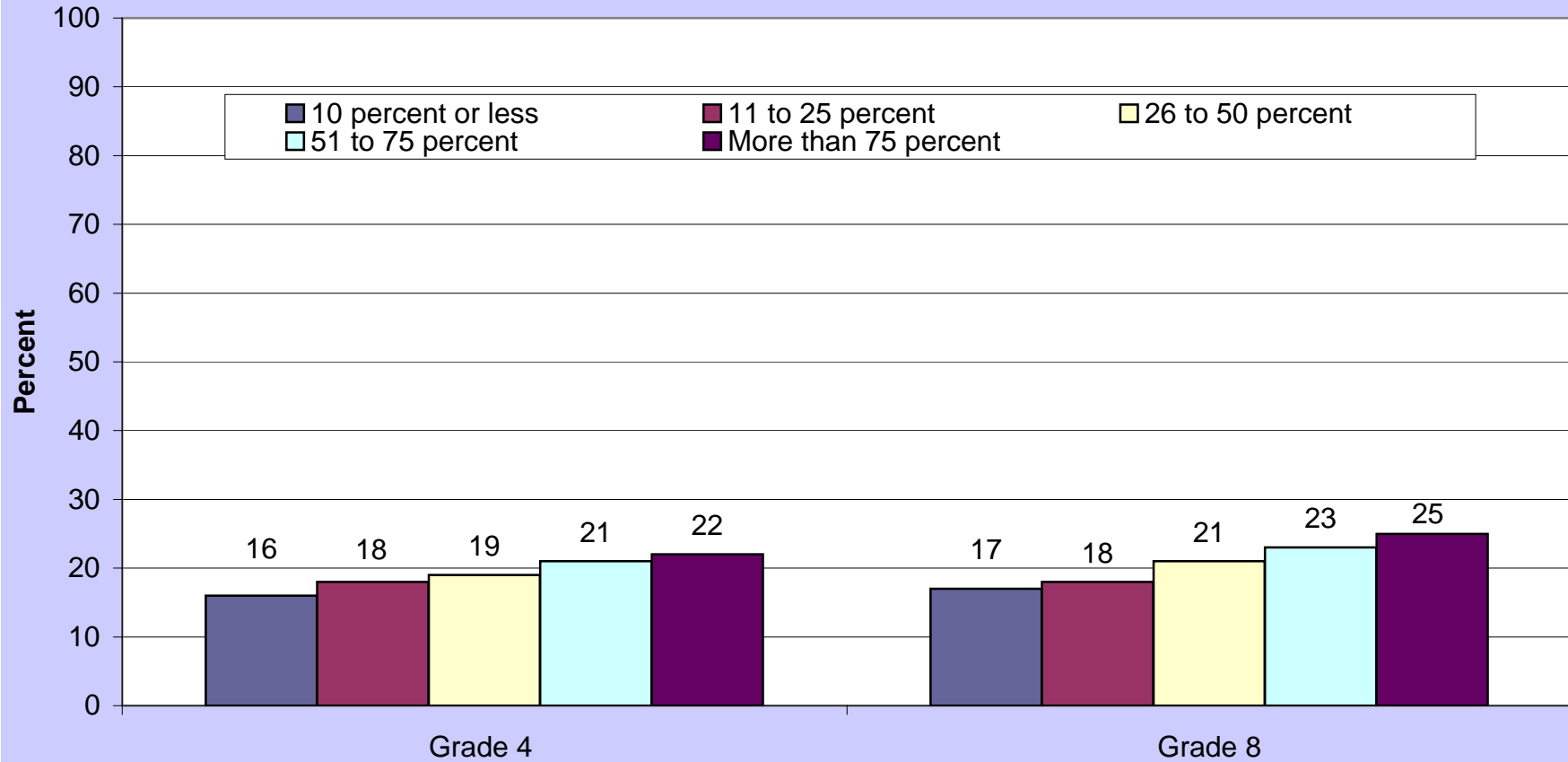
Percentage of Grade 4 and Grade 8 Students Who Report Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month, By Disability Status, 2005



SOURCE: Student Absenteeism. The Condition of Education 2006. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/indicator24.asp#info>

Figure 3

Percentage of Grade 4 and Grade 8 Students Who Reported Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month, By School-wide School Lunch Eligibility, 2005



SOURCE: Student Absenteeism. The Condition of Education 2006. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/indicator24.asp#info>



Table 1

Percentage of Students Who Reported Missing 3 or More Days of School in the Previous Month, 1994-2005

	Grade 4					Grade 8				
	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005	1994	1998	2002	2003	2005
Total	18	17	18	22	19	22	22	20	22	20
Sex										
Male	18	16	17	21	18	22	21	19	21	20
Female	18	18	18	22	20	22	22	20	22	21
Race/Ethnicity¹										
White, non-Hispanic	17	16	17	22	18	20	21	19	21	19
Black, non-Hispanic	21	18	20	24	21	27	22	22	24	24
Hispanic	23	20	19	22	21	27	24	22	23	23
Asian/Pacific Islander	12	—	13	13	13	21	15	12	11	12
American Indian	—	—	24	28	25	—	—	32	32	29
English Language Learner²										
Yes	—	23	20	20	21	—	26	23	23	23
No	—	17	18	22	19	—	22	20	22	20
Classified as having a disability										
Yes	—	26	23	27	24	—	31	28	30	29
No	—	16	17	21	19	—	21	19	21	20
Language other than English spoken in home										
Yes	19	18	19	22	20	24	22	21	22	21
No	18	16	17	22	18	21	22	19	21	20
Student Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch³										
Eligible	—	21	21	25	23	—	26	24	26	25
Not eligible	—	14	16	20	17	—	20	18	19	18
School Location										
Central City	20	17	18	22	20	24	22	21	23	22
Urban fringe/large town	17	16	17	20	18	21	21	20	20	20
Rural/Small Town	17	18	18	23	20	20	23	19	22	19
Percent of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunch										
10 or less	—	14	15	18	16	—	18	16	18	17
11 to 25	—	16	16	20	18	—	20	19	20	18
26-50	—	16	18	23	19	—	22	20	23	21
51-75	—	19	19	24	21	—	27	22	24	23
More than 75	—	19	21	23	22	—	25	25	26	25

—: Not available or reporting standards not met (too few cases).

¹Black includes African American, Hispanic includes Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian, and American Indian includes Alaska Native.

²In testing years previous to 2005, English language learners (ELL) were identified as limited English proficient (LEP).

³This information was not available for a small percentage of students (2 percent of the total population in 2005).

NOTE: From 1994 to 2000, students responded to the question "How many days of school did you miss last month?" After 2001, students were asked "How many days were you absent from school in the last month?" Accommodations were not permitted for the 1994 assessment, but they were permitted for all other assessment years reported here.

SOURCE: Student Absenteeism. *The Condition of Education 2006*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006/section3/indicator24.asp#info>

