

Wyoming Department of Education's

Policy Partner Forums

“Talk to Action!”

These forum notes represent the collective wisdom of many people from around the state who came together literally and figuratively to contribute to the development of strategies that will improve the retention and graduation of Wyoming's high school students.

The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) believes that public education, parents, students, and communities, working together, can meet the personal and social needs of youth and build the skills and competencies that will allow them to be successful in their lives. WDE is grateful to them for their intellectual contributions and their willingness to transcend professional boundaries to address our hopes for these students at a time when the challenges facing school districts and public education, and the choices confronting youth today, are becoming increasingly difficult.

This report simply reflects the highlights of the forum and outlines actions underway. For additional information please call Deborah Hinckley, (307) 777-7674.

Desired Result: High school students graduate prepared for success.

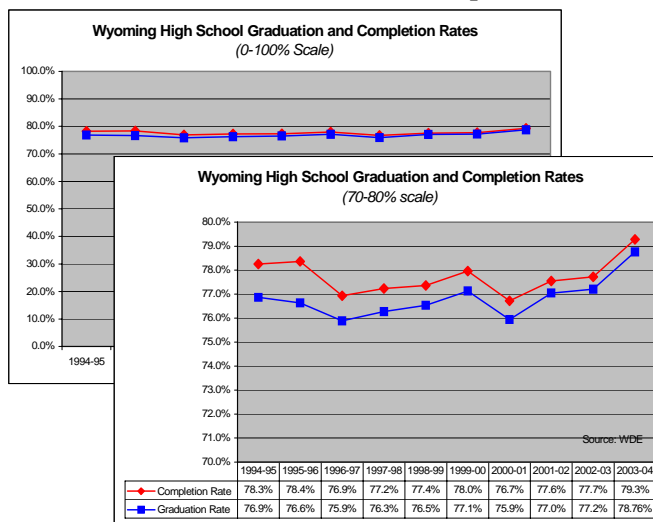
Importance/Significance:

- Eight of ten occupations listed in the 2000-2010 U. S. Department of Labor projections will require some form of postsecondary education, a trend that is expected to continue.
- In the year 2000, female and male college graduates earned 60 and 95 percent more, respectively, than those who had not gone beyond high school.
- High school dropouts earn 27-30% less, respectively, than their male and female counterparts who completed only high school or a GED.
- Economic benefits are not the only effects of high school success. The importance of developing human potential is intrinsic and fundamental to a prospering, stable society.
- Dollar for dollar, well-targeted strategies to graduate students reduce societal costs associated with corrections, welfare, health care, unemployment and other remedial costs.

How's Wyoming Doing?

The following proxy indicators say something of central importance about the result; communicate and address a range of audiences; and data are consistently available to measure trends.

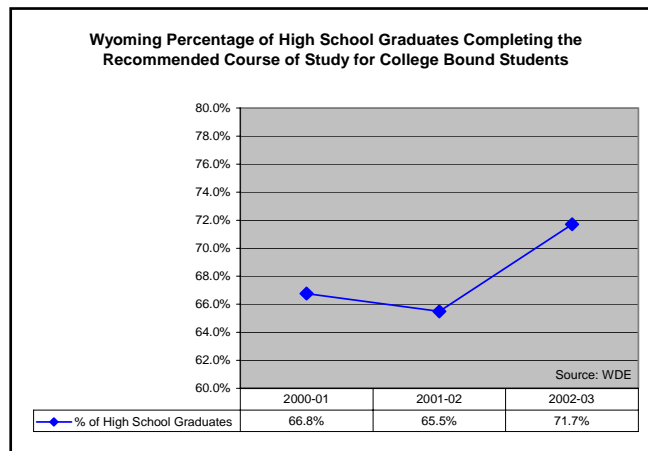
Graduation Rate and Completion Rate



Contributing factors include:

- Classroom climate
- Perceived relevance
- Perceived level of challenge
- Risk taking behaviors

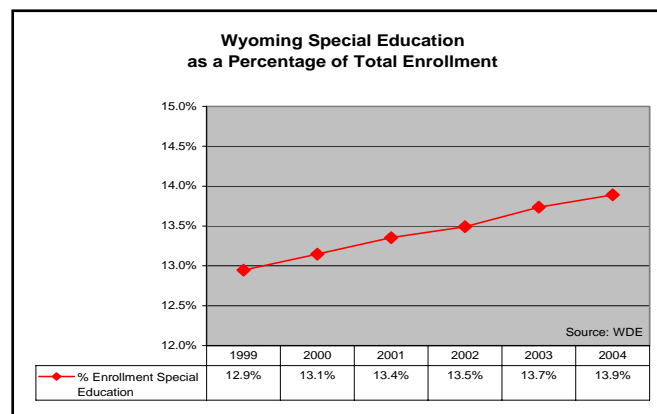
Percentage of High School Graduates Completing the Recommended Course of Study for College/Technical Bound Students



Contributing factors include:

- Level of counseling
- Societal models
- Economics of the state
- Perceived relevance

Wyoming Special Education as a Percentage of Total Enrollment

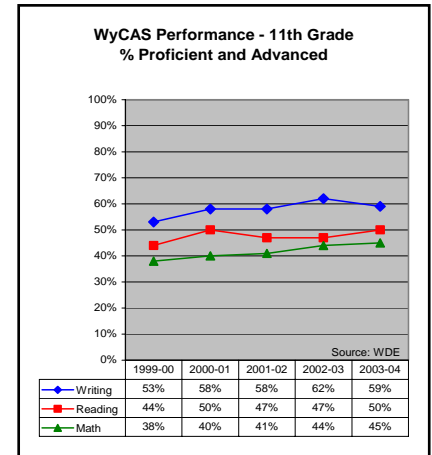
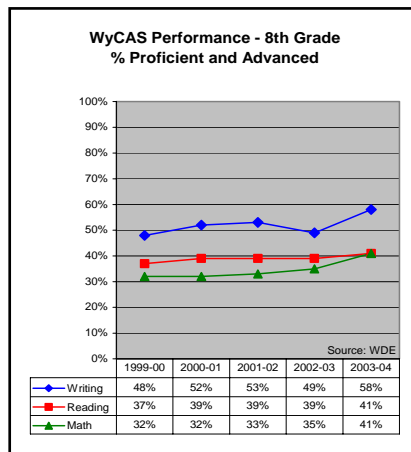
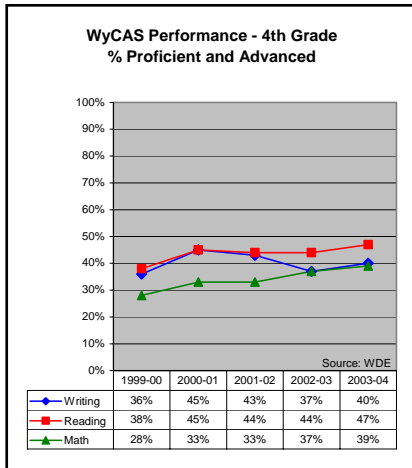


Contributing factors include:

- Children are entering later due to behavioral issues

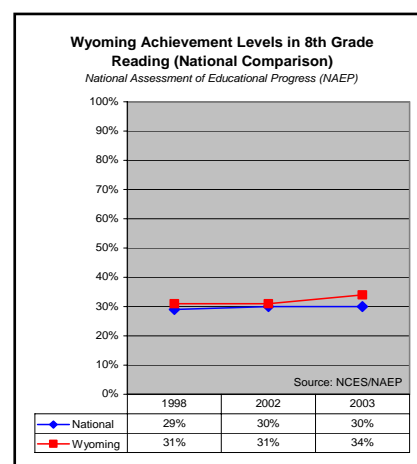
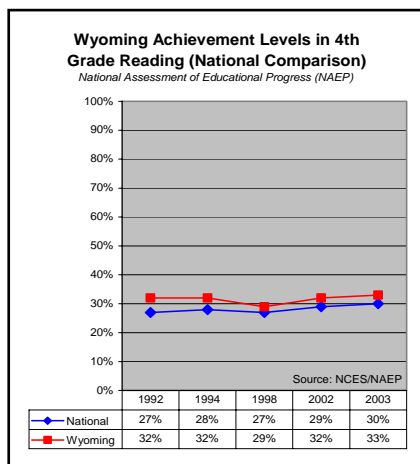
Year	Enrollment - All Students	Enrollment - Special Education	%Enrollment Special Education
1999	90,403	11,704	12.9%
2000	89,531	11,772	13.1%
2001	87,897	11,738	13.4%
2002	86,117	11,619	13.5%
2003	84,741	11,640	13.7%
2004	83,772	11,636	13.9%

WyCAS



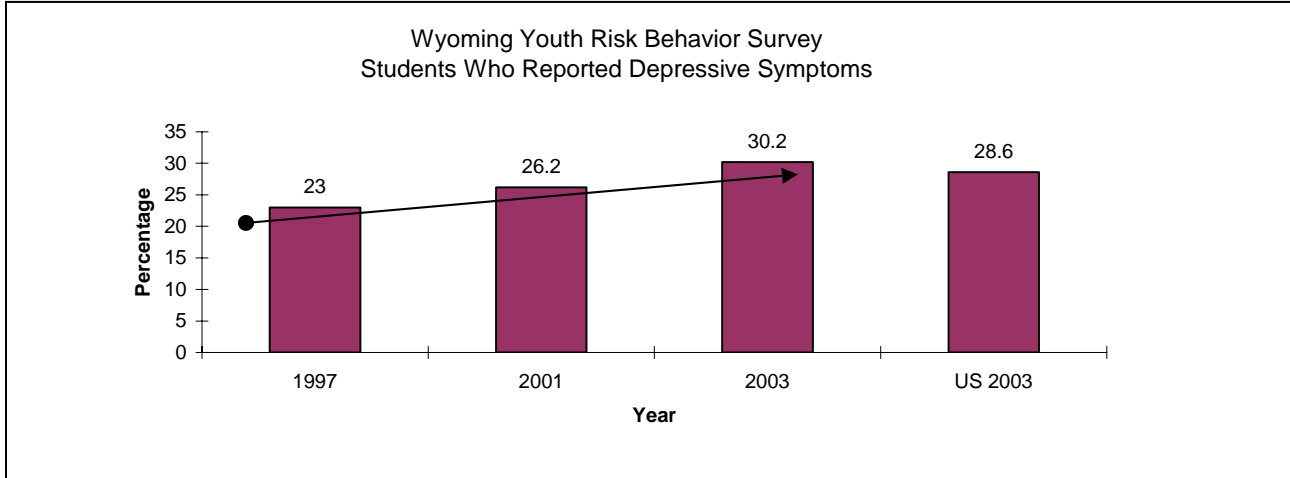
NAEP Assessment

- Our latest National Association of Educational Progress [NAEP] scores show Wyoming students are scoring above the national average in mathematics and reading
- Wyoming 8th grade readers were the only students nationally who had a significant gain in their average score from 2002-2003.



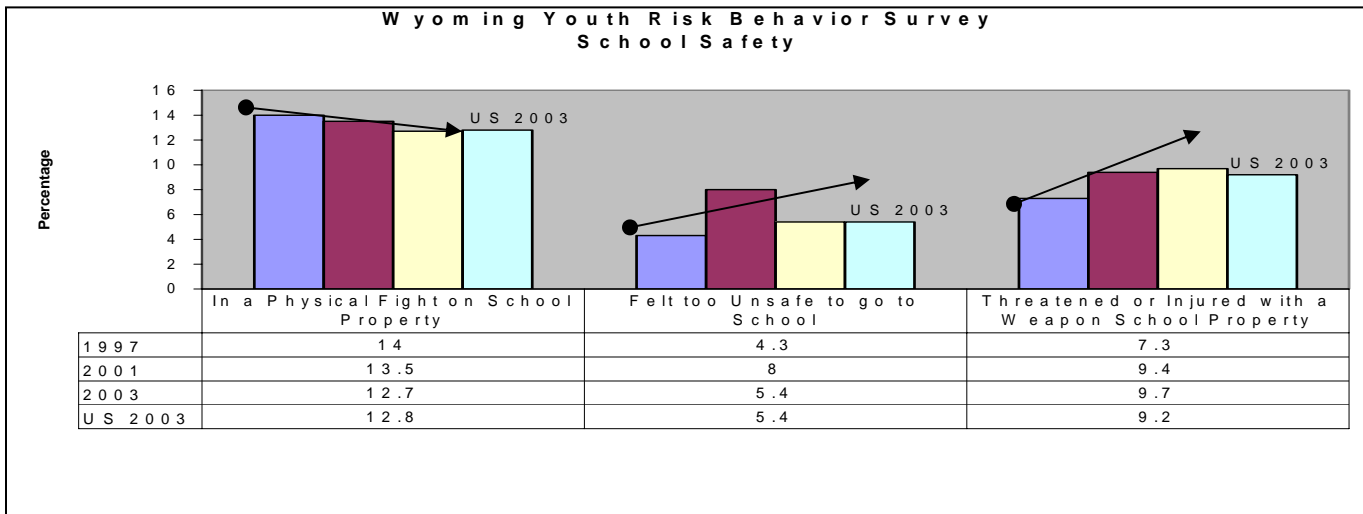
Although trends are improving, causes for these trends might include:

- Professional development
- Feedback to students and teachers
- Degrees of unmet social needs



Contributing factors include:

- Research has shown a strong connection between mental health, school failure, and school dropout.
- Approximately one-fourth of Wyoming high school students have seriously considered suicide. Currently, suicide is the number two cause of death for Wyoming youth, behind motor vehicle crashes. In the past 20 years, the suicide rate for 15-19 year olds has increased by 14 percent; and for persons 10-14 by 100 percent.



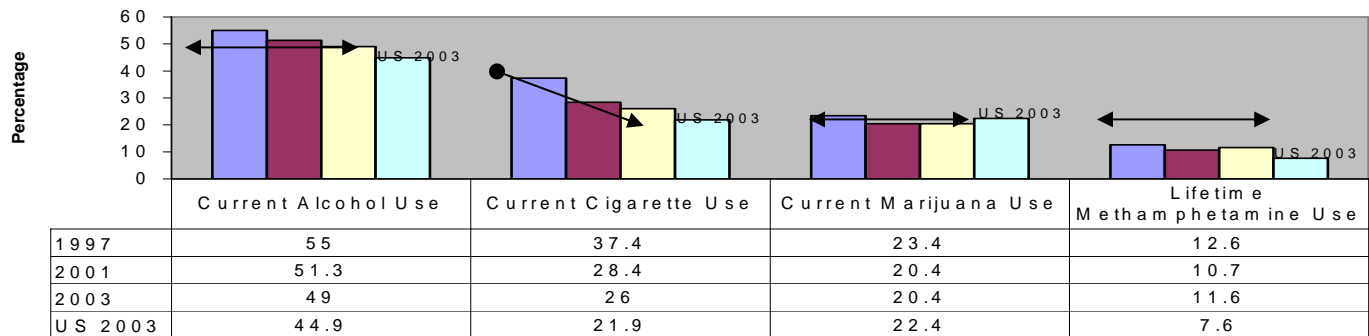
Contributing factors include:

Note: Wyoming youth are less likely to be murdered or experience serious victimization than their national counterparts. Nationally, the leading causes of death for adolescents were: (1) unintentional injury (primarily motor vehicle crashes), (2) homicide, and (3) suicide. In Wyoming, motor vehicle crashes account for 42 percent of childhood mortality (ages 5 to 24), followed by suicide at 22 percent. Only two percent of Wyoming children died as a result of homicide in 2002.

- Wyoming YRBS data also indicate that our youth have shown steady reductions in weapon carrying and physical fighting behaviors.

- Approximately ten percent of the surveyed students indicated that they had been threatened or injured with a weapon during the past 12 months. A slightly larger percentage had been in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months,.
- Even though data shows some cause for concern about the safety of children at school, it is important to note that our youth are much safer at school than away from school. The data show that the majority of violent acts committed against children take place off of school grounds. From July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000, only one percent of all youth homicides were school-associated, violent deaths. Students ages 12–18 were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime—including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault—when they were away from school than at school (see *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2003*, National Center for Education Statistics).

**Wyoming Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use**



Notes: According to the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results Wyoming High School Trend Analysis Report, use of alcohol and most illicit drugs has remained stable over time. There has been no statistically significant upward or downward trend in alcohol and drug use measures, with the following exceptions: there has been a positive downward trend in the percentage of high school students who report alcohol use before age 13, report having ever used inhalants, and report being offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property

Even though the YRBS data show no change in methamphetamine use among Wyoming high school students since 1999, other indicators give us reason for concern. The YRBS probably does not capture the true burden of methamphetamine use in Wyoming, as research has shown that this drug is usually a tertiary drug of abuse (that is, that people tend to try and/or abuse other drugs--most often tobacco and alcohol--before they try methamphetamine). The average age of first use for methamphetamine is 18 to 19 years old.

Contributing factors include:

- Education and prevention efforts show signs of working, and our greatest progress is in tobacco, where the most effort and funding have been expended. Almost all of the tobacco questions show a decrease in use since 1995, although over half of Wyoming high school students (56.1%) reported trying cigarettes in 2003.
- Culture of acceptance
- Our youth use many drugs at a higher percentage than their national counterparts. This includes higher rates of spit tobacco use, using any tobacco in the past 30 days, drinking alcohol before age 13, binge drinking, and methamphetamine use. This may be an indicator of Wyoming's cultural acceptance of substance use.

What did forum participants suggest be done to improve high school graduation rates?

Including no-cost and low-cost ideas

Targeted strategies suggested include:

<p><u>K – 12 School Climate and Risky Behaviors</u> - Reduce risk taking behaviors, intervene earlier and more meaningfully - Teachers and adults modeling positive behaviors</p> <p><u>Special Education</u> - Vision/implement continuum of Special Education Services - Implement for all students - Differing expectations - NCLB & IDEA <i>Culture (Low/No Cost):</i> - Parent and community involvement - Mentorship opportunities - Rewards and recognition (not college bound IS OK)</p> <p><u>College Prep</u> - More focused electives <i>Culture (Low/No Cost):</i> - Diploma is not enough prep for success at the next level - Mentors</p>	<p>- Instill the value of college early (Middle school) - Shared vision with community - Begin with the end in mind</p> <p><u>Gifted & Talented Program</u> - Block scheduling - Intern/business opportunities <i>Culture (No/Low Cost):</i> - Listen to students - Give students responsibilities</p> <p><u>Assessment</u> - Early and varied (multiple) assessments of needs and progress to milestones - Restructure proficiencies to mirror career goals - No penalty for early graduates - Timely feedback to students and teachers - Educate students (and parents) about the value of assessment - No high stakes single exams</p>	<p><u>Curriculum & Instruction</u> - Transcript endorsement - Teacher development, incentives and supports - Module – based education - Differentiated diplomas - Challenge curriculum - Concurrent enrollment - Various academic pathways - Life skills development (health, problem solving, money management) programs</p> <p><u>Alternative Programming</u> - Closed campuses - Flexible timetable (to graduation) - One and only one diploma - Strong substance abuse and mental health interventions <i>Culture (Low/No Cost):</i> - Build sense of purpose/self-esteem in students; reward and share successes - Greater flexibility in working with the community</p>
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How WDE is responding to participant suggestions:

Special Education

- Reauthorization of IDEA allows for more flexibility and funding for early intervention and prevention activities.
- In an effort to reach children before they can fail, Dr. Blankenship has a vision to develop a K-12 learning continuum that will focus research proven instruction, activities and diagnostics for all children K – 12
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) ensures high standards and expectations for all students including those with disabilities
- WDE will monitor all school districts to ensure that all students with disabilities have “transition plans” to help them prepare for and move into the world of work and independence as appropriate to each individual.

Gifted and Talented

- WDE is working on clarifying and standardizing the methods districts use as the criteria to define and identify gifted and talented students.
- WDE is researching federal funding possibilities for gifted education
- WDE is beginning to identify successful local, regional and national gifted and talented programs that are currently working for Wyoming’s students.
- Through the school finance recalibration process, WDE will explore ways to balance the per pupil costs for special needs populations which by definition may include gifted and talented children.
- WDE is researching the possibility of developing and funding regional gifted and talented programs such as summer programs, summer camps, enrichment programs, academic programs, and specialized schools.

School Climate and Risky Behaviors

- Based on the success of a small school district in McComb, MS, the Wyoming Departments of Education, Health and Family Services have collaborated to offer grants to six school districts as part of the Healthy Living, Healthy Learning Program, a modification of the Coordinated School Health model.

- These school districts are implementing programs, based on local need, that have been shown to improve both academic and health-related measures. Research has shown that school health programs can positively impact academic achievement:

- * Schools that incorporate breakfast programs in their food service see increases in academic test scores, daily attendance and class participation

- * Schools that offer physical education programs, even when time for physical education is taken from the academic day, see positive effects on academic achievement, including increased concentration, improved mathematics, reading and writing scores and reduced disruptive behaviors

- * School connectedness is consistently related to reductions in behaviors that jeopardize academic success such as alcohol use, drug use and delinquent behaviors.

Assessment

Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students (PAWS) allows focus on individual student growth and performance and district choice of testing format.