

Identifying Indicators of Risk/Success in Seattle Middle and High Schools

A Briefing for the Seattle City Council

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Focus of today's briefing:

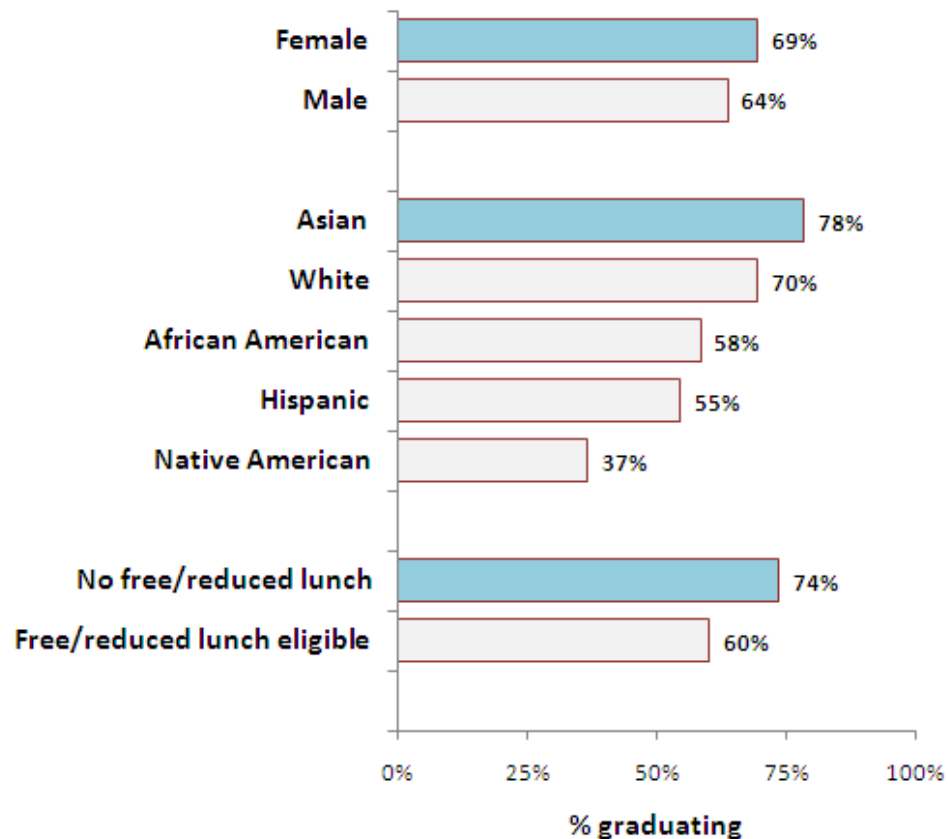
- Briefly describe research about graduation / dropout rates in Seattle Public Schools
- Show how different SPS graduation criteria might affect graduation rates (current vs. Core 24)
- Identify research-based indicators of middle and high school risk/success for graduation from high school in Seattle
- Illustrate ways in which research can (and already has) guided dropout intervention efforts in urban districts

Seattle Public School 2006 Cohort Study

- Study commissioned and paid for by the Levy Committee;
- Followed members of the Class of 2006 from 4th grade (or entry into district) to 2006 and beyond;
- Developed middle and high school early warning indicators that can be used to predict withdrawal from high school without a diploma;
- Identified critical times/events that signal imminent withdrawal from school, ('tipping points'); and
- Defined segments (subgroups) of the dropouts according to the nature and timing of indicators so that interventions can be tailored and targeted.

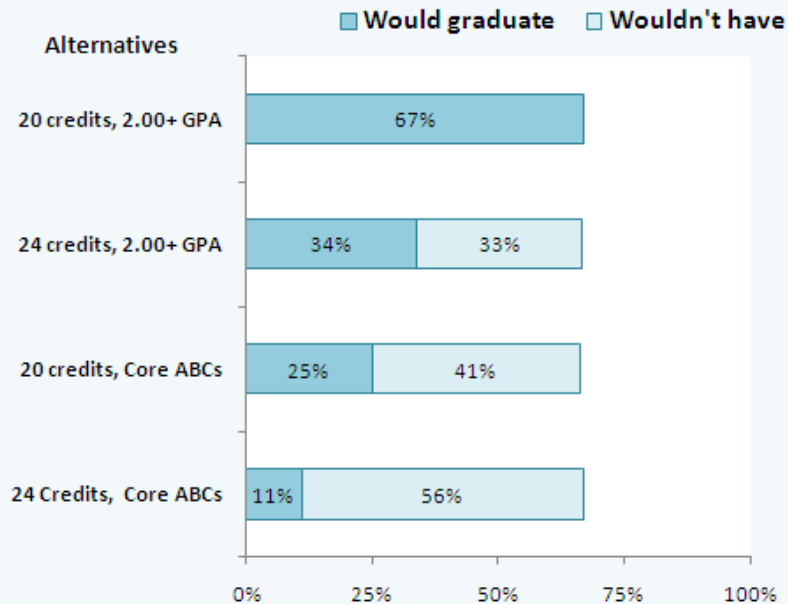
Bottom line: 67% of 2006 cohort graduated, but there are gaps by sex, race, income

Graduation rates: 2006 criteria



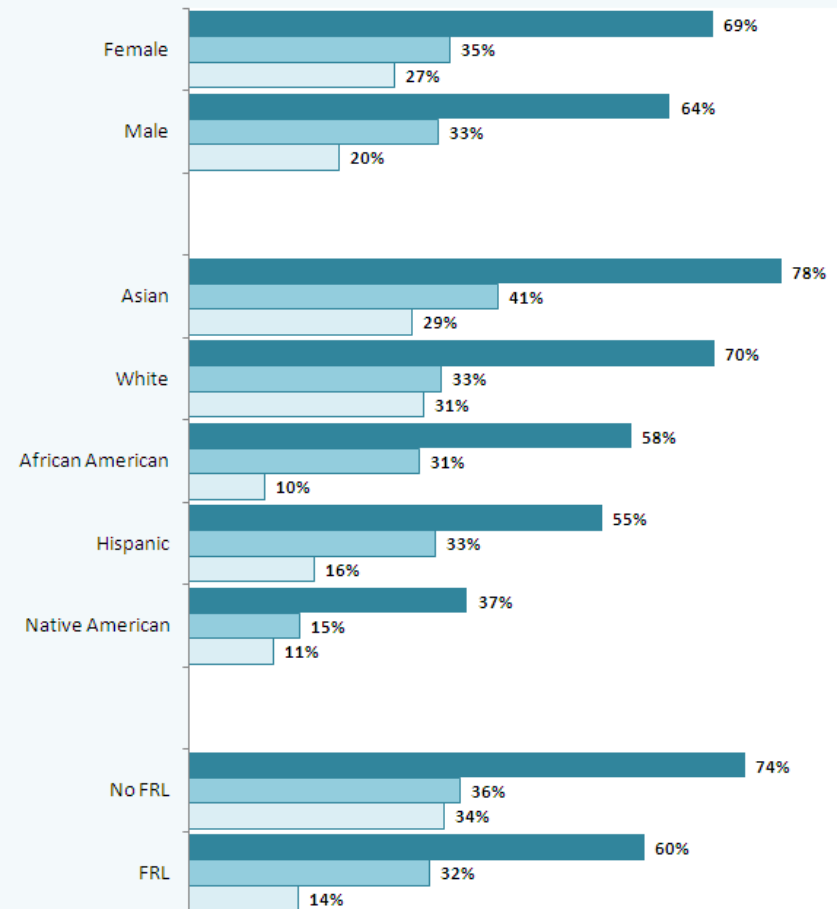
Under alternative criteria, grad rate drops for all groups of students

Graduation rates under alternative criteria



Gaps remain

■ 2006 ■ Core24 □ All ABCs

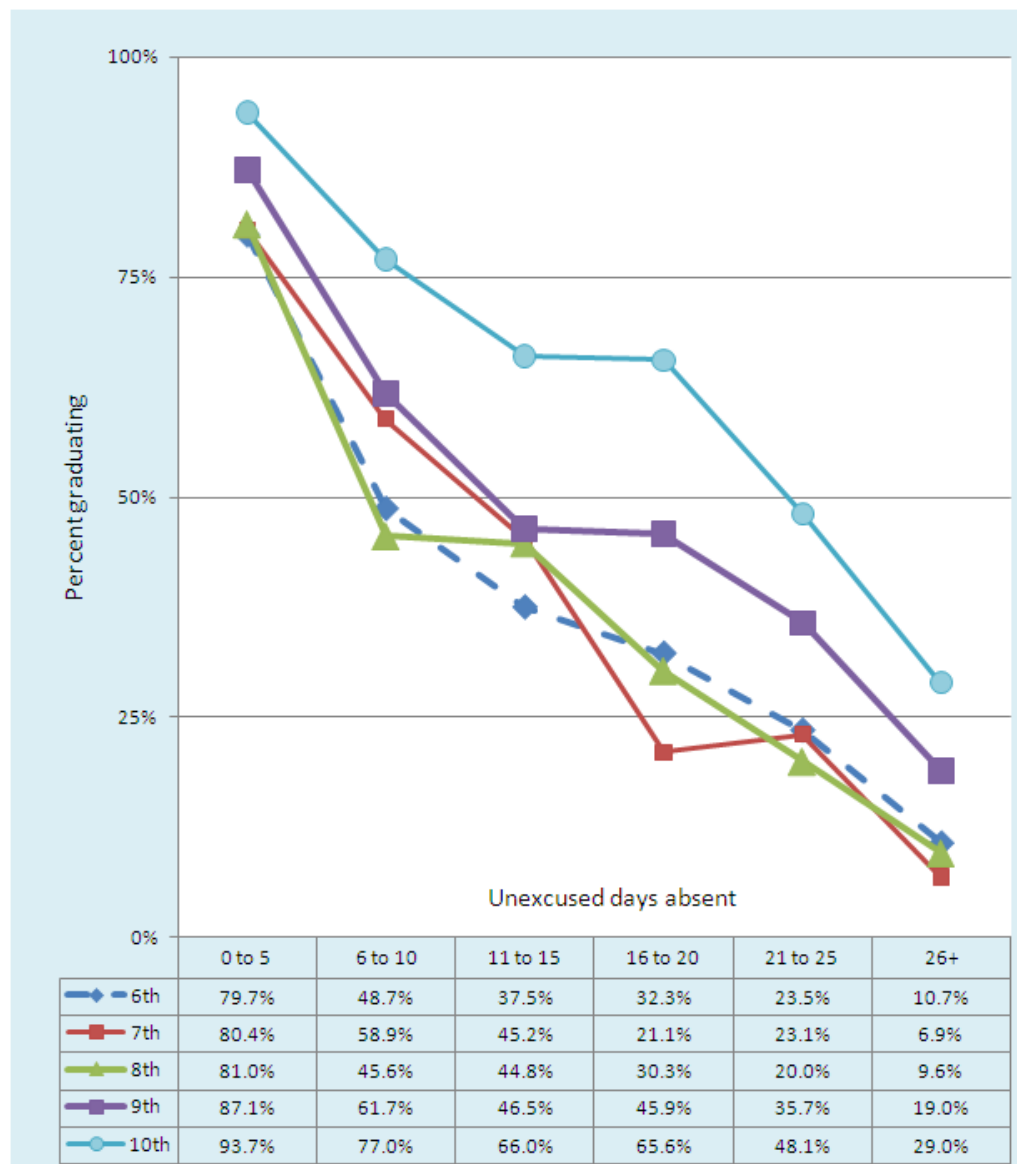


The challenge is clear. So what? What now?

- Lots of good will and data available, but hard to know where to focus.
- Cohort study identified a limited number of strong indicators of risk that can be used to identify potential dropouts early and intervene appropriately.
- Graduation rates differ by race, sex and income but only 15-18% of dropouts can be predicted by these alone. Most powerful predictors are academic and behavioral events.
- Risk factors appear, and peak, at different times for different kinds of kids.
- There are critical events/times that signal immediate danger. These can be used to flag students for immediate intervention.

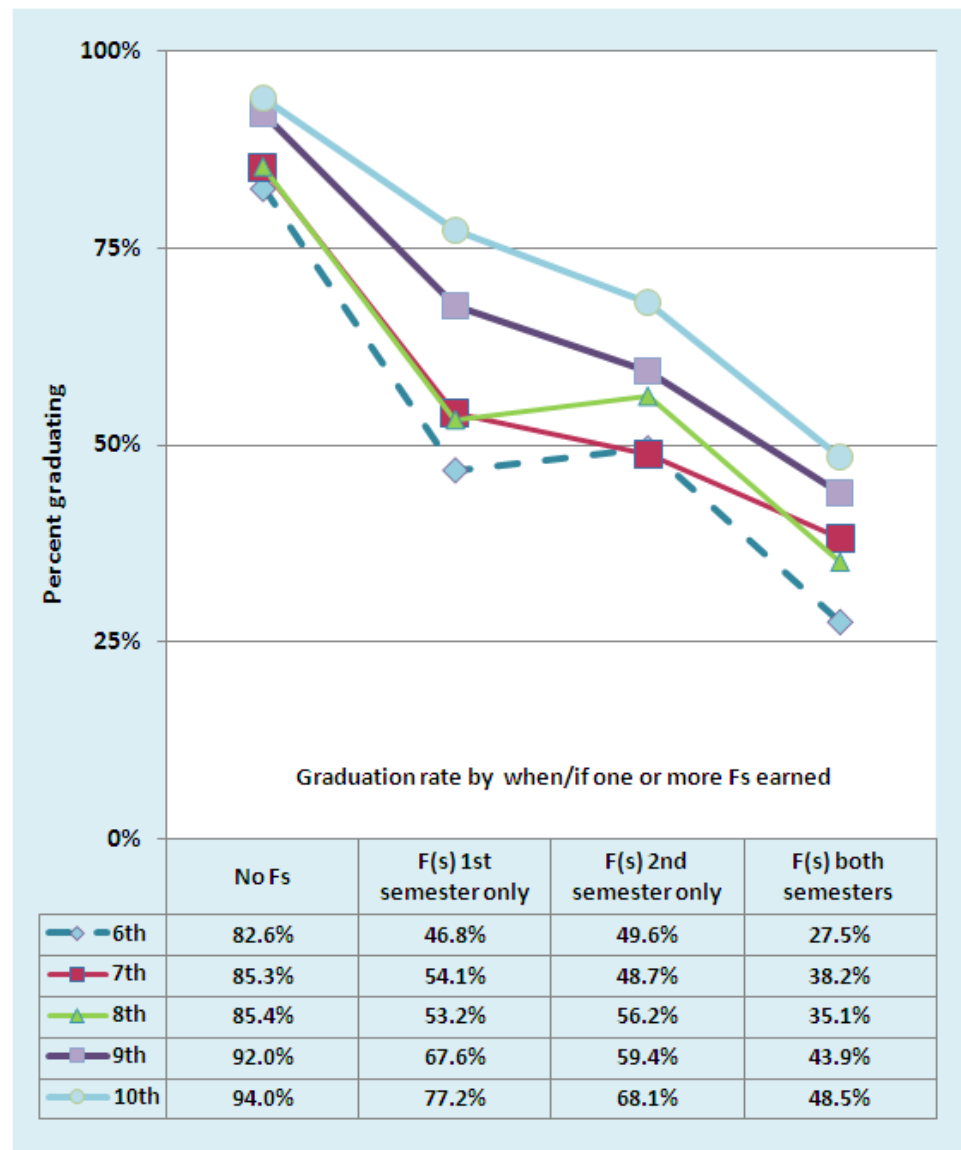
Indicator: Unexcused absences

- Unexcused absences at any grade are highly predictive of eventual high school failure.
- Unclear whether unexcused absences cause or are a result of poor school performance. Highly predictive either way.
- Definitions of absences (excused/unexcused) are unclear and differentially applied. . . but relationship is strong nevertheless.
- The graduation rate drops 20-35 percentage points after 5 unexcused absences at any grade between 6th and 10th.



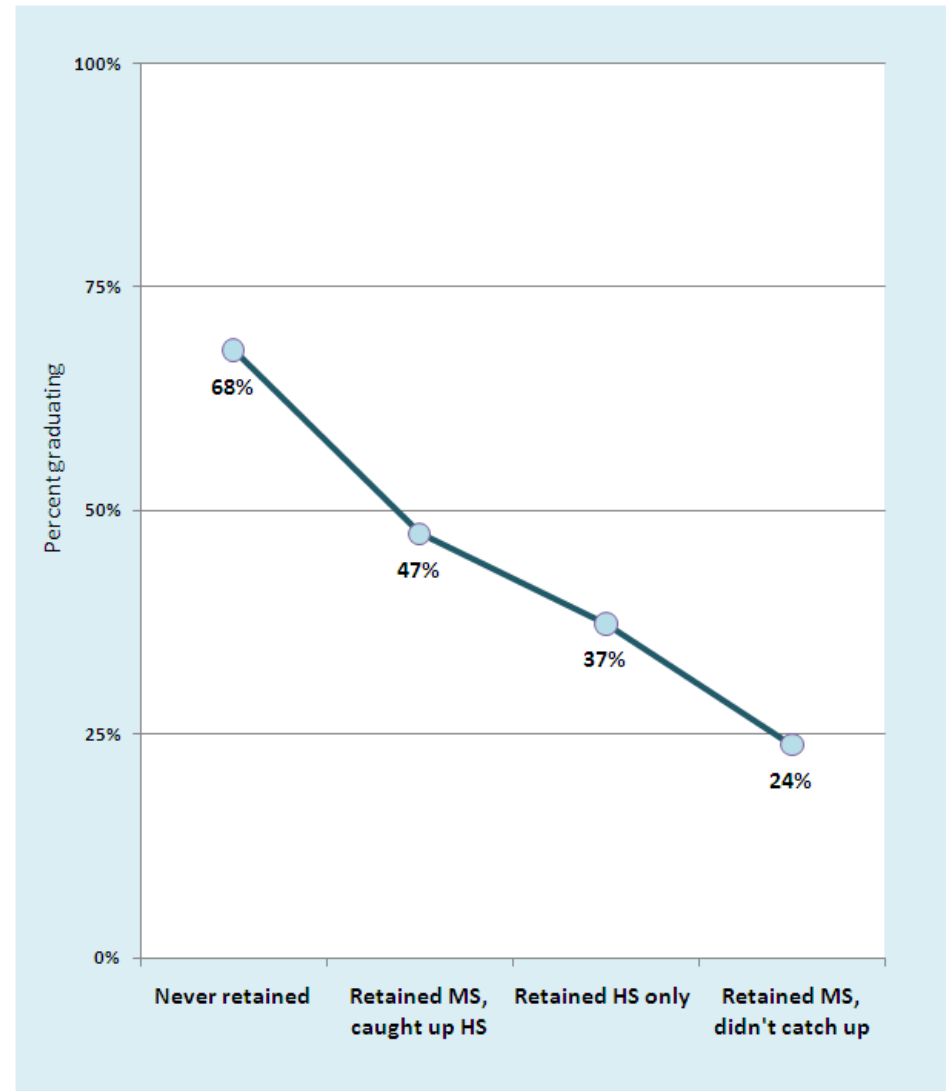
Indicator: Fs in core courses.

- Earning 1 or more Fs in 9th grade core courses is a very strong predictor of dropping out.
- However, **Fs in middle school are just as dangerous and predictive.**
- Earning 1 core course F in any grade (6th to 10th) reduces the chances of graduating; earning 2 or more almost eliminates those chances.



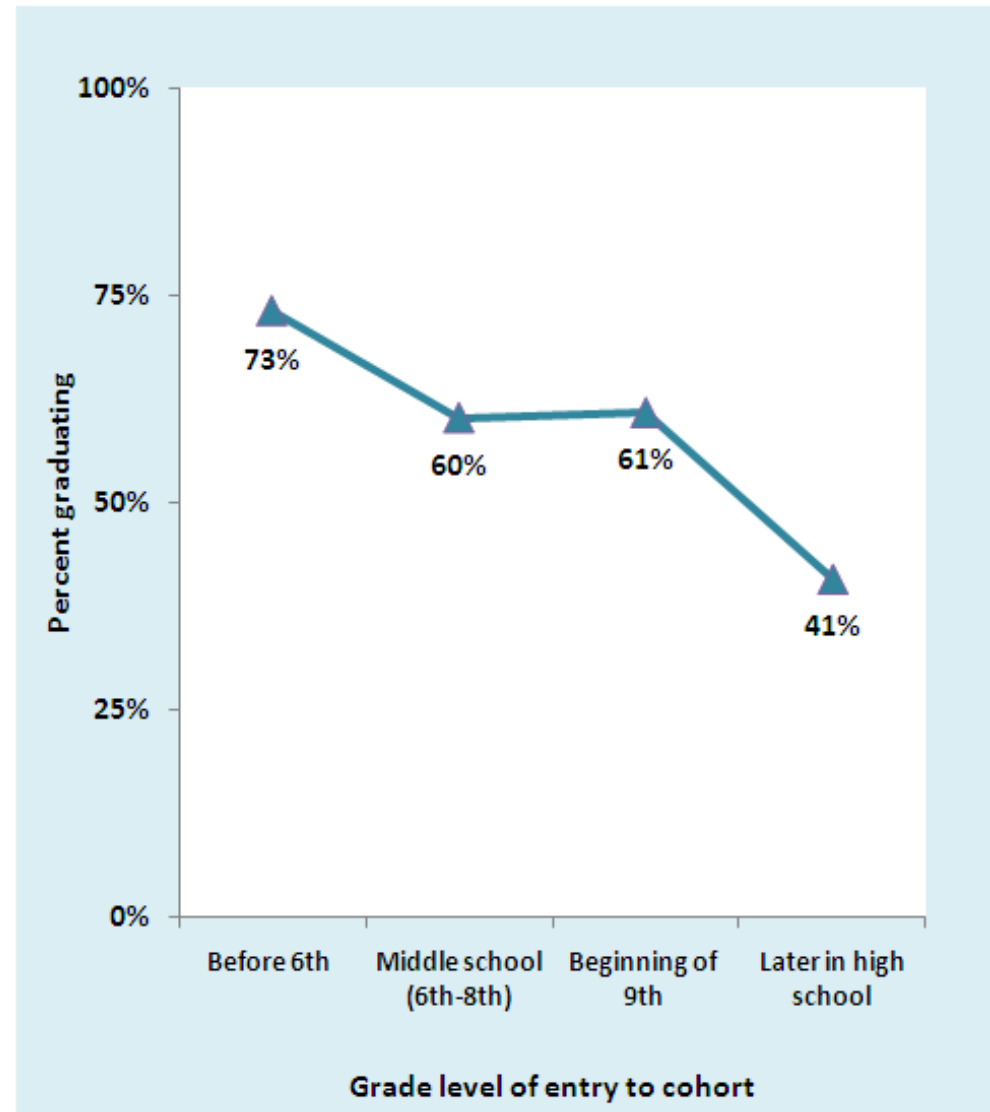
Indicator: Retention/demotion

- Students retained in any pre-high school grade are significantly less likely than other students to graduate.
- Some students catch up after middle school; those who don't are unlikely to graduate.
- Demotion in HS cuts grad rate in half



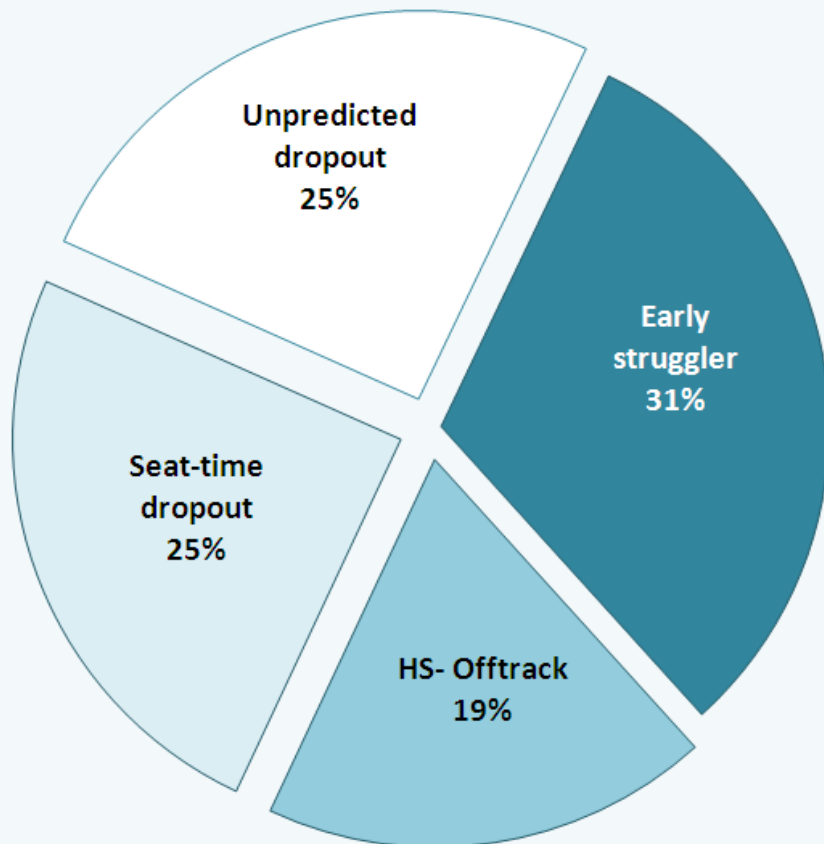
Indicator: Timing of entry at SPS

- One-fourth of the students in the cohort entered SPS in or after the 9th grade.
- Dropout rates were lowest for students who entered the cohort in grades K-5; those entering later were somewhat more likely to drop out.
- Graduation rates were highest for students who entered the cohort before 6th grade.
- Students entering after the beginning of 9th grade had the lowest graduation rates.



Risks (and dropouts) can be “clustered” by type and timing

Segments defined by timing of both prediction and dropping out



- **Early strugglers:** students who have academic or behavioral risk factors in middle school that continue into high school.
- **HS Off-track:** students who enter SPS without evidence of risk and then get off-track—usually within the 1st year.
- **Seat-time dropouts:** students who have relatively low measures of risk and stay through 12th grade (or longer) but lack the credits to graduate.
- **The unpredictable:** no evident risk factors.

How can this information be used? The Levy, SPS and others have used it to focus efforts and resources.

- Keep better track of all students (*follow up on absentees and no-shows*)
- Improve quality/reliability of student data (*especially absences and exits*)
- Focus on orientation of/support for late entry students
- Develop alternatives to out-of-school suspensions
- Use indicators in an early warning system (*assess early and often*)
- Build triggers into the data system based on tipping points
- Create targeted interventions for different segments of at-risk students