

In Wake of Grad-Rate Scandal, D.C. Projects Sharp Decline in Diplomas

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on March 1, 2018 12:45 PM

The District of Columbia is anticipating a dramatic drop in the number of students who will graduate from high school this year, in what appears to be another chunk of fallout from a recent scandal that revealed the district had been inflating its high school graduation rate.

The school district released [data Thursday showing that only 42 percent of 3,962 seniors in traditional public schools are "on track" to earn their diplomas](#) this spring. Last year, 73 percent of seniors graduated. The district's graduation rate had soared 20 points in the last six years.

Another 19 percent of D.C. seniors are only "moderately off-track," meaning that they could still earn enough credits to graduate.

In a memo accompanying the new numbers, the school district said it projects that "more students will become on-track for graduation" in June and August by completing current courses, or classes in the summer, or by passing credit recovery courses "in alignment with current policy." (The district includes August graduates in the previous spring's class, which is why it typically releases graduation rates in the fall, according to district spokeswoman Kristina Saccone.)

Twenty-six percent of the class of 2018 has transferred or withdrawn from school, according to city data. Federal rules require that districts obtain

written confirmation of those withdrawals, or transfers to diploma-granting schools. The district won't get that information until the end of the school year, its memo said.

The data in the new report don't include the half of D.C. high school students who attend charter schools. Data for charters is kept separately, by the board that oversees those schools.

An investigation of grading and graduation practices in D.C. found that one-third of last year's seniors got diplomas only through violations of city policies. Schools awarded passing grades to students who should have failed for missing too much class, and let students earn too many credits through quick, online courses known as credit recovery.

In the wake of the scandal, the district pledged to more stringently monitor grading and graduation practices. But the D.C. grad-rate scandal, combined with a number of similar issues nationwide, have [prompted renewed doubts about the meaning of the country's all-time-high graduation rate of 84 percent, and a new round of questions about the pressures and incentives built into high school accountability.](#)

The district has not released "on track to graduate" data before, but decided to do so in the interest of "transparency," school district spokeswoman Michelle Lerner [told radio station WAMU](#), which originally broke the grad-rate story.

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