

Graduation rates at Jackson-area schools get mixed results in state report

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Roughly half of the Jackson-area high schools improved their graduation rates between 2007 and 2008 while rates for the other half decreased, according to a state report released last week.

Napoleon and Columbia Central high schools topped the list with 96.5 percent and 96.3 percent of students graduating in 2008.

"I'm very proud of the fact that the high school staff maintains constant contact with kids to pursue the ultimate goal of graduating from high school," Napoleon Superintendent Jim Graham said Wednesday.

The graduation rates issued by the state track students who complete school within four years, or "on time."

Vandercook Lake posted the lowest graduation rate among traditional high schools with 76.6 percent.

Superintendent Tony Hollow said a possible reason for his district's lower percentage is that, unlike other districts, Vandercook Lake runs an alternative program in which its roughly 20 students are counted as part of the high school.

Jackson Public Schools as a district, for example, had a graduation rate of 66.9 percent, while Jackson High School had a rate of 89.1 percent, up from 84.2 percent the previous year.

"It becomes difficult for a small district like us to decoy that percentage," Hollow said. "I'm not saying we're not going to work on improving it because we are."

Among alternative high schools, Albion's had the highest graduation rate in 2008 at 50 percent while Jackson's T.A. Wilson Academy's rate was the lowest at 16.7 percent.

The Wilson graduation rate is from the year the district was deciding whether to move the alternative school from Tomlinson to Wilson, and the rate could have been affected by that decision, district spokeswoman A'Lynne Robinson said.

"It would be interesting to see what the next couple of years look like," she said.

Springport High School showed the biggest drop in its rate among traditional high schools, from about 93 percent in 2007 to 79 percent in 2008.

Springport's superintendent could not be reached for comment.

The da Vinci Institute, a charter school, had among the lowest graduation rates with 51.5 percent. However, it also saw the greatest improvement after 12 percent graduated the previous year.

Western High School's rate stayed steady at about 91 percent, and Northwest High School saw a slight decrease from 89.6 percent in 2007 to 88.6 percent the following year.

The state also released a five-year graduation rate this month that shows the percentage of students who started school in fall 2003 and finished school within five years.

That figure shows that many area districts have students who take longer than four years to graduate.

The dropout rate also released last week increased at many Jackson-area schools.

The majority of traditional high schools had a higher dropout rate in 2008 compared to 2007, while the majority of alternative schools saw a decrease in their dropout rates.

The state superintendent recently announced a Dropout Challenge in which schools will identify and support 10 to 15 students next year who display early warning signs that they will drop out.

Research shows students who have poor grades and low attendance, and students who repeat grades and are not engaged in class in fifth through ninth grades are prone to dropping out later, according to a statement from the [Michigan Department of Education](#).

Robinson said Jackson Public Schools is considering the initiative but has not made a decision.

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