

SDCCD Trends Update



The Placement of June 1998 High School Graduates in the SDCCD

*The Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
Assessment Performance of June, 1998 High
School Graduates at San Diego City, Mesa, and
Miramar Colleges Shown by the Primary
Feeder High Schools of the SDCCD.*

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Research Questions

What Proportion of June 1998 High School Graduates from SDCCD Feeder High Schools Place into the College and Remedial Curricula in English and Mathematics? Does Placement Vary by High School of Origin?

Background

The use of the high school diploma as a proxy for student achievement and ability is increasingly called into question by policymakers and educators. As early as 1983, in a report entitled “A Nation at Risk”¹ a national commission warned of a “rising tide of mediocrity” in our nation’s schools. This rising tide threatened to harm our nation in the form of declining economic productivity, domestic security, and international economic competitiveness. The authors recommended rigorous reforms in the nation’s kindergarten through high school curriculum. Tougher standards would improve the productivity and economic prospects for increasing numbers of underprivileged students and resurrect the status of the high school diploma as an indicator of achievement. Seventeen years later, the debate continues over how best to improve high school education. For example, the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, ordered that the practice of “social promotion” (the promotion of students to higher grades based on age rather than school achievement) be stopped. More students not performing at grade level must be held back to learn the skills they should have learned in earlier grades. This trend is sweeping across the nation as more parents and policymakers demand accountability from their schools. The college readiness of high school graduates is of particular value to the community colleges. An understanding of the incoming skills of recent diploma graduates helps faculty and administrative leaders to better plan the curriculum and remedial needs of incoming freshman students. This edition of research trends presents data to show the differential performance of high school diploma graduates when examined by feeder high school.

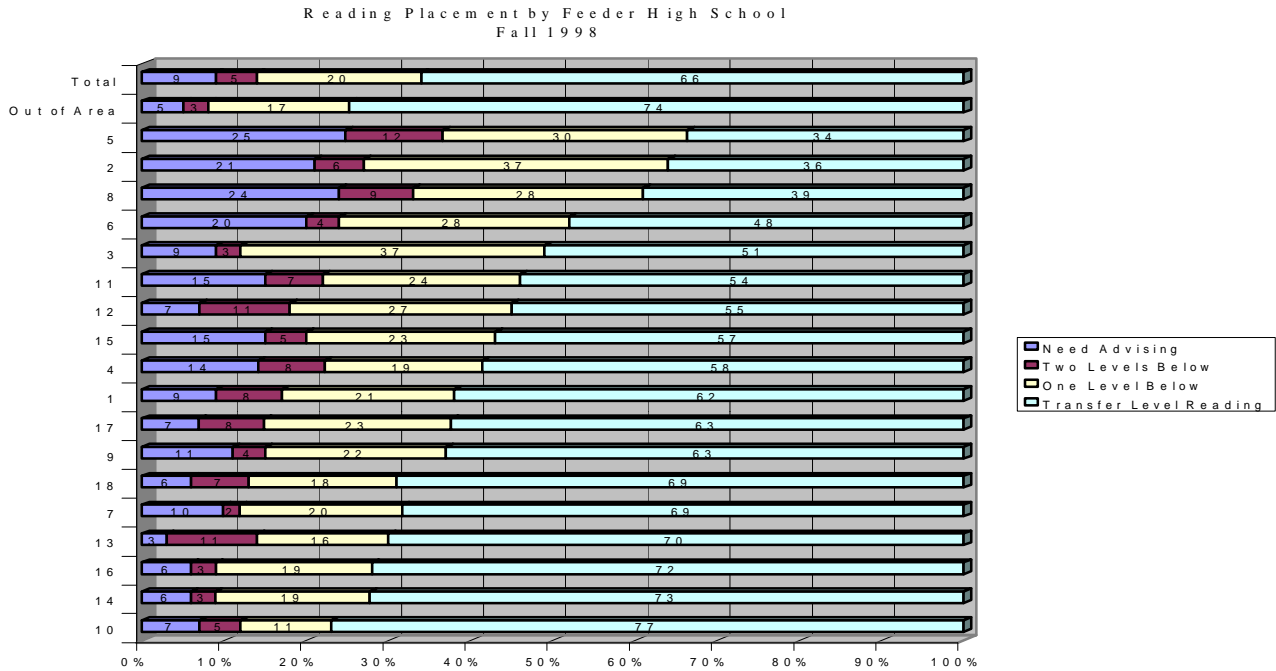
Method

■ Determining Placement

The data provided in this report were drawn from SDCCD student assessment, enrollment, and performance data for recent high school diploma graduates. Participants included all June, 1998 high school graduates who took a reading, writing, or mathematics placement test during the summer and early fall of 1998. A query and matching of the databases provided some 2300 students who met these criteria. Three levels of placement were identified; Transfer, One Level below College (Associate degree applicable), and Two Levels below College (remedial or basic skills).

¹ National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. A report to the nation and secretary of education. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

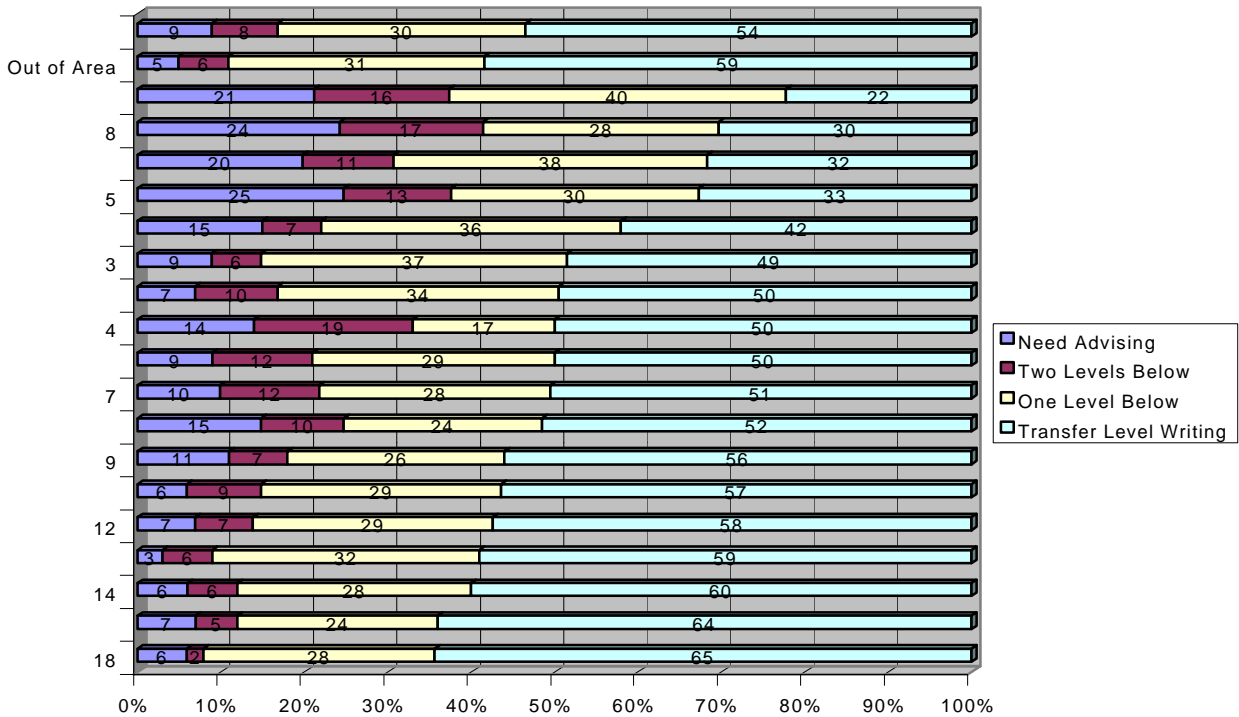
Findings: Reading Placement Results



- On average, about two-thirds (66%) of June 1998 high school graduates enrolled in the SDCCD during fall, 1998 were eligible for transfer level courses.
- A significant proportion score at the basic skills level, or score so low on placement tests that no determination as to a placement can be made.
- The proportion of students placing at the three levels of the curriculum varies dramatically when examined by individual feeder high school.
- The proportion of June 1998 graduates eligible for the transfer level curriculum can vary by as much as 40%.

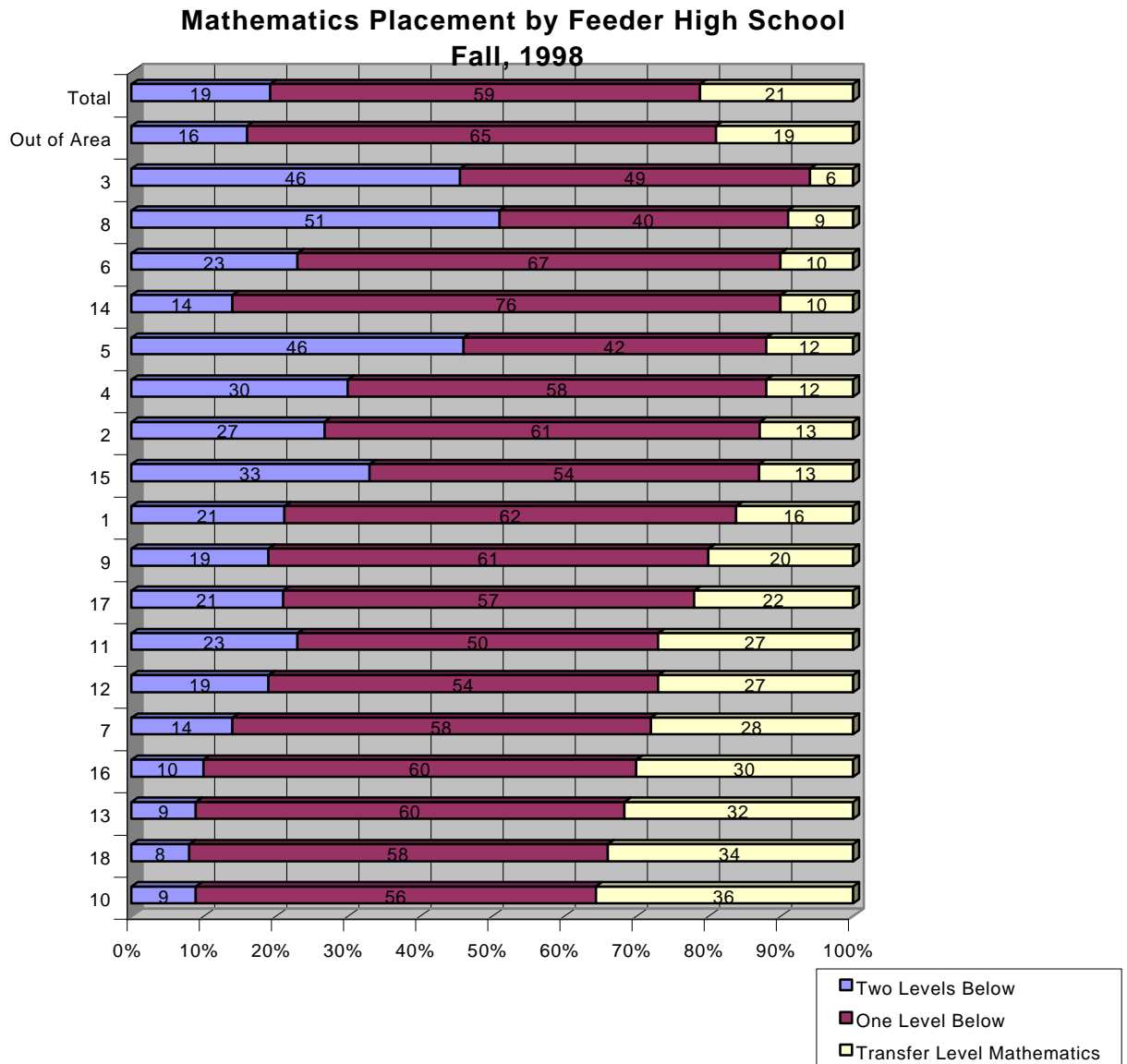
Findings: Writing Placement Results

Writing Placement by Feeder High School
Fall, 1998



- About one-half place into transfer level courses (i.e., freshman composition or higher). This suggests that approximately one-half of June 1998 graduates be not prepared to write at college level.
- As with Reading placement, the proportion placing in the three levels of the curriculum varies tremendously when examined by high school. For example, only 22% of students from high school '7' are eligible for Freshman composition at entry to the community college.

Findings: Mathematics Placement Results



- Approximately one-in-five students place into transfer level mathematics, while one in five place into remedial or basic arithmetic courses. This is consistent with statewide findings for recent high school diploma graduates.
- The above chart suggests tremendous variation when examined by feeder high school. For example, high school number 3 places almost 40% of its students into Freshman mathematics (trigonometry), while high school number 19 places less than 10% of its students into Freshman Mathematics.

Implications

This edition of SDCCD Trends is intended to show the placement and entering communication and computation abilities of June 1998 high school diploma graduates. The high schools included in the charts are the primary feeder high schools to our college programs at City, Mesa, Miramar, and ECC. Although all students included in the study completed the high school diploma, it is evident that even with this achievement, there is a wide observable variation in the placement of students. This disparity in placement appears to be at least somewhat related to the high school of attendance. There are implications here for SDCCD faculty and administrative leadership. For example, it appears that our colleges need to prepare for increasing numbers of students needing remediation, particularly in mathematics. It also suggests that if students can be tested early in the school term, such as the summer prior to the fall semester, then students may be better able to plan their course taking in the fall, and possibly address deficiencies through summer school attendance. This practice of providing the student and the college with early information would help in the curriculum balance plans of the college, particularly with respect to the core courses in English and Mathematics. There are also implications for K-12 faculty and administrative leaders. This information may also serve as ancillary information to the incipient school report card movement. Placement data identified by individual high school may help to provide additional information to the performance review of these schools. Such information may lead to reforms that improve the achievement and subsequent placement performance of high school graduates. Using assessment information as feedback to the learner and institution may enhance counseling and advisement. Viewed in this way, schools demonstrating superior placement may provide examples to other schools as environments where more positive outcomes can occur. This can help to provide school leaders with the context in which positive change takes place. To the extent that student outcomes are affected by their incoming skills, the value of assessing performance from different high schools may become a valuable tool for improving the quality of secondary and post-secondary education in the San Diego region.