

HIGHROAD FELLOWSHIP REPORTS

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES PORTFOLIO

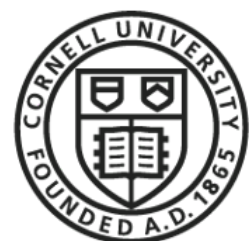
July 2015

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With the United Way of Buffalo &
Erie County



ILR Buffalo Co-Lab

The ILR Buffalo Co-Lab advances an equitable economy and democratic community, collaboratively integrating scholarly and practical understanding to strengthen civic action.

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Fellows are in Buffalo, NY for eight weeks in the summer, working on projects through their host organization.





High School Graduation Rates

Portfolio

Shira Kotz

7/23/2015

This portfolio focuses on the indicator of high school graduation rates, and includes a full report of the research in the Community Brief, a more condensed highlights version of the brief in the Community Report Card to be sent to donors and the public, a Marketing Infographic to publicize graduation rates in social media, as well as an advocacy letter to NY State Assembly Member in support of Community Schools Act. Also included is a reflection on a volunteer event I participated in as part of my internship.

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Community Brief

Introduction: Framing the Problem

With the advancements of technology and a knowledge-driven economy that favors specialized skills, a high school diploma has become a minimum requirement for the labor market.¹ Because of this, it has become significantly harder for those who don't have a high school diploma to find stable employment. While the median income for male graduates during this time period has increased, median income for male non-high school graduates has significantly decreased, further increasing the income disparity between those with a diploma and without.² Research shows that those with a high school diploma earn an average \$272,000 more over a lifetime and have a 3% lower unemployment rate than their counterparts without a diploma³.

However, the detriment of not having a high school diploma goes further than unemployment. High school dropouts are more likely to be in poverty, have health problems, and spend time in prison than their counterparts with a diploma⁴. They also have a greater chance of being a single parent, and research shows that those who are children of single parents are more likely to become high school dropouts themselves, thus further perpetuating the cycle of generations failing to complete high school.

While graduation rates in the United States have hit a "new record high" according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the state of New York has seen little to no growth in graduation rates over the last few years⁵. New York continues to lag behind the nation's average of 81% with rates of 77% in the 2012-2013 school year, and new numbers seem to suggest that New York's rates actually

¹ University At Buffalo Regional Institute, and The Urban Design Project. "Buffalo Promise Neighborhood Needs Assessment Study." *Buffalo Promise Neighborhood* (2011): 1-47. Web. 24 June 2015.

<<http://buffalopromiseneighborhood.org/public/files/BufferoPromiseNeighborhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>>.
² Messacar, Derek. "Staying in School: A Proposal to Raise High School Graduation Rates." (2012): 1-27. The Hamilton Project. Web. 24 June 2015.

³ United States Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment*. N.p., 2 Apr. 2015. Web. 24 June 2015. <http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_001.htm>.

United States Census Bureau. American Community Service Briefs. *Work-Life Earnings by Field of Degree and Occupation for People With a Bachelor's Degree: 2011*. By Tiffany Julian. Oct. 2012. Web. 24 June 2015.
<<https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-04.pdf>>.

⁴ University At Buffalo Regional Institute, and The Urban Design Project. "Buffalo Promise Neighborhood Needs Assessment Study." *Buffalo Promise Neighborhood* (2011): 1-47. Web. 24 June 2015.

<<http://buffalopromiseneighborhood.org/public/files/BufferoPromiseNeighborhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits New Record High*. N.p., 12 Feb. 2015. Web. 24 June 2015. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high>

U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Public High School 4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for the United States, the 50 States and the District of Columbia: School Years 2010-11 to 2012-13*. N.p., Jan. 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds_tables/2010-11_to_2012-13.asp>.

decreased to 76% over the 2013-2014 school year⁶. However, this may be partly due to New York State's recent law that creates stricter requirements to obtain a high school diploma⁷.

There are many fundamental student characteristics, such as demographic/ socio-economic factors as well as institutional factors that affect high school graduation rates. For example, research has shown that income is a key factor affecting high school graduation rates, with low income students having significantly lower than average graduation rates in the state of New York and the nation overall.⁸ According to the New York State Department of Education, in New York, high income districts have almost a 30 percentage point higher graduation rate than low income districts.⁹ Institutional factors have also been shown to be significant indicators of low high school graduation rates, such as low attendance records, high suspension rates, and low academic proficiency¹⁰. Significant evidence-based research has shown that students who exhibit certain risk behaviors are much more likely to not complete high school, such as low attendance, frequent suspensions, or exhibit academic proficiency problems, such as failing core courses or low exam scores.¹¹ The large number of institutional factors and fundamental student characteristics that affect graduation rates show the importance of a multipronged approach at the community level.

⁶ New York State Education Department. *Statewide High School Graduation Rate Shows Incremental Increase, Achievement Gap Persists*. N.p., 23 June 2014. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://www.nysed.gov/news/2015/statewide-high-school-graduation-rate-shows-incremental-increase-achievement-gap-persists/>>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Murnane, Richard J. "U.S. High School Graduation Rates: Patterns and Explanations." *Journal of Economic Literature* 51.2 (2013): 370-422. 28 May 2013. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/760625/murnane-paper-on-grad-rates.pdf>>.

"High School Graduation Rates by State." *Governing the States and Localities*. Governing.com, n.d. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html>>.

⁹ New York State Education Department. *Statewide High School Graduation Rate Shows Incremental Increase, Achievement Gap Persists*. N.p., 23 June 2014. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://www.nysed.gov/news/2015/statewide-high-school-graduation-rate-shows-incremental-increase-achievement-gap-persists/>>.

¹⁰ University At Buffalo Regional Institute, and The Urban Design Project. "Buffalo Promise Neighborhood Needs Assessment Study." *Buffalo Promise Neighborhood* (2011): 1-47. Web. 24 June 2015. <<http://buffalopromiseneighborhood.org/public/files/BuffaloPromiseNeighborhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>>.

¹¹ Connell, J. P., B. L. Halpem-Felsher, E. Clifford, W. Crichlow, and P. Usinger. "Hanging in There: Behavioral, Psychological, and Contextual Factors Affecting Whether African American Adolescents Stay in High School." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 10.1 (1995): 41-63. *Sage Journals*. Web. 30 June 2015. <<http://jar.sagepub.com/content/10/1/41.abstract>>.

Christle, C. A., K. Jolivet, and C. M. Nelson. "School Characteristics Related to High School Dropout Rates." *Remedial and Special Education* 28.6 (2007): 325-39. *ProQuest Education Journals [ProQuest]*. Web. 30 June 2015. <<http://www.sebosis.com/members/peter/UNE-CAGS-Portfolio/EDU701%20-%20Ed%20Leadership/DropOutPrevention/Christle-SchoolCharacteristicsRelated%20to%20DOrates.pdf>>

Erie County Trends

Erie County’s high school graduation rate is higher than New York State’s average, at 81% in 2014 compared to New York State’s average of 76%.¹² This means that in Erie County, out of the 10,410 students in the 2010 cohort, 8,432 graduate by August of 2014. However, the school districts in Erie County have a large range of high school graduation rates, ranging from a highest of 97% in Lancaster District, to a lowest of 55% in Buffalo City School District. The graph on the next page shows graduation rates for the 2010 cohort who began 9th grade in 2010, and graduate by August of 2014 (with the normal graduation date of June of 2014). That graph shows that school districts of Lackawanna City and the City of Buffalo are significantly below the Erie County average in high school graduation rates.¹³ It is also important to note that the City of Buffalo is the largest school district in Erie County, with almost 25% of the total cohort in Erie County from Buffalo.¹⁴ In addition, 1,407 students in Buffalo graduate by August in a cohort of 2,558 students, which means 1,151 students from Buffalo aren’t graduating within the summer of their regular graduation year.¹⁵ The chart below illustrates that Buffalo School District is significantly bigger than the other school districts, especially those with the highest and lowest graduation rates.¹⁶

Size of Cohorts for Districts with Highest and Lowest Graduation Rates

Name of District	Graduation Rates	Number of Graduates	Size of Cohort
Countywide	81%	8432	10,410
Buffalo City	55%	1407	2558
Lackawanna City	69%	100	145
Iroquois	97%	214	221
Lancaster	97%	493	508

¹² New York State Education Department. DATA NYSED.gov. *Erie County Public School High School Graduation Rate (2013 - 14) - 4 Year Outcome as of August*. N.p., 2015. Web. 25 June 2015.

<<http://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?county=14&year=2014&cohortgroup=1>>.

All graduation rates reported by the New York State Department of Education are for a 9th grade cohort in August of their 4th year.

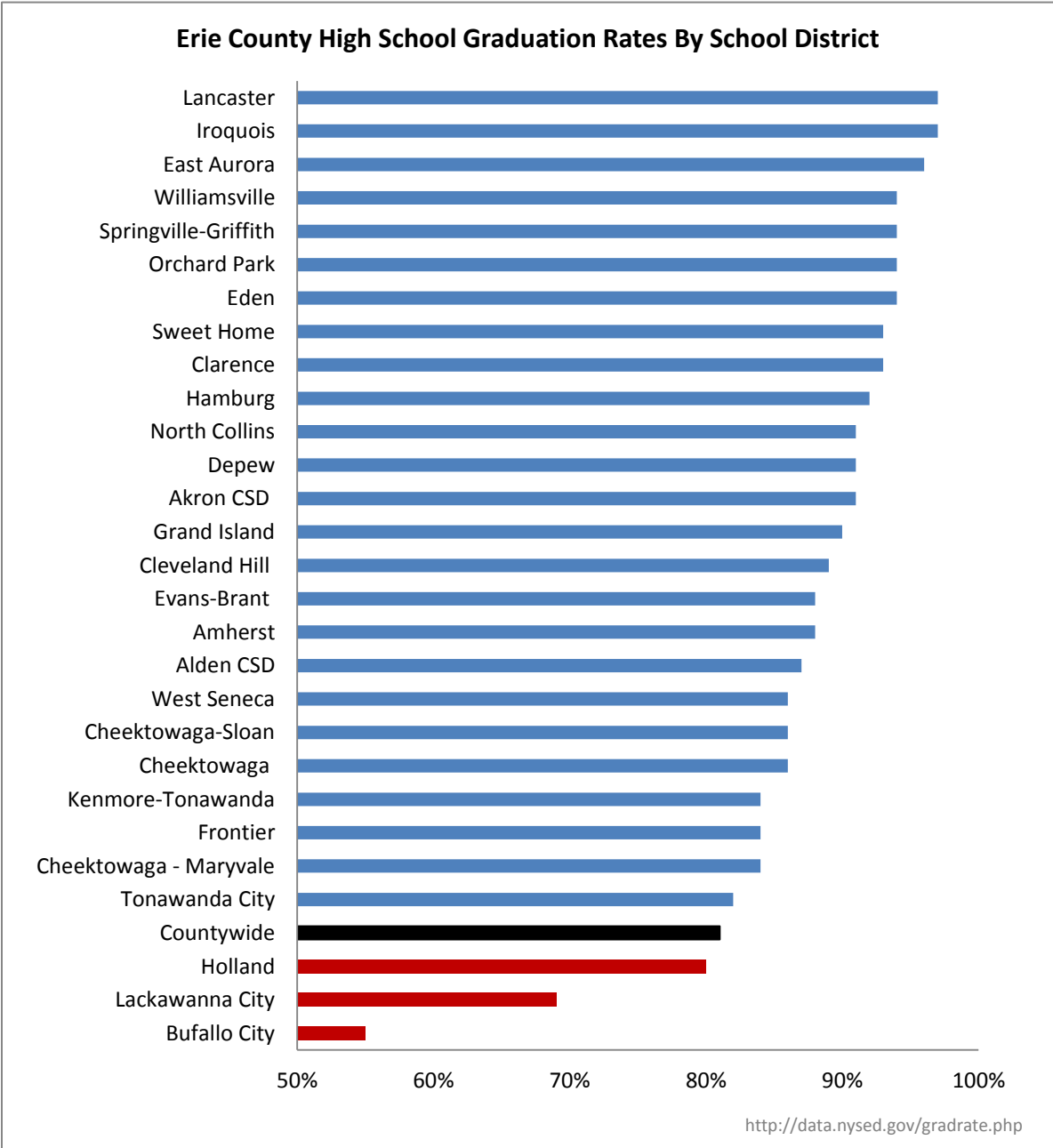
¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ New York State Education Department. DATA NYSED.gov. *Buffalo City School District High School Graduation Rate (2013 - 14) - 4 Year Outcome as of August*. N.p., 2015. Web. 25 June 2015.

<<http://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?instid=800000052968&year=2014&cohortgroup=1>>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

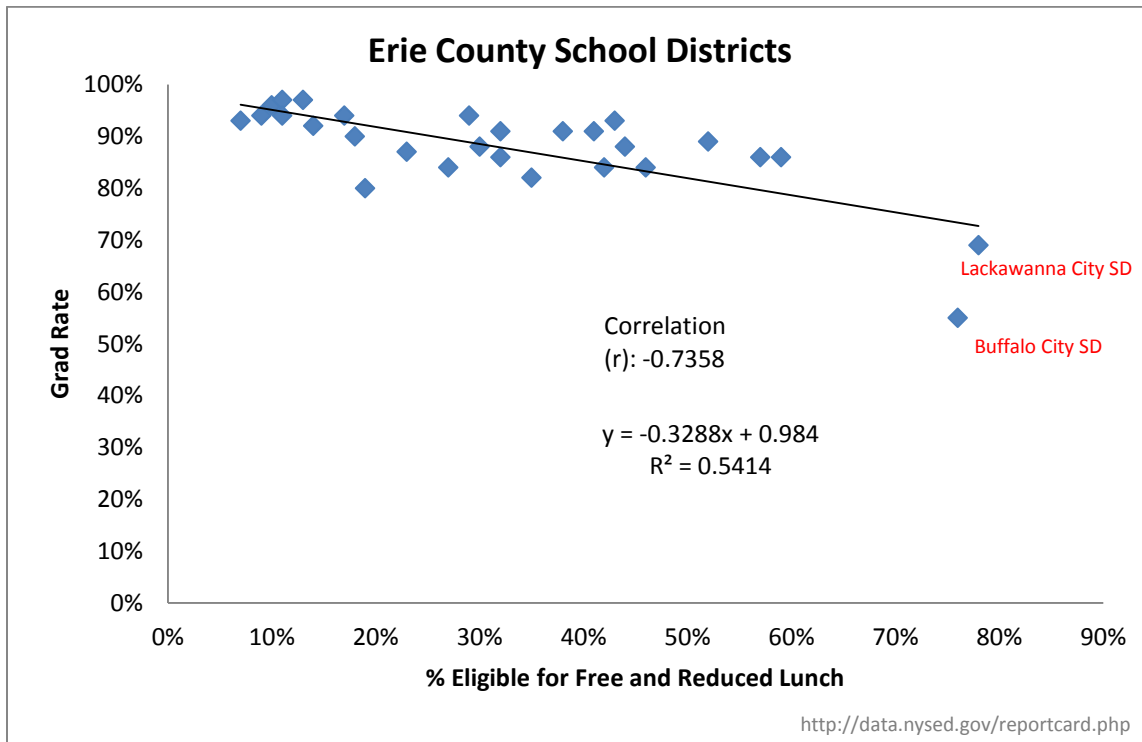
¹⁶ Ibid.



It is also important to note the relationship between income level and high school graduation rates in Erie County. A common proxy for concentration of low-income students in a school is the percent eligible for free and reduced lunch meals.¹⁷ The federally-assisted National School Lunch Program provides free meals to children with families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line, and reduced meals to those between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty

¹⁷ United States Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch*. N.p., May 2015. Web. 30 June 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clb.asp>.

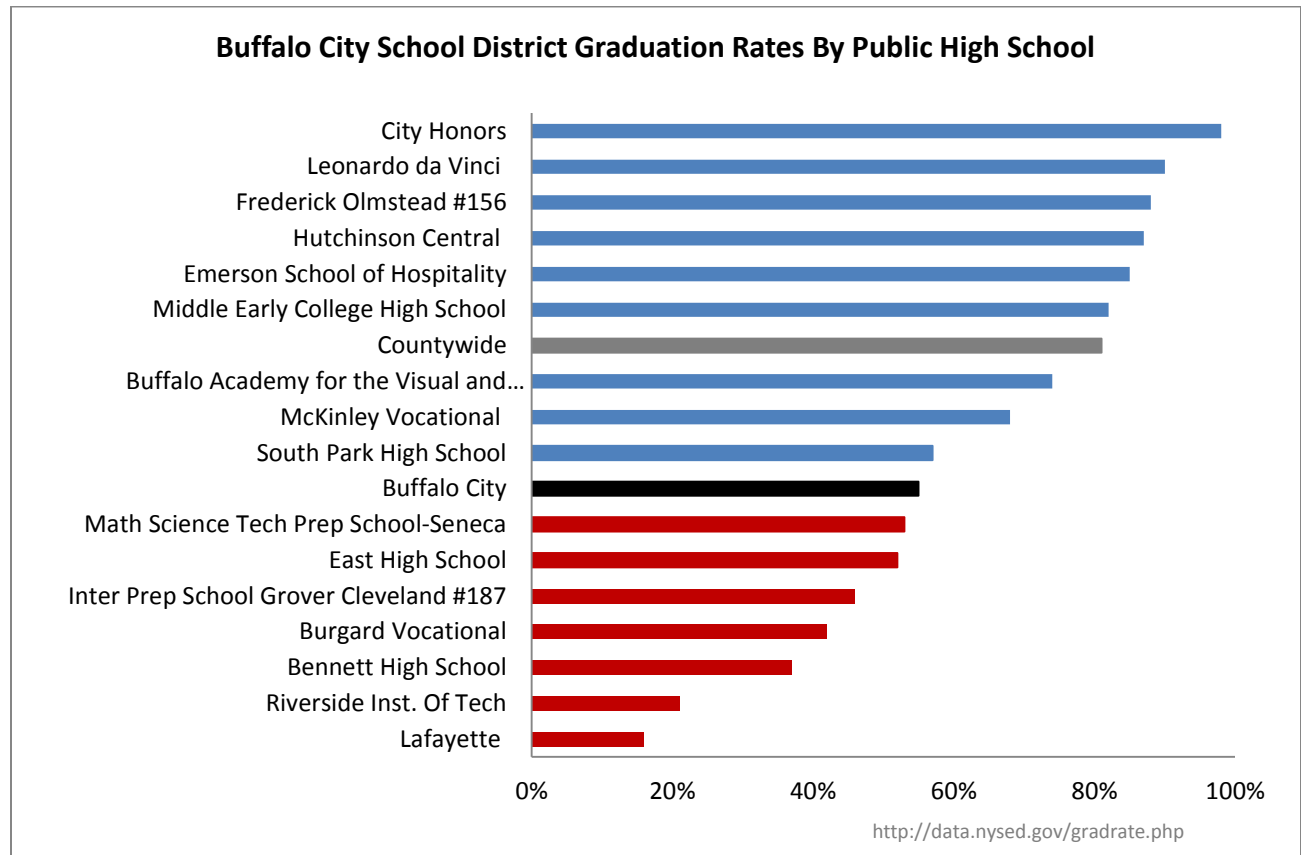
line.¹⁸ As shown in the chart below, the school districts with the lowest graduation rates had a significantly higher percentage of students that were eligible for free and reduced lunch, with a correlation coefficient showing a negative correlation of -0.7358. The R^2 shows that the percent of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch in a given district accounts for 54% of the variability in graduation rates. This relationship is especially significant in the districts of Buffalo and Lackawanna City, who have the largest percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, and the lowest graduation rates. Analysis of the Erie County districts without Buffalo and Lackawanna districts yields a much weaker negative relationship between percent of students' eligible for free and reduced lunch and graduation rates, with a correlation coefficient of about -0.53. Without Buffalo and Lackawanna City, low household income only accounts for around 28% ($R^2 = 0.28$) of the variability in high school graduation rates. However, they would not be considered outliers given that Buffalo is by far the largest district in the county, and accounts for a large portion of Erie County students, and this difference may be due to the fact that most of the low income population is concentrated in Buffalo. In general, there is a negative relationship between Erie County districts' high school graduation rates and students' eligibility for free and reduced lunch and the relationship is especially strong in regards to the districts of Lackawanna City and Buffalo City.



¹⁸ Ibid.

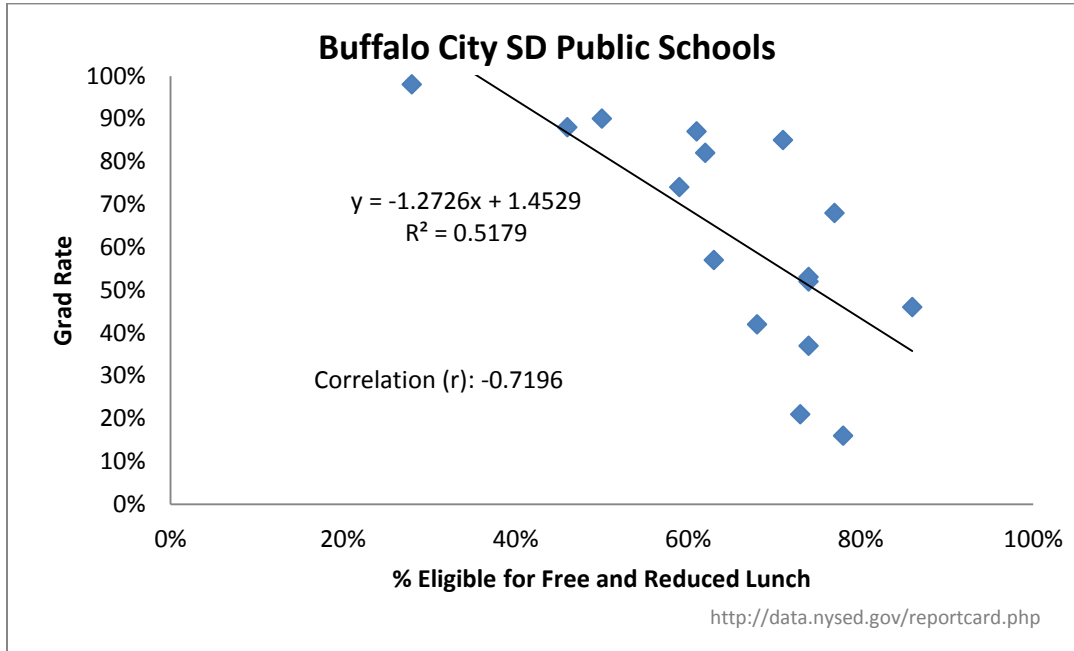
Buffalo Trends

Within the City of Buffalo, there is also a large disparity between the highest and lowest graduation rates for public high schools. As shown in the table below, the rates range between 98% in City Honors to 16% in Lafayette High School.¹⁹



The relationship in the City of Buffalo between low household income and high school graduation rates is also particularly strong. As shown in the graph below, there is a strong negative relationship between percent of student eligible for free and reduced lunch and graduation rates, with a correlation coefficient of -0.72, and low household income accounts for 52% of the variability in graduation rates. It is also important to note that almost all of the public schools have high levels of low income students, with the lowest being 50% of the students eligible for free and reduced lunch, furthering the point that a significant amount of the low income population is concentrated in Buffalo.

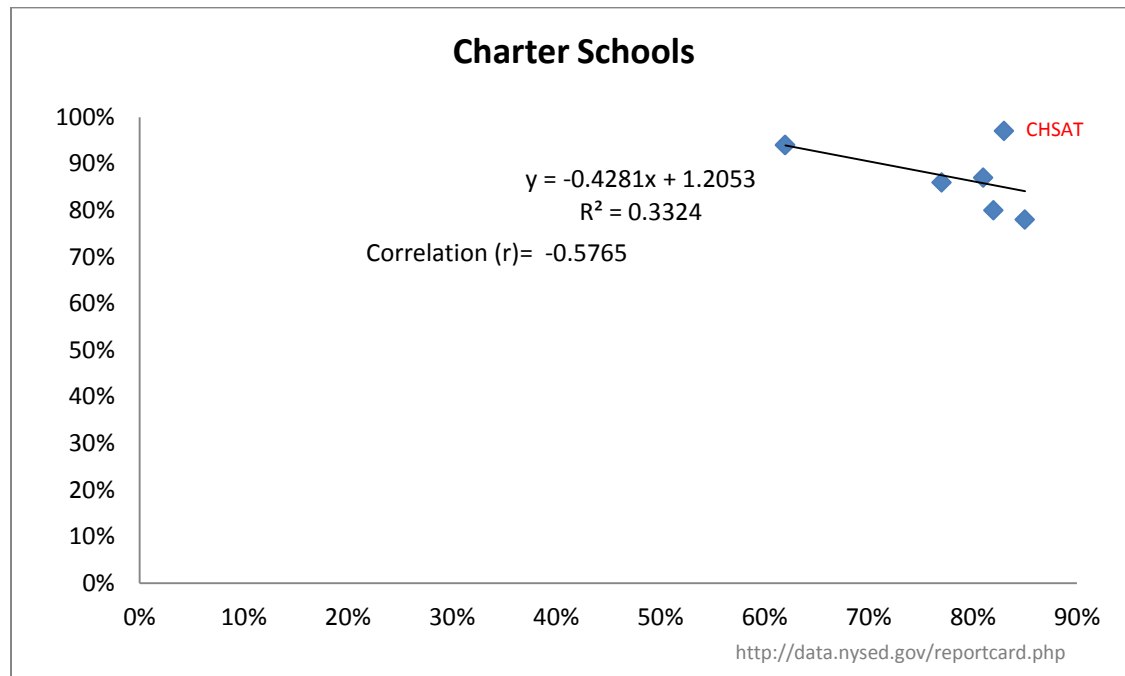
¹⁹ New York State Education Department. DATA NYSED.gov. *Buffalo City School District High School Graduation Rate (2013 - 14) - 4 Year Outcome as of August*. N.p., 2015. Web. 25 June 2015.
<<http://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?instid=800000052968&year=2014&cohortgroup=1>>.



While this data may seem to suggest that fundamental student characteristics, such as demographic and socio-economic factors, and not institutional factors completely determine the high school graduation rate, charter schools show a different side.

The table below shows the charter schools in Erie County (all of which are in Buffalo, except the Global Concepts School which is in Lackawanna), despite having high percentages of those eligible for free and reduced lunch, have relatively high graduation rates, well above the average of Lackawanna and Buffalo school districts.²⁰ While there is still a negative correlation between low income and graduation rates, it is less strong in charter schools than in Buffalo Public Schools, and percent eligible for free and reduced lunch in these charter schools only accounts for 33% of the variability in graduation rates.

²⁰ New York State Education Department. DATA NYSED.gov. *Erie County- School Report Card Data [2013-2014]* N.p., 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://data.nysed.gov/reportcard.php?year=2014&county=14>>.



This seems to suggest that while the household income of the students clearly has a connection to an institutions graduation rate, charter school’s success shows that there may be ways that institutions with many low income students can have high graduation rates.

Experimental research in Chicago and Florida has shown that a student enrolled in a charter middle school is associated with a 7-11% increase in the probability that they will graduate high school within five years, and is also associated with higher rates of enrolling and persisting in college.²¹ A meta-analysis on charter schools in eight states found that those attending a charter high school were on average 8-10% more likely to enroll in college. This research suggests that the charter school do not tend to have substantially different student demographics or achievement levels than the public schools the students originated from. This research also found that a common characteristic of many charter schools is unusual grade configurations (such as schools that go from 7th grade to 12th grade), that often eliminate the often difficult transition from middle school to high school. However, overall the study found mixed results over whether charter schools have higher academic achievement than a typical public school.²²

On a more local level, The Buffalo News discussed that in 2014, the Charter School for Applied Technologies (CHSAT) has one of the highest graduation rates in Erie County. (CHSAT represents the outlier in the chart above, with a 97% high school graduation rate despite 69% of the students eligible

²¹ While charter schools have a large number of minority and low income students, it is important to note that they have lower than average percentages of special-education and English Language Learners. Booker, Kevin, Brian Gill, Tim R. Sass, and Ronald W. Zimmer. "Charter High Schools' Effects on Long Term Attainment and Earnings." *SSRN Journal SSRN Electronic Journal* 29 (2014): 1-43. Jan. 2014. Web. 25 June 2015. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/~media/publications/PDFs/education/charter_long-term_wp.pdf>.

²² Zimmer, Ron, Brian Gill, Kevin Booker, Stephane Lavertu, Tim R. Sass, and John Witte. *Charter Schools in Eight States: Effects on Achievement, Attainment, Integration, and Competition*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009. Print.

for free lunch).²³ One of CHSAT’s innovative programs is they have a final 40 minute period added to their day called “intervention”, where teachers can flag students who have incomplete assignments or need extra help, as part of their “no failure policy”.²⁴ The success of CSHAT and other charter schools across in county, state, and nation in raising graduation rates, show that while beginning student characteristics like income level certainly have an effect, there is much room for improvement at the educational level as well.

Buffalo and Erie County Initiatives

Name of Program	Description of Program	Category
1. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie County- Transforming Buffalo Through Mentoring and Education	Program that aims to improve graduation rates by matching students with a mentor until they graduate high school. ²⁵	Community-School
2. Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo- Bridging the Gap	Offers homework help, tutoring, academic clubs, and job preparation courses to help improve children’s academic success. ²⁶	Afterschool Program
3. Child and Adolescent Treatment Services (CATS) – 21 st Century Program	Offers afterschool and summer homework help, academic skill building activities, as well as arts, athletic, therapeutic, and recreational programming, through East High School. ²⁷	Afterschool Program
4. Hillside Family Agencies- Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection	Professional youth advocates help at-risk students in grades 9-12 and their families connect to academic, workforce and social supports, and provide additional afterschool programming. ²⁸	Students, Families-Community/Afterschool
5. Valley Community Association- Striving for Excellence Youth Program	Offers afterschool programming including homework, and computer instruction, physical education, nature education, art, and community service. ²⁹	Afterschool Program

²³ Pasciak, Mary. "A Charter School That Beats City Honors." *City & Region*. The Buffalo News, 6 Oct. 2014. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/education/a-charter-school-that-beats-city-honors-20141004>>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Transforming Buffalo Through Mentoring and Education." *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie County*. N.p., 2012. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.beafriend.org/our-programs/tbtme/>>.

²⁶ "Bridging the Gap." *Education and Career Development*. Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo, 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://www.bgcbuffalo.org/Tools/Broadcaster/frontend/itemcontent.asp?reset=1&type=3&iPageView=0&itemID=15>>.

²⁷ "CATS/21st Century Afterschool Program." *Child and Adolescent Treatment Services of Western New York*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.buffaloschools.org/East.cfm?subpage=83254>>.

²⁸ "HWSC - What We Do - Hillside Family of Agencies." Hillside Family of Agencies, 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <<https://www.hillside.com/about-us/family-agencies/hwsc/hwsc-what-we-do/>>.

²⁹ "After School Program." *Valley Community Association*. N.p., 2015. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://thevalleycenter.com/youth-services/after-school-program/>>.

National Best Practices

Alabama has had one of the steepest improvements in high school graduation rates, an 8% increase from 2010-2013, and is on pace to meet their goal of a 90% graduation rate by 2020. This initiative is primarily being led by the Alabama Department of Education, and the State Superintendent, who is working with local education agencies and the Alabama School system to monitor graduation rates, and academic and attendance problems as well as partnering with local community, and health services organizations.³⁰

The National Dropout Prevention Center has evaluated many programs for raising graduation rates, and listed several “model programs” that have been proven effective. This means that this program has had consistent positive outcomes, has been subject to rigorous evaluations, and has been successfully replicated in other sites.³¹

One program deemed to be a model program by the National Dropout Prevention Center is *Families and Schools Together (FAST)*, which is a two year, school-based program that works to improve family relationships between children and parents, and between the family and the school. This program works by partnering an elementary, middle, or high school to public health and mental health agencies, and helps children build a foundation of success in school with fewer problem behaviors, and build a stronger relationship between the parents and the school.³²

Another model program is *Center for Supportive Schools*, which has a program called Peer-Group Connection that works by training local faculty to train older students (juniors and seniors in high school) to mentor freshmen in high school, or help their transition from middle school to high school. This program helps build a student’s connection to the school, and among peers in different grades, and has found proven success in improving graduation rates. This program currently has locations in New Jersey, New York City, and North Carolina.³³

A third model program, that has found considerable success in improving graduation rates is *Communities in School*, which is a national program with local affiliates across 25 states, and currently serving 1.5 million students and their families. An independent national evaluation by IFC International has concluded that their model of providing care for the whole child is effective in preventing students from dropping out, and 91% of the students they serve graduate.³⁴ Their model works by assigning a site

³⁰ Alabama Department of Education. Supporting Increased Graduation Rates Strategic Plan A Component of Plan 2020: Strategies for Support Systems. By Thomas R. Bice, Sherrill W. Parris, Melinda Mallox, Linda Felton-Smith, and Tony Thacker. N.p., Aug. 2012. Web. 2 July 2015. <<https://www.alsde.edu/sec/acct/Waiver%20Documents/Attachment%2013%20Increasing%20Graduation%20Rates.pdf>>.

³¹ Reimer, Mary S., and Kaki Dimock. "Best Practices and Model Truancy Programs." (2005): 1-48. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 29 Nov. 2005. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED491287.pdf>>.

³² "How FAST Works." Families and Schools Together, 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <<https://www.familiesandschools.org/how-fast-works/>>.

³³ "Peer Group Connection (PGC)." Center for Supportive Schools, 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <<http://supportiveschools.org/solutions/peer-group-connection/>>.

³⁴ "91% of Our Students Graduate." *Communities in Schools: Our Results*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.communitiesinschools.org/our-results/of-our-students-graduate/>>.

coordinator to a high school, who assesses the school and works with volunteers, partners and the local community, to provide basic needs, academic assistance, career services, and service learning.³⁵

While this particular program does not have any chapters in New York State, the *Full Service Community School-Closing the Gap in Student Performance (FSCS-CTG)* in South Buffalo follows a similar model of a holistic approach to raising high school graduation rates. This program partners with many local mental health, education, and other community organizations as well as the Buffalo City School District to improve education in the South Buffalo Promise Zone by integrating families, students, and schools. This program works on an elementary and high school level, by targeting its work to South Park High School, and Southside Elementary School.

Recommendations

What Can We Do

Raising graduation rates needs to be addressed by the entire Erie County and Buffalo community. This includes school districts, high schools, students, and families.

School Districts can help by building a supportive environment for raising high school graduation rates, by keeping track of the high schools in their district that are struggling with low graduation rates, and supporting programs that integrate communities, schools, families, and students to raise graduation rates, and foster communication between the groups.

High Schools should work with an understanding of the diverse needs of the individual at-risk students. High schools should also be making sure students are held accountable for turning in their assignments and are not failing any core classes. Teachers should communicate with students and service providers to make sure students are getting the focused help they need. High schools should also monitor factors that have shown to be significant indicators of low high school graduation rates such as low attendance records, high suspension rates, and low academic proficiency.

Students and Families should work on finding the help they need through communication with their schools, teachers and service providers outside of school. Families should monitor their child's attendance rates, and academic proficiency, and seek help if their child is struggling. Students and families should advocate for programs that work on a high school level to improve graduation rates, by partnering with local community organizations, schools, and families.

Service Providers should target services to high schools with low graduation rates, and partner with Erie County School District, other local community organizations, and families, to focus their work on a high school level.

³⁵ "Our Work : Communities In Schools." Communities in Schools, n.d. Web. 25 June 2015.
<<http://www.communitiesinschools.org/our-work/>>.

Community Report Card

The Dividing Line Between Those with a High school Diploma and Without

With the rise of technology over the recent years, it has become much harder for those who don't have a high school diploma to get a job, and the incomes of those without a high school diploma continue to decrease. Research shows with those with a high school diploma earn an average \$272,000 more over a lifetime and have 3% less unemployment than their counterparts without a diploma³⁶.

High school dropouts are more likely to be in poverty, have health problems, and spend time in prison than their counterparts with a diploma³⁷. They also have a greater chance of being a single parent, and research shows that those who are children of single parents are more likely to become high school dropouts themselves, further perpetuating the cycle of failing to complete high school.

While graduation rates in the United States have hit a "new record high" according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the state of New York has seen little to no growth in their rates over the last few years, and lags behind the nation's average³⁸.

Erie County's high school graduation rate is higher than New York State's average, at 81% in 2014 compared to New York State's average of 76%.³⁹ However, the school districts in Erie County have a large range of high school graduation rates, ranging from a highest of 97% in Lancaster District, to a lowest of 55% in Buffalo City School District. The chart below shows that school districts of Lackawanna City and the City of Buffalo are significantly below the Erie County average in high school graduation rates.

³⁶ United States Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment*. N.p., 2 Apr. 2015. Web. 24 June 2015. <http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_001.htm>.

United States Census Bureau. American Community Service Briefs. *Work-Life Earnings by Field of Degree and Occupation for People With a Bachelor's Degree: 2011*. By Tiffany Julian. Oct. 2012. Web. 24 June 2015. <<https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-04.pdf>>.

³⁷ University At Buffalo Regional Institute, and The Urban Design Project. "Buffalo Promise Neighborhood Needs Assessment Study." *Buffalo Promise Neighborhood* (2011): 1-47. Web. 24 June 2015. <<http://buffalopromiseneighborhood.org/public/files/BufferoPromiseNeighborhoodNeedsAssessment.pdf>>.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits New Record High*. N.p., 12 Feb. 2015. Web. 24 June 2015. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high>

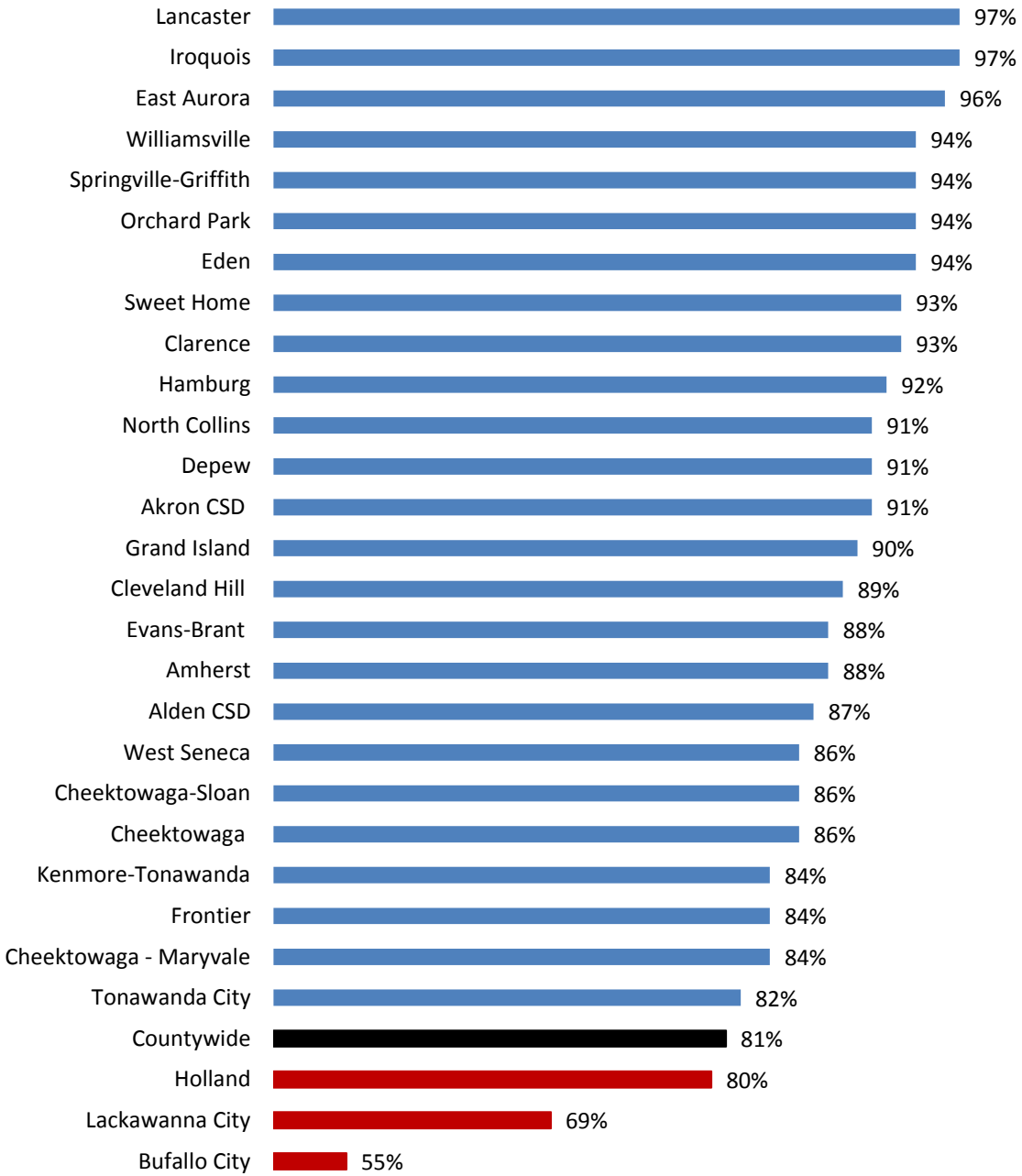
U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Public High School 4-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for the United States, the 50 States and the District of Columbia: School Years 2010-11 to 2012-13*. N.p., Jan. 2015. Web. 25 June 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/tables/ACGR_2010-11_to_2012-13.asp>.

³⁹ New York State Education Department. DATA NYSED.gov. *Erie County Public School High School Graduation Rate (2013 - 14) - 4 Year Outcome as of August*. N.p., 2015. Web. 25 June 2015.

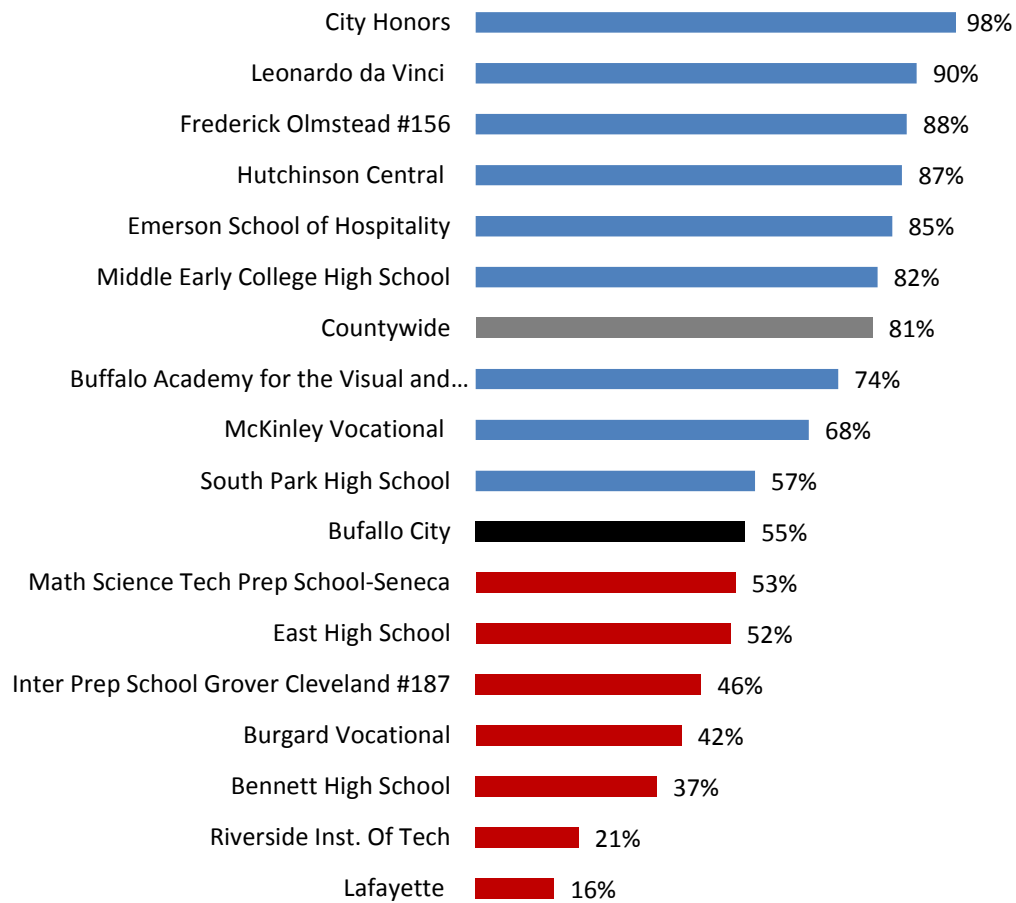
<<http://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?county=14&year=2014&cohortgroup=1>>.

All graduation rates reported by the New York State Department of Education are for a 9th grade cohort in August of their 4th year.

Erie County High School Graduation Rates By School District



Buffalo City School District Graduation Rates By Public High School



Academic Risk Behaviors For Low Graduation Rates *(Idea for designer to put on side of graph)*

Low Attendance

Failing Core Classes



Important Factors Affecting High School Graduation Rates

There are many factors that have contributed to the unevenness in high school graduation rates. Income has shown to be a major factor in affecting graduation rates in Erie County, and the wealthier districts generally have high graduation rates. This trend is shown here by the number of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch, which is a common indicator of low income households.

[See Page 18 "Report Card Chart Income and Grad Rates" for chart idea to be sent to graphic designer]

However, income is not the only factor affecting high school graduation rates. Significant evidence-based research has shown that students who exhibit certain risk behaviors are much more likely to not complete high school, such as low attendance, frequent suspensions, or exhibit academic proficiency problems, such as failing core courses or low exam scores.⁴⁰ The transition from middle school to high school is also a key period in determining whether a student will complete high school. The large number of institutional factors and fundamental student characteristics that affect graduation rates show the importance of a multipronged approach at the community level.

Charter Schools

Charter Schools in Erie County have managed to have above-average graduation rates, despite having large low income populations in their schools. While there are mixed results on whether charter schools cause higher academic achievement than typical public schools, there are initiatives that have been successful in charter schools that may be applied to public schools in Buffalo and Erie County.

What Can We Do

Raising graduation rates needs to be addressed by the entire Erie County and Buffalo community. This includes school districts, high schools, students, and families.

School Districts can help by building a supportive environment for raising high school graduation rates, by keeping track of the high schools in their district that are struggling with low graduation rates, and supporting programs that integrate communities, schools, families, and students to raise graduation rates, and foster communication between the groups.

High Schools should work with an understanding of the diverse needs of the individual at-risk students. High schools should also be making sure students are held accountable for turning in their assignments and are not failing any core classes. Teachers should communicate with students and service providers

⁴⁰ Connell, J. P., B. L. Halpem-Felsher, E. Clifford, W. Crichlow, and P. Usinger. "Hanging in There: Behavioral, Psychological, and Contextual Factors Affecting Whether African American Adolescents Stay in High School." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 10.1 (1995): 41-63. *Sage Journals*. Web. 30 June 2015. <<http://jar.sagepub.com/content/10/1/41.abstract>>. Christle, C. A., K. Jolivet, and C. M. Nelson. "School Characteristics Related to High School Dropout Rates." *Remedial and Special Education* 28.6 (2007): 325-39. *ProQuest Education Journals [ProQuest]*. Web. 30 June 2015. <<http://www.sebosis.com/members/peter/UNE-CAGS-Portfolio/EDU701%20-%20Ed%20Leadership/DropOutPrevention/Christle-SchoolCharacteristicsRelated%20to%20DOrates.pdf>>

to make sure students are getting the focused help they need. High schools should also monitor factors that have shown to be significant indicators of low high school graduation rates such as low attendance records, high suspension rates, and low academic proficiency.

Students and Families should work on finding the help they need through communication with their schools, teachers and service providers outside of school. Families should monitor their child's attendance rates, and academic proficiency, and seek help if their child is struggling. Students and families should advocate for programs that work on a high school level to improve graduation rates, by partnering with local community organizations, schools, and families.

Service Providers should target services to high schools with low graduation rates, and partner with Erie County School District, other local community organizations, and families, to focus their work on a high school level.

Report Card Chart- Income and Graduation Rates

(see Page 16)

Average Graduation Rate of Top 3 Buffalo Public Schools with Least Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (called High Income Schools)- 92%

Average Graduation Rate of Bottom 3 Buffalo Public Schools with Highest Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (called Low Income Schools)- 43%

Gap- 49%

Overall-63%

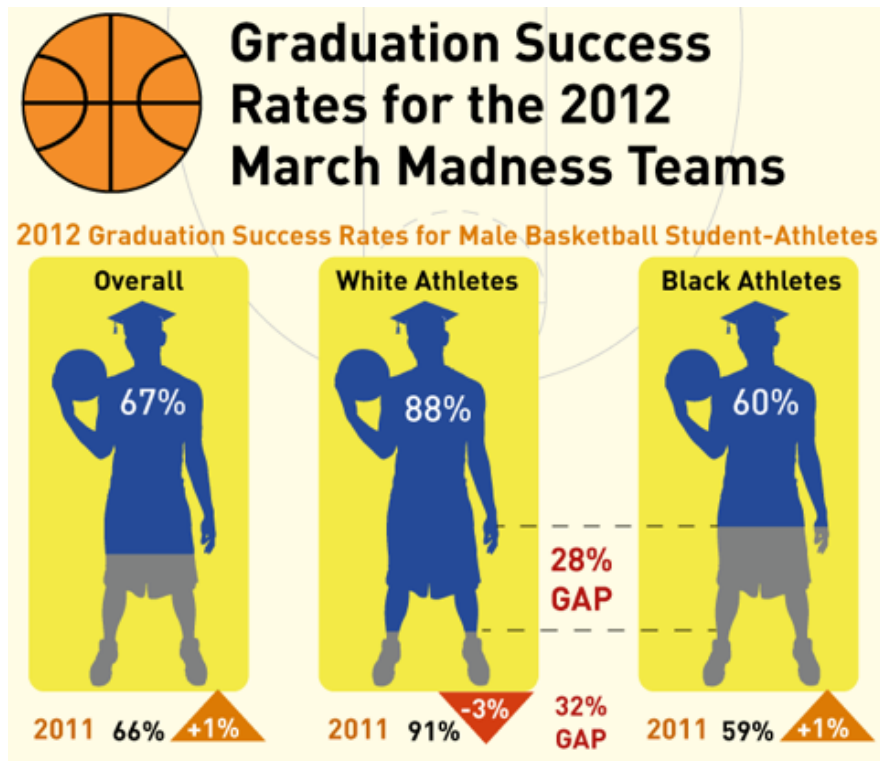
Districts with Least Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (called High Income School Districts)- 94%

Average Graduation Rates of Bottom 3 Erie County School Districts with Highest Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (called High Income School Districts)- 70%

Gap- 24%

Overall- 81%

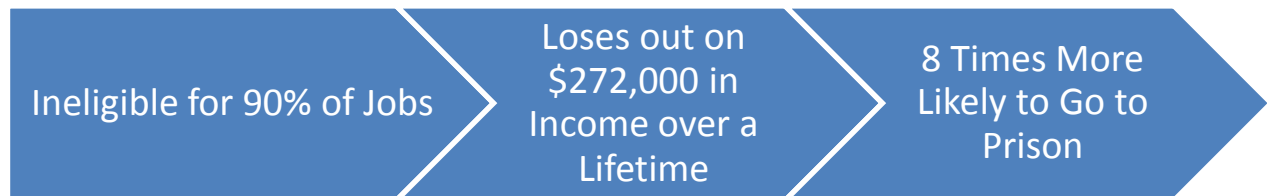
Possible Chart Template



Marketing Infographic Proposal

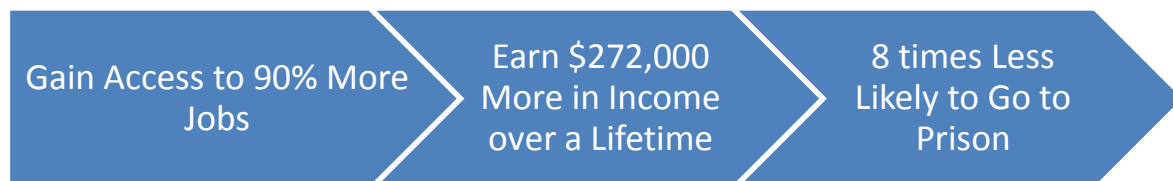
(The image I would use is a person about to walk on a path with the given information. I included the same information in both a positive and negative spin, to hear the graphic designer's preference)

A Student Who Does Not Graduate High School is...



This Year 1,978 Students in Erie County Stepped on this Path

Improving High School Graduation Rates Can Help Potential Dropouts...



This Year 1,978 Students Could Have Been Prevented from Stepping on this Path.

How Can We Do this Better Next Year?

Advocacy Letter- Community Schools Act

Dear Crystal Peoples-Stokes,

On behalf of your constituents in District 141, we are writing to encourage you to consider re-submission of A-6791 in next session. This bill is an act to amend the education law, in relation to establishing the Community Schools Act. This bill would allow the commissioner to award competitive grants to eligible cities in New York State to implement community schools that link local community academic, health, counseling, legal, and other services to directly to the students and their families through the school system.

Research has shown that communities with high poverty rates are very likely to have low graduation rates in their schools. In New York State, high income districts have almost a 30 percentage point higher graduation rate than low income districts. In Buffalo City School District, 3 out of every 4 students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and almost half the students in Buffalo fail to graduate on time. If a child is unable to see the blackboard, or is struggling with mental health or family problems, they not be able to properly focus on their education. While improving the quality of education is absolutely vital to the solution, a successful approach needs to focus on the holistic needs of the whole child, which reach far beyond their life in the classroom.

Even more research has shown that a child who fails to graduate high school earns an average of \$272,000 less in their lifetime, and has a 3% higher unemployment rates than their counterparts with a diploma. Students who don't graduate high school are also more likely to be in poverty, have health problems, and spend time in prison, which also raises public expenditures. This year alone, the City of Buffalo lost out on 18.2 million in annual earnings because 1,153 students in the Class of 2014 did not graduate. This shows the pressing need to improve graduation rates through an evidenced based approach.

The Community Schools model has been proven effective in improving academic achievement and high school graduation rates in a range of cities, including Tulsa, Oklahoma; Cincinnati Ohio; and Providence, Rhode Island. In addition, the national organization *Communities in Schools*, which follows the community school model, has been one of the few organizations to have evidence- based research indicating its success in raising high school graduation rates. Because of the model's proven success, Buffalo has initiated the *Full Service Community School-Closing the Gap in Student Performance (FSCS-CTG) Consortium* in South Buffalo. This program partners with many local mental health, education, and other community organizations as well as the Buffalo City School District to improve education in the South Buffalo Promise Zone, with services provided in Southside Elementary (SE) and South Park High School (SPHS).

The Community Schools model is also highly cost-effective, as they bring existing services to the schools where students are already located, which allow the federal, state, local, and private dollars to directly

meet the students' need. In addition, grants are awarded to school districts after careful consideration of the district's measured need, the strength of the district's proposal to target the highest need schools, and sustainability of their community school program.

Given the importance of education to so many residents of Erie County, we at United Way look forward to A-6791 eventually reaching the Assembly Floor. If you have any questions or need further information please do not hesitate to contact me at...

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Weiner

Volunteer Reflection: West Side Ministries

Wednesday July 15, 2015

The first thing I immediately noticed when volunteering at West Side Ministries was the wealth of volunteers the organization has. West Side Ministries' volunteer coordinator, Megan Platt, had to take us to 4 or 5 different projects that were packed with volunteers before finally finding a project that could use our help. We ended up painting the outside of one of the walls of a house, along with many high school students from Western New York, who came from over an hour and half away looking to fulfill their community service hours. One of the main things that struck me was the patience the supervisor of the project John had with the volunteers. I have basically no experience painting, was amazed with John's patience in explaining how to paint properly over and over again, even when I was standing on a ladder and accidentally dripping paint on those below me. It made me think about how frustrating it must be for the experienced painters and supervisors to give up control of the project to children and student volunteers, when they must know they could do it better and faster themselves. John made me realize that there is a great deal more importance to the volunteer work than actually getting that particular job done, but part of the purpose is to inspire these children and students to gain an appreciation for volunteering, and to have them keep it as a part of their lives. It also showed me the incredible patience and faith in people that people at these organizations have.

Similarly, a man I talked to during lunch who worked at a different non-profit organization on the East Side of Buffalo in an afterschool youth mentoring and basketball program discussed how so often the children he works with don't believe in their own abilities, and often don't have mentors that show them that they can be successful, and not fall into a life of crime or drugs. He said that this also serves to benefit the mentors, who are also youth from the same neighborhoods, as it provides them incentive and purpose to be a good role models. He described how the quality of the mentor's experience evolved from a side benefit to one of the main focuses of the organization when he saw how much this program benefited the mentors. This showed me how important it is to exude trust, and confidence in everyone in a non-profit organization, because sometimes the people that benefit the most from it are not the ones originally anticipated.