

## Moving Forward to Increase Graduation Rates in Baltimore City

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# Policy Brief

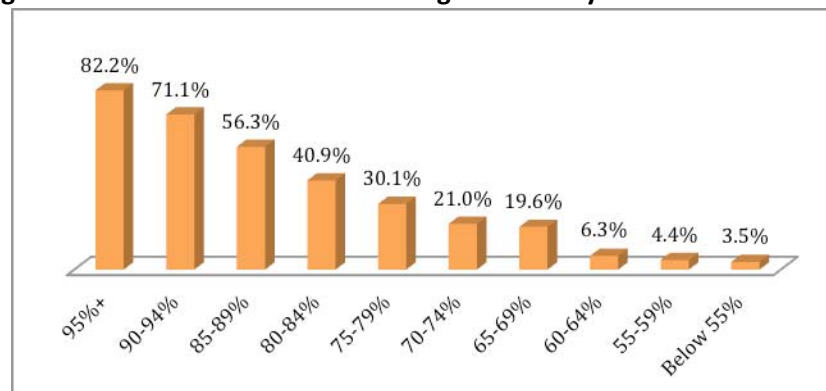
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A study of two first-time ninth grade cohorts in Baltimore City Schools, followed forward to their on-time graduation year and one year beyond, found that **increasing ninth grade attendance and course passing rates is the most important lever for increasing the graduation rate.**

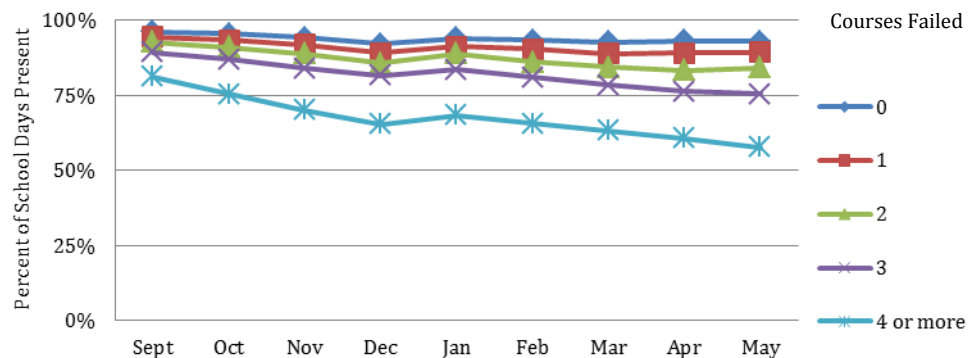
The probability of graduation increases steadily as ninth grade attendance rates increase (Figure 1). More than eight in ten who attended school at least 95% of the time in ninth grade went on to graduate. By contrast, the graduation rate was lower than 20% for those ninth graders who attended less than 70% of the time.

**Figure 1. Percent of Cohort Graduating On-Time by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Attendance**



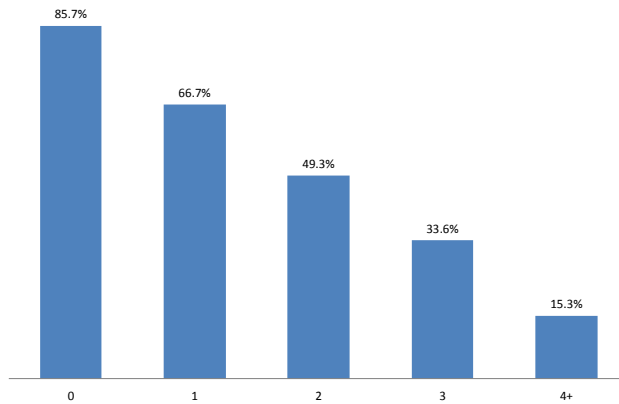
Ninth grade course passing declines with attendance (though a notable number of students with relatively good attendance also failed courses). Figure 2 shows the relationship between course failure and monthly attendance in the ninth grade year:

**Figure 2. Percent of School Days Present per Month, by Number of Core Course Failures in 9<sup>th</sup> Grade (2004-05)**



As Figure 3 illustrates, the probability of graduation decreases steadily with each ninth grade course failure.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Students Graduating On-Time, by Number of 9th Grade Core Course Failures**



**Credit Recovery.** The total number of high school courses failed in Baltimore City Schools in 2009-10 (including both core and non-core subjects) was over 45,000 (25% of all attempted). Accommodating credit recovery for all of these courses is a huge undertaking. City Schools may be better served to focus on helping students earn the course credit the first time to increase the district's graduation rate.

**Warning Indicators.** Almost two-thirds of students with low ninth grade attendance and course passing rates were showing early warning signals in middle school, but more than a third began falling off-track only when they reached ninth grade. Even after controlling for attendance and course failure in ninth grade, **males and students who were overage for grade (because of previous retentions) were less likely to graduate.**

### Implications

**Continue City Schools' campaign to increase attendance** in all schools. Preventing chronic absence and re-engaging chronically absent students will help increase the city's graduation rate.

**Deliver explicit instruction to middle grades students about the importance of a high school diploma** and the behaviors (attendance and course passing) necessary to receive it. This instruction should be incorporated into curriculum so that students experience it frequently during the school year and their school career.

**Ensure that incoming ninth graders are prepared** by having them participate in effective programs for a successful transition to high school. Transition programs need to be engaging and focused on motivating students to attend and succeed in school.

**Support high school teachers to:**

- **Build consensus about the need to prevent course failure** rather than to rely on credit recovery opportunities, and
- **Implement explicit strategies** for preventing failure.



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