

# The Readiness Question: What Falling Graduation Rates Mean for New York's Future

## Introduction

In 2022, the New York Equity Coalition analyzed [state high school graduation rates](#) and found a significant [nine percent increase](#) in the statewide graduation rate since 2016. However, the analysis also found that the increase was primarily the result of Covid-era Regent exam exemptions and other regulatory changes, rather than improvements in academic preparedness. The brief cautioned that there could be a decline in graduation rates in the coming years unless there were significant improvements in instruction and learning across the state's K-12 system.

Today, with the Covid-era exemptions no longer available, the New York Equity Coalition's predictions have proven true: [graduation rates have dropped across the state from 87% in 2022 to 85% in 2025](#). While a two percent decrease may not seem significant, it is the largest year-over-year decline in twenty years, and a stark signal that we are heading in the wrong direction.

What is most concerning about this decline from 2022 is that it was [disproportionately comprised of students who are underserved](#), particularly English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELLs/MLLs) and students with disabilities, who saw a 15% and 3% decrease in 2025 graduation rates, respectively, since 2022.

The graduation rate changes indicate that waivers benefited ELLs/MLLs more than they did other student subgroups, demonstrating that the Regents exams, particularly in ELA, have historically posed the most significant barrier to graduation.

Taken together, these findings are both predictable and deeply concerning as the state moves to sunset Regents exams as a graduation requirement and create new, more subjective graduation requirements based on the



Portrait of a Graduate. While the decline in graduation rates for ELLs/MLLs and students with disabilities confirm that passing Regents exams were a barrier to graduation for some students, the findings, combined with state and national assessment data, show that far too many New York students are leaving school without the foundational skills necessary for success in college and career.

At the same time, it is already difficult for parents, employers, and policymakers to make sense of students' post-secondary preparedness — [despite](#) the state's 85% graduation rate, only 56% of New York students passed the Algebra 1 Regents Exam, and only 31% of eighth graders were proficient in Reading on the 2024 NAEP. EdTrust-New York is deeply concerned that the elimination of Regents exams as an objective graduation measure, combined with uncertainty about how the state will ensure rigor and comparability across schools in their place, will make it even more challenging to determine if a New York diploma truly signifies college and career readiness.

## The Role of Testing Exemptions & Declining Proficiency Rates

Much of the decline in graduation rates can be attributed to the rollback of exemptions offered by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) during the COVID-19 pandemic and other regulatory changes made earlier. This included the cancellation of Regents exams, lowering of scores required to pass Regents exams, the introduction of the 4+1 Pathway that allowed students to earn a Regents diploma by passing fewer Regents exams with an additional pathway, and an increase in the number of local diplomas awarded.

Importantly, students of color and students with disabilities were the most likely to utilize these changes, resulting in an increase in graduation rates that mask state and national data on student math and reading proficiency. There is a clear issue emerging across the state — the standard used to determine the readiness of a graduate has been adjusted and redefined to a point where it is difficult to determine if a New York diploma truly signifies college and career readiness.



# Key Findings

## Graduation Rates Decline Across the State

As noted, a two percent decrease in graduation rates is substantial and concerning. From an equity perspective, it is more concerning when those declines are singularly comprised of Black and Latinx students, those from low-income backgrounds, ELLs/MLLs, and students with disabilities. These student subgroups account for 100% of the two percent decline from 2021-'22 and 2024-'25.

Student Group	2021-2022	2024-2025	Percentage Point (pp) Difference
All Students	87%	85%	-2 pp
Black Students	82%	80%	-2 pp
Latinx Students	81%	79%	-2 pp
Economically Disadvantaged Students	82%	81%	-1 pp
Students with Disabilities	69%	66%	-3 pp
English Language Learners/ Multilingual Learners	65%	50%	-15 pp
Asian American and Pacific Islander Students	93%	92%	-1% pp
White Students	91%	91%	0 pp

## Black and Latinx Students See a Decline

- Graduation rates declined by 2% for Black and Latinx students to 80% and 79% respectively, lower than the statewide average of 85% and significantly lower than the graduation rates of White (91%) and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (92%).
- These students also disproportionately opted into Regents waivers, 4+1 Pathways, and other alternatives like local diplomas.

## Multilingual Learners See the Most Significant Decrease

- ELLs/MLLs saw a 15% decrease in 2025 graduation rates since 2022 — the largest of all student groups.
- These declines are even more stark when considering the baseline from which they have fallen. In 2022, 65% of ELLs, or only two out of every three, graduated high school. Today it is only 50%.

**15** percentage point

decrease in ELLs/MLLs 2025 graduation rates since 2022

## Graduation Rates 2024-2025

**85%**

Statewide average

**80%**

Black Students

**79%**

Latinx Students

**91%**

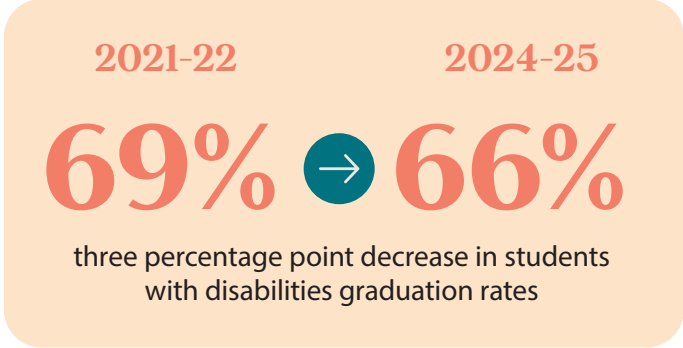
White Students

**92%**

Asian American and Pacific Islanders

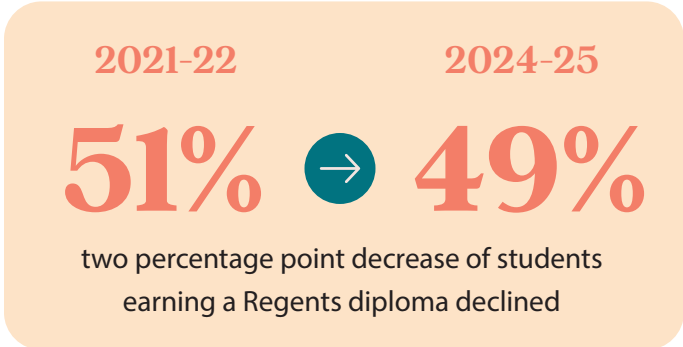
## Students with Disabilities are Heavily Affected

- Students with disabilities saw the second-highest decline in graduation rates — from 69% to 66%.
- There are multiple alternative assessments and local diplomas available to these students — however, they have recently been scrutinized for a lack of transparency and rigor associated with them. For this cohort of students, graduation rates alone may not provide a representative metric for assessment and post-graduate readiness.



## Decline in Traditional Diplomas Earned

- Statewide, the percentage of students earning a Regents diploma declined from 51% in 2022 to 49% in 2025.
- Regents diploma attainment among ELLs/MLLs has declined alongside their overall graduation rates. In 2022, 55% of ELLs/MLLs earned a Regents Diploma, but by 2025, that figure had fallen to 38%.
- There was a 2% overall decline in students earning a Regents Diploma and a 4% increase in students earning a less rigorous Local Diploma. This increase in Local Diploma attainment was even higher for Black, Latinx, ELLs/MLLs, and students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are more likely than any other group to receive local diplomas. Statewide, 21% of students with disabilities graduate with a Local Diploma, followed by 12% of ELLs/MLLs, and 9% of Black students.



# The Big 8 Graduation Rates

## Albany

Albany's graduation rate fell by 7 percentage points, going from 82% in 2022 to 75% in 2025.

7 ↓ percentage points

### Equity Implications

- The graduation rate for Black students fell by 9 percentage points, from 82% in 2022 to 73% in 2025. The graduation rate for Latinx students fell by 8 percentage points, from 76% to 68% in the same timeframe.
- The graduation rate for ELLs/MLLs fell 10 percentage points from 68% in 2022 to 58% in 2025.
- For students with disabilities, it fell from 60% to 54% — an 8-percentage point drop.

## Buffalo

The graduation rate in Buffalo fell 8 points from 2022 to 2025 — from 79% to 71%.

8 ↓ percentage points

### Equity Implications

- The graduation rate for Black and Latinx students both saw drops of 9 percentage points — from 78% to 69% for Black students, and from 72% to 68% for Latinx students
- Students with disabilities are graduating at a rate 6 points below 2022 (from 65% to 59%), and economically disadvantaged students are graduating at a rate 10 points below 2022 (79% to 69%)
- The number of graduates who are ELLs/MLLs has plummeted the most over three years. The graduation rate for these students effectively was halved: from 76% in 2022 to 38% in 2025.

## Mount Vernon

After experiencing a dip in its graduation rate from 79% in 2022 to 74% just a year later, Mount Vernon's graduation rate in 2025 has risen back up to 79%.

### Equity Implications

- The graduation rate for students with disabilities fell the most between 2022 and 2023 — from 61% to 39%. The graduation rate has improved to 55% this past year but remains below its height in 2022.

## New York City

Over three years, the graduation rate in New York City has fallen 3 percentage points (from 84% in 2022 to 81% in 2025).

3 ↓ percentage points

### Equity Implications

- Graduation rates for most student groups fell a comparable amount, but rates for ELLs/MLLs had the steepest drop-off between 2022 and 2025: from 67% to 52% (15 percentage points).
- Other student groups saw comparatively smaller drop-offs in their graduation rates. Black students saw a 4-percentage point drop from 81% to 77% in three years. Latinx students and economically disadvantaged students both saw a 3-percentage point drop, and the graduation rate for students with disabilities dropped from 64% to 59% — 5 percentage points.

## Rochester

**Rochester has seen an 11-point drop in its graduation rate since 2022 — from 71% to 60% among all students.**

**11** ↓ **percentage points**

### Equity Implications

- The graduation rate for Latinx students saw the largest drop: 14 percentage points between 2022 (67%) to 2025 (53%). The number of Black graduates dropped 9 percentage points from 73% to 64% in the same time frame.
- The graduation rate for students with disabilities fell from 55% to 46% from 2022 to 2025, but ELLs/MLLs saw the sharpest decline. In 2022, nearly two out of three ELLs/MLLs graduated (64%). In 2025, only a bit over a third graduated (35%).

## Syracuse

**The graduation rate in Syracuse has fluctuated over the last five years. In 2022 the graduation rate was 72%, and since then has landed at 71%.**

### Equity Implications

- Latinx students saw the largest one-year drop in graduations, from 72% in 2024 to 65% in 2025. The graduation rate for Black students has stayed steady at 72% between these years, but is still 3 percentage points below where it was in 2022 (75%).
- The graduation rate for ELLs/MLLs dropped the most, from 70% in 2022 to 50% in 2025.

## Utica

**The graduation rate in Utica has fallen 17 percentage points between 2022 and 2025 — from 84% to 67%.**

**17** ↓ **percentage points**

### Equity Implications

- Black and Latinx students experienced harsher drop-offs in graduation rate. Black students are graduating at a rate 19-points below their 2022 high (from 76% to 57%). The graduation rate for Latinx students in 2022 was 85%, and since then it has dropped 21-percentage points to 64%.
- The graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students dropped 17 percentage points since 2022, from a high of 83% to 65%. Their graduation rate is lower than it has ever been in the past six years.
- Just over half of all students with disabilities are graduating on time (52%), compared to 2022 when about two-thirds were graduating on time (65%).
- Among the state's eight largest cities, Utica recorded the most significant drop in ELL/MLL graduation rates. While in 2022 ELLs/MLLs were graduating at a rate of 71%, now they are graduating at a rate of 27% — a drop of 44 percentage points.

## Yonkers

**Yonkers's graduation rate has held steady overall. After a one percentage point dip in 2024, the graduation rate has moved back up to where it was in 2022 at 90%.**

### Equity Implications

- The graduation rate for ELLs/MLLs follows the trend in the rest of the state, though not as severely. In 2022, ELLs/MLLs had a graduation rate of 83%. In 2025, the graduation rate was 73%.

## Moving Forward

### *New Graduation Requirements Will Blur Future Data*

2029 is expected to mark the first academic year in which the redesigned graduation standards and requirements — referred to as the “Portrait of a Graduate” — will replace Regents exams as a requirement to graduate. The Portrait of a Graduate will be used to assess the post-graduate readiness of students in New York.

With new graduation requirements on the horizon, it is important to closely monitor graduation rates until the new system is fully in place. Currently, there is limited clarity of the new system and how schools and districts will measure the readiness of graduating students in a way that ensures rigor and comparability across over 700 New York school districts.

With the upcoming phase out of passing Regents exams being a graduation requirement, the next three years represent the last chance stakeholders will have to capture objective graduation data. It is imperative that NYSED continues to message the importance of all students taking Regents exams, which federal law requires at least 95% of students to complete, to ensure meaningful collection of data. Without this data, it will be extremely difficult to establish any comparable baseline between now and 2029, or a baseline to compare students who do not opt out of Regents testing once the new system is in place. NYSED must continue to administer the Regents for all eligible students, and encourage families to opt into testing to ensure the collection of data.

This creates even more urgency for New York to develop and implement a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) to evaluate the success of the Portrait of a Graduate and its impact on students’ post-secondary success. It also underscores the importance of federal NAEP data as an objective measure, particularly as it expands to include 12th grade reading and math in 2028.

