

The CTE Achievement Gap

CTE Students Are 15.5% More Likely to Graduate High School

Summary:

In the graduating class of 2014, Oregon Career and Technical Education (CTE) concentrators were 15.5 percentage points more likely to graduate high school in four years than were students statewide^{1, 2}. This “CTE Achievement Gap” is the opposite of Oregon’s Achievement Gap and the increase in graduation rates for CTE concentrators is greatest for historically underserved students.

The CTE Achievement Gap is not unique to Oregon. According to the Association for Career & Technical Education, nationwide “the average high school graduation rate for students concentrating in CTE programs is [13 percentage points higher than the] average national freshman graduation rate³.”

A growing body of academic research supports these graduation data. A 2013 study from Mississippi State University found that students taking any CTE course graduated at a rate of 77.5%. CTE students in Career Pathways graduated at a rate of 81.1%. Both graduation rates were “considerably higher than the state-reported graduation rate of 73.7% for all students.” In addition, “purposeful programs of study in career and technical education at the secondary level can not only increase graduation rates, but also create a college and career ready individual (Lim, Owen, & Nordin)⁴.”

Taken together, the CTE Achievement Gap and impact on college and career readiness may provide a path to reduce or eliminate Oregon’s Academic Achievement Gap.

Analysis:

CTE concentrators across every racial/ethnic subpopulation graduated at higher levels than did students in the same subpopulation statewide. The CTE Achievement Gap is particularly pronounced in subpopulations whose students graduated below the statewide average of 72.0%.

Class of 2014 Student Subpopulation	CTE 4Yr Grad	Statewide 4Yr Grad	% Difference	CTE n
Black/African American Students	84.0%	60.2%	23.8%	231
American Indian/Alaska Native Students	76.6%	53.5%	23.1%	226
Hispanic/Latino Students	85.9%	64.9%	21.0%	2,495
Multi-Racial Students	87.6%	69.8%	17.8%	639
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Students	83.6%	68.8%	14.8%	73
White Students	87.8%	74.2%	13.6%	10,030
Asian Students	94.6%	85.9%	8.7%	647
All Students	87.5%	72.0%	15.5%	14,341

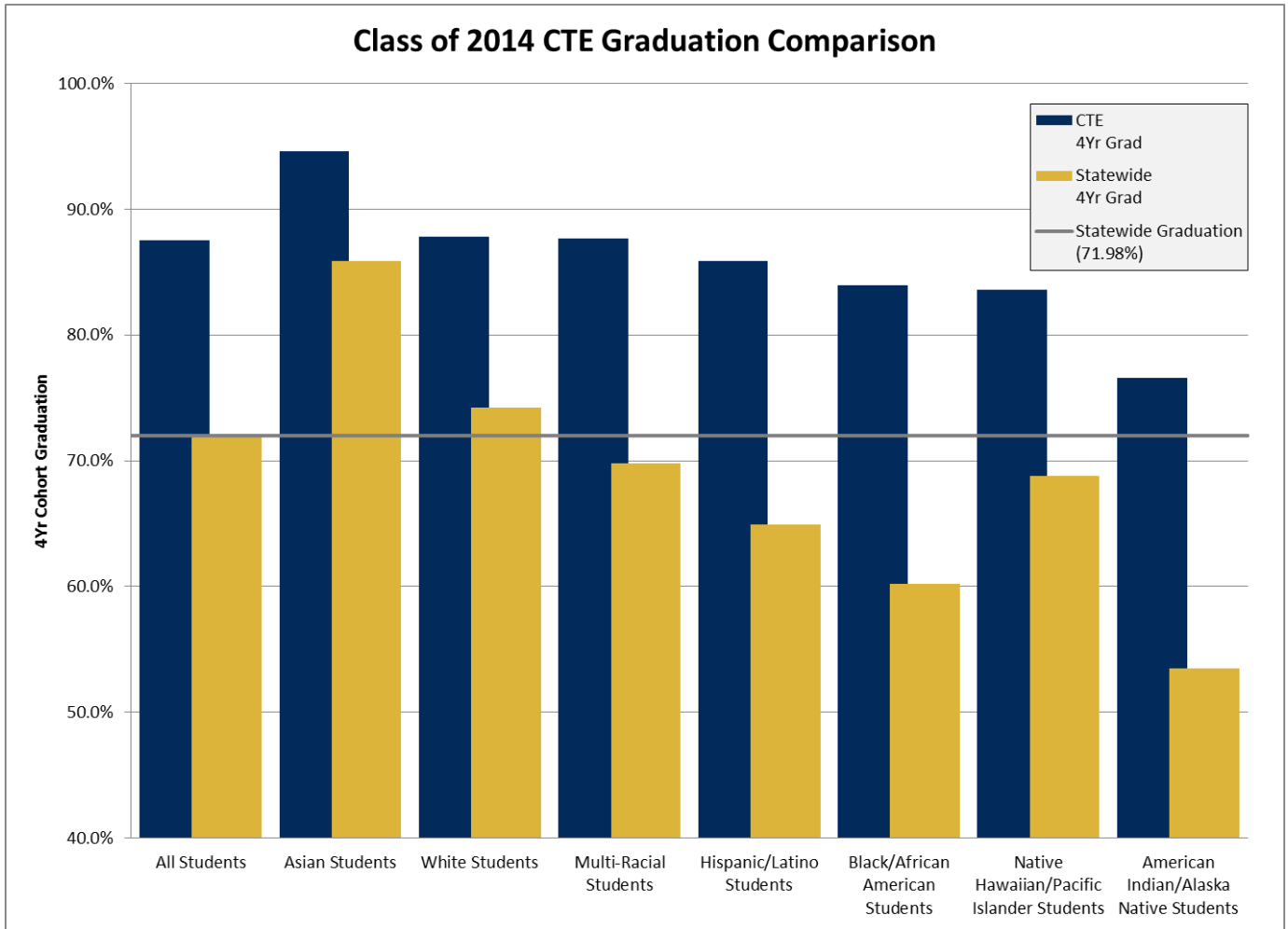
¹ CTE data from Oregon 2014-2015 Perkins Consolidated Annual Report. More information is [available here](#).

² Statewide data from Oregon 2014-2015 Statewide Report Card. More information is [available here](#).

³ Association for Career & Technical Education “What is CTE?” More information is [available here](#).

⁴ “Graduation Rates and Contributing Factors in CTE Students Versus Traditional Academic Students” More information is [available here](#).

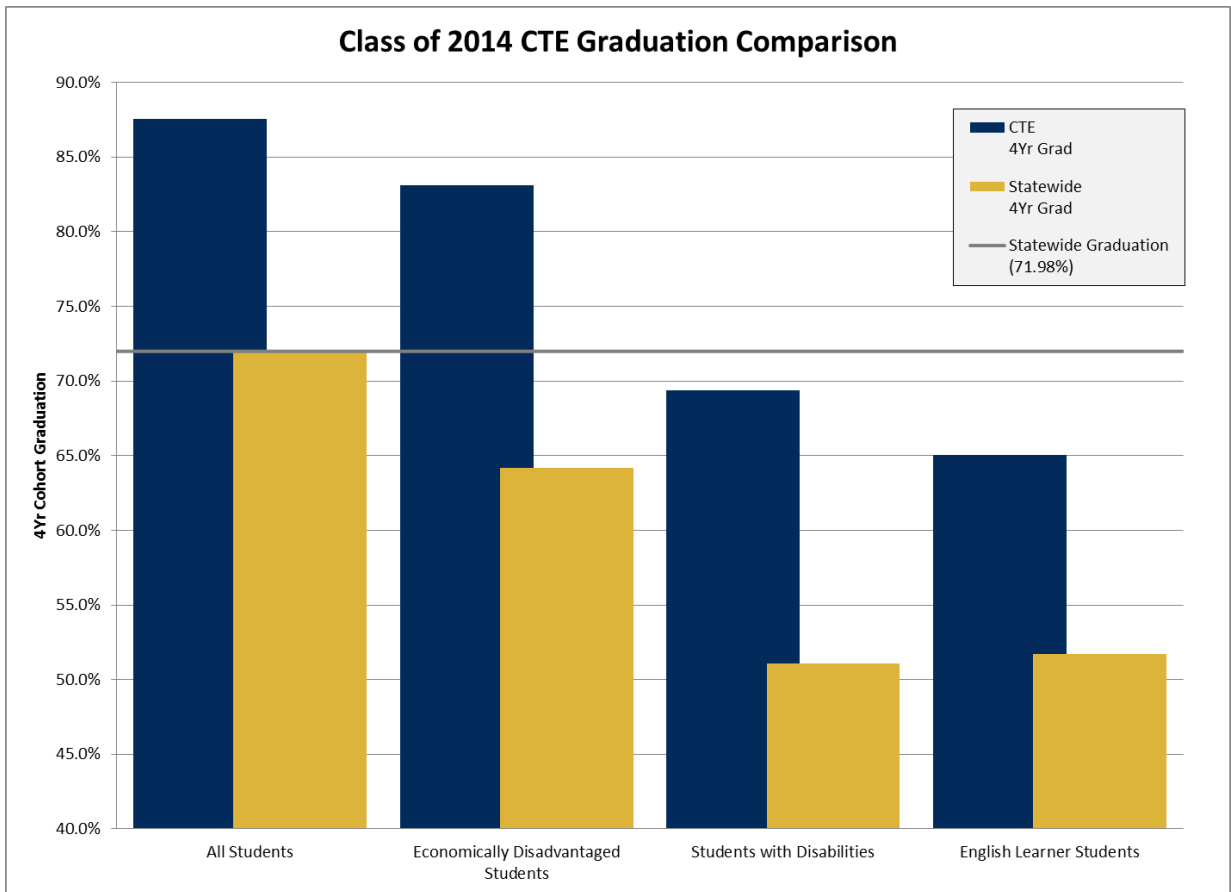
CTE concentrators across every racial/ethnic subpopulation graduated at levels higher than the statewide average of 72.0%.



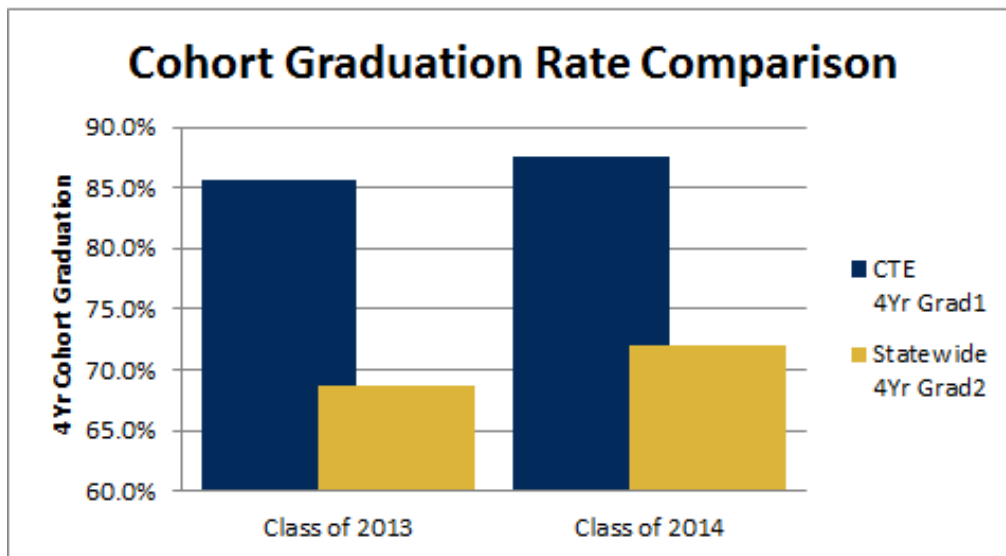
The CTE Achievement Gap is also significant for other subpopulations whose students graduated below the statewide average of 72.0%.

Class of 2014 Student Subpopulation	CTE 4Yr Grad	Statewide 4Yr Grad	% Difference	CTE n
Economically Disadvantaged Students	83.1%	64.2%	18.9%	5,698
Students with Disabilities	69.4%	51.1%	18.3%	2,086
English Learner Students	65.0%	51.7%	13.3%	143
All Students	87.5%	72.0%	15.5%	14,341

CTE concentrators with disabilities graduated near the statewide average for all students (69.4% compared to 72.0%). Economically disadvantaged CTE concentrators were more likely to graduate than students statewide (83.1% compared to 72.0%).



The 2014 CTE Achievement Gap is not unique. The Oregon Department of Education has CTE cohort graduation data for the classes of 2013 and 2014. As noted, The CTE Achievement Gap was 15.5 percentage points for the Class of 2014; the CTE Achievement Gap was 17.0 percentage points for the Class of 2013.



Additional Information:

This analysis is correlational and should not be interpreted as demonstrating that CTE *causes* graduation rate increases.

- The best explanations available today for CTE graduation rates are anecdotal and come from the field (administrators, teachers, students, etc.).
- What we hear from the field is that CTE is different in important ways: learning reflects student interests, it is specifically focused on career outcomes, and instruction is hands-on.

CTE graduation rates and statewide graduation rates are not precisely an apples-to-apples comparison.

- Oregon statewide cohort graduation rates include every first year student (net of students moving into/out of the state, etc.). Oregon CTE graduation rates are defined similarly but include only students who have earned one or more credits in a technical skill course as part of an Oregon state-approved CTE Program (CTE Program of Study, State-Recognized CTE Program), of which at least one-half (.5) credit must be designated as “required” for program completion.
- CTE graduation rates are included in, and contribute to, the statewide numbers.

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