

# Making School Matter:

Providing Support to At-Risk Students and  
Reducing the Dropout Rate

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# Distinguishing Between Symptoms and Causes

- High dropout rates are a symptom of larger systemic problems
- Many school reforms are not implemented with a clear focus on how they will solve the problems schools face
- Marginal and peripheral efforts are unlikely to change patterns
- Must examine the way failure becomes normalized - Payne

# Reducing Dropout Rates Requires a Change in How Schools Operate

- Challenge assumptions about kids who fail
  - Normalization of failure
- Need for early intervention systems
- Need to engage parents early
- Need for partnerships between schools and CBOs
- Need to personalize the learning environment - schools where students are known

# Why Students Dropout:

- Source: The Silent Epidemic - Gates Foundation, Education Week, Pew Center on Public Policy
- 47% dropout because they are bored, unmotivated and disengaged
  - Poor teaching - heavy reliance on lecture, drill, test prep
  - Stuck in remedial courses - students treated as though they are dumb, no plan to connect students to more challenging academic program
  - Unchallenging curriculum - what they learn is not connected to their lives

# Why Students Dropout:

- 43% drop out because they are behind in credits because they have missed too many days of school
- Why?
  - Stress in the household and lack of support at home
  - Lack of connection with adults at school
    - School has no plan to help students to catch up
  - Distracted by misguided peers - pull of the streets

# Why Students Dropout:

- 35% were failing classes and unprepared for high school - 65% were passing and on track
- Why:
  - Weak literacy skills
    - Most high schools lack reading specialists
  - Lack of organization skills, time management
  - Low esteem due to lack of competence
  - Lack of clear future goals

# Why Students Dropout:

- 32% leave school to work - especially true for immigrant students
- Why?
  - Immigrant youth feel pressure to work to support themselves and their families
  - Kids in poverty are faced with tough choices related to supporting family and self

# What Can be Done to Reduce the Dropout Rate

- Improve teaching - Move away from excessive reliance on lecture and test prep
  - Interactive strategies - project-based learning, Socratic seminars, experiential learning, simulations, presentations
  - Make class time work time - reduce reliance on homework, teachers must look for evidence of learning

# Strategies for Reducing Dropout Rates

- Make curriculum more relevant to the lives of students
  - Vocational education - marketable skills that don't limit options
  - Cultural relevance - build connections between what is learned and what is familiar to students
  - Show how what is learned in school can help students to address real problems in their lives

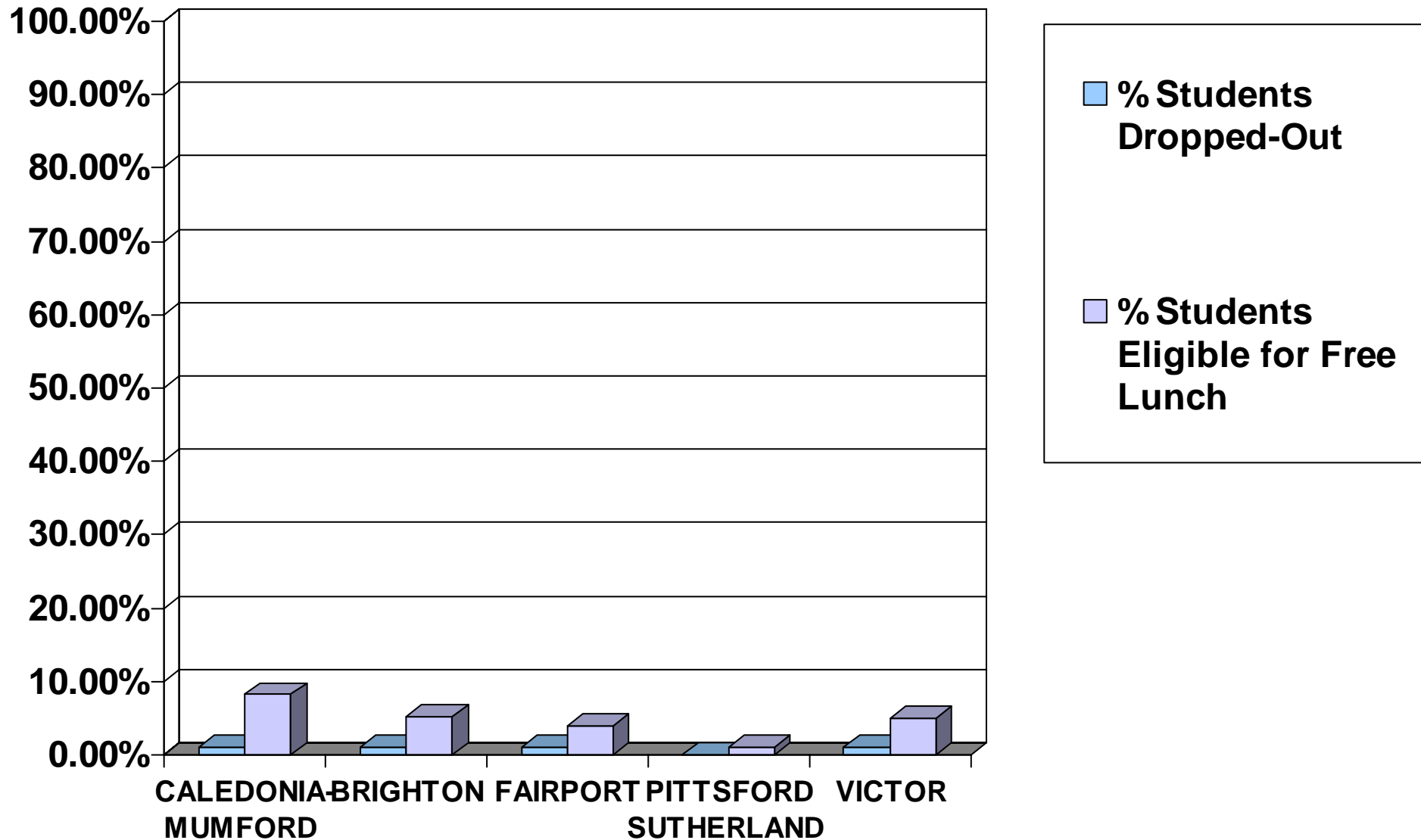
# Strategies for Reducing Dropout Rates

- Help students to develop concrete plans for the future early
  - Involve students in counseling about college early
  - Engage parents in advising
- Build stronger ties between adults and students
  - Effective use of extracurricular activities
  - Develop small learning communities
  - Pro-active mentoring
  - Utilize every teacher as an advisor
- Design systems to identify at-risk students and to intervene early
  - Target at-risk youth with mentors, jobs, and services
  - Utilize after-school and intensive summer school programs

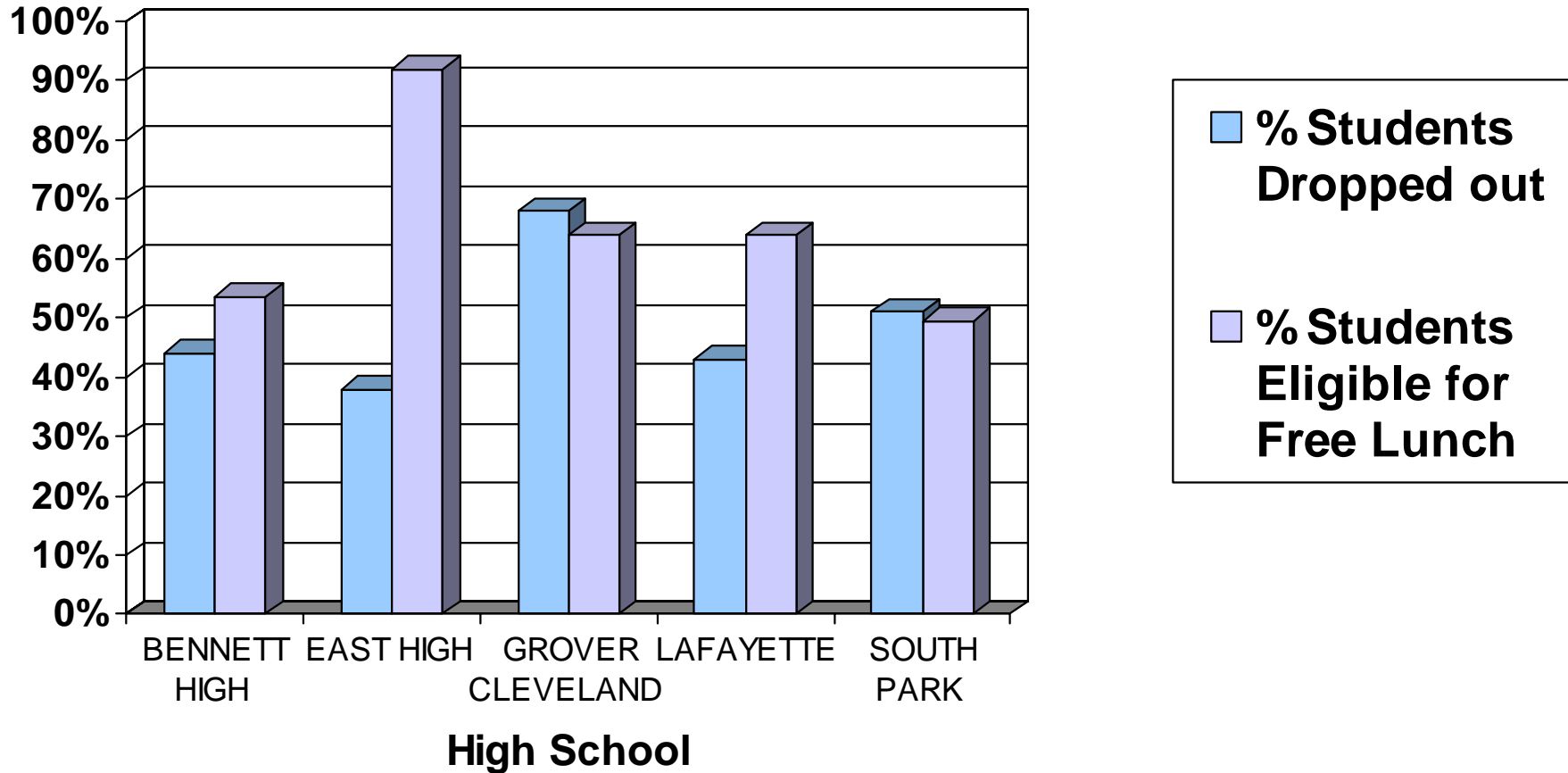
# Keep in Mind

- Changing school culture is the most important thing that can be done to keep students in school
  - Build community
  - Adopt rituals and practices that reinforce values and norms that promote achievement
  - Counter anti-intellectualism so that its “cool to be smart”
- We may need to adopt alternative pathways to diplomas for students who cannot fit into traditional school structures and schedules

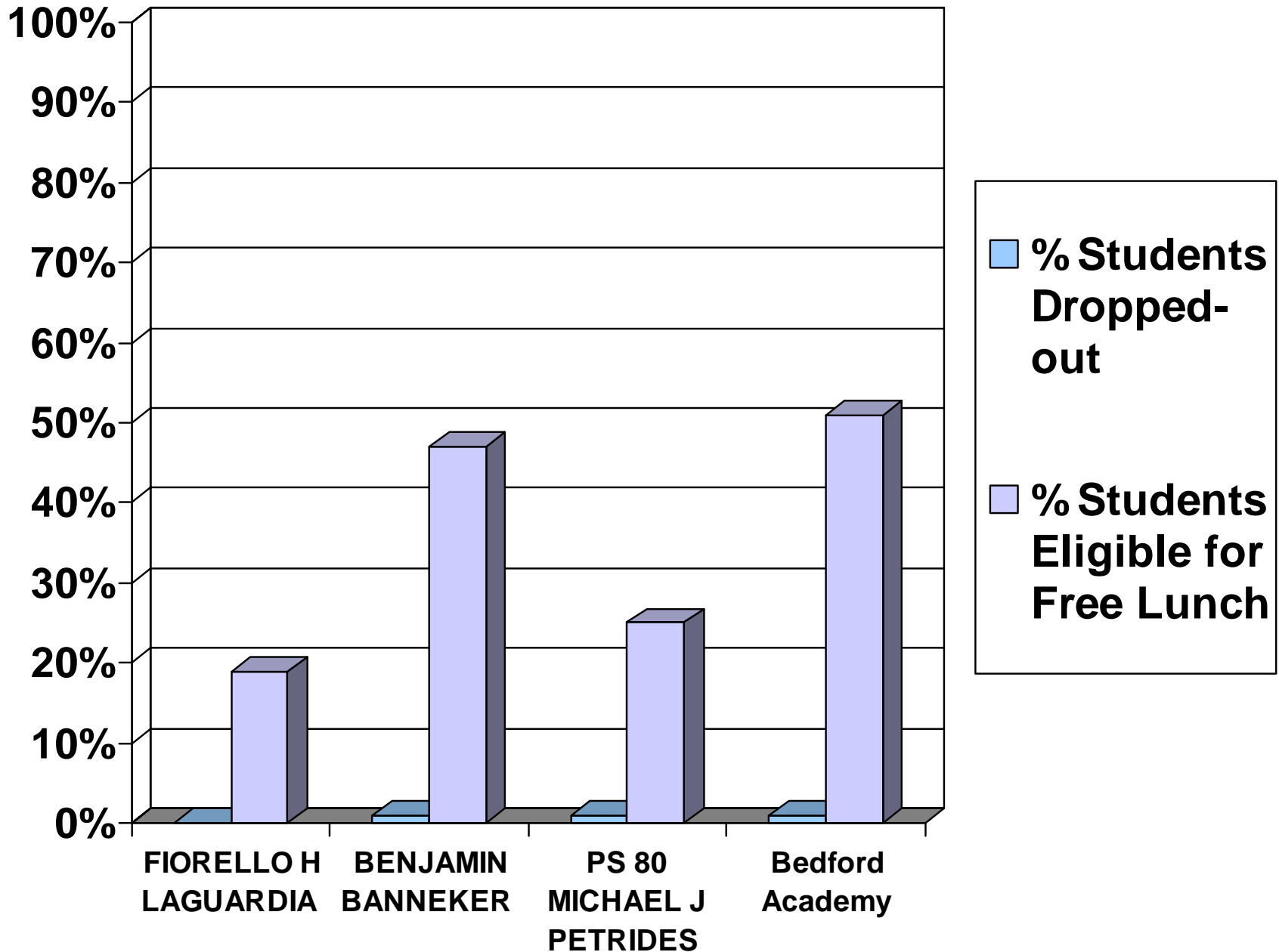
# Rochester high schools with the lowest drop-out rates



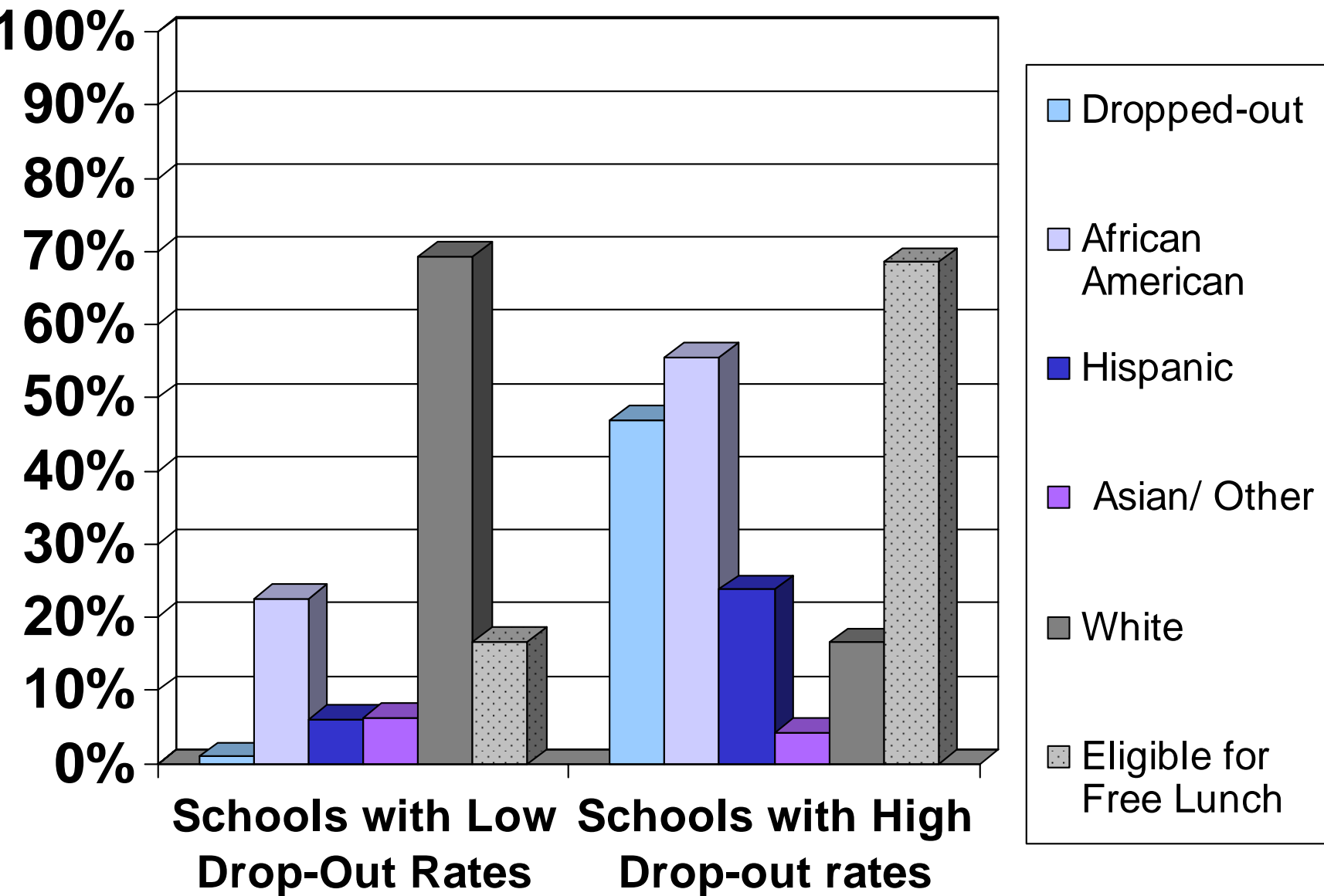
# Buffalo High Schools with Highest Drop-out Rates



# NYC High Schools

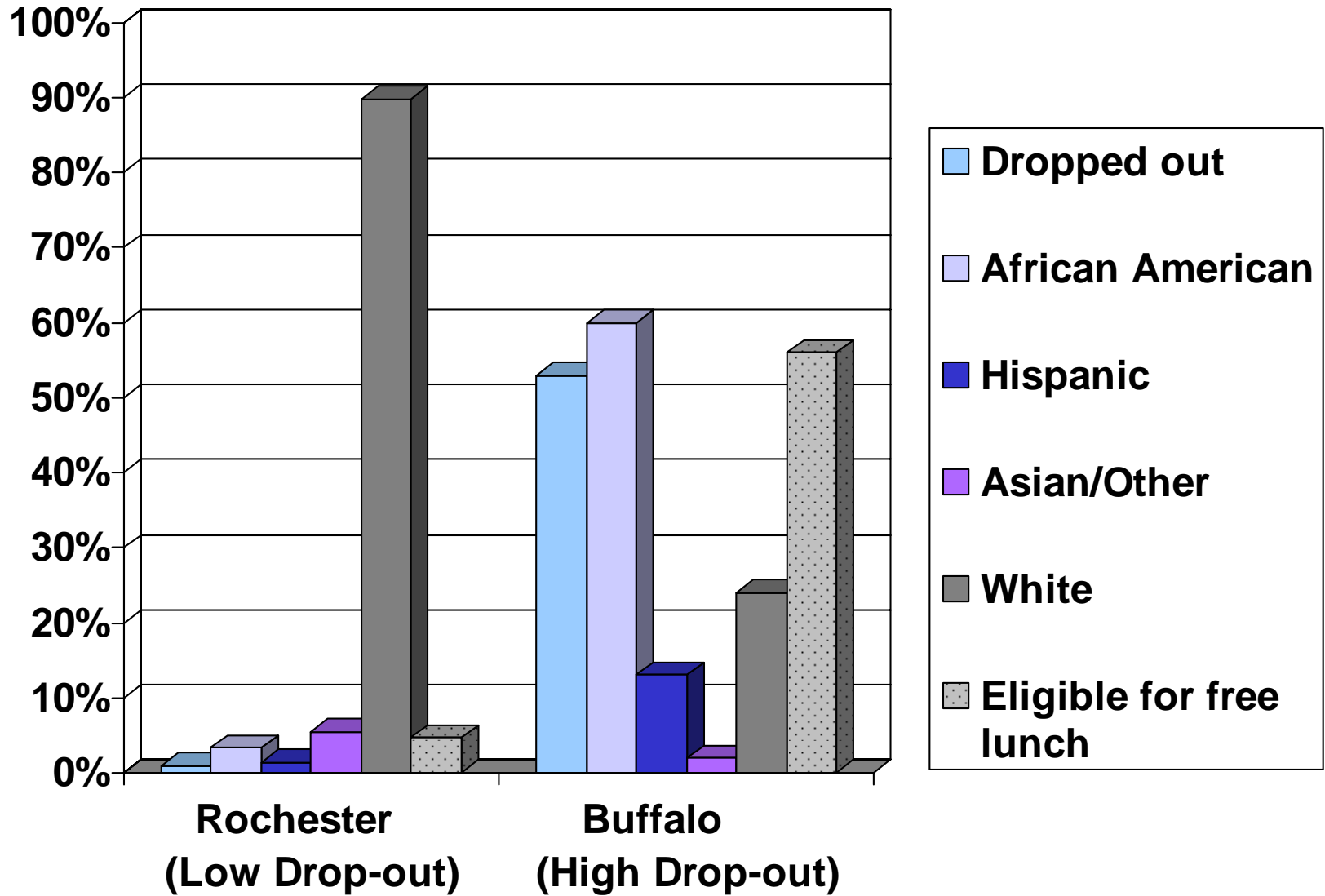


# Comparison Across New York State

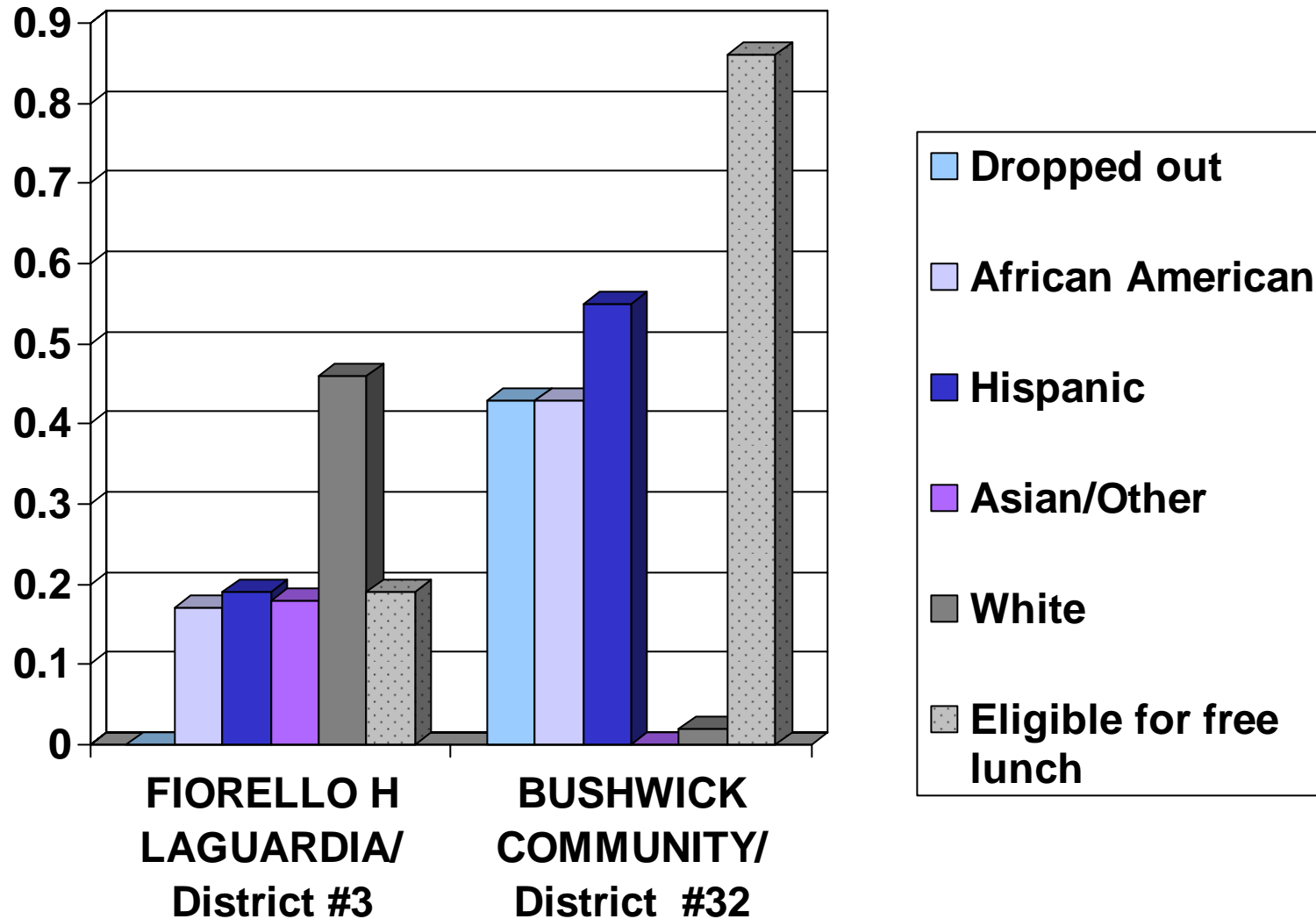


\*Averages based on ten schools per category

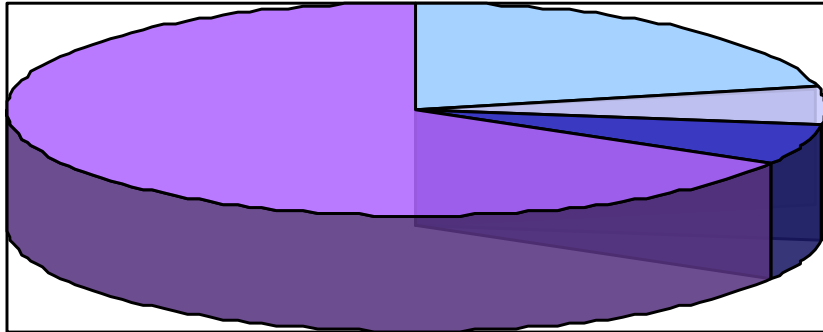
# A Comparison Across Cities



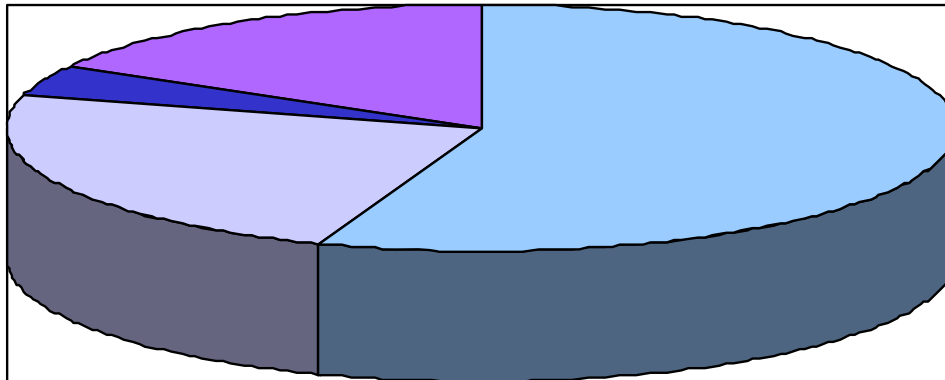
# Comparison Across NYC High Schools



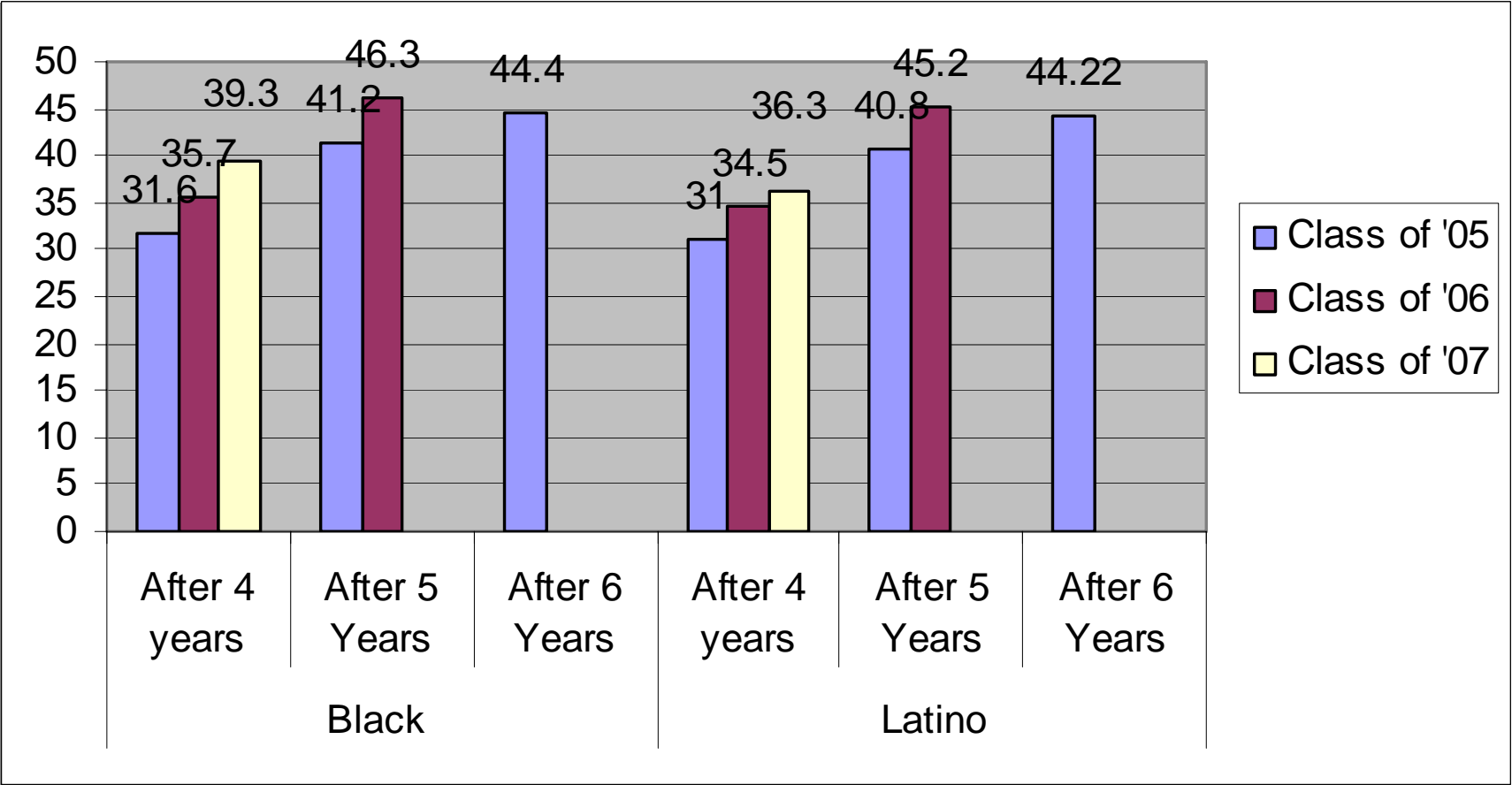
## Average Demographics for Schools with Low Drop-Out Rates



## Average Demographics for Schools with High Drop-out Rates



# Percentage of Black and Latin Males in NYC Earning Regents or Local Diplomas



# Percentage of Black and Latino Males in NYC Earning Regents Diplomas

