

Appendix A

Methodology for Income Study

Defining the Cohort. This study tracked a cohort of students who were in ninth grade in 1997-98. Using the Florida Educational Data Warehouse, 251,930 students were identified. Each student was then tracked through 2000-01, the academic year anticipated for high school graduation. A student was removed from the cohort if at least one of the following conditions was met:

- a. Transferred out of the school or district and did not receive a high school diploma at a Florida public high school by 2000-01;
- b. Transferred to a private school;
- c. Transferred to a home-education program;
- d. Transferred to an adult-education program; or
- e. Student was deceased.

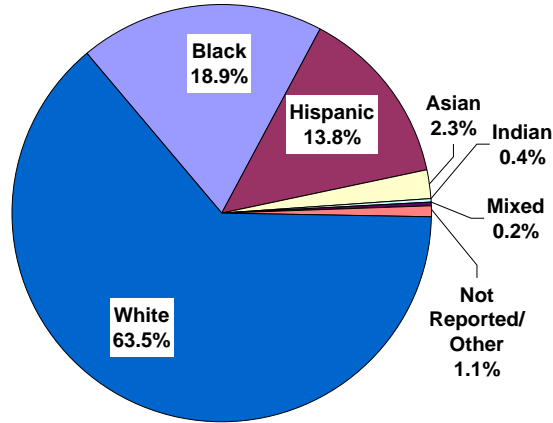
This resulted in a cohort of 191,872 students. Because the purpose of the study is to track a cohort over a period of years, students who subsequently moved to a Florida public high school after ninth grade were not added to the cohort. Therefore, graduation rates will differ from those published by the Florida Department of Education.

Using information from a ninth grade student's 1996-97 eighth grade year, each student was designated as receiving free lunch or reduced-cost lunch (participants) or not receiving free/reduced-cost lunch (non-participants). Free meals are available to students "from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level" (USDA, 2004) and reduced-cost meals are available to students from families "with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level" (USDA, 2004). The poverty level in 1996 was \$15,600 for a family of four. Therefore, to qualify for free meals, a family income had to be \$20,684 or less, and for reduced-cost meals it had to be between \$20,685 and \$29,435. Students in this study not only had to qualify, but also participate in the program to be counted as a participant. Students whose eighth grade information was unavailable were categorized as a non-participant. For this study, free and reduced-cost meals are both in the "participants" group, but are shown separately in the graphs and tables.

Complete data were available for 191,872 students who were in public ninth grade in 1997-98. More than half of the students in the cohort (70.2%) did not participate in the free or reduced-cost lunch program. Exhibit 1 shows the racial/ethnic distribution among the groups of students. Exhibit 1 shows that White students comprise two-thirds of the non-participants and only one-third of the participants. Additionally, African American and Hispanic students comprise much smaller proportions of the non-participating students than the participating groups. African American students comprise more than one-third of the participants group, and less than one-fifth of the non-participants. Hispanic students comprise 26% of free lunch students and 20% of reduced-cost lunch students. Among non-participants, they represent slightly more than one-tenth of the students.

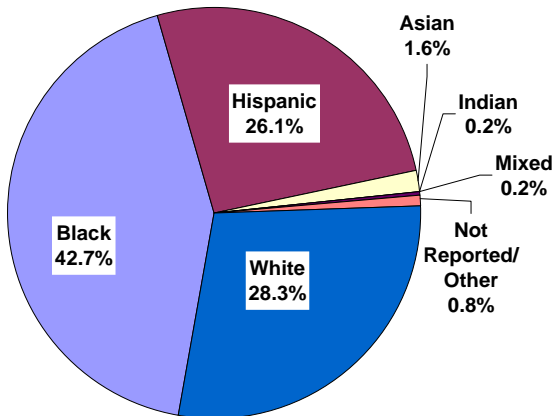
**Exhibit 1
Race/Ethnic Distribution of 1997-98 9th Graders**

**Non-Participants
n=134,703**

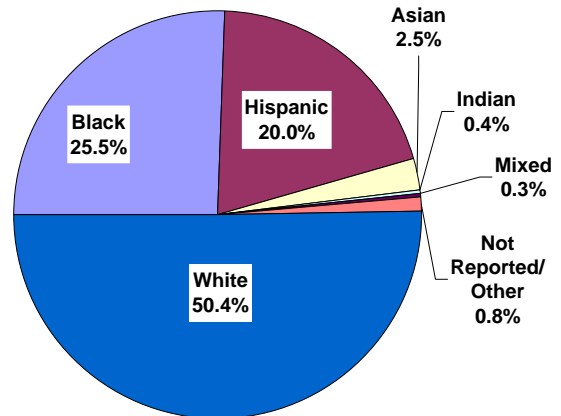


**Participants
n=57,169**

**Free Lunch Participants
n=46,534**



**Reduced-Cost Lunch Participants
n=10,635**



Source: Florida Education Data Warehouse, 2005.

The entire study period was from 1997-98 through 2004-05. Following the general path of four years in high school, tracking students through 2004-05 would allow four years for students to enter a postsecondary institution. The focus of this study is on major entry points into the postsecondary arena and, therefore, district technical centers were excluded.