

# 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<sup>1, 2</sup>. This “CTE Achievement Gap” is the opposite of Oregon’s Achievement Gap and the increase in graduation rates for CTE students is greatest for historically underserved students.

The CTE Achievement Gap is not unique to Oregon. According to the Association for Career & Technical Education, “The average high school graduation rate for students concentrating in CTE programs is [13 percentage points higher than the] average national freshman graduation rate<sup>3</sup>.”

A growing body of academic research supports these graduation data. A 2013 research paper 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<sup>4</sup>.”

The same study found that, “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).”

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.

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 currently graduate below the statewide average of 72.0%.

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

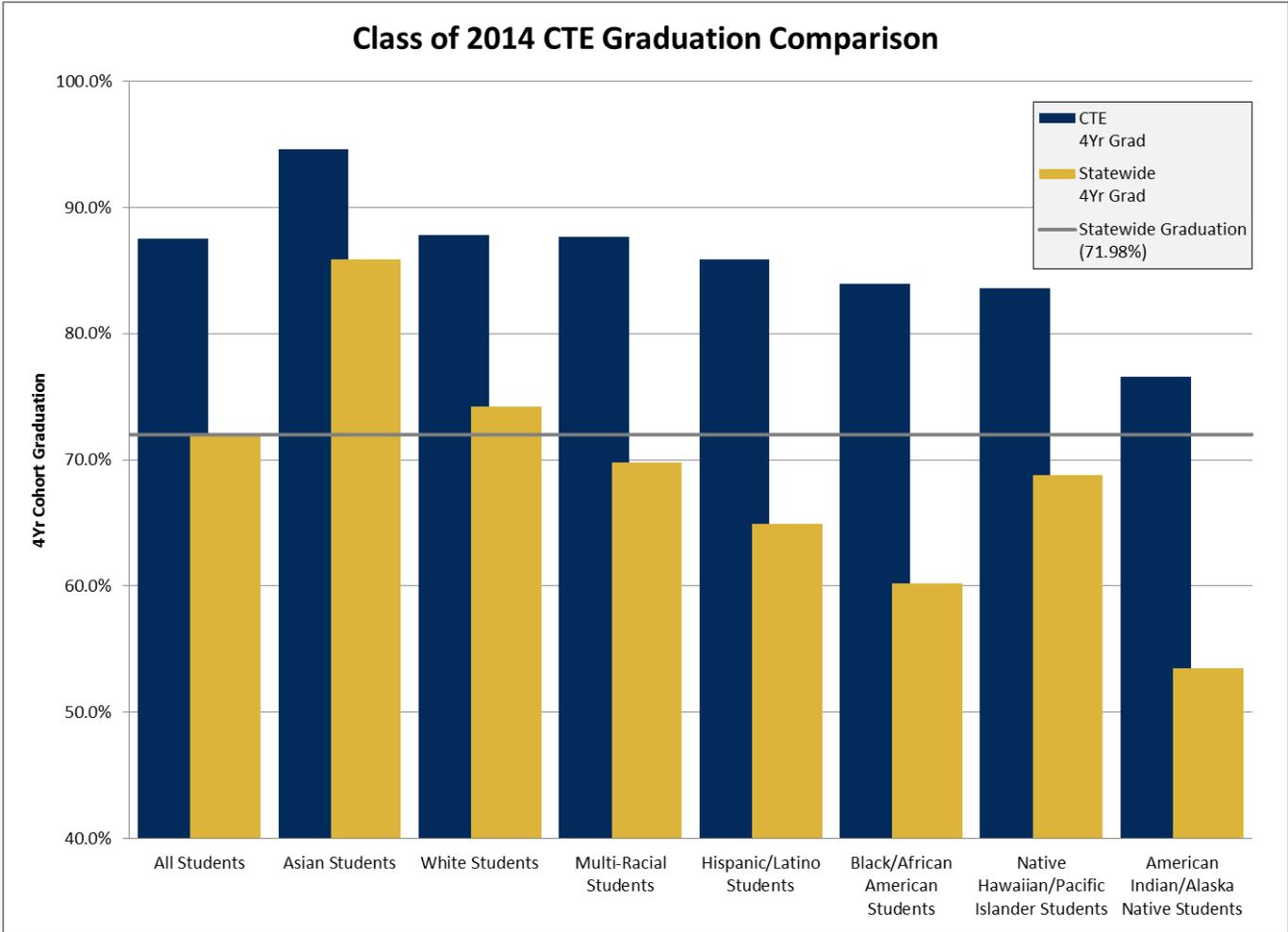
<sup>1</sup> CTE data from Oregon 2014-2015 Perkins Consolidated Annual Report. More information is [available here](#).

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

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

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

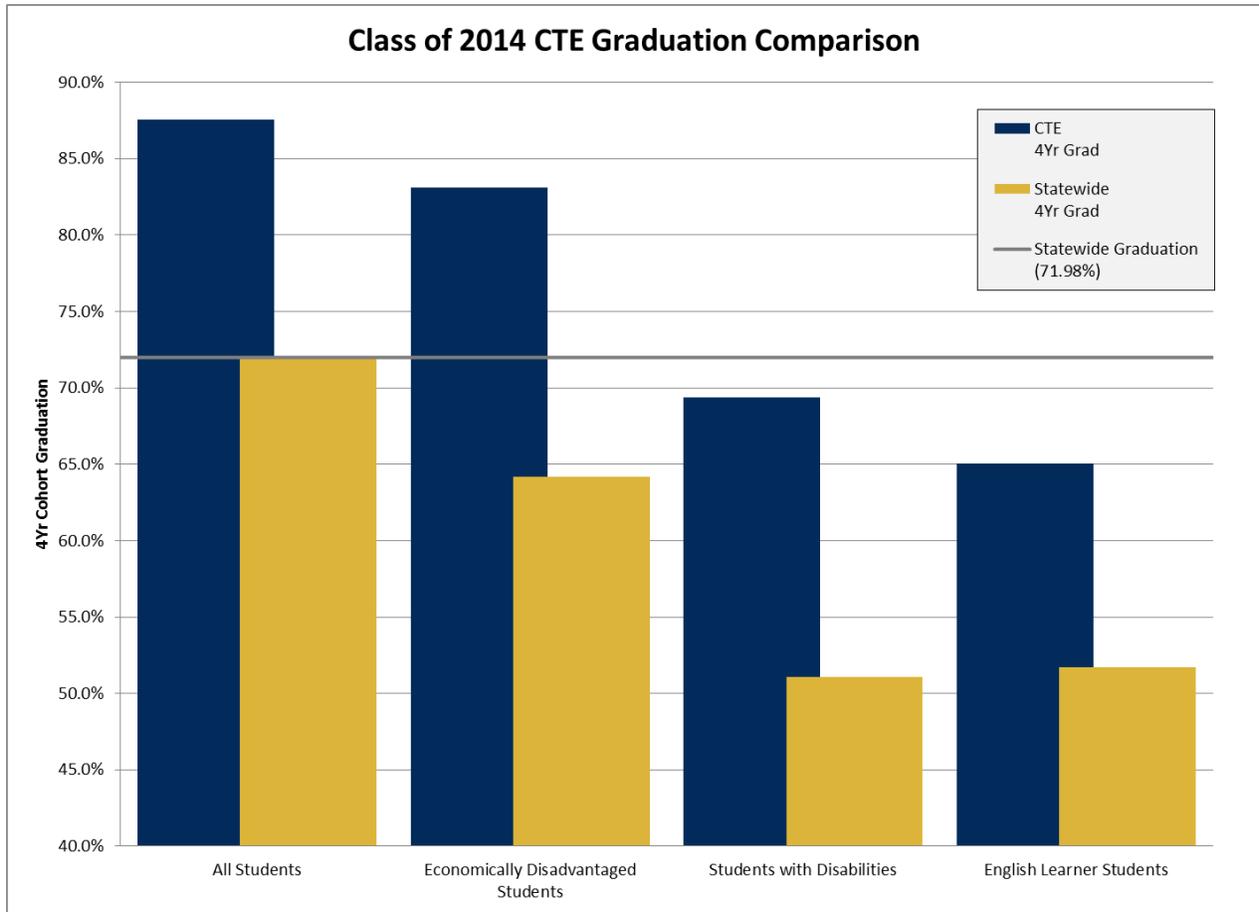
CTE concentrators across every racial/ethnic subpopulation graduate at levels higher than the statewide average of 72.0%.



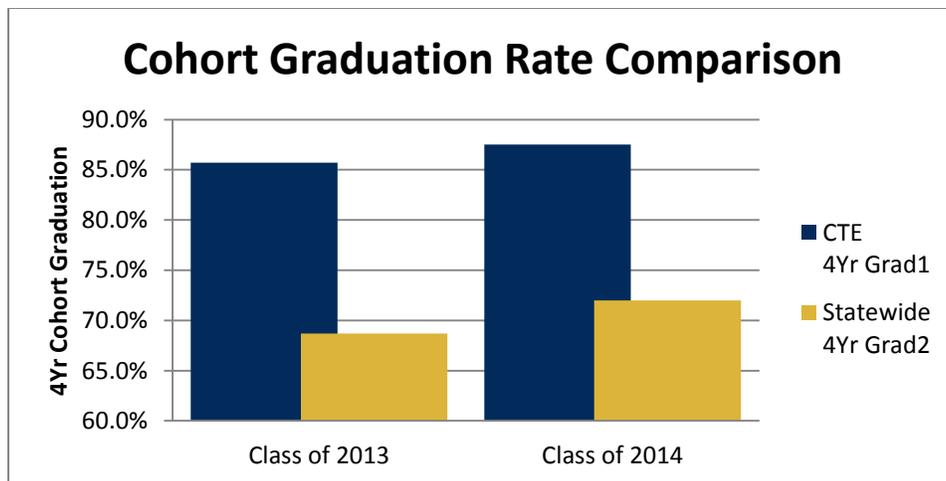
The CTE Achievement Gap is also significant for other subpopulations whose students currently graduate below the statewide average of 72.0%.

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

CTE concentrators with Disabilities graduate near the statewide average for all students (69.4% compared to 72.0%). Economically Disadvantaged CTE concentrators graduate at a higher rate than do all students statewide (83.1% compared to 72.0%).



The 2014 CTE Achievement Gap is not an anomaly. The Oregon Department of Education has four year, 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 Career and Technical Education 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 4Yr 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 the statewide numbers.

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