

The Truth-O-Meter Says:



Says "kids who start in the ninth grade in the city of Newark this past September, 23 percent of them will graduate in four years."

[Chris Christie](#) on Thursday, December 29th, 2011 in a radio interview

Chris Christie repeats misleading statistic on Newark's high school graduation rate

Gov. Chris Christie pushes his plans to reform New Jersey public schools using student performance in urban school districts as one of his statistical battering rams, but consistently misrepresents the high school graduation rate of the state's largest district.



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Christie claims fewer than 25 percent of freshmen in Newark high schools graduate in four years. PolitiFact New Jersey debunked similar statements twice -- first in June, then again in November. But the governor hasn't learned his lesson and keeps repeating the statistic.

On Nov. 18, the day after we published a story criticizing Christie for his use of the statistic, the governor delivered the keynote address at a Notre Dame education forum. He said there: "How hard is it to understand failure, when in Newark, the children this year, two months ago, who entered the ninth grade, 23 percent will graduate in four years with a high school diploma."

More recently, in a Dec. 29 radio interview on WOR-AM, host John Gambling asked Christie what his biggest disappointment was in 2011.

"The biggest disappointment is that we didn't get any education reform this year, and we really need to. Now, members of the Legislature are telling me that we're going to get to it in the first quarter of 2012. So I live in hope, John," Christie said. "But my biggest disappointment is, when you know that the kids who start in the ninth grade in the city of Newark this past September, 23 percent of them will graduate in four years, 23 percent."

He said to Gambling later in the interview, after also citing per-pupil spending costs in Newark: "that's why education reform is so necessary and that's the biggest disappointment from 2011 is that we didn't get it done."

Actually, more than half of Newark's ninth grade students will graduate from high school in four years, because there's more than one way recognized by the state Department of Education to earn a high school diploma.

But Christie cites the lower number, which represents a segment of the city's high school graduates. Both graduation rates are included in a presentation based on a study by a private consulting firm

that had ties to Christopher Cerf before he was named New Jersey's acting education commissioner.

The smaller percentage -- 22 percent, not 23 percent, according to the presentation -- only includes students who graduate in four years by passing the High School Proficiency Assessment, a state standardized test. But there are other routes to graduation.

Students can take an alternate exam, now called the Alternative High School Assessment, to finish high school and some students are exempt from testing.

In all, 55 percent of students graduate from Newark's high schools in four years, according to data from the 2009-2010 school year.

Though there is debate about the merits of the alternate exam, it is still a state-approved way to graduate from high school. And when Christie cites a graduation rate without explaining who it represents, he ignores a group of the students he argues it's imperative to help.

The governor's office did not respond to requests for comment.

Our ruling

Christie said "that the kids who start in the ninth grade in the city of Newark this past September, 23 percent of them will graduate in four years."

The claim has been debunked twice but Christie continues to repeat the erroneous statistic. About 55 percent of Newark freshmen graduate in four years, not 23 percent. Consistently repeating a proven falsehood isn't just wrong, governor, it's ridiculous. Pants on Fire!

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