

Graduation Rate Q&A

Section A - US DOE 4 Year Graduation Guidance

A-1. What is a “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate”?

As defined in 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(i)-(iv), the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (hereafter referred to as “the four-year graduation rate”) is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently “adjusted” by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the 9th grade and the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during that same period. (See questions A-10 through A-24 for more information about adjusting a cohort.)

A-2. How is the four-year graduation rate calculated?

The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate in four years or less with a regular high school diploma by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class. (See question A-25 for the definition of a regular high school diploma and questions A-10 through A-24 for more information about adjusting a cohort.)

The following formula provides an example of the four-year graduation rate for the cohort entering 9th grade for the first time in the fall of the 2007-2008 school year and graduating by the end of the 2010-2011 school year. (See question A-5 for more information about the option to include summer graduates)

Number of cohort members who earned a regular high school diploma by the end of the 2010- 2011
school year

Number of first-time 9th graders in fall 2007 (starting cohort) plus students who transfer in, minus
students who transfer out, emigrate, or die during school years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and
2010-2011

A-3. Why must States base the four-year graduation rate on “first-time in 9th grade” cohorts?

Cohort-based graduation rates are accurate only if each student is assigned to a single cohort. For example, without a single cohort assignment, a student who repeated 9th grade might be included in two separate cohorts of 9th graders—the class in which the student originally started 9th grade and the class in which the student was assigned for his or her second year of 9th grade. Unless the student skipped a grade later in high school or caught up with the original cohort in some other manner, that student would not graduate within four years of starting 9th grade. Therefore, to ensure an accurate measure of a four-year graduation rate, the cohort must be based only on students who are first-time 9th graders.

A-4. Does the four-year graduation rate include a student who graduates from high school in less than four years?

Yes. The four-year graduation rate counts a student who graduates with a regular high school diploma in four years or less as a high school graduate in his or her original cohort—that is, the cohort with which he or she started 9th grade. For example, a student who enters the 9th grade for the first time in the 2011-2012 school year and graduates in three years would be included in the cohort of students expected to graduate in the 2014-2015 school year, even though that student would receive his or her diploma in the 2013-2014 school year. The student may be included only in the graduation rate calculated for the cohort of students who started 9th grade in 2011-2012; effectively, the student’s graduation information is “banked” for a year until his or her cohort graduates in 2014-2015. Thus, the numerator in the graduation rate calculation includes only *members of the cohort* that graduate in a particular year, not other students who may also graduate that year.

A-5. May the four-year graduation rate include students who graduate in the summer after their fourth year of high school?

A State may, but is not required to, include students who graduate in the summer after their fourth year of high school among the cohort members who graduate in four years. However, the inclusion of such students in the four-year graduation rate may not delay annual AYP determinations. Since South Dakota only has a small number of summer graduates, we will continue to include these graduates in the districts/schools graduation calculations by having the districts/schools request their inclusion through the AYP appeal process.

A-6. If a student drops out before entering 9th grade, is the student included in the four-year graduation rate?

No. In order to be included in the four-year graduation rate at the school level, a student must be enrolled as a first-time 9th grader.

A-7. If a student changes subgroup membership by the end of high school, how would that student be counted in the four-year graduation rate?

In some cases, a student who is part of one subgroup as a 9th grader may no longer be part of that subgroup as a 12th grader (e.g., a student might be LEP upon entering high school, but designated proficient in English by the end of high school). States are responsible for developing clear and consistent rules for how to count such students in the four-year graduation rate. In South Dakota students are included in the subgroups in which they were members in 12th grade.

A-8. How is a student who graduates in more than four years counted in the four-year graduation rate?

A student who graduates in more than four years is counted as a non-graduate in the four-year graduation rate. Such a student must be included in the denominator of the four-year graduation rate and may not be included in the numerator because the student did not graduate in four years or less with a

regular high school diploma. The student may not be removed from the cohort or assigned to a different cohort when calculating the four-year graduation rate.

A-9. How is a student with a disability who has an individualized education program (IEP) that includes a plan to complete graduation requirements in more than four years included in the four-year graduation rate?

Only students who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less may be included in the numerator of the four-year graduation rate. Thus, a student who takes more than four years to graduate, regardless of the reason, must be included in the adjusted cohort for the four-year graduation rate (the denominator) but may not be counted as a graduate (the numerator) when calculating the four-year graduation rate.

A student with a disability who does not graduate with a regular high school diploma, but instead receives an alternative diploma, certificate of completion, or any other degree or certificate that is not fully aligned with a State’s academic content standards may not be counted as graduating in calculating the four-year graduation rate.

A-10. How is a cohort “adjusted”?

The four-year graduation rate follows a cohort, or a group of students, who begin as first-time 9th graders in a particular school year and who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less. The cohort is “adjusted” by adding any students transferring into the cohort and by subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during the years covered by the rate.

A-11. Which students may be “removed from a cohort”?

Only a student who transfers out and enrolls in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma, emigrates to another country, or dies may be removed from a high school’s or LEA’s cohort. Before removing a student from a cohort, a school or LEA must obtain confirmation in writing that the student transferred out, emigrated, or is deceased. No other students may be removed from the cohort. Thus, schools and LEAs must ensure that a student who drops out of high school is not deemed a transfer for purposes of calculating graduation rate; rather, the student must remain in the adjusted cohort— that is, the denominator of the graduation rate calculation.

A-12. What is the definition of a “transfer”?

A *transfer into* a cohort occurs when a student enrolls after the beginning of the entering cohort’s first year in high school, up to and including in grade 12. A *transfer out* of a cohort occurs when a student leaves a school and enrolls in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. A student who is retained in grade, enrolls in a GED program, or leaves school for any other reason may not be counted in the four-year graduation rate as a transfer and must remain in the adjusted cohort (i.e., must be included in the denominator of the graduation rate for that cohort) (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)(2)).

A-13. When a student transfers into a school, to which cohort should a school or LEA assign the student?

A student who transfers into a school should be assigned to the cohort in which the student started 9th grade for the first time. This information should be easily obtained for the vast majority of students who transfer into a school. A State's longitudinal data system will provide this information for students who transfer between schools within the State. Schools and LEAs should make every effort to obtain this information for students who transfer from another State or another country.

If a student who has repeated a grade transfers into a school, the student should be assigned to the cohort in which the student started 9th grade for the first time. This assignment prevents the student from being included in two separate cohorts of 9th graders—the cohort in which the student originally started 9th grade and the cohort in which the student was assigned in the school to which he or she transferred. Unless the student skipped a grade later in high school or caught up with the original cohort in some other manner, that student could not graduate within four years of starting 9th grade.

A-14. If a student re-enrolls in a public high school after having dropped out of school for a period of time, how may a school or LEA count that student in the four-year graduation rate?

The adjusted cohort graduation rate requires a State to have in place an accurate student record system that can track the progress of individual students over time. This system must record when a student has dropped out of school (and may not count him or her as a student who has transferred out). If, for example, a student who was a first-time 9th grader in 2008-2009 drops out in 2009-2010 after tenth grade, and then re-enrolls in high school in 2011-2012, that student may be deemed to have transferred into the receiving school and should be assigned to the cohort in which the student was a member when he or she started 9th grade for the first time (2008-2009). Unless the student skipped a grade later in high school or caught up with the original cohort in some other manner, that student could not graduate within four years of starting 9th grade, and therefore would count as a non-graduate in the four-year graduation rate. As long as the student re-enrolls before the State determines the four-year graduation rate for that student's cohort, the student would no longer be recorded as a drop out and the student record system should be adjusted accordingly.

A-15. May a school or LEA consider a student to be a transfer if the student leaves a public high school and enrolls in a private school?

Yes. If a student leaves a public high school to enroll in a private school, that student would be considered to be a transfer out under 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)(I). (See question A-19 regarding the official written documentation required to count a student as a transfer in calculating the four-year graduation rate.)

A-16. May a school or LEA consider a student to be a transfer if the student leaves a public high school to be home schooled?

Yes. A student who leaves a public high school to be home schooled would be considered to be a transfer if the home school meets the State's requirements for compulsory attendance or other State laws

or policies applicable to home schools. See A-19 for examples of official written documentation needed to confirm that a student has transferred to a home school.

A-17. May a school or LEA consider a student to be a transfer if the student leaves a public high school and enrolls in another educational program?

A student who leaves a public high school and enrolls in another educational program may be considered a transfer only if that educational program culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. For instance, if a student leaves a public high school because the student is placed in a juvenile detention center, the student would be a transfer if the center provides and the student participates in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma (as defined in 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(iv)). Otherwise, the student may not be considered a transfer and must remain in the adjusted cohort for purposes of calculating the four- year graduation rate.

A-18. Why is written confirmation required before a student may be removed from a cohort?

It is critical for a school or LEA to have written confirmation that a student has transferred, emigrated to another country, or died before a student is removed from a cohort. Written documentation facilitates audits and, thus, will help ensure that States, LEAs, and schools have an accurate measure of graduation rate. Often LEAs and States have classified as a transfer a student who leaves a school for any reason, even if the student does not enroll in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. Unless a school or LEA can confirm in writing that a student has transferred out, emigrated to another country, or is deceased, the school or LEA must consider that student to be in the adjusted cohort for purposes of calculating the four-year graduation rate.

A-19. What documentation is required to confirm that a student has transferred out--i.e., transferred to another school or to an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma?

To confirm that a student transferred out, a school or LEA must have “official written documentation” that a student has transferred to another school or to an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)(I)). In the case of a student who moves to another public school within the State, that transfer would most likely be officially documented and recorded in the State’s data system; thus, a record from the State’s data system would be considered official written documentation. Other examples of official written documentation include: a request for student records from a receiving public or private high school or an educational program (that culminates in a regular high school diploma); or a written record of a response from an official in the receiving school or program acknowledging the student’s enrollment. With respect to a home schooled student, official written documentation may include, for example, a letter of withdrawal or other written confirmation from the parent or guardian; any documentation that meets the home school notification or compulsory attendance requirements in the State; or any other written documentation accepted in the State to verify a child is home schooled. A conversation with a parent or neighbor of a student, for instance, would not be considered official written documentation of a transfer.

A-20. What documentation is required to confirm that a student has emigrated to another country?

A school or LEA must have written confirmation that a student has emigrated to another country (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)), but need not obtain official written documentation. For example, if a parent informs a school administrator that the family is leaving the country, the school administrator may document this conversation in writing and include it in the student’s file. The regulations do not require written documentation to be “official” for a student who emigrates to another country because the Department recognizes that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain transcripts or other official documentation from another country confirming that the student is enrolled in school.

A-21. What documentation is required to confirm that a student is deceased?

A school or LEA must have written confirmation that a student is deceased before removing the student from the cohort (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)). A letter from a parent or an obituary is sufficient documentation. Official written documentation of a student’s death, such as a death certificate, is not necessary.

A-22. How can an LEA document the transfer of a migrant student?

The Department’s Migrant Student Information Exchange system includes information on migrant students that can be accessed by all States and LEAs to help ensure that the academic records of these highly mobile students are preserved during their frequent moves. This system should be of great assistance to States in documenting the enrollment of migratory students, as defined in section 1309 of the ESEA, in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma.

A-23. Is a student who leaves school because the student is incarcerated considered a transfer?

An incarcerated student may be considered a transfer only if the prison or juvenile facility to which the student is confined has a school (as defined under State law) or provides an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. If the facility does not have a school or educational program, or provides an educational program that does not culminate in the award of a regular high school diploma, the student may not be considered a transfer, may not be removed from the cohort, and must remain in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation for the school, LEA, and State in which the student last attended high school.

A-24. If, after multiple attempts, an LEA cannot obtain official written documentation that a student has transferred out, may the LEA remove the student from the cohort?

No. Although in some cases it may be difficult for an LEA to obtain official written documentation of a student’s transfer, the student may not be removed from the cohort simply because the student’s status cannot be documented. Removing a student from the cohort whose status cannot be documented could produce an inaccurate graduation rate if that student dropped out of school rather than transferred. It is

critical that an LEA carefully document student transfers and accurately calculate the four-year graduation rate in order to (a) give parents and the public accurate information about the success of a school, LEA, and State in graduating students and (b) ensure that AYP determinations are based on valid graduation rate calculations.

A-25. How is a “regular high school diploma” defined?

Under 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(iv), a “regular high school diploma” means the standard high school diploma awarded to students in a State that is fully aligned with the State’s academic content standards and does not include a GED credential, certificate of attendance, or any alternative award. The term “regular high school diploma” also includes a “higher diploma” that is awarded to students who complete requirements above and beyond what is required for a regular diploma.

A-26. May a GED, alternative diploma, or certificate of attendance be counted as a regular high school diploma?

No. Alternative graduation credentials that are not fully aligned with a State’s academic content standards may not be counted as a regular high school diploma for the purpose of calculating the four-year or extended-year graduation rate. Thus, students who graduate with a credential other than a regular high school diploma, such as a GED, modified diploma, or certificate of attendance, may not be included in the numerator, but must be included in the denominator of the four-year graduation rate.

Section B - South Dakota DOE Guidance on Specific Questions from School Districts

B-1. How are foreign exchange students counted in the graduation rate calculations?

Foreign Exchange students are not included in the school/districts graduation calculations as long as they are marked as a Foreign Exchange student in Infinite Campus.

B-2. How are alternative school students counted?

(See A-17 for specifics)

B-3. Are students who are enrolled less than 50% counted in the graduation rate calculations?

Yes. Once the student enters 9th grade they are in the cohort unless they transfer or die.

B-4. What happens if a school district re-enrolls a student who was 100% enrolled in the previous year and make them only partially enrolled (48%) this year? If they drop out is the school district who last had them enrolled as 100% stuck with the drop?

(See A-14 for specifics)

B-5. Does a student drop out of a single school or the district as a whole?

In the graduation calculations, if a student drops out of school and therefore does not graduate with their cohort, both the school and district are negatively affected.

B-6. If a dual enrolled High School students stopped attending one of his/her High Schools, but graduated from the other, would that student be coded as an “02 – Drop” in one school and “04 – Graduated” in the other?

No. If the student leaves school A but is still attending school B, school A would consider the student as a transfer student. As long as the student remained on course at school B to graduate with their cohort, there would be no negative impact.

B-7. What happens when a student drops from one school in October to get their GED, then decides to come back to the district in February and re-enrolls in a different school to get their diploma?

A student who leaves a public high school and enrolls in another educational program may be considered a transfer only if that educational program culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. (See A-26 for specifics on GEDs) In this case, the student cannot be considered a transfer since they dropped out to get their GED. The student must remain in their original cohort for purposes of calculating the four-year graduation rate.

B-8. How long can a student be out of school due to a “temporary” suspension or illness before we have to code that student as a dropout?

15 days

B-9. As I understand it, AYP graduation rate is calculated in part by using the previous years’ dropout counts. If we find previous year dropouts that were coded incorrectly, can we go back and fix them in Infinite Campus? Is so, will it affect our 2011 AYP determination?

Starting with the 10/11 school year South Dakota will be utilizing the “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate”. (See A-2 for the specific formula which will be used)

B-10. If a student meets the 15 day “No Show” requirements, we are to drop the student using the “02-Drop” code. If that student then returns to the district during the same school year, do we change the withdrawal code of that “No Show” enrollment to something more appropriate, like “11-Continues”?

Yes change it to In State Transfer or even Student Continues.

B-11. If the student meets the 15 day “No Show” requirement during the first 15 days of school, are we allowed to change that student’s enrollment and withdrawal dates to before

the first day of school, so that the enrollment will not upload to Infinite Campus and we will not have the “02-Drop” count against us?

No, if a student completed the previous year but then does not return, they are a drop out for the year they do not return. For graduation, either way they would still be counted in the denominator in the cohort year in which they were suppose to graduate no matter if the enrollment record was deleted or not.

If a student moves out of state during the summer, a district should go in and change the end status from Student Continues to Out of State Transfer only if official written documentation is available. (See A-24 for specifics)

B-12. Will newly consolidated districts get a restart in their graduation calculations the first year they are in existence?

Yes.

B-13. If a Colony student who is less than 21 years of age begins 9th grade and then drops out of school prior to graduating, is the Colony School/District held accountable for this student given SDCL 13-27-1.1?

Yes. If the school district accepts the state aid for this student then they are held accountable for the student.

B-14. When will DOE and the districts know if USED has agreed to lowering the benchmark for graduation rate from 85% to 80% due to the implementation of the 4 year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Calculation?

At this time, we don't have a firm date for when we will be notified if our proposed reduction of the graduation rate from 85% - 80% will be approved. As soon as SD DOE is notified, we will communicate this information out to the districts.