# 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate Frequently Asked Questions



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#### Q: What is the significance of a Graduation Rate?

A: Federal No Child Left Behind Guidelines require that states use a Graduation Rate as one of the indicators in determining a district and high school's Adequate Yearly Progress ("AYP").

Since 2002 Pennsylvania has been using a "4-Year Leaver Rate" calculation to determine the Graduation Rate. However, states are required to use a "4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate" calculation to determine AYP status beginning in 2012. 2010 and 2011 graduation rate data based on the cohort calculation will be utilized to determine 2012 AYP status.

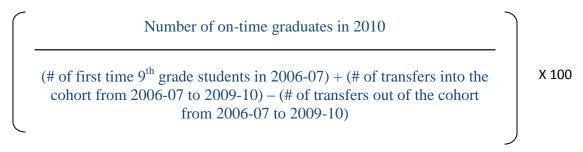
#### Q: What is the "4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate"?

A: The "4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate" is a calculation of graduates that reports the number of students who start ninth grade and complete high school within four years. This calculation begins with a "cohort" of students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and makes the following calculations:

- a student who transfers into the school is *added* to the cohort;
- a student who transfers to a different school is *removed* from the cohort;

#### Q: How is the cohort graduation rate calculated?

A: The cohort graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students graduating in 4 years by the number of students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade 4 years earlier, plus the number of transfers into the graduating class, minus the number of transfers out of the graduating class.



The cohort rate can also be calculated on a five- or six-year basis to account for students who take longer to graduate but can still successfully earn a regular diploma.

*Note*: A student who drops out of school is identified as such in PIMS but is not removed from the cohort when calculating the 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate.

### Q: How is the 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate calculation different from what PA has been using to measure graduation rates of districts and high schools?

A: The use of a 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate will allow for a more precise calculation as it will account for transfers into and out of the graduating class. Previously, Pennsylvania used a "4-Year Leaver Graduation Rate" for this calculation:

Since the "leaver rate" does **not** account for students who require more than four years tograduate, the leaver rate can overstate the graduation rate of a school or district.

#### Here is an example:

- 100 students start in ninth grade;
- 10 students drop out of the school; 15 students transfer in between ninth grade and the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade; and 5 students transfer out during that same time.
- 98 students graduate and seven (7) do not graduate at the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### **Using the 4-Year Leaver Graduation Rate**

- 98 graduates divided by (98 graduates plus 10 leavers) = 98/108 = 90.7%.
  - The seven (7) who did not graduate, but are still enrolled in the school, do not affect the graduation rate.
  - o The transfers into and out of the graduation class do not affect the graduation rate.

#### **Using the 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate**

- 98 graduates divided by (100 original students to the cohort) + (15 transfers in) (5 transfers out) = 98/110 = 89.1%
  - The seven (7) students who did not graduate, but are still enrolled remain in the cohort (denominator) and pull the rate down.
  - The transfers into the class remain in the cohort while the transfers out are removed from the cohort.

#### Q: Will a 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate be calculated for every high school and school district?

A: A cohort graduation rate will be calculated for every public school and district including comprehensive career and technical centers and charter schools which graduate students from 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### Q. When will Pennsylvania adopt the "4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate"?

A. Pennsylvania will report a preliminary 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate for schools and districts *for informational purposes only* in the December 2010 using data from the 2009-10 school year and will begin using the cohort rate for AYP for the 2011-12 school year. Cohort graduation data from the 2009-2010 and 2010-11 school years will inform 2011-2012 AYP status.

#### Q: How will the cohort rate affect Adequate Yearly Progress targets under NCLB?

A: For the 2009-2010 school year, Pennsylvania will report the 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rates for schools and districts *for informational purposes only*. Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, federal regulations require that all states use the cohort graduation rate for AYP. Pennsylvania uses a "lag rate" when calculating its graduation data for purposes of AYP to allow for those students who graduate over the summer. Therefore, the 2010-11 graduation rate will be used for the 2011-12 AYP. Improvement in graduation rates may be the basis for determining AYP. Therefore, 2011 cohort rates may be compared to 2010 cohort rates to determine 2012 AYP status. Consequently, accuracy of the 2010 graduate data is critical to subsequent AYP determinations.

Pennsylvania is currently in the process of identifying an appropriate graduation rate goal and annual targets for AYP which will be subject to the approval of USDE.

### Q: Will the 4-Year Cohort Graduation rate be applied to disaggregated student subgroups?

A: Yes, federal regulations require that 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate goals and targets be met by each NCLB (No Child Left Behind) subgroup for AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) purposes. AYP subgroups include special education students, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and racial subgroups. Schools and districts will have to meet Pennsylvania's graduation rate goal or improvement targets for each of these subgroups in order to make AYP beginning in school year 2011-12 based on data from 2010 and 2011. As mentioned above, Pennsylvania is currently developing its 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate goal and annual targets which will be subject to USDE approval.

#### Q: How are students assigned to a cohort?

A: Students are assigned to a cohort when they first enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Once a student is assigned to a particular cohort year (e.g. entering ninth grade in 2006 the student is entered into the 2010 Cohort), the student stays in that cohort unless the student is documented as a transfer to another school, emigrated to another country, or is

deceased. Students who do not graduate in four years, or leave school and are not documented as transferring to another school, stay in the cohort for graduation rate calculation purposes.

#### Q: When a student transfers into a school, to which cohort should a school assign the student?

A: A student who transfers into a school should be assigned to the cohort associated with the year in which the student started 9<sup>th</sup> grade for the first time. This information should be obtained from the last school the student attended.

#### Q: What about students who graduate early?

A: Students who graduate early will count in the cohort to which they were originally assigned.

#### Q: What about students who take more than four years to graduate?

A: Federal regulations require that any student who graduates in more than four years is counted as a non-graduate in the 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate. However, states are permitted to calculate "extended-year" cohort graduation rates which would give the state, schools or districts "credit" for AYP purposes for the success of students who take additional time to meet their graduation requirements, subject to USDE approval. As of June 2010, Pennsylvania has considered but has not submitted a plan to USDE to use extended graduation rates for AYP purposes.

# Q: How are students who graduate at the end of summer school following their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year included in the graduation rate calculation?

A: Pennsylvania uses a "lag rate" when calculating its graduation data for purposes of AYP to allow for those students who graduate over the summer. A student who graduates by September 30, 2010 will be counted as a 2010 graduate.

#### Q: How will the graduation rates of students be attributed (i.e., high school, district and/or state)?

A: Just as a student's performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is attributed to a school, district and/or the state, so too is the student's graduation status. In cases where a student's performance on the statewide assessment is attributed only to the state, his/her graduation status will be attributed only to the state.

#### Q: Who is considered a "graduate" for the purpose of the 4-year cohort graduation rate?

A: A graduate is a student who earns a regular diploma. Students who earn a GED or a Certificate of Completion are considered "non-graduates" in the cohort graduation rate calculation.

### Q: What data is used to calculate the cohort graduation rate?

A: The cohort graduation rate is calculated using data from the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) student template that is reported to PDE by all public schools including comprehensive CTCs and charter schools. For this reason, entering accurate and timely data in PIMS regarding the status of students is essential to ensuring that the cohort graduation rate for a school or district is correct.

## Q: What kind of student data must be submitted by schools and districts for the cohort graduation rate to be accurately calculated?

A: Because the cohort graduation rate is based on the specific status of individual students, it is essential that the data submitted by schools and districts accurately track individual students through the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) and document and report the circumstances of students who leave the school. Therefore, federal regulations require that a student can only be removed from a cohort if the student transfers to another diploma-granting program; emigrates to another country; or dies.

#### Q: How does the accuracy of PIMS data affect calculation of the cohort graduation rate?

A: Each student who is included in the entering ninth grade cohort will remain in that cohort for calculation of the cohort graduation rate. Federal regulations only allow a student to be removed from a cohort if the student transfers to another diploma granting program, emigrates to another country or dies. Schools will be required to maintain appropriate documentation of student transfers.

Students who leave school but are not properly entered into PIMS as a transfer and students who simply stop attending school are NOT removed from the cohort, and therefore, if they do not graduate, they will have a negative effect on the cohort graduation rate.