

Hillsboro School District: Understanding Graduation Rates

BACKGROUND

Since reporting requirements were implemented under No Child Left Behind, states have calculated graduation rates using varying methods, creating inconsistent data from one state to the next. Many states' calculations (Oregon's included) were based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) formula. The NCES graduation rate was based on outcomes within a single school year, dividing the number of graduates with a regular diploma in that year by the sum of the number of graduates with a regular diploma and the number of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out that year (not just seniors who dropped out). **Note that students who were continuing on in some sort of educational program—credit recovery, GED, etc.—or those who earned alternate diplomas were not included in the NCES graduation rate.** Other states likely used a variation of the NCES formula of graduates minus “drop-outs” to determine their rates (perhaps just focusing on seniors who dropped out in a given year).

To address and rectify these inconsistencies and get a clearer picture of outcomes over time, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) announced its decision to begin reporting high school graduation rates using a more rigorous, uniform four-year adjusted cohort rate as of the 2010-11 school year. A *cohort* is defined as the set of students that enter ninth grade in a given school year; the *cohort graduation rate* is the percentage of students in that cohort that graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma*—determined by dividing those graduates by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier, adjusted for transfers in and out. (*Starting with the graduating class of 2014, students with a modified diploma are also included in the 4-year cohort graduation rate.)

Sample 4-year cohort graduation rate =
$$\frac{\text{Number of students in the adjusted cohort who earn regular (or modified, as of 2014) high school diplomas in 2010 (numerator)}}{\text{Number of first-time 9}^{\text{th}} \text{ graders in 2006-07 adjusted for transfers in and out (denominator)}}$$

Note that students who earn an adult high school diploma, extended diploma, or general educational development (GED) certificate are considered “other completers,” not graduates. Students who earn an alternative certificate, are continuing their enrollment beyond four years of high school, or whose plans are uncertain are considered non-graduates, along with students who drop out. All of these students are included in the denominator only in the cohort graduation calculation.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) began reporting the cohort graduation rate two years in advance of the USDOE; in the spring of 2010, they released the 2008-09 graduation rates using both the NCES calculation and the cohort calculation for comparison, and to begin explaining the transition to schools and stakeholders.

Dropout Rate

Oregon does not calculate a *cohort* dropout rate.¹ (p. 11) Dropouts are considered along with other non-completers in the cohort graduation rate calculation: “For the purposes of the cohort rate calculations, a dropout/non-continuing student is a student who was enrolled at some point during the period measured, did not reenroll by the beginning of the school year following the period being measured, and for whom no higher-ranked outcome (e.g. modified or extended diploma, GED, transfer out) has been reported. This category includes both students explicitly reported as dropouts, as well as students who were reported as expected to return, but for whom no record of re-enrollment exists.”¹ (p. 21) Oregon does still calculate an annual dropout rate based on the NCES model described above.

¹Oregon Department of Education, [“Cohort Graduation Rate Policy and Technical Manual,”](#) 2014-15, pp. 11, 21