



**Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent**  
*"Making Education Work for All Georgians"*

## **Four-year Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rate**

### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

*A new method for calculating high school graduation rates will allow — for the first time — rates to be uniformly compared across states.*

#### **PURPOSE**

##### **Q. Why is a new graduation rate being reported?**

**A.** The U.S. Department of Education is requiring all states to begin publicly reporting comparable high school graduation rates using its new four-year adjusted cohort rate calculation method. In October 2008, a regulation by the U.S. Department of Education [section 1111(h) of ESEA] was amended, which included a requirement for all states and local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funds (money for schools with a certain percentage of low-income students) to begin calculating and reporting the more uniform rate beginning with 2010-2011 data.

Historically, states have calculated graduation rates using varying methods, creating inconsistent data from one state to the next. The transition to a uniform high school graduation rate requires all states to report the percentage of freshmen students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma. This rate will reflect a uniform method for reliable comparisons among states.

##### **Q. How did the idea for a four-year rate get started?**

**A.** In 2005, the National Governors' Association took the lead to recommend all states adopt and begin to take steps to implement a standard four-year rate consistent with that proposed by an expert panel convened in 2004 by the National Center for Education Statistics. All states signed the NGA compact to work toward producing a cohort graduation rate.

#### **DEFINITION**

##### **Q. How is the four-year graduation rate defined?**

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

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*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*

##### **Q. How does the "new" graduation rate calculation differ with Georgia's current rate?**

**A.** The primary difference is defining the cohort. The four-year high school graduation rate defines the cohort when the student first becomes a freshman, and the rate is calculated using the number of students who graduate within four years. The current graduation rate defines the cohort upon graduation, which includes students who take more than four years to graduate from high school.

#### **REPORTING**

##### **Q. When was the new four-year high school graduation rate first reported?**

**A.** In Georgia, the new high school graduation rate was first reported on April 10, 2012.

##### **Q. How will the new graduation rate be reported in Georgia?**

**A.** The new four-year high school graduation rate is reported online at the Georgia Department of Education's website at [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org) and on the State's Report Card at [www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org).



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## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Q. How will the new four-year high school graduation rate impact school districts' state and federal accountability requirements?**

A. Use of the new rate for federal accountability purposes go into effect across the nation this school year (2011-12). Georgia is a state that has been granted permission to use a five-year rate for federal accountability purposes for 2011-12.

## **COHORT INCLUSION/EXCLUSION**

**Q. Will a student who graduates early be counted as a graduate with the student's original freshman cohort?**

A. Yes. In the current implementation, the early graduate is included in the numerator along with the rest of that student's ninth-grade cohort graduates.

**Q. Will Georgia count graduates who complete their coursework in the summer of their senior year?**

A. Yes. Georgia seniors who complete their credits during summer school can be reported as graduates and can therefore be counted as graduating on time.

**Q. If a student is held back or repeats a grade, do they enter a new cohort?**

A. A student who is held back will not enter a new cohort. He/she will be counted in the school's denominator and will not be in the numerator, unless that student accumulates enough credits and graduates within four years.

**Q. What if a student transfers to a new school after three years of high school, but is still only a sophomore?**

A. He/she will be counted in the new school's denominator and will not be in the numerator, unless that student accumulates enough credits and graduates within four years.

**Q. What if a student transfers in from a private school, home school, or out-of-state school and it is not possible to accurately determine when the student first became a freshman?**

A. The district that first enrolls the student will record the grade-level for that student. The student then enters that cohort.

**Q. How will transfers-in and transfers-out be treated within a freshman cohort?**

A. Students who transfer to another high school are entered into their new school's cohort, but transfers-out are removed from the cohort of the school they are leaving. So, depending on when those students graduate, it could have a negative or positive impact on a school's graduation rate.

**Q. Are students who do not graduate within the four-year window considered dropouts?**

A. No, they are not considered a dropout, but they are not counted in the four-year high school graduation rate.

**Q. Will students who drop out and complete their GED be counted in the four-year graduation rate?**

A. Students who drop out of school and receive a GED certificate are not considered high school graduates and will not be included in the numerator.

**Q. If a student leaves for home school, will he/she count as a transfer?**

A. A student transferring to home school is a transfer-out, if the student registers as a homeschool student with the state, so he/she would leave a school's cohort, and thus not impact its four-year graduation rate. If a student transferring to home school fails to register with the state, that student will remain as part of the school's cohort and count against a school's graduation rate.

## **Additional References:**

• U.S. Department of Education, High School Graduation Rate, Non-regulatory Guidance (2008):

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf>

• No Child Left Behind - Summary of Final Title I Regulations (2008): <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/title1/summary.pdf>