

Christie Administration Releases District and School Graduation Rates, Reinforcing Need for New Graduation Requirements

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ – Reinforcing the need for new graduation requirements not only to increase the number of high school graduates but to ensure that students who do graduate from high school are college and career ready, the Christie Administration today released district and school graduation rates along with graduate pathway information.

“As we look at these new graduation rates across the state, the question we must continue to ask ourselves is not only whether students are graduating from high school, but whether we are truly preparing them to be ready for the demands of the 21st century. These results reinforce the need for the new end-of-course assessments not only to increase the number of high school graduates, but to increase the number of graduates ready for college and career,” said Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf. “We should approach these results with both confidence and humility – we continue to be among the leaders in the nation, but we can still do more to make sure every child, regardless of zip code, has an equal opportunity in life.”

As announced yesterday, for the first time, New Jersey has calculated its high school graduation rate using a new federally-mandated methodology for the 2011 cohort of students. This new methodology, called the “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate,” is required of every state in the country and presents a more complete and accurate way of calculating the high school graduation rate. Under this new methodology, the statewide graduation rate is 83%.

Because this is the first year that New Jersey is using the new methodology to calculate the graduation rate, direct comparisons to previous year’s rates are not possible. Rather, it represents a different way of reporting the graduation rate for the state

Transitioning from the previous methodology to the “four-year adjusted cohort” methodology has required a significant level of collaboration and effort across the state. Over the past two years, the Department of Education held trainings in each county and worked with over 200 individual districts on the change in methodology and the requirements for districts to track all students in NJSMART. NJSMART allows districts to track each student for every year they are enrolled, and allows districts to update a student’s history from 9th through 12th grade with the click of a mouse. In this way, a district can update a student’s status in real time based on a transfer or other change in status. In order to ensure that the data collected over the past four years was correct, the Department worked on over 7,000 student level appeals from districts in the fall.

As Governor Christie announced yesterday, New Jersey will be transitioning away from the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPA) to a new series of end-of-course assessments to better measure and prepare students to graduate high school ready for college and career. These new assessments will for the first time measure whether students can apply the knowledge they have learned to the real world, which will provide an incentive for schools to focus on critical thinking skills that are crucial to college and career readiness.

In spite of the fact that 82% of graduates in 2011 graduate from high school by passing the HSPA exam, 90% of students that matriculate to Bergen and Essex County Community College, and 1/3 of students matriculating to Rutgers, need remediation before taking a college course. The number of students passing HSPA, which is widely considered to equate to an 8th grade achievement level, is even lower in the state’s highest need districts.

	Four Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate	Percent of students that start 9th grade and graduate via HSPA four years later
Asbury Park	59.5%	24.3%
Camden	56.9%	21.6%

Newark	61.3%	32.2%
Paterson	64%	31.7%
Trenton	47.7%	22%

“This new graduation methodology gives us an honest picture of our current level of achievement and a new baseline upon which we can measure our progress,” said Acting Commissioner Cerf. “Through the transition from HSPA to new end-of-course assessments, we are taking a crucial step not only to increase the number of high school graduates, but to make a New Jersey diploma the gold standard for the country.”

About the graduation rate methodology change

In previous years, New Jersey used the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) “Leaver Rate” to calculate the graduation rate. Under this methodology, districts would report their graduation rate to the state by looking at the reported graduates in the current year out of a cohort of those graduates plus the reported drop outs from previous years. Districts reported overall numbers to the state each year, but did not report the status of every student that attended the school. The summary below outlines this methodology.

NCES “Leaver Rate” Methodology (for 2010 as an example)	
Numerator	Count of graduates in 2010
Denominator	Count of graduates in 2010 Plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of 12th grade dropouts in 2009-10 • The number of 11th grade dropouts in 2008-09 • The number of 10th grade dropouts in 2007-08 • The number of 9th grade dropouts in 2006-07

Based on a recommendation from the National Governor’s Association, the US Department of Education has required all states to report their graduation rate using the “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” beginning with the 2011 cohort.

Under this formula, districts have submitted student-level data into our statewide data system, NJSMART, over the past four years. Using this data, the Department of Education calculates a graduation rate for the state, each district, and each school. The new formula creates the percentage by looking at the number of students that graduated out of a cohort of students that began four years earlier in that school in 9th grade. The only adjustments that are made to that cohort are to add students who transfer into the school during those four years, and to subtract students that the district can document as transferred to another school or state, emigrated out of the country, or died. The cohort is only adjusted if the district can document these changes for an individual student. All other students are calculated in the graduation rate cohort.

Four-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (2011)	
Numerator	Count of graduates in 2011
Denominator	Entering 9th grade class Plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any student who (who started 9th grade in the same year) that transferred into the school Minus:

- A student who transfers to another school or state
- A student who emigrates to another country
- A student who dies

Additional details about this methodology can be found on the US Department of Education's website at the link below:

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

Although many students take more than 4 years to graduate from high school, the federal requirements do not allow the exclusion of students on a 5 or 6 year track, whether for special education students as indicated in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or otherwise. In future years, the Department will be able to also calculate an extended-year graduation rate to help account for these students.

District and state level graduation rates: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/grate/11rates.pdf>

Graduate pathway information: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/grate/11type.pdf>



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