



Jason E. Mumpower, Comptroller of the Treasury

December 20, 2023

Comptroller's Office Studies High School Graduation and Dropout Rates

The Tennessee Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has released a report on the federal and state criteria for calculating high school graduation rates and dropout rates in Tennessee.

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 requires states to use the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) formula for calculating graduation rates. The ACGR compares the number of 12th grade students who graduate with a regular diploma with the number of students enrolled in 9th grade four years earlier, referred to as a cohort. Students who exit a district for reasons such as transferring to another school district, withdrawing to home school, or moving to another country are removed from the cohort and do not negatively impact the district's ACGR. Federal graduation rate requirements do not allow states to make exceptions in any circumstances, including those over which districts or schools have no control (e.g., incarcerated students and students with permanent medical withdrawals). **In the 2021-22 school year, the Tennessee ACGR was 89.8 percent.**



Federal law does not require states and districts to track and report dropout rates, but nearly half of all states, including Tennessee, voluntarily report dropout rates on the education report cards required by ESSA. Tennessee uses a cohort dropout rate formula based on the same 9th grade cohort used for calculating the ACGR. The formula divides the total number of dropouts by the total number of students in the cohort to determine the dropout rate. **In the 2021-22 school year, the Tennessee cohort dropout rate was 8.6 percent.**

OREA found that certain student subgroups are more likely to drop out and not graduate from high school because of multiple factors. In 2021-22, English learners in Tennessee had an ACGR of 67.8 percent and a dropout rate of 30 percent. The rates of economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities also fell below the state rate.

The Comptroller's Office included one policy consideration for the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) in its report. TDOE could publish an extended-year graduation rate in addition to its four-year graduation rate. Over half of all states report a five-, six-, or seven-year graduation rate to highlight the students who needed extra time to meet graduation requirements. While not required for federal accountability purposes, extended-year graduation rates could provide useful insight to educators, parents, and policymakers.

To read the report, please visit the Comptroller's website at: tncot.cc/orea.

Follow us on X/twitter [@TNCOT](https://twitter.com/TNCOT) and Instagram [@tncot](https://www.instagram.com/tncot)

Media contact: John Dunn, Director of Communications, 615.401.7755 or john.dunn@cot.tn.gov

