

Applicant Writing Test - #3 (option A) A legislator wants information about how the state is calculating a school district's (LEA's) graduation rate on the State Report Card because the school district is complaining to the legislator that it's not fair. Please review this federal document and write no more than a one-page explanation for the legislator.

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

The 2008 Title I regulations require States and local educational agencies (LEAs) to report on their annual report cards a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, disaggregated by subgroups, at the school, LEA, and State levels, respectively. This requirement is to be implemented beginning with the report cards, required by section 1111(h) of ESEA, that include information from State assessments administered during the 2010-2011 school year.

A-1. What is a “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate”?

As defined in 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(i)-(iv), the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (hereafter referred to as “the four-year graduation rate”) is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently “adjusted” by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the 9th grade and the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during that same period. (See questions A-18 through A-32 for more information about adjusting a cohort.)

A-3. How is the four-year graduation rate calculated?

The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate in four years or less with a regular high school diploma by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class. (See question A-33 for the definition of a regular high school diploma and questions A-18 through A-32 for more information about adjusting a cohort.)

The following formula provides an example of the four-year graduation rate for the cohort entering 9th grade for the first time in the fall of the 2008-2009 school year and graduating by the end of the 2011-2012 school year. (See question A-6 for more information about the option to include summer graduates.)

Number of cohort members who earned a regular high school diploma by the end of the 2011- 2012 school year

Number of first-time 9th graders in fall 2008 (starting cohort) plus students who transfer in, minus students who transfer out, emigrate, or die during school years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012

Appendix A provides an example of how a four-year cohort would be tracked from year-to-year to calculate the four-year graduation rate.

A-4. Why must States base the four-year graduation rate on “first-time in 9th grade” cohorts?

Cohort-based graduation rates are accurate only if each student is assigned to a single cohort. For example, without a single cohort assignment, a student who repeated 9th grade might be included in two separate cohorts of 9th graders—the class in which the student originally started 9th grade and the class in which the student was assigned for his or her second year of 9th grade. Unless the student skipped a grade later in high school or caught up with the original cohort in some other manner, that student would not graduate within four years of starting 9th grade. Therefore, to ensure an accurate measure of a four-year graduation rate, the cohort must be based only on students who are first-time 9th graders.

A-5. Does the four-year graduation rate include a student who graduates from high school in less than four years?

Yes. The four-year graduation rate counts a student who graduates with a regular high school diploma in four years or less as a high school graduate in his or her original cohort—that is, the cohort with which he or she started 9th grade. For example, a student who enters the 9th grade for the first time in the 2011-2012 school year and graduates in three years would be included in the cohort of students expected to graduate in the 2014-2015 school year, even though that student would receive his or her diploma in the 2013-2014 school year. The student may be included only in the graduation rate calculated for the cohort of students who started 9th grade in 2011-2012; effectively, the student’s graduation information is “banked” for a year until his or her cohort graduates in 2014-2015. Thus, the numerator in the graduation rate calculation includes only *members of the cohort* that graduate in a particular year, not other students who may also graduate that year.

A-6. May the four-year graduation rate include students who graduate in the summer after their fourth year of high school?

A State may, but is not required to, include students who graduate in the summer after their fourth year of high school among the cohort members who graduate in four years. However, the inclusion of such students in the four-year graduation rate may not delay annual AYP determinations. In order not to delay those determinations, a State that includes summer school graduates typically “lags” graduation rates for AYP determinations. For example, such a State would announce AYP determinations for the 2011-2012 school year prior to the start of the 2012-2013 school year using assessment results from the 2011-2012 school year and the graduation rate from the 2010-2011 school year (which includes students who graduated in summer 2011). Lagging graduation rate in this manner may provide a State with a more complete picture of the on-time graduation rate, while also allowing additional time to review and ensure the accuracy of graduation rate data without delaying annual AYP determinations. See question D-3 for information about how lagged graduation rate data factor into the timeline for implementing the graduation rate provisions.

The following formula provides an example of the four-year graduation rate for the cohort entering 9th grade for the first time in the fall of the 2007-2008 school year and graduating by the end of summer 2011.

Number of cohort members who earned a regular high school diploma through summer 2011

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, 2010-2011, and through summer 2011

A-7. How is an adjusted cohort graduation rate calculated for a high school that does not have each of grades 9-12?

The graduation rate is calculated only for the grades included in a high school. For example, if a high school only has grades 10-12, the State would use a three-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that would include only grades 10-12. The adjusted cohort would consist of first-time 10th graders in a given year at the school plus any students who transfer into the cohort during the next three years, minus any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during the three years. The three-year adjusted cohort graduation rate would be calculated by dividing the number of students who receive a regular high school diploma in three years or less by the adjusted cohort. As noted in question A-1, the final regulations specify that States use a *four-year* graduation rate, consistent with the statutory requirement in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(vi) of the ESEA that graduation rate is to be defined as the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma *in the standard number of years*, because more than 90 percent of schools with a 12th grade in the country also have a 9th grade; therefore, the standard number of years is four years after starting the 9th grade.⁷

Adjusting a cohort

A-18. How is a cohort “adjusted”?

The four-year graduation rate follows a cohort, or a group of students, who begin as first-time 9th graders in a particular school year and who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less. An extended-year graduation rate follows the same cohort of students for an additional year or years. The cohort is “adjusted” by adding any students transferring into the cohort and by subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during the years covered by the rate.

A-19. Which students may be “removed from a cohort”?

Only a student who transfers out and enrolls in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma, emigrates to another country, or dies may be removed from a high school’s or LEA’s cohort. Before removing a student from a cohort, a school or LEA must obtain confirmation in writing that the student transferred out, emigrated, or is

deceased. No other students may be removed from the cohort. Thus, schools and LEAs must ensure that a student who drops out of high school is not deemed a transfer for purposes of calculating graduation rate; rather, the student must remain in the adjusted cohort— that is, the denominator of the graduation rate calculation. The 2008 Title I regulations do not require a State to track and report on the drop out rate, although data on drop outs is collected by the Department of Education independently of these requirements (see question C-7).

A-20. What is the definition of a “transfer”?

A *transfer into* a cohort occurs when a student enrolls after the beginning of the entering cohort’s first year in high school, up to and including in grade 12. A *transfer out* of a cohort occurs when a student leaves a school and enrolls in another school or in an educational program that culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma. A student who is retained in grade, enrolls in a GED program, or leaves school for any other reason may not be counted in the four-year or extended-year graduation rate as a transfer and must remain in the adjusted cohort (i.e., must be included in the denominator of the graduation rate for that cohort) (34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(ii)(B)(2)).