

# 2020 High School Graduation FAQs

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This document answers frequently asked questions related to the NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile and Graduation Appeals process.

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## Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

### **1. Question: When did the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) begin using the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) methodology?**

Answer: The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) began using the adjusted cohort rate graduation rate methodology in 2011, which all states are required to use for reporting per [federal requirements](#).

### **2. Question: What is a graduation cohort?**

Answer: A graduation cohort is a group of students who entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade during the same school year. In New Jersey, all first-time 9th graders are assigned to a cohort. During high school, the cohort is adjusted each year to add verified transfers in and subtract verified transfers out.

The adjusted cohort is the group of students who remain in the cohort after these adjustments are made. Any students who drop out during high school and any students who are still enrolled remain in the adjusted cohort for graduation rate calculations.



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If a student graduates early, for example if a student in Cohort 2020 graduates in June 2019, that student will remain in Cohort 2020 and will be included in the four-year graduation rate for the 2020 cohort. That student will not be included in the graduation rate for the 2019 cohort.

## **7. Question: Can I change a student's cohort year?**

Answer: The student's cohort year can only be changed if the student was incorrectly assigned to the wrong cohort year. The SID Management system would need to reflect that the student belonged in a different cohort year. For example, the student's assessment record clearly shows that the student completed grade-level assessments that align to a different cohort year.

## Cohort Status

## **8. Question: Which students should be marked as graduates?**

Answer: Only students who earn a state-endorsed ("regular") diploma by August 31<sup>st</sup> should be marked as a graduate (School Exit Withdrawal Code of "L"). A state-endorsed diploma is awarded to students who meet both [course requirements](#) and [graduation assessment requirements](#).

## **9. Question: My district inactivated a student as a dropout but then the student was activated in another district. Will this student still count as a "Dropout" for my district in graduation rate calculations?**

Answer: No, NJ SMART will recognize the student as active in a new district and they will no longer be considered a dropout in graduation calculations.

## **10. Question: Are students who become "Off-Track Continuing" in another district and then transfer into our district included in our graduation rate even though they were not in our district when they were retained?**

Answer: Yes, they will count as off-track in your district. Graduation cohort statuses are based on a four-year expected timeline of graduation for each student and are updated based on student progress through grade levels. "On-Track / Off-Track Continuing" statuses are not affected by transferring to a new school.

## **11. Question: Are students who transfer out-of-state considered "Transfer Out – Unverified" since those students will not be reactivated on another district's register in NJ SMART?**

Answer: A verified transfer to an out-of-state school will count as "Excluded from Cohort" and the student will be subtracted from your school's cohort count (i.e., your district is no longer responsible for the student with respect to this calculation). Districts should make sure to use a School Exit Withdrawal Code of "T8" (Transfer out of the state or country) for students who transfer outside of New Jersey.

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**12. Question: How are students who graduate early (e.g. in three years) accounted for in graduation rate calculations?**

Answer: As long as students are exited with a School Exit Withdrawal Code of “L”, they will be counted as graduates for their cohort (i.e., the cohort they were assigned in 9<sup>th</sup> grade) in both the four-year graduation rate and the five-year graduation rate.

**13. Question: Is a “Status Unknown” student included in graduation rate calculations?**

Answer: Yes, if you have active students with “Cohort Status Unknown” statuses at the time that the graduation rate is calculated, they will be included in your adjusted cohort count (i.e., in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation).

**14. Question: How do we report students who are staying for post-graduate work and how are they included in graduation rate calculations?**

Answer: Students who meet graduation requirements and receive a state-endorsed diploma should be exited as graduates (“L”). If the student will be entering a post-graduate program or enrolling in continuing or adult education courses at the school, the students should no longer be reported to SID Management. (Please note that students who are continuing as postgraduates are not publicly funded.) For graduation rate calculations purposes, these students will remain as graduated in the adjusted cohort calculation once they are captured as graduated on an official snapshot.

**15. Question: What should I do if a student is included in my 2020 Cohort as “Transfer Out - Unverified” but they were assigned a new SID by another district?**

Answer: You will need to contact the district that received the student and obtain the SID number that they submitted for the student. You should email the NJ SMART help desk with both SID numbers and request a SID merge. Once the SIDs are merged, the student will be removed from your “Transfer Out - Unverified” bucket.

## NJ SMART Submissions

**16. Question: How will errors or sync records submitted to the Official State Submission affect our graduation rate?**

Answer: The cohort statuses of active students will be updated based on the records that you successfully submit to the State Submission. If you “Release with Errors”, those records in error/sync will be updated to “Cohort Status Unknown” since there will be no grade level submitted for those records.

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**17. Question: What do I need to submit to NJ SMART for my graduation rate report?**

Answer: There is no separate graduation data collection in NJ SMART. Graduation rates are based on information that districts already submit to NJ SMART in SID Management and the State Submission. The most important thing to remember is to be timely in the inactivation of your high school students in NJ SMART. Students completing the school year in your district should remain “Active” in the system for the End-of-Year SID Management Snapshot. After that snapshot is taken, districts can begin inactivating their students (as appropriate) during the summer, from the first week of July through August. The deadline for inactivating regular school-year students is the beginning of August and the deadline for summer school students is August 31<sup>st</sup>. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, a snapshot is taken of SID Management to calculate 4-Year and 5-Year graduation rates.

**18. Question: Can I change a student’s School Exit Withdrawal Code if I inactivate a student in error?**

Answer: Yes, with the exception of the School Exit Withdrawal Code of “L”, you can change a student’s School Exit Withdrawal Code in SID Management by submitting the student to SID Management with a Status = Active and no errors. Once the student record has been re-activated, you can inactivate it with a new School Exit Withdrawal Code. Please note that if you simply try to edit an inactivate record by changing the Exit Code, without first re-activating the student, the system will not register the change.

If students were incorrectly exited as graduated (“L”) and captured as such on an official snapshot, a graduation appeal is required to change the student’s status.

**19. Question: Where can I view New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) and Foster Indicator Data in NJ SMART?**

Answer: You can access NJSLA and Foster Indicator data through the Student List within the District Reports page. To access District Reports, your NJ SMART account must have District Reports access.

- Navigate to the Reporting tab of the NJ SMART portal and select District Reports.
- Select Student List.
- On the Report Parameters page, use the drop-down menus to select the students who you wish to view by a variety of parameters such as School, Gender, Grade Level, and others.
- Click Run Report.
- The Student List will display any students who met your outlined parameters. You can click the Export to Excel link to download an Excel file with the students’ data for analysis.



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A school's Federal School Type, State School Type, Operational Status, and school grades from the CDS system also impact accountability designations. Districts should ensure that the information in CDS is up to date.

**24. Question: *The NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile has options to view graduation data by both the attending and accountable perspective? Which version will be used for public reporting of graduation rates?***

Answer: All public reporting of graduation rates reflects the accountable perspective.

## Graduation Appeal Requests

**25. Question: *Where do I go to appeal any graduation data?***

Answer: Users should navigate to the "Graduation Appeals" page under the Reporting tab in the NJ SMART portal to make an appeal request. This page is available to any user with "District Reports" access, which should be requested through your Homeroom Administrator. On this page, you will be able to view a list of your "Cohort Students", click on an individual student's LID to drill down to the Student Details page, and submit an appeal request. In addition, you will be able to view a list of your "Appeal Requests" to track and monitor submitted requests.

**26. Question: *The data in the Official Snapshot taken on August 31 regarding my High School Graduation Cohort Status profile is incorrect. Can I fix it?***

Answer: Districts are encouraged to monitor and maintain their graduation data throughout the school year by using Official Snapshot and local data mart (LDM) High School Graduation Cohort Status Profiles. However, after each release of the August 31 Snapshot Profile (in early September), a graduation appeals period opens for that year's four-year and five-year graduation rates. District users can submit appeal requests to the NJDOE for individual student records; each request is evaluated by an NJDOE official and decided upon. Any approved requests are incorporated into the Official Snapshot graduation data.

**27. Question: *Why is my appeal being rejected for a student who is inactive in my SID Management?***

Answer: The student's School Exit Date is greater than June 15<sup>th</sup> of the current year and the student's cohort year equals the current cohort year. Therefore, the student finished the year in your district and is in your cohort.

**28. Question: *Why am I receiving an error message when I try to submit an appeal to request a cohort year change?***

Answer: An appeal cannot be accepted if you are trying to change the cohort year to:

- the year that it is already set to; or
- a year that is too far in the future or too far into the past.

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**29. Question: Can I appeal a record for a student who graduated in Cohort 2018?**

Answer: No, only cohort years 2019 and 2020 can be appealed.

**30. Question: Will I be able to appeal if I forgot to inactivate my 12th graders before the August 31<sup>st</sup> snapshot?**

Answer: Yes. You will need to contact the NJ SMART Help Desk by calling (800) 254-0295 or e-mailing [NJSMART@pcgus.com](mailto:NJSMART@pcgus.com) to obtain instructions for completing the Mass Appeals template.

**31. Question: Can I appeal a student who is showing as dropped out, but the student received a state-issued diploma by passing a high school equivalency test?**

Answer: No. For the purposes of calculating the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), under 34 C.F.R. §200.19(b)(1)(iv), a “regular high school diploma” means the standard high school diploma awarded to students in a state that is fully aligned with the state’s academic content standards and does not include a GED credential, certificate of attendance, or any alternative award. Therefore, a student who leaves school to obtain their GED is counted as a dropout in NJ SMART. Please note that this reflects the Federal policy: [High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance](#).

**32. Question: How can I appeal a student who was submitted with the incorrect ELA Graduation Pathway Indicator and/or Math Graduation Pathway Indicator?**

Answer: You should select Reason for Appeal G on the Graduation Appeals form and complete all required sections to change one or more Graduation Pathway Indicator for a student.

If you are appealing to change a student’s status (Reason for Appeal A or B) and a change to the Graduation Pathway Indicators is also required, please select G for Reason for Appeal (2).

**33. Question: Do the graduation rates posted on the NJDOE website and in the New Jersey School Performance Reports reflect approved appeals?**

Answer: Yes, approved appeals are applied to the August 31<sup>st</sup> Graduation Snapshot data available through the NJ SMART Graduation Profiles and this will match the data displayed on the NJDOE website and the School Performance Reports.

**34. Question: A student’s In-District Placement value was incorrectly reported to the Snapshot and the student’s Accountable School is incorrect. Can I appeal this record to assign the correct Accountable School?**

Answer: Yes, you can appeal the record, but you will also need to update the student’s record in SID Management to reflect the correct In-District Placement value. When you file an appeal, select option H (In District Placement) as the reason for appeal.

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## Graduation Appeals: Student Transfer Questions

### **35. Question: How are districts required to document transfers?**

Answer: When NJDOE transitioned to the adjusted cohort graduation rate methodology, a [memo](#) was shared with districts that explained the importance of documenting transfers. The memo included a link to a [form](#) to keep on file for the documentation of transfers. This documentation is subject to audit by NJDOE.

Students who transfer from one public school district to another must have documentation of a transfer once the student ID (SID) is accepted by the receiving district. Other types of transfers will require a parent/guardian's signature and other specific documentation on file to verify the transfer, if applicable. Without the proper verification, the transfer must be classified as a dropout.

If districts request changes to a student's cohort status during the appeal period, districts may be required to provide documentation. Valid documentation requirements are outlined in the [NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide](#).

### **36. Question: I have a transfer card verifying that a student transferred to another public-school district in New Jersey; however, the student is still included in my district's cohort. Can I appeal?**

Answer: Yes. You will need to contact the receiving district to determine if they uploaded the student. If this was not done, instruct them to upload the student immediately. It is also possible that the receiving district assigned the student a different state identification (SID) number. If so, you will need to acquire that SID number to submit an appeal so we can merge the two records.

### **37. Question: Why is my appeal being rejected by the NJ SMART system if he/she transferred to another NJ SMART submitting district?**

Answer: For a student to be transferred, their current status in SID Management must be inactive. The student's current status in SID Management is likely Active. In order to submit the appeal, the student must first be inactivated in SID Management.

### **38. Question: A student transferred out of my district to a school that is not a NJ SMART submitting district (e.g. a non-public school in New Jersey, a school outside the state or country, parental instruction, or a private facility). Will that student still be counted in my district's cohort? Can I appeal?**

Answer: Yes, but if you request exit code of T3 (transfer to nonpublic school within NJ), T8 (transfer out of state or country), T9 (transfer to parental instruction), or TP (transfer to private facility) you will be asked to provide documentation to verify the request. Valid documentation requirements are outlined in the [NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide](#).

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**39. Question: Can I appeal a record for a student if I entered the incorrect School Exit Withdrawal Code of T4 (transfer to any public school outside the district and within NJ)?**

Answer: Yes, but if you request exit code of T3 (transfer to nonpublic school within NJ), T8 (transfer out of state or country), T9 (transfer to parental instruction), or TP (transfer to private facility) you will need to provide documentation to verify the request. Valid documentation requirements are outlined in the [NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide](#).

**40. Question: Can I appeal a record for a student who is showing as “Transfer Out- Unverified”, but they transferred to an adult education school as a TA?**

Answer: No. Adult education schools do not report data to NJ SMART.

**41. Question: Why am I receiving an error that the School Exit Date is after August 31<sup>st</sup>?**

Answer: A student’s School Exit Date must be on or before August 31 to be considered a part of the August 31 Graduation Snapshot. Students who transferred or exited after August 31 are considered to be a part of the next school year and those changes do not impact the 4-year graduation rate for the 2019 cohort or the 5-year graduation rate for the 2020 cohort.

## Graduation Questions related to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

**42. Question: Has NJDOE released guidance for high school graduation during COVID-19 school closures?**

Answer: Information regarding the 2019-20 COVID-19 related waiver of [graduation assessment requirements](#) is provided on the NJDOE [COVID-19 Pandemic website](#).

**43. Question: Can students who need to complete course requirements or need an extension of services during the summer of 2020 be marked as graduates?**

Answer: As long as the student meets the graduation requirements and receives a state-endorsed diploma by August 31, 2020, the student can be marked as a graduate in NJ SMART.

**44. Question: How should students who had their graduation assessment requirements waived by Executive Order 117 be coded in NJ SMART?**

Answer: Executive Order 117, signed April 7, 2020 by Governor Phil Murphy, waives the graduation assessment requirement for any 12<sup>th</sup> grade student who is expected to graduate in the class of 2020 but, as of March 18, 2020, had not yet met the graduation assessment requirement. Students in the class of 2020 who have not yet met the assessment requirement must still meet all other state and

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local graduation requirements, including but not limited to credit, curriculum, and attendance requirements.

Students whose graduation assessment requirements were waived as a result of this executive order and who have met all other state and local graduation requirements should be coded with School Exit Withdrawal Code of “L” and use the ELA Graduation Pathway and/or Math Graduation Pathway of “W” (Graduation Assessment Requirements Waived under Executive Order No. 117). This code will only be available for class of 2020 graduates and will not be available for graduates with an exit date after August 31, 2020.

Students who were able to meet the graduation assessment requirements for ELA and/or mathematics by March 18, 2020 should use the appropriate pathway A-N.