



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: September 14, 2023
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: School Business Administrators, Web User Administrators, Principals and School Leads
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Services
Deadline: October 6, 2023, 5 p.m.

Action Required: Review 2023 Graduation Rate Data and Submit Graduation Appeals

Beginning Monday, September 18, local educational agencies (LEAs) can view preliminary graduation rates based on the New Jersey Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART) student identification (SID) Management snapshot captured on August 31, 2023. LEAs can submit graduation appeals to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in NJ SMART starting on September 18. All appeals and any required documentation must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Friday, October 6, 2023.

SID Management is the management system that establishes students' unique identification numbers, compiles demographic data, and tracks graduation data and the pathways students use to meet the [graduation assessment requirements](#).

LEA graduation rates will be reported in the 2022-2023 School Performance Reports which will be released in spring 2023. For school and district accountability, graduation rates from the previous year are used, so the 2023 graduation rates will be included in the ESSA Accountability Profiles in fall 2024. The 2022 graduation rates will be used in the ESSA Accountability Profiles this fall.

Graduation Appeals Process

The graduation appeals process provides districts a final opportunity to resolve issues due to incorrect or missing information in their graduation data before it is finalized and used for reporting and accountability purposes. The [Graduation Appeals User Guide](#) provides details on the process, reasons for appeals, how to identify issues and fix errors, and the required documentation for each type of appeal. The [Graduation FAQs](#) answer common questions about the appeals process. The NJDOE has created a new [Graduation Data Quality Checklist](#) to help districts review their graduation data and determine if there are errors that need to be corrected during the appeals process.

Key Actions

Starting on September 18, districts should take the following steps to ensure accurate graduation rates for their schools and districts:

1. Ensure all graduation data is reported correctly by making sure that:
 - All students who graduated by August 31, 2023 are reported as graduated with the correct school exit date;
 - All students who have transferred out of the district have the appropriate exit withdrawal code; and
 - The IEP Graduation Course Requirement and IEP Graduation Attendance fields are coded correctly to reflect whether students with disabilities did not meet course and/or attendance requirements because of modification or exemptions in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

2. Use the NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile district report to:
 - Review cohort 2023 four-year, cohort 2022 five-year, and cohort 2021 six-year graduation rates;
 - Check the graduation rates and data for each school and the overall district;
 - Ensure that all students have the correct cohort, cohort status, and accountable school and district;
 - Review both the state and federal versions of the graduation rates;
 - Review students in the Transfer Out – Unverified category to determine if students have the correct exit withdrawal code or if they were reported by another district using a different state identification number, which may require a SID merge.
3. Submit graduation appeals by 5 p.m. EST on October 6, 2023 and ensure that:
 - Data is corrected in NJ SMART SID Management prior to filing an appeal, where necessary;
 - Appeals include clear explanations and appropriate documentation; and
 - Appeals are submitted as early as possible during the appeals period and appeal statuses are monitored regularly during the appeals period.
 - The NJDOE will be reviewing appeals on a rolling basis and may request additional information to review an appeal.

Districts can use the new Graduation Data Quality Checklist document to help check that all student and school data has been reported correctly and that appeals contain all required information.

If your district needs to appeal data to correct the Cohort 2022 4-year or Cohort 2021 5-year graduation rates that were finalized last fall and will be used for accountability for the 2022-2023 school year, contact gradappeals@doe.nj.gov after submitting your appeals to ensure that approved appeals are incorporated into the graduation data that will be used in the 2022-2023 Accountability Profiles.

Final Graduation Data

The NJDOE will review all appeals that have been submitted by 5 p.m. on October 6, 2023 and make final decisions by mid-October. Districts can review the status of appeals in NJ SMART on the Graduation Appeals page. If the NJDOE needs additional information about an appeal, districts may receive an email notifying them to review the appeal in NJ SMART.

Final graduation rate data reflecting all approved graduation appeals will be available at the end of November in NJ SMART District Reports. Districts will be notified by NJ SMART when the data is available.

Changes to Federal Graduation Calculations

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) was required to make changes to graduation rate calculations beginning in 2021 based on the United States Department of Education's (USED) 2019 Federal Performance Review Report. This change was first outlined in an [April 28, 2021 broadcast](#). In 2021, the NJDOE began reporting two versions of the adjusted cohort graduation rate: a **state version** that includes all students that earn a state-endorsed diploma as graduates (in the numerator) in the calculation and a **federal version** that aligns with federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) guidance for calculating graduation rates. Importantly, please note that these changes to the graduation calculation for federal reporting do not affect the requirements to earn a diploma or the type of diploma that the State awards to students with disabilities.

To be included as a graduate in the federal version of the graduation rate, students must have met state course requirements and local attendance requirements for graduation. Additionally, students must meet the graduation assessment requirements in place based on the year they are graduating, regardless of their graduation cohort. Because there are no graduation assessment requirements for the class of 2023, students graduating between September 1, 2022 and August 31, 2023 will only be excluded as graduates in the federal version of the

graduation rate if they did not meet the state course requirements and/or the local attendance requirements for graduation due to an exemption or modification in their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The NJDOE will use the IEP Graduation Course Requirement and IEP Graduation Attendance fields in SID Management to identify the students with disabilities who did not meet the state course and/or local attendance requirements, respectively. The ELA and Math Graduation Pathway Indicator fields will be used, **for students who graduated with the class of 2022 only**, to identify the students with disabilities who did not meet the state graduation assessment requirements but instead met alternate requirements specified in their IEPs for students. Districts should ensure that these fields are accurate and error-free by the August 31, 2023 deadline.

Districts can view both the state and federal versions of their preliminary graduation rates using the NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Profile district reports starting September 18, 2023.

Graduation Resources

There are several graduation resources available that can support districts in reporting graduation data, explain how graduation rates are calculated, answer frequently asked questions, explain the appeals process, and describe how to use the associated district reports. These resources include:

- [Introduction to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculation in New Jersey](#)
- [User Guide to High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile](#)
- [NJ SMART Graduation FAQs](#)
- [NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide](#)
- [Graduation Data Quality Checklist](#)
- [Understanding Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates](#)
- [School Exit Withdrawal Codes and Graduation Cohort Status Overview](#)
- [NJ SMART High School Graduation Training eLearning Video](#)

[Additional resources and trainings](#) for NJ SMART submissions are available under “Documents for Download” and “eLearning Videos & Webinars.”

Contact Information

Contact the NJ SMART help desk at (800) 254-0295 or njsmart@pcgus.com with any questions about NJ SMART reports or technical issues with the appeals process. Contact reportcard@doe.nj.gov with any questions about your district’s graduation data or the graduation appeals process.

c: Members, State Board of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group