



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: October 29, 2025
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: Principals and School Leads, Web User Administrators
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Services
Deadline: November 21, 2025, 5 p.m.

Action Required: Review 2025 Graduation Data and Submit Appeals

Local educational agencies (LEAs) can now view preliminary graduation rates in the New Jersey Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (NJSLEDS). These preliminary rates are based on the NJ SMART SID Management snapshot captured on August 29, 2025. LEAs can submit graduation appeals to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in NJSLEDS to correct data that impacts the calculations of graduation rates. All appeals and any required documentation must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Friday, November 21, 2025.

LEA graduation rates for the 2024-2025 school year, which include four-year, five-year, and six-year rates, will be reported in the 2024-2025 School Performance Reports which will be released in spring 2026. For accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), graduation rates from the prior year are used, so the 2024-2025 graduation rates will be included in the ESSA Accountability Profiles in fall 2026. The 2025 ESSA Profiles and the 2024-2025 ESSA accountability process will use the finalized 2024 graduation rates from fall 2024.

NJSLEDS Graduation Reports

NJSLEDS has two new graduation reports that LEAs can use to review their graduation data. The **Graduation Cohort Profile** report shows calculated state and federal graduation rates and the count and percentage of students in each cohort category. This is a streamlined version of the NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Profile. The **Graduation Student-Level** report is new for NJSLEDS, and it shows all the students by graduation cohort with their cohort category (Graduated, Dropout, Transfer Out – Unverified, etc.) and other information used in the calculation of graduation rates.

The Graduation Reports User Guide, which can be found on the [NJSLEDS Graduation User Resources page](#), gives an overview of both reports and instructions on how to use the reports and the filters available.

Graduation Appeals Process

The graduation appeals process provides LEAs with 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. Resources for the graduation appeals process, including the Graduation Appeals Handbook, the Graduation Appeals User Guide, and the Graduation Data

Quality Checklist, can be found on the [NJSLEDS Graduation User Resources page](#). The Graduation Appeals User Guide provides details on the appeals process, reasons for appeals, how to identify issues and fix errors, and the required documentation for each type of appeal. The Graduation Data Quality Checklist gives suggestions of what LEAs should look for while reviewing their graduation data to help determine if appeals are needed to correct data.

Key actions

LEAs should take the following steps to ensure accurate school and district graduation rates:

1. Ensure all graduation data is reported correctly by making sure that:
 - All students who graduated by August 29, 2025, are reported with school exit withdrawal code L (Graduated) and the correct school exit date;
 - All students who have transferred out of the district have the appropriate school exit withdrawal code;
 - The ELA and Math Graduation Pathway indicators are coded correctly to indicate how students met the graduation assessment requirements; 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. Make sure to review the following data using the new NJSLEDS Graduation Reports:
 - Check the graduation rates and data for each school and the overall district both for all students and by student group;
 - 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; and
 - 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 an SID merge.
3. Submit graduation appeals by 5 p.m. EST on November 21, 2025, and ensure that:
 - Data is corrected in NJSLEDS Student 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 appeals statuses are monitored regularly during the appeals window.
 - The NJDOE will be reviewing appeals on a rolling basis and may request additional information to review an appeal.
 - LEAs will receive an email if the NJDOE is requesting additional information or edits to the submitted appeal.

If an LEA needs to appeal data to correct the Cohort 2024 four-year, Cohort 2023 five-year, or Cohort 2022 six-year graduation rates that were finalized in fall 2024 and will be used for accountability for the 2024-2025 school year, it should contact performancemanagement@doe.nj.gov after submitting its appeal. LEAs should also submit an ESSA Profile appeal using the link available in homeroom starting November 5, 2025, to ensure that

approved appeals are incorporated into the final graduation data that will be used for the 2024-2025 ESSA Accountability process.

Final Graduation Data

The NJDOE will review all appeals submitted by 5 p.m. on November 21, 2025, and make final decisions by early December. Districts can review the status of appeals in NJSLEDS on the Graduation Appeals Summary page. If the NJDOE needs additional information about an appeal, districts may receive an email notifying them to review the appeal in NJSLEDS.

Final graduation rate data reflecting all approved graduation appeals will be available by January 2026 in the NJSLEDS Graduation Reports. Districts will be notified when the final data is available.

Graduation Rate Reporting and Accountability

The NJDOE calculates and reports two versions of graduation rates:

- **State version:** Includes all students who earn a state-endorsed diploma as graduates (in the numerator) in the calculation.
- **Federal version:** Includes only students who earned a state-endorsed diploma and met the state course, local attendance, and, depending on the year of graduation, assessment graduation requirements; pursuant to federal rules, the federal version does not include students with disabilities who receive a state-endorsed diploma but instead met alternate requirements specified in their IEPs.

State regulations allow the IEP team to exempt a student with disabilities from graduation requirements or modify the requirements that a student must meet to graduate. ESSA does not allow students who have not met the state's graduation assessment, course, or attendance requirements, because of a modification or exemption in the student's IEP, to be included as graduates in the graduation rates used for federal reporting and accountability. As such, students with disabilities who earn a state-endorsed diploma but have not met all the graduation requirements because of modifications or exemptions in their IEPs are counted as graduates in the state version of the graduation rate but are not counted as graduates in the federal version of the graduation rate. The adjusted cohort (denominator) is the same for both the state and federal versions of the graduation rate.

The NJDOE uses the IEP Graduation Course Requirement and IEP Graduation Attendance fields from Student Management to identify students with disabilities who did not meet the state course and/or local attendance requirements, respectively. The ELA and Math Graduation Pathway Indicator fields in Student Management are used to identify students with disabilities who did not meet the state graduation assessment requirements but instead met alternate requirements specified in their IEPs. If there were any errors in these data fields as of the NJ SMART August 29, 2025, snapshot, LEAs should submit appeals in NJSLEDS to correct the data by the November 21 appeals deadline.

The NJSLEDS Graduation Cohort Profile allows LEAs to see their federal and state graduation rates in the same report, so they can compare whether they are different. The Graduation Student-Level

report includes a new Graduation Status field, which allows LEAs to review whether a student was included as a “State and Federal Graduate” or a “State Graduate Only.” The Graduation Student-Level report also includes the ELA and Math Pathway fields and the two IEP fields to make it easy for LEAs to see why students may be included only as graduates in the state graduation rate.

Graduation Resources and Training

Graduation resources are available on the NJSLEDS Graduation User Resources page to support LEAs in reporting graduation data, explaining how graduation rates are calculated, answering frequently asked questions, understanding the appeals process, and describing how to use the new NJSLEDS graduation reports. These resources include:

- Introduction to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate
- Graduation Accountable Rules
- Graduation Reports User Guide
- School Exit Withdrawal Codes and Graduation Cohort Status Overview
- Graduation Frequently Asked Questions
- Graduation Appeals Handbook
- Graduation Appeals User Guide
- Graduation Data Quality Checklist

The [Understanding Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates](#) webpage also includes information on how adjusted cohort graduation rates are calculated with examples.

The NJSLEDS team will be hosting a High School Graduation Appeals Training on Thursday, October 30 at 1 p.m. Register for the webinar on the [NJSLEDS Trainings page](#). A copy of the PDF used for the webinar will be posted on the [NJSLEDS Resources page](#).

Contact Information and Provide Feedback

Contact the NJSLEDS Help Desk at (609) 376-3970 or helpdesk-sleds@doe.nj.gov with any questions about NJSLEDS reports or technical issues with the graduation appeals process. Contact gradappeals@doe.nj.gov with any questions about your district’s graduation data or the graduation appeals process.

Take a [short survey](#) to let the NJDOE know how we can improve the graduation reports and appeals process in NJSLEDS for next year.

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