



Changes to Graduation Rates in Minnesota Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

As Minnesota implements the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), its approach to calculating graduation rates is changing (and not changing) in some important ways. The following are some frequent questions asked of the Minnesota Department of Education about these changes.

What's changing about student groups?

Two changes will affect the groups a student is included in.

- Students will be identified using one of seven racial/ethnic groups. These seven groups are defined at the federal level, and replace an earlier set of five groups. The seven groups are:
 - American Indian
 - Asian
 - Black
 - Hispanic
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Two or more races
 - For example, Pat receives both the Black and White racial codes. Pat will be included in the “two or more races” group.
 - EXCEPTION: Any student who receives the “Hispanic” ethnic code is always included in the “Hispanic” group. This is based on the federal rules for identifying race and ethnicity.
- A student who spends any time during high school in one of the three program-based groups – English learners, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, or students in special education – will be counted in that group in the school's graduation rates.
 - Previously, a student counted only in the groups they were identified in during their ninth grade year.
 - For example, Andy was not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch during ninth grade, then spent 10th and 11th grades eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and finally spent 12th grade not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Andy will be included in the “eligible for free or reduced-price lunch” group in graduation rate calculations.
 - Under the previous calculation rules, Andy would **not** have been included in the “eligible for free or reduced-price lunch” group.

- The graduation rates of students who are **not** English learners, students who are **not** eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and students who are **not** in special education will be calculated. These are known as “counter-groups.”
 - These counter-groups may be used in accountability calculations, if:
 - The counter-group includes at least 20 students, AND
 - The original group includes at least 20 students.

What’s changing about dropouts?

Students who drop out of a high school after spending less than half an academic year there will be counted as a dropout at the high school where they spent the most time during their high school years.

- Note that this applies only to students who **drop out**. A student who continues their education past their senior year, or whose final situation is unknown, will still be included as a nongraduate at whichever high school they last attended.
- For example, Jamie spends ninth, 10th, and 11th grade at School A. In April of 12th grade, Jamie transfers to School B and drops out in May. Jamie will count as a dropout in School A’s graduation rate.
 - Under the previous rules, Jamie would have counted as a dropout in School B’s graduation rate.

What’s changing about foreign exchange students?

Foreign exchange students will no longer be included in graduation rate calculations.

What else is new?

Minnesota will begin calculating seven-year graduation rates. Four-year, five-year, and six-year rates will all still be calculated as well.

For some students, the seven-year graduation rate is the most appropriate. For example, the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for some students in special education call for the students to receive education through age 21. In those cases, the seven-year graduation rate allows schools, districts, and the state to reflect students’ successful graduation in compliance with their IEPs.

Both the four-year and seven-year graduation rates will be used for accountability purposes.

What about summer graduates?

Summer graduates **will continue to be included** in graduation rates.

- For example, Pat enters 12th grade at School A in the fall of 2018, but fails a required class and does not graduate at the end of the 2018-19 school year. However, over the summer of 2019, Pat makes up the class at School A and graduates. Pat will be included as a graduate in School A’s four-year graduation rate.

- This has been part of how Minnesota has calculated graduation rates for the past several years, and will continue to be the case under ESSA.

When will graduation rates using the new calculation be used and released?

The first release of graduation rates with the new calculation will occur in early 2018. In February 2018, graduation rates for the 2016-17 school year will be made available. Historical rates will be recomputed using the new calculations and will be released at the same time as the 2016-17 graduation rates. The Minnesota Report Card, Data Reports and Analytics page, and Secure Reports will all be updated to reflect these changes.

The four-year and seven-year graduation rates from 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 will be used to help identify schools for improvement going into the 2018-19 school year.

Graduation rates using the new calculation should **not** be directly compared to graduation rates using the previous calculation. This is similar to how proficiency and achievement data from the MCA-III should not be directly compared to data from the MCA-II. Because historical graduation rates will be recomputed and released, it is appropriate to look at year-to-year trends using the new calculations.

Other than using the new calculation, will anything else be different about historical graduation rates?

When computing historical graduation rates using the new calculation, the graduation rates through 2016 will now use the most recent available records for students. In very rare instances, this will result in a change in a student's status.

For example, if a summer graduate from 2016 was incorrectly coded as "Continuing" in the Fall 2016 Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) submission, but correctly reported as a 2016 graduate in the End of Year 2017 MARSS submission, that student was included as a nongraduate in the 2016 graduation rate. When historical rates are run using the new calculation, however, that student will now be reported as a 2016 graduate.

This adjustment is happening only once, as part of the historical recalculation. It will not be a routine part of graduation rate calculation going forward.

Who can I contact for more information?

For more information about submitting graduation data through MARSS, contact marss@state.mn.us.

For more information about how graduation rates will be used for accountability, contact mde.essa@state.mn.us.