

**1. Is this the first year for a 4-year graduation rate?**

No, New Mexico implemented the first 4-year cohort graduation rate for the class of 2008, published in 2009. Prior to that time the state utilized a senior completion method that tracked 12th grade students to completion of graduation requirements by spring. The use of the senior completion method was discontinued after the class of 2007, as New Mexico undertook the transition to the National Governors Association (NGA) cohort computation.

2. Is this the first year for a 5-year graduation rate?

No, New Mexico implemented the first 5-year cohort graduation rate in 2010, reporting on the Cohort of 2008 and their success in the 5th year. The longitudinal data system STARS (Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System) now contains necessary data to inform a 5-year rate. Therefore, beginning in 2010 the 5-year rate will be reported along with the 4-year rate for all classes.

3. Is this the first year for a 6-year graduation rate?

No, New Mexico implemented the first 6-year cohort graduation rate for the Cohort of 2009 which contributed to school grading. We will continue to publish the 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year rates for each graduating cohort.

4. How are the cohorts named?

Graduation rules apply to students that began high school in the fall of a given school year, and who were expected to graduate 4 years later by August 1. The group is named by their expected graduation year, such as the Cohort of (or Class of) 2012. Students who qualify to be members of the 4-year cohort are then tracked for one additional year, and reported in the 5th year and 6th year named for their original cohort (i.e. 5-year graduation rates for the Cohort of 2011).

5. Why are we reporting the prior year's class instead of this year's?

The federally approved rules require that students be given 4 full years to graduate, including the summer following their 12th grade year. In order to capture the outcomes of students completing requirements their final summer, the reporting of graduation must be lagged by one year. That is, the graduates of 2012 are reported in the fall. To shift to the one-year lagged schedule of reporting, the United States Department of Education allowed New Mexico to duplicate the graduation rates from 2007 in 2008.

6. Are these rates similar to prior rates?

No. Beginning in 2012, certain flexibilities that were applied to prior cohorts of 2008, 2009, and 2010 were rescinded by the federal government. For that reason there is a break in trend that complicates historical comparisons between these cohorts and subsequent cohorts. Consult the *Graduation Technical Manual* for the details of the changes.

7. How is the 4-year rate generated?

In 2005 the National Governors Association (NGA) convened a task force to make recommendations on how states could measure graduation rates in a way that was comparable based on high-quality, student-level longitudinal data. The resulting recommendation, ultimately agreed to by all 50 governors, was for all states to calculate a high school graduation rate based on the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{On-time graduates by year X}}{\text{[(first time 9th graders in year X-4) + (transfers in) - (transfers out)]}}$$

8. What is "Shared Accountability"?

In the past, New Mexico assigned a student's graduation outcome to the school where they were last enrolled. Mobile students who attended several schools would impact only their most recent school. Moreover, only schools with a 12th grade were eligible to receive a rate. In order to hold all schools accountable for their effect on graduating students, the *Shared Accountability* method was developed to give feedback to all high schools,

including those with only 9th or 10th grades. The method apportions a student's outcome among all schools they attended.

9. Does this mean that mobile students count more than stable students in the rates?

No, every student contributes a total count of 1.0 to the numerator and denominator of the rate for schools, districts, and state. For example, a student who attended two schools for equal amounts of time would contribute .50 (or 50%) of their outcome to each school.

10. Who else uses this method?

New Mexico is one of the first to use shared accountability, primarily because of the capabilities of our Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) which was implemented in 2005. Students are now tracked with multiple yearly snapshots that provide a valuable history of how long the student attended each high school. Other states do not yet have adequate information systems that can provide this information.

11. Who is a member of the cohort?

The cohort consists of all first-time 9th graders in the first of the 4 years of the cohort span. They are joined by incoming first time 10th graders in the second year, 11th graders in the third year, and 12th graders in the fourth year. To become a member the student must have been enrolled for at least one semester during the four year period.

12. Are there any students who are not in the cohort?

Yes. Certain students are excluded from the cohort because they meet these conditions:

- Foreign exchange authorized to be in the U.S. on a "J" visa
- Transferred out to a private, out-of-state, Bureau of Indian Education, or home school
- Deceased
- Moved outside of the United States and its territories

13. Can students be reassigned to a different cohort?

No. A student joins their on-time graduation cohort from the moment they enter schools under the jurisdiction of New Mexico's Public Education Department (PED).

14. What about students who graduate early?

Students who graduate early will count in the cohort to which they were originally assigned.

15. Early rules allowed certain students with disabilities or English language learners extra time. Does New Mexico follow this practice?

No. In 2012 the federal government removed this flexibility. Prior to this time students were allowed extra time to graduate (see question 6).

16. Does every high school receive a graduation rate?

Yes, every school with any grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 will receive a rate. That includes 9th grade academies, schools configured with additional lower grades such as K-12, and regular high schools. There are a small number of new schools whose students have not yet reached the age of 4-year graduation, and these schools cannot yet receive a rate.

17. How does the graduation rate relate to ESEA (formerly NCLB) requirements?

New Mexico was granted a waiver in 2012 to allow the *A-F School Grading* system to serve as the primary accountability for all schools and LEAs. All high schools are now graded according to their 4-year, 5-year and 6-year graduation rates, as well as on the growth of their 4-year rate from year to year.

18. Can some students take longer to graduate?

Students may take 5 or 6 years or more to graduate and schools will receive some credit for these later students. However these graduates merit fewer points in the school grading model than the on-time graduates that finish in 4 years.

19. Who is considered a "graduate"?

Graduates are students who graduate with a standard diploma (including the Career and Ability pathways). Students who exit high school with a GED or a Certificate of Completion (complete course requirements but do not

pass all portions of the high school exit exam) are considered “non-graduates” in the computation of the graduation rate.

20. Is the dropout rate related to the cohort rate?

No. The federal definition for a *dropout* differs from a *non-graduate* and therefore the rates are not complementary. To be excused from the dropout rate a student can be still enrolled after 4 years, receive a GED, or finish high school with a certificate of completion. None of these conditions are allowed in the graduation rate.

21. Is it possible that the 5-year rate can be lower than the 4-year rate?

Yes. For 4-year cohort members that transfer to another school during their final year, the time that they spend in the new school counts toward that school’s rate. When the incoming student does not graduate at the end of their 5th year, the receiving school’s non-graduate population grows and can cause their overall rate to decline. This is a unique feature of the Shared Accountability model that all schools attended by a student during the 5 year period must share responsibility for the student’s outcome, regardless of whether the student succeeds or fails to graduate.

22. How are returning students under *Graduate New Mexico* treated in the cohort?

“Graduate New Mexico, It’s Everybody’s Business” was a state initiative that recruited dropouts to complete graduation requirements and receive a diploma. Some of these students left school many years before (15 or 20 years or more) and are returning adults and part-time students. The student’s 4-year cohort membership was triggered by the year they were a first-time 9th grader in New Mexico public schools so their cohort will have already graduated. Moreover, these students do not qualify for the current cohort because they have already been counted as a non-graduate in prior rates. Success rates for Graduate New Mexico are reported through a separate mechanism.

23. How do I calculate a graduation rate?

An example in the *Graduation Technical Manual* is helpful for those who want to understand the mechanics of the calculation. The PED publishes a confidential report in *High School Cohort* that will indicate each student’s contribution to the rate. This report is similar to the *Consolidated Outcomes Report* but appends additional values that can be used to compute the rate.