

Study on the Accuracy of the Graduation Data of Students with Disabilities in the LAUSD, 2007-2008 School Year

Office of the Independent Monitor

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the study on the accuracy of the graduation data of students with disabilities (SWD) in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The study measures the accuracy of the District's data of SWD who graduated with a high school diploma in accordance with Outcome 3: Graduation Rate, of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD). The results of this 2007-2008 validation study were used by the Independent Monitor (IM) for determining whether the District met performance targets of Outcome 3. This data was also used to validate data associated with Outcome 4: Completion Rate.

This report also provides background on the development of the outcome targets, methodology of the study and findings.

Background

The Modified Consent Decree includes two outcomes that are aimed at increasing the rate of students with disabilities that graduate with a diploma and/or complete high school. The outcomes are intended to increase the number of students with disabilities completing high school while decreasing the number of students with disabilities that drop out.

In 2007, the State's decision to eliminate the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) exemption for SWD resulted in the IM's decision to revise Outcome #3 and use the State of California methodology of calculating the graduation rate for SWD. To determine a reasonable target percentage of students graduating with a diploma the IM considered whether to maintain a level playing field based on the District's performance in school year 2006-2007. A level playing field would have resulted in a target of 37.89 %. However, since the method of calculation allows the District to improve its performance by increasing the number of students graduating and/or staying in school, the IM decided that a 5% increase was reasonable and within the District's reach. Therefore, the target to meet Outcome 3 was established to 39.79% of SWD graduating with a diploma.

The outcomes are as follows:

Outcome 3: Graduation Rate

The District shall increase the number of grade 12 students with disabilities that receive diplomas to 39.79% by 6/30/2008 using the State of California methodology for calculating the graduation rate for students with disabilities. If the State's diploma requirements change, the Independent Monitor shall meet with the parties to discuss the impact of the change and may revise this outcome if appropriate

Outcome 4: Completion Rate

The District's completion rate shall increase based on an increase in the number of students who graduate with a diploma, receive a certificate of completion, or age out, as compared to the total number of students with disabilities who graduate with a diploma, receive a certificate of completion, age out, or drop out (grades 7-12).

OIM Study of the Accuracy of the District's Graduation Data 2007-2008

To verify the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the 2007-2008 school year, the Office of the Independent Monitor (OIM) conducted a validation study to verify the graduation status of all SWD identified as 12th grade students. This study aimed to identify sources of error within the data and establish an accurate¹ graduation rate for the 2007-2008 school year. The study consists of a verification of the District's data by visiting all schools that reported graduation data, and reviewing all available sources of data to obtain the most accurate outcome for each student. In addition, data were requested from the Planning, Assessment and Research Division regarding approved CAHSEE waivers and 2007 CAHSEE exemptions.

Data Collection of Graduation Rates by Research and Planning Division (formally Program and Evaluation and Research Branch)

To determine the graduation rates of students with disabilities, consistent with years past, Research and Planning provided all schools with a list of the 12th grade SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2007. These lists required schools to report the graduation and enrollment status of the each student by indicating whether a student had: completed the requirements of a diploma; received a certificate of completion; aged out; dropped out; did not graduate but continued to be enrolled; and/or transferred to another District school, out of a district school or non-public school. Schools were also instructed to add any additional students that enrolled and graduated from their school during the 2007-2008 school year. Data was collected through October 2008, therefore allowing for student graduation through the end of the extended school year 2007-2008. Upon completion of this data collection, R&E provided the OIM copies of the graduation data as reported by schools. This data was then entered into a database developed by the OIM to determine graduation rates.

The verification of graduation data includes only those students identified by the District's data systems with grade 12 status enrolled on December 1, 2007.

Methodology

To validate the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the entire population of 12th grade students with disabilities, the OIM visited all of the District's schools that reported graduation data for SWD enrolled on December 1, 2007. The objective of the site visit was to review the various sources of data used by schools for reporting graduation data. This included reviewing: student transcripts in the Secondary Student Information System (SSIS); various data fields

¹ This graduation rate only reflects those SWD enrolled on December 1, 2007 with 12th grade status.

within the SSIS; and, counselor/administrator records used for tracking student graduation requirements and issuance of a diploma.

The instrument utilized for the 2007-2008 school year study for validating graduation data included student demographic information such as: the student's identification number, date of birth and eligibility code. Several options were included for verification to capture the outcome of each student (i.e. graduated with a diploma, received a certificate of completion, aged out, dropped out, transferred to another LAUSD school, transferred out of district/within state, transferred out of state, transferred to a non public school, continued enrollment, and/or status unknown). Using the data reported by schools, the instruments contained the outcome as reported by schools above the corresponding verification box on the instrument. For instance, if a school had reported that a student graduated with a diploma, "YES" was indicated above the verification box marked "Diploma". If the school presented evidence of a student receiving a diploma, the box was checked to indicate a match. If the school reported a different outcome than a diploma for the student, such as having received a certificate of completion the corresponding box was marked. In addition, a comment section was provided for each student for additional relevant information. During the 2007-2008 school year, data on the leave "L" code was collected to identify discrepancies within the SSIS system. The instrument was modified to include the L code uploaded centrally, and data was collected to identify the L code observed during the site review. Finally, information regarding passage of the CAHSEE was verified at schools. For students with discrepancies that could not be resolved as a result of the data collection, schools were contacted to verify and/or obtain CAHSEE scores, CAHSEE score reports and waiver/exemption forms granted by the District. In addition, a request was made to the Division of Planning, Assessment and Research for a list of students that were granted waivers and/or 2007 CAHSEE exemptions.

Graduation with a diploma was verified in the following ways: year end flag code of A (graduation with diploma); an L7 code (culmination) within the SSIS system using the graduation requirement screen (TR04) indicating that the student met all of their requirements and the minimum of 230 cumulative credits; a code of 90 accompanying the L7 code indicating culmination with a diploma; verification of diploma based on counselor graduation logs; and, in some instances if conflicting information was observed within the data system, counselor verbal reports that the student graduated with a diploma with demonstrated evidence that the student met the minimum of 230 cumulative credits (in many instances the data systems were not updated).

For students that received certificates of completion the following data indicators were used to verify the provision of a certificate of completion: the year end flag within the SSIS of C (certificate), the 421 field (non-standard exit) of the SSIS indicating issuance of a certificate, the L7 code with an accompanying code of 92 (culmination with a certificate). As the case of diplomas, some schools reported the most accurate data source as counselor logs or databases, whereby this source of data was used to verify a certificate of completion.

For students that were reported as having transferred to another LAUSD school or out of the District, information was obtained regarding their subsequent school of enrollment. For students that were reported as having continued enrollment, verification of enrollment was obtained from their class schedule (CL54) screen within the SSIS. During the 2007-2008 school year, an

additional verification of continued enrollment was conducted by cross referencing an October 1, 2008 data enrollment census derived from the SSIS.

Sample/Population

As agreed by the parties, this outcome measures the graduation rate of SWD in the LAUSD by first obtaining a fixed student count of students identified as 12th graders receiving special education services in order to track whether these students graduated with a diploma. This cohort of students serves as the population for determining the graduation rate for the 2007-2008 school year. To ensure capturing all 12th grade SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2007², a combination of the District’s data systems was used by OIM to determine the population of students.

The population of students includes 2,651 students from 118 sites and all local districts (Table 1). This includes 50 comprehensive high schools, 13 special education centers and 55 magnet, charter and options schools. Students that leave the District for reasons of attending another school district in California (L3), a non-public school (L4) and/or leave the state (L5) are dropped from the sample. For the 2007-2008 school year, 104 students were identified as having transferred out of the LAUSD resulting in a final sample of 2,547.

TABLE 1. Analyzed Sample by Local District

Local District	Total Grade 12 SWD	Left the District L3, L4, L5	Total Students in Analyzed Sample	Percent of Analyzed Sample
1	558	19	539	100%
2	291	15	276	100%
3	351	16	335	100%
4	334	8	326	100%
5	291	12	279	100%
6	161	5	156	100%
7	220	11	209	100%
8	277	17	260	100%
Charter	156	1	155	100%
Other	12		12	
	2,651	104	2,547	100%

It is important to reiterate that the population of SWD only consists of those students identified as 12th grade SWD enrolled in a LAUSD school on December 1, 2007. Students that dropped out prior to December 1, 2007, or enrolled thereafter, are not included in this population, and are therefore not included in the number or percentage of students with disabilities that graduated. In addition, the population of SWD includes students that may not be considered diploma track and therefore it is assumed that the population does not have the potential for graduating all students

² A December 1, 2007 student count was selected for the following reasons: This count coincides with the Title I student count required by federal law; the CASEMIS count of students with disabilities required by the State of California; maximizes the number of students enrolled; and, attempts to avoid capturing SWD promoted to 12th grade after the 2nd semester, as these students would not have sufficient time to graduate during the 2007-2008 school year.

with a diploma. However, student outcomes for non-diploma track students are counted for Outcome 4, which includes students that may have received a certificate of completion, aged out, or are still enrolled. Data on outcomes for non-diploma track students was also reported by schools and the accuracy of the data was verified by the OIM within this study.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, data was entered into the database developed by the OIM. Data obtained from the validation study was entered with the data reported by schools for comparison and to determine errors within the data. Since the population of students was observed, the graduation rate of students with disabilities reported by the OIM is considered the actual graduation rate of SWD for the 2007-2008 school year.

The graduation rate was determined as agreed upon by the parties, and is as follows:

- Numerator includes grade 12 SWD receiving a diploma or passing the High School Proficiency Exam/GED for the 2007-08 school year.
- Denominator includes grade 12 SWD enrolled December 1, 2007 excluding SWD who have left LAUSD to another California public school (L³), California nonpublic school (L⁴) or school outside of California (L⁵) after December 1, 2007. This measure calculates the percentage of all *exiting* students in grade twelve, and *exiting* ungraded students eighteen and over, who graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

Findings

The graduation validation study had two primary goals. The first was to determine the actual graduation rate of SWD within the District by conducting site verification of student outcomes; the second was to identify sources of error associated with the data as reported by schools. It is important to note that charter schools were reported as a separate local district during the 2007-2008 school year. Since the population of students with disabilities attending charter schools represents a small portion of the entire population of SWD, comparisons should be made with caution. In addition, the performance of charters is not included within the discussion below to focus such comparisons on comparably sized local districts.

Graduation Rate by OIM

During the 2007-2008 school year, 41.66% of SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2007 graduated with a diploma (Table 2). Graduation rates by local district indicate that local district 1 (49.35%) and local district 2 (45.65%) had the highest rates of graduation for SWD, while local district 7 (28.71%) and local district 8 (27.31%) had the lowest.

TABLE 2. Number and Percentage of SWD that Received a Diploma, by Local District

Local District	Total 12 th Grade SWD	Received a Diploma	% Received a Diploma	Did Not Receive a Diploma	% Did not Receive a Diploma
1	539	266	49.35%	273	50.65%
2	276	126	45.65%	150	54.35%
3	335	131	39.10%	204	60.90%
4	326	128	39.26%	198	60.74%
5	279	101	36.20%	178	63.80%
6	156	50	32.05%	106	67.95%
7	209	60	28.71%	149	71.29%
8	260	71	27.31%	189	72.69%
Charters	155	128	82.58%	27	17.42%
Other	12	0	0%	12	100%
	2,547	1,061	41.66%	1,486	58.34%

Outcomes for SWD receiving a Certificate of Completion and/or Aged Out

For those students that did not receive a diploma, 31.49% of the 12th grade SWD received a certificate of completion or aged out (Table 3). Local district 5 shows the highest rate of students receiving a certificate of completion (40.50%), while local district 7 (24.88%) and local district 3 (28.36%) had the lowest rate.

TABLE 3. Number and Percentage of SWD Receiving a Certificate of Completion/Aged Out by Local District.

Local District	Total 12 th Grade SWD	Received Certificate/Aged out	% Received Certificate/Aged out
1	539	175	32.47%
2	276	94	34.06%
3	335	95	28.36%
4	326	117	34.82%
5	279	113	40.50%
6	156	56	35.90%
7	209	52	24.88%
8	260	88	33.85%
Charters	155	12	7.74%
Other	12	0	0%
	2,547	802	31.49%

Table 4 shows the percentage of SWD enrolled on December 1, 2007 that dropped out (6.95%) during the 2007-2008 school year. Local district 6 (12.82%), local district 7 (10.53%) and local district 8 (9.62%) demonstrate the highest rates of student drop out, while local district 1 (3.90%) and local district 2 (3.99%) had the lowest rate of drop-outs of SWD. It is important to reiterate that this table only reflects students that were part of the graduation study cohort for the purposes

of monitoring Outcome 3: Graduation and is not representative of the total number of drop-outs (grades 7-12) reported by the District for this corresponding school year.

For students reported as having transferred to a school within LAUSD, outcomes were not reported by any other school for 110 students. As was noted in the methodology, schools were required to include any additional SWD that enrolled in their schools that did not appear on the December 1, 2007 count. Since neither enrollment nor graduation outcomes could be verified for students reported as having transferred within LAUSD, an additional 4.32% of all 12th grade SWD were counted as not having received a diploma and identified as status unknown or drop-out.

TABLE 4. Number and Percentage of SWD who Dropped Out or with Unknown Status, by Local District.

Local District	Total 12 th Grade SWD	Reported as Dropped Out	% Reported as Dropped Out	Transferred within LAUSD- Not Reported	% Transferred within LAUSD- Not Reported
1	539	21	3.90%	26	4.82%
2	276	11	3.99%	19	6.88%
3	335	27	8.06%	17	5.07%
4	326	27	8.28%	10	3.07%
5	279	17	6.09%	7	2.51%
6	156	20	12.82%	7	4.49%
7	209	22	10.53%	8	4.00%
8	260	25	9.62%	13	5.00%
Charter	155	6	3.86%	2	1.29%
Other	12	1	8.33%	1	8.33
	2,547	177	6.95%	110	4.32%

Sources of Error of Graduation Data as Reported by Schools

For the 2006-2007 school year, schools reported a total of 986 SWD as having graduated with a diploma. The validation study was able to verify the graduation with diploma for 1,061 students. This included 110 students that schools had reported as not having received a diploma. This may be partly due to students who finished additional course requirements or received updated CAHSEE scores after the time of the data reporting by schools. In some cases, student data had been updated and not reviewed by school personnel until the time of the OIM visit, resulting in the school becoming aware that the student had completed the necessary requirements for a diploma.

In 50 cases, the schools had reported the graduation with a high school diploma by a student in error. Upon the OIM visit, it was determined that the student had not met the requirements and the reporting was a result of inaccurate data entry. The OIM review did not determine whether students may have received a diploma without meeting the necessary requirements.

In approximately 35 instances, the databases indicated that students had received a diploma but did not have evidence of passing CAHSEE scores. For these cases, schools were contacted to request CAHSEE score reports provided by the state and/or CAHSEE exemptions granted by the District. In the majority of cases, this evidence was provided by schools.

Another potential source of error is that for 701 students CAHSEE scores were not available within the SSIS system. Of these, 114 received a diploma. These students represented a significant part of the discrepant data observed during the OIM data collection, since passage of the CAHSEE is an essential requirement to verify graduation with a diploma. As was aforementioned, this data was verified by requesting CAHSEE score reports from schools and central office personnel. This potential source of error was also noted for the majority of students attending charter schools. Since some charters do not utilize the student information system, there was apparently no evidence provided to the District regarding these scores. For all students attending charters, charters were contacted and requested to provide CAHSEE test dates and scores, and a copy of the state reports if available.

Summary

Although the validation study was specific to students with disabilities, it should be understood that the review and observations of the District's data system and procedures for documenting and reporting graduation are not limited to SWD.

Overall, errors were observed within the graduation data as reported by schools. However, these errors had minimal impact on the overall graduation rate identified by the OIM review as multiple inquiries were made for students with missing and/or discrepant information to reconcile this data. In many of the cases, these discrepancies confirmed that the student had met the state requirements for a diploma. It is important to note that without this extensive review of data and further school assistance, a graduation rate based solely on the review of the multiple data indicators within the data systems this count would be considerably inaccurate.

These errors appear to be due to the following factors: multiple codes and fields within the SSIS to document graduation and leaver data; lack of edits within these fields to prevent discrepant data; variations in the understanding and accurate data entry of graduation and leaver data and codes; and, data maintenance and timeliness of data updates.

These factors that contribute to the discrepant and inaccurate graduation and leaver data observed are exacerbated by one primary variable. In the LAUSD, the school rather than the District issues the diploma. This process coupled with the various data sources and fields for capturing graduation and leaver data, exposes the District to variations for issuing diplomas, certificates of completions and recording leaver data. These weaknesses within the process have been evidenced during the OIM validation study on a year-to-year basis, where students that had met the graduation requirements did not receive one, and vice versa. It has also become apparent that the District data systems lack the necessary edits and central office oversight to prevent the erroneous granting or omission of student diplomas. Furthermore, the reliance on a process where schools are the sole and primary issuer of a diploma limits the effectiveness of even the best data system. The District should consider establishing a uniform and centralized process that effectively verifies the necessary State and District requirements students must meet prior to

issuing them a diploma. This process would also enable the District to provide and implement any necessary interventions and support for students needing additional course requirements and/or CAHSEE test preparation.