

Study on the Accuracy of the Graduation Data of Students with Disabilities in LAUSD, 2010-2011 School Year

Office of the Independent Monitor

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study on the accuracy of graduation data of students with disabilities (SWD) in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The study measured the accuracy of the District's data of all 12th grade SWD who graduated with a high school diploma in accordance with Outcome 3: Graduation Rate, of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD). The study also collected data of SWD who received a certificate of completion, aged out or dropped out. The information was used to validate data associated with Outcome 4: Completion Rate.

The report provides a brief background on the outcome targets, methodology of the study, findings and recommendations.

Background

The MCD includes two outcomes aimed at increasing the rate of SWD who graduate with a diploma and/or complete high school. The outcomes are intended to increase the number of SWD completing high school, while decreasing the number of SWD who drop out.

The outcomes are as follows:

Outcome 3: Graduation Rate

The District shall increase the number of grade 12 students with disabilities who 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 2010-2011

To verify the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the 2010-2011 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 2010-2011 school year. The study consists of a verification of the District's data by visiting all secondary schools that reported graduation data, and reviewing all available sources of data to obtain the most accurate outcome for each student.

Data Collection of Graduation Rates by the Division of Special Education and Research Unit, Office of Data and Accountability

To determine the graduation rates of SWD, consistent with years past, the District provided all schools with a list of the 12th grade SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2010. These lists required schools to report the graduation and enrollment status of 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; or transferred to another District school, out of a District school or into a non-public school. Schools were instructed to add any additional students who enrolled and graduated from their school during 2010-2011. Data were collected through October 2011, therefore allowing for student graduation and passage of the CAHSEE through the end of the extended school year. This year, the Division of Special Education required all schools to submit transcripts and copies of diplomas and/or certificates for all students enrolled as of December 1, 2010. These documents were accompanied with a form that school administrators, parents and students signed to indicate that the information being provided accurately reflected the student's outcome (see Attachment A). However, in some instances these forms were inaccurate in that they reflected an anticipated outcome such as graduation with a diploma, which may have not occurred due to a student not completing required coursework during the extended school year. The District provided the OIM copies of the graduation data as reported by schools, including copies of student transcripts, diplomas or certificates of completion, and verification forms. This information was then entered into a database developed by the OIM to determine the graduation rates of the December 1, 2010 cohort.

Methodology

To validate the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the entire population of 12th grade SWD, the OIM visited all of the District's schools that reported graduation data for SWD enrolled on December 1, 2010. The objective of the site visits was to review the various sources schools use for reporting graduation data. This included reviewing: student transcripts in the Secondary Student Information System (SSIS); various data fields within the SSIS; and counselor/administrator records used for tracking graduation requirements and issuing a diploma. This year, the OIM was able to review the transcripts and diploma/certificate documents prior to the site visits to identify possible discrepancies. This additional step reduced the amount of time spent at schools.

The instrument (see Attachment B) used to validate graduation data included the student's identification number, date of birth and eligibility code. Several options were included for verification to capture the outcome of each student. The instruments contained the outcome as reported by schools above the corresponding verification box on the instrument. For instance, if a school reported that a student graduated with a diploma, "YES" was indicated above the

¹ This graduation rate only reflects those SWD enrolled on December 1, 2010 with 12th grade status.

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 an outcome different than a diploma, 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. Data on the leave (“L”) code were collected to identify discrepancies within the SSIS system. The instrument also included the “L” code uploaded centrally, and data were collected to identify the “L” code observed during the site review.

Graduation with a diploma was verified in the following ways:

- Year-end flag code of A (graduation with diploma)
- L7 code (culmination) within the SSIS system using the graduation requirement screen (TR04) indicating that the student met all of his or her requirements and the minimum of 230 cumulative credits
- A code of 90 or 96 (CAHSEE exemption) accompanying the L7 code indicating culmination with a diploma
- Verification of diploma based on counselor graduation logs, if available
- In some instances, if conflicting information was observed within the data system, counselors’ verbal reports were used as evidence to that a student met the minimum of 230 cumulative credits (in many instances the data systems were not updated)

For students who 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)

For students who 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 who were reported as having continued enrollment, verification of enrollment was obtained from their class schedule (CL54) screen within the SSIS. An additional verification of continued enrollment was conducted by cross-referencing October 1, 2011 enrollment data obtained from the SSIS.

Sample/Population

This outcome measures the graduation rate of SWD in the LAUSD by first obtaining a fixed count of students identified as 12th-graders receiving special education services. This cohort serves as the population for determining the graduation rate for the 2010-2011 school year. The population also includes students who are on an alternate curriculum and who receive a certificate of completion. Therefore, this population includes students who do not graduate with a diploma. Outcomes for non-diploma track students are counted for Outcome 4, which includes students who may have received a certificate of completion, aged out, or are still enrolled. Data on outcomes for non-diploma track students were also reported by schools and the accuracy of the data were verified by the OIM within this study.

The population includes 4,851 students from 218 sites including 58 magnet centers, local districts (1-8), charter (R), options (S), innovation/partnership schools (T) and adult schools (Y) (Table 1). Students who leave the District to attend another school district in California (L3), a non-public school (L4) and/or leave the state (L5) are dropped from the sample. This resulted in the removal of 101 students and a final sample of 4,750 students.

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	829	18	811	17.07%
2	562	12	550	11.58%
3	563	15	548	11.54%
4	522	9	513	10.80%
5	361	11	350	7.37%
6	344	5	339	7.14%
7	229	6	223	4.69%
8	556	15	541	11.39%
R	496	6	490	10.32%
S	49	1	48	1.01%
T	339	3	336	7.07%
Y	1	0	1	.02%
Total	4851	101	4750	100%

R – Charters; S – Options; T – Partnerships; Y – Adult

Findings

The validation study had two primary goals. The first was to determine the number of SWD who received a diploma or a certificate of completion, aged out or dropped out. The second was to identify sources of error associated with the data as reported by schools. The performance of option and adult schools is not included within the discussion below to focus such comparisons on comparably sized local districts.

Graduation Rate by OIM

During the 2010-2011 school year, 48.3% of SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2010 graduated with a diploma (Table 2). Graduation rates by local district indicate that charters (75.7%) and partnership/innovation schools (60.1%), Local District 2 (55.6%) and Local District 6, (54.6%) had the highest rates of graduation for SWD. Local District 7 (25.1%) and Local District 8 (34%) had the lowest rates of students receiving a diploma.

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

Local District	Total SWD in Analyzed Sample	Received a Diploma	% Received a Diploma	Did Not Receive a Diploma	% Did not Receive a Diploma
1	811	361	44.51%	450	55.49%
2	550	306	55.64%	244	44.36%
3	548	238	43.43%	310	56.57%
4	513	233	45.42%	280	54.58%
5	350	142	40.57%	208	59.43%
6	339	185	54.57%	154	45.43%
7	223	56	25.11%	167	74.89%
8	541	184	34.01%	357	65.99%
R	490	371	75.71%	119	24.29%
S	48	17	35.42%	31	64.58%
T	336	202	60.12%	134	39.88%
Y	1	0	0.00%	1	100%
Total	4750	2295	48.32%	2455	51.68%

R – Charters; S – Options; T – Partnerships; Y – Adult

Outcomes for SWD receiving a Certificate of Completion or Aged Out

During the 2010-2011 school year, 9.5% of SWD in 12th grade received a certificate of completion or aged out (Table 3). Local District 4 (22.4%), Local District 5 (12.8%) and Local District 8 (12.2%) show the highest rate of students receiving a certificate of completion. It is important to point out that some local districts contain more students with moderate to severe disabilities who attend special education centers, which impacts the number of students who receive a certificate of completion.

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

Local District	Total SWD in Analyzed Sample	Received Certificate	% Received Certificate	Aged out	% Aged out	% Received Certificate / Aged out
1	811	59	7.27%	2	0.25%	7.52%
2	550	30	5.45%	2	0.36%	5.82%
3	548	59	10.77%	2	0.36%	11.13%
4	513	115	22.42%	1	0.19%	22.61%
5	350	45	12.86%	1	0.29%	13.14%
6	339	21	6.19%	0	0.00%	6.19%
7	223	22	9.87%	0	0.00%	9.87%
8	541	66	12.20%	2	0.37%	12.57%
R	490	10	2.04%	0	0.00%	2.04%
S	48	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
T	336	26	7.74%	1	0.30%	8.04%
Y	1	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
Total	4750	453	9.54%	11	0.23%	9.77%

R – Charters; S – Options; T – Partnerships; Y – Adult

Table 4 shows the percentage of SWD in 12th grade who were enrolled on December 1, 2010 but dropped out (6.5%). This percentage is less than half of the students in last year’s cohort who dropped out during the 2009-2010 school year (14.9%). Local District 6 (10.9%) and partnership/innovation schools (25.0%) demonstrate the highest rates of students dropping out. It is important to restate that this table only reflects students who were part of the graduation study cohort for the purposes of monitoring Outcome 3: Graduation, and is not representative of the total number of dropouts (grades 7-12) reported for Outcome 4.

Information on completion status was not reported by any school for 222 students who transferred to a school within LAUSD. As was noted in the methodology, schools were required to include any additional SWD who enrolled in their schools and who did not appear on the December 1, 2010 count. Since neither enrollment nor graduation outcomes could be verified for students reported as having transferred within LAUSD, an additional 4.7% of all 12th grade SWD were counted as not having received a diploma and identified as status unknown or drop-out. Similarly, this rate is about half of that observed in the 2009-2010 study (9.8%).

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

Local District	Total SWD in Analyzed Sample	Reported as Dropped Out	% Reported as Dropped Out	Transferred within LAUSD-Not Reported	% Transferred within LAUSD-Not Reported
1	811	32	3.95%	43	5.30%
2	550	38	6.91%	37	6.73%
3	548	22	4.01%	17	3.10%
4	513	31	6.04%	20	3.90%
5	350	13	3.71%	7	2.00%
6	339	37	10.91%	15	4.42%
7	223	9	4.04%	2	0.90%
8	541	22	4.07%	29	5.36%
R	490	37	7.55%	33	6.73%
S	48	12	25.00%	6	12.50%
T	336	54	16.07%	13	3.87%
Y	1	1	100%	0	0.00%
Total	4750	308	6.48%	222	4.67%

R – Charters; S – Options; T – Partnerships; Y – Adult

Sources of Error of Graduation Data as Reported by Schools

The validation study continued to observe inaccuracies with the completion data maintained in the SSIS. However, compared to past years, there were fewer inaccuracies, which appeared to be due to school-specific factors such as inconsistent data entry and maintenance. This year, schools continued to note staffing reductions and/or transfers as an area of concern in maintaining accurate completion data. Another factor contributing to these inaccuracies is the failure of schools to update the SSIS after students complete credits throughout summer. As in the past, instances of students having met their requirements but who had not been updated and a diploma issued continued to be observed.

As noted earlier, the District augmented its data collection activities this year with the deployment of transition teachers to collect and verify graduation data and materials. Schools were required to submit transcripts, copies of diplomas or certificates and a verification form of the pending outcome (i.e., diploma, continued enrollment, drop out) signed by the school administrator, parent and student. These additional efforts had a positive impact on the quality and accuracy of the data. While some schools continued to demonstrate errors, these appeared to be due to the inconsistent follow-up and data entry which may have been attributed to staff turn over or lack of understanding of leave codes or year end-flags. For instance, a few schools coded students who received a diploma with a CAHSEE exemption with a year-end flag of S, and leave code of L7 90 instead of L7 96.

The study found an additional 118 students who received a diploma but had been reported as an L8 77-79 and counted as an unknown or dropout. In comparison, last year's study found 376 students identified and/or confirmed to have earned and/or received a diploma than were previously reported by the SSIS system. The study also found that of the 2,213 students reported by SSIS as having received a diploma, six dropped out, nine had a status unknown, three left the District for another state or district, 42 received a certificate of completion and five were still enrolled. These findings are evidence that the maintenance, coding and updating of completion data continues to be a challenge at some schools. While improvements are noted in the quality of the data, these findings imply that the District's data system continues to lack the adequate edits or safeguards to ensure that students are coded appropriately.

Summary and Recommendations

In past reports, the validation study of the District's graduation data has noted persistent problems. As a result of the findings of last year's study, the District indicated that it would improve its overall data system that captures graduation data for the 2010-2011 school year. While the system does not appear to have been changed considerably, the District continued to communicate expectations for accurate data entry and maintenance to schools. This study found improvements in the quality of the data, which may be attributed to the additional efforts by the District to follow up and verify its completion data. These efforts allowed schools to update information for students who may have completed their graduation requirements through summer and early fall. While discrepancies in the inaccurate coding and lack of updating of completion data were still observed, such discrepancies appeared to be school-specific. Additionally, the data system continues to lack the necessary safeguards for ensuring accurate data entry. However, it appears that with appropriate follow-up by school staff, these limitations within the system may be remediated. The District should strongly consider a review of graduation data for all students in late fall to ensure that graduation data for the 2011-2012 school year is fully updated and accurate.

**DUE DATE: June 24, 2011*
or September 20, 2011****

**HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT AND COMPLETION STATUS CERTIFICATION FORM
FOR GRADE 12 STUDENTS WITH AN IEP**

DIRECTIONS

This form must be completed for all grade 12 students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) at least annually, and more frequently, as appropriate, to certify their credit and completion status and to ensure that the information is current and accurate. This form is available online in the "Forms" section of the Division of Special Education website at: http://sped.lausd.net/sepg2s/pg2_staff_for.htm. The principal or the principal's administrator designee must sign this form in addition to the student and the student's parent, as appropriate. The original must be filed in the student's cumulative record folder and a photocopy of: (1) the completed certification form; (2) the student's diploma or certificate of completion; (3) and the student's official transcript^ must be sent via school mail to the District Office of Transition Services (DOTS):

**DOTS, Division of Special Education
333 S. Beaudry Avenue, Floor 17**

SECTION I. STUDENT INFORMATION: Please type or print legibly in the area below.

Student Name	
Student ID	
Date of Birth	
School	

SECTION II. CLASS CREDIT INFORMATION: Please complete this section using verified student data.

Number of Credits Completed Toward Graduation/Completion		Notes	
Graduation / Completion Goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Completion		
Expected Date of Graduation / Completion			

SECTION III. REQUIRED SIGNATURES The person who completed this form, and the principal or an administrator designated by the principal must sign certifying the accuracy of the data on this document. In addition, the student is required to sign indicating s/he has been informed of this information. The parent's signature is required if the student is under age 18.

Signature of Person Completing Form		Date	
Name of Person Completing Form Printed/Typed		Title	
Email Address		Contact Phone	

Principal / Administrator Designee Signature Certifying Accuracy of Data		Date	
Principal / Administrator Name Printed/Typed			

Student Signature		Date	
Student Name Printed/Typed			

Parent Signature		Date	
Parent Name Printed/Typed			

*DUE: FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2011- 4:00 P.M. for grade 12 students who have completed all requirements by June 2011.

**DUE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2011- 4:00 P.M. for students who have completed all requirements by end of summer 2011.

^Send a photocopy of: (1) the completed certification form; (2) the student's diploma or certificate of completion; and (3) the official transcript via school mail to the DOTS Unit at 333 S. Beaudry Avenue, Floor 17. **Contact: (213) 241-8050**

