

**Office of the Independent Monitor
Los Angeles Unified School District**

**Study on the Accuracy of the Graduation Data of Students with Disabilities in LAUSD,
2011 - 2012 School Year
March 17, 2013**

Outcome 3 of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD) was designed to increase the percent of students with disabilities (SWD) who graduate with a diploma¹. Students who graduate with a diploma participate in the general education curriculum, and not an alternate curriculum leading to a Certificate of Completion. To date, one of the major issues in determining the graduation rate for SWD has been the accuracy of the District's graduation data. Previous reports by the OIM have documented inconsistencies between students' graduation status as reported in the Secondary Student Information System (SSIS), the electronic transcript program for secondary schools, and counselor/administrator records used for tracking student graduation requirements and issuing a diploma^{2,3}.

Due to the documented discrepancies in the District's data, the OIM has historically validated the graduation and completion status of the entire population of twelfth-grade SWD by visiting all secondary schools and examining student records. For 2011-12, however, the official SWD graduation and completion rates will be based solely on the data entered by schools into SSIS. The OIM conducted a study to determine the accuracy of the SSIS data, by verifying the graduation status for a sample of the twelfth-grade SWD. The purpose of this report is two-fold: (1) to report the graduation rate for SWD, as well as the dropout, completion, and percent of SWD enrolled in 2012-13; and (2) to detail the results of the OIM study of the accuracy of the District's graduation data.

Methodology

To determine the District's SWD graduation rate, the OIM first established the population of all twelfth-grade SWD, using data contained in Welligent and CASEMIS. A total of 5,179 SWD were identified as having been enrolled on December 1, 2011. From this original population, 90 were reported to have left the District between December and June, two students were reported to have died, and another two students were reported to have enrolled in an Alternative Education and Work Center (AEWC), an adult education program. After removing these 94 students, the final population of twelfth-grade SWD consisted of 5,075 students (see Table 1).

¹ Outcome 3 of the Modified Consent Decree was met on June 30, 2008. Outcome 4 was met by stipulation of the parties.

² Weintraub, F. J., Alleman, J. R., & Hernandez, J. E. (2012, February 17). *Report on the Progress and Effectiveness of the Los Angeles Unified School District's Implementation of the Modified Consent Decree during the 2010-11 School Year – Part II*. Los Angeles: Office of the Independent Monitor, Modified Consent Decree.

³ Weintraub, F. J., Alleman, J. R., & Hernandez, J. E. (2011, March 2). *Report on the Progress and Effectiveness of the Los Angeles Unified School District's Implementation of the Modified Consent Decree during the 2009-10 School Year – Part II*. Los Angeles: Office of the Independent Monitor, Modified Consent Decree.

Table 1: 12th Grade SWD Leaving LAUSD by Educational Service Center

Ed Service Center	#	%	Final # of Students in Cohort
East	10	1.2%	838
North	19	1.7%	1,120
South	4	0.7%	561
West	10	2.6%	380
Superintendent	29	1.9%	1,528
Indep. Charter	6	1.4%	429
Option	14	6.0%	219
TOTAL	92	1.8%	5,075

SSIS is used by all LAUSD traditional schools to record students' courses, marks, fulfillment of graduation requirements, as well as their final educational status. As such, SSIS should accurately reflect the progress that students are making towards their goal of either graduating or completing high school. To calculate the SWD graduation rate for 2011-12, we assigned each student one of the following outcomes based on the information contained in SSIS:

- Enrolled
 - Student is enrolled in an LAUSD school in 2012-13. The vast majority of these students were enrolled on August 14, 2012, the first day of the 2012-13 school years.
- Graduated with a Diploma
 - Student is not enrolled in 2012-13, and has a year-end code of 90 (graduated with a diploma) or 96 (graduated with CAHSEE exemption)
- Certificate of Completion/Aged Out
 - Year-end code of 92 or 95
- Dropped out
 - All remaining students. In other words, if students did not graduate or complete, and they did not leave the District, and they were not enrolled, they were considered dropouts.

Results

Student Graduation Outcomes. Student outcomes for the 5,075 12th SWD are displayed in Table 2. As shown in the table, over 40% of 12th grade SWD graduated with a diploma, while approximately one-quarter re-enrolled and another one-quarter received a certificate of completion. Less than 10% were reported to have dropped out.

Table 2: Student Outcomes for 12th Grade SWD, 2011-12

Outcome	# of	
	students	%
Enrolled	1,213	23.9%
Graduated with a diploma	2,162	42.6%
Certificate of Completion/Aged Out	1,243	24.5%
Dropped out*	457	9.0%
	5,075	100.0%

*Includes 89 students with a leave reason of “Passed course requirements, failed CAHSEE. If these 89 students had graduated with a CAHSEE Exemption, the District’s % graduated would have increased by 1.75 percentage points. 61% of these students were found at just four schools.

Table 3 shows the student outcome results by educational service center (ESC). There was considerable variation among the ESCs across all outcome categories:

- The percent of SWD that re-enrolled ranged from less than 10% in ESC South and the Superintendent’s ESC, to over 50% in ESC East.
- The percent of SWD that graduated with a diploma was less than 20% in ESC East, and nearly 60% among independent charters.
- The percent of SWD who completed or aged out was approximately 25% or less in all ESCs except ESC South, in which over 50% of SWD completed school.
- Finally, the percent of students dropping out was less than 10% in all ESCs but ESC West, the Superintendent ESC, and the Option ESC. In the Option ESC, approximately 30% of SWD dropped out of school.

Table 3: Outcomes for Students With Disabilities By Educational Service Center, 2011-12*

Ed Service Center	# of Students in Cohort	Enrolled 12-13 (%)	Graduated (%)	Completed /Aged Out (%)	Dropped Out/ Unknown Status (%)
East	838	56.4%	19.2%	21.2%	3.1%
North	1,120	32.5%	43.9%	18.8%	4.8%
South	561	8.7%	33.7%	50.1%	7.5%
West	380	21.1%	45.5%	21.8%	11.6%
Superintendent	1,528	8.2%	54.0%	25.8%	12.0%
Indep. Charter	429	16.6%	58.3%	15.4%	9.8%
Option	219	24.2%	32.9%	13.2%	29.7%
TOTAL	5,075	23.9%	42.6%	24.5%	9.0%

Outcome 3 Graduation Rates. The actual SWD graduation rate for Outcome 3 is equal to the number of students graduating with a diploma as a percentage of all students who left school. Based on the results from Table 2, the LAUSD graduation rate was 56.0%. And as shown in Table 3, the graduation rates by ESC ranged from 37% in ESC South, to nearly 70% in the ESC for independent charters.

Table 3: SWD Graduation Rates by Educational Service Center, 2011-12

Ed Service Center	# of SWD Leavers	Outcome 3
		Graduation Rate (%)
East	365	44.1%
North	756	65.1%
South	512	36.9%
West	300	57.7%
Superintendent	1,403	58.8%
Indep. Charter	358	69.8%
Option	166	43.4%
TOTAL	3,860	56.0%

Alignment of Graduation Information in SSIS. One of the factors that have historically influenced the accuracy of the District’s graduation data is the absence of edit checks to prevent contradictory information in SSIS among the fields related to a student’s graduation status. For example, SSIS might indicate that a student graduated with a diploma, while at the same time indicating that the student has not fulfilled all of his/her individual graduation requirements. The reverse is also possible: SSIS may indicate that a student has fulfilled all of his/her graduation requirements, but inexplicably did not graduate. Due to this lack of alignment, and its potential impact on students’ transcripts, we examined the level of agreement among the graduation fields in SSIS.

Table 4: SWD Graduates Meeting Graduation Requirements as Reported by SIS, 2011-12

Graduation requirement	# of SWD graduates not meeting requirement	
	per SIS	%
Complete service learning	199	9.2%
Demonstrate computer literacy	48	2.2%
Earn 230 credits	408	18.9%
Pass CAHSEE ELA	106	4.9%
Pass CAHSEE Math	85	3.9%

Table 4 displays the number of SWD graduates for which SSIS indicated contradictory information. Although SSIS indicated that 2,162 SWD graduated with a diploma, SSIS also indicated that a substantial number of these students had not met all of LAUSD’s specific graduation requirements. As shown in the table, this problem was most common for the requirement that students earn 230 credits, as nearly 20% of SWD graduates had fewer than 230 credits in SSIS. It should be noted that LAUSD has additional credit requirements; in addition to earning 230 credits, students are also required to earn credits within specific subject areas. Therefore, 20% is likely to be a conservative estimate of the number of SWD graduates that did not accumulate a sufficient number of credits, or for whom credits were not accurately recorded in SSIS. Based on previous studies of the District’s graduation data, the OIM

considers the latter to be the more likely explanation, i.e., students had earned credits that were not captured in SSIS.

Study of the Accuracy of LAUSD’s Graduation Data in SSIS. In order to evaluate the accuracy of the District’s graduation data in SSIS, the OIM sampled a total of 2,146 twelfth-grade SWD (approximately 42%) from the original population of 5,075 students.

The OIM visited all of the secondary schools that reported graduation data for SWD in the sample, with the goal of reviewing the various sources schools use for reporting graduation data. This included reviewing the following: student transcripts in SSIS; various data fields within the SSIS; and counselor/administrator records used for tracking graduation requirements and issuing a diploma.

Table 5 displays the level of agreement between the student outcomes in SSIS and those verified by the OIM. Overall, the outcomes agreed for a total of 1,949 SWD, or 90.8%.

Table 5: SWD Graduation Status in SSIS and as Verified By the OIM, 2011-12

SSIS Status	OIM Status							Total
	Enrolled	Graduated w/ Diploma	Earned a Certificate	Dropped Out	Age Out	Left the District	Unknown	
Enrolled	220	4	3	7	-	2	24	260
Graduated w/ Diploma	2	1,171	9	-	-	-	1	1,183
Earned a Certificate	173	24	260	3	-	-	5	465
Dropped Out	18	37	4	125	4	4	46	238
Total	413	1,236	276	135	4	6	76	2,146

Using the OIM data, the SWD graduation rate for the sample was 71.3%, which was slightly higher than the 69.1% graduation rate based on SSIS data. The higher OIM graduation rate was largely due to the fact that the OIM identified 65 SWD as graduates that were reported by LAUSD to be non-graduates.

Below are notable findings from Table 5:

- The OIM status was “Unknown” for 3.5% of the sample. These SWD were reported in SSIS to have transferred to another LAUSD school, but the OIM lacked sufficient information on the students’ new school to be able to verify their enrollment status.
- There were a relatively large number of students reported as having earned a Certificate of Completion in SSIS, but the OIM found them to have graduated with a diploma (1.1% of the sample). The incorrect graduation status for these students had a negative impact on the District’s SWD graduation rate.
- A large number of students were also incorrectly identified by SSIS as dropouts, including 37 SWD (1.7% of the sample) found by the OIM to have graduated with a diploma. The incorrect

graduation status for these SWD had an even larger negative impact on the District’s graduation rate.

- The OIM could *not* confirm the graduation status for 12 (0.6%) SWD reported as graduates in SSIS.

Table 6 shows the level of agreement between SSIS and the OIM among ESCs. Overall, the lack of agreement ranged from a low of 4.8% in ESC East, to 24.3% among independent charter high schools. The lack of agreement also exceeded 10% in the South and Option ESCs.

Table 6: Level of Agreement between SSIS and OIM Student Outcomes by ESC, 2011-12

Ed. Service District	Non-matches		Matches		Total
	N	#	N	#	
East	7	4.8%	138	95.2%	145
North	31	6.0%	488	94.0%	519
South	31	13.4%	201	86.6%	232
West	13	6.7%	182	93.3%	195
Superintendent	73	8.4%	798	91.6%	871
Indep. Charters	35	24.3%	109	75.7%	144
Option	7	17.5%	33	82.5%	40
Total	197	9.2%	1,949	90.8%	2,146

Conclusions

Based on SSIS data, the District had an SWD graduation rate of 56.0% in 2011-12. However, the OIM’s study of the District’s graduation data suggested that the true SWD graduation rate may actually be higher. As in years past, SSIS identified as dropouts a number of SWD that the OIM found to have graduated with a diploma.

The OIM’s study of LAUSD’s graduation data suggested that the student outcomes as reported in SSIS may be inaccurate for up to nearly 10% of all SWD. The OIM study found that discrepancies were most likely to occur for students identified as dropouts by SSIS; a significant number of these students were found to have re-enrolled or graduated with a diploma.

There was considerable variation among the educational support centers in both the SWD graduation rate and the accuracy of the graduation data. ESC North and independent charters had the highest graduation rates for SWD, with both ESCs graduating over 65% of their SWD. Conversely, the SWD graduation rates were below 50% for the East, South, and Option ESCs.

The results of the OIM study suggested that the accuracy of the graduation data varied considerably. The level of agreement between the District’s graduation data and the data verified by the OIM ranged from 75% among independent charters, to over 95% in the East ESC. The level of agreement was also quite high in the North, West, and Superintendent ESCs, where it exceeded 90%.

Recommendations

The findings from this study suggest that although the District has made progress in increasing the accuracy of its graduation data, there are still areas in need of improvement. Below are several recommendations for the District to consider as it continues to work to improve the accuracy of its graduation data:

- Provide additional trainings to school personnel, to help them understand the linkages between the leave reasons and leave codes in SSIS. For example, the OIM found two students with mental retardation (MR) who had reached the age of 22 and were reported as dropouts in SSIS, with a leave reason of '55,' indicating that they were overage. While it is perhaps understandable that a school would think a leave reason of overage is appropriate for such students, it unfortunately leads to their identification as dropouts.
- Focus efforts to support and train staff in assigning the appropriate leave reasons on those ESCs that this study suggests are most in need of support: ESC South and the Option ESC.
- Consider clarifying and/or streamlining the leave reasons in SSIS, which are numerous and have definitions that are not always clear.
- Provide information and support to schools to ensure that *no* SWD leave school without a diploma solely because s/he is in need of a CAHSEE exemption.
- In adopting a future information system for LAUSD, strongly consider implementing edits that would ensure that there is alignment in the system between the graduation status and the successful completion of all graduation requirements.
- Consider once a year submitting to schools for correction the names of students that they have identified as graduates but who, according to SSIS, have not fulfilled all of their graduation requirements.