

Rhode Island Graduation Rates – The Cohort Formula

Questions & Answers

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How does the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Administration (RIDE) calculate the 4-year graduation rates?

To calculate the 4-year graduation rate, RIDE tracks a cohort of students from 9th grade through high school and then divides the number of students who graduate within four years by the total number in the cohort. In other words, the rate provides the percentage of the cohort that graduates in four years or fewer. For example, the formula for the 2007 cohort is:

of students in cohort who graduate in 4 years or fewer

[# of 1st time entering 9th graders in 2003–04] – transfers out + transfers in

Rates are generated for the entire student population and for individual student groups at the state, district, and school level.

What was the impetus for changing the formula for calculating the graduation rates?

RIDE is calculating and reporting graduation rates as part of overall efforts to improve educational outcomes for all students. In addition, reporting graduation rates is required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and by a National Governors Association compact that Rhode Island has signed.

Rhode Island began the transition to the new graduation rate, known as the “cohort rate,” in 2003 when RIDE implemented the first State-Assigned Individual Student Identifier. Under a plan approved by the U.S. Department of Education, RIDE agreed to report the newly calculated graduation rate for the Class of 2007 for informational purposes only. Beginning with the Class of 2008, RIDE used the new graduation-rate formula to determine whether schools have met their annual targets.

What about students who take longer than four years to graduate?

RIDE understands that many students need longer than four years to graduate from high school and that it is important to recognize the accomplishment regardless of the time it

takes. Therefore, RIDE publishes 5-year and 6-year graduation rate when data become available and additional rates as policy and program needs may warrant.

Are graduation rates disaggregated by student groups?

Beginning with the graduating Class of 2008, graduation rates are reported for all student groups, as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). These student-group graduation rates are used to determine whether schools and districts have met their targets under NCLB.

How are students assigned to cohorts?

Students are assigned to cohorts based on when they first enter grades 9-12 in a Rhode Island public-school system.

How are out-placed students included?

Publicly funded students placed in collaboratives and private special-education schools or programs are included in their district rates.

How are transfers counted?

Students who transfer from one school to another within the same district will not be included in the original school cohort, but will be in the second school cohort.

There is no cut-off date for transfers into a school in the 4-year graduation rate. For example, a student who transfers into a high school in May of his/her senior year will be counted in that school's graduation rate.

What happens to students retained in their grade?

The student's cohort does not change when he/she is retained in grade. Therefore, the student does not count as a graduate in the 4-year rate, but could be counted in the 5-year determination for that cohort.

Students who are retained in a high-school grade prior to transfer are counted in the second school and district cohort, but not as a 4-year graduate. For example, if a student repeats grade 9 in school X and then moves to school Y in another district at the start of grade 10 and graduates three years later, he/she is counted in the denominator for school Y but not in the numerator for the 4-year graduation rate. He/she is counted in the numerator for the 5-year graduation rate.