



## Understanding Michigan's New Four-Year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates

The release of graduation rates for the class of 2007 marks the first time that Michigan has used a four-year cohort graduation rate. In order to comply with the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*, Michigan is moving to an accountability system in which a graduation rate includes only "on-time" graduates who earn regular diplomas within four years of entering high school. This new calculation meets the guidelines provided by the National Governors Association (NGA) Graduation Counts Compact for calculation of such rates. As more and more states implement the NGA standard, state-to-state comparisons will become more meaningful.

The change to this more accurate formula for the calculation of 2007 graduation rates is possible because school districts have been tracking the enrollment of individual students since those students first enrolled in the 9th grade in the 2003-2004 school year and reporting that data to the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). The gathering of this information at a statewide level allows CEPI to help districts adjust enrollments to reflect transfers in and out of the district, as well as students who exit from the public education system itself, over the course of four years. Use of a more accurate formula will mean that some schools and districts in Michigan will see a change in their graduation rates.

### Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate

The total number of students who were identified as first-time 9th graders in the 2003-2004 school year formed the initial 2007 cohort, since they would be expected to graduate on time in 2007. Students who transferred into the state, district, or building at any time during the four-year cohort period were added to the initial group. For students who moved within the public schools, student records were updated to reflect the correct district and building location. These students were considered "transfers out" of the district/building they left and "transfers in" to the district/building they entered. Students who exited the public school system entirely (out of state, to non-public school, or home school) or became deceased at any time during the four-year cohort period are considered "exempt" and removed from the cohort.

To calculate the four-year cohort graduation and dropout rates after transfers are accounted for, students are placed into one of four categories:

1. On-track graduated- completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less
2. Other completer- earned a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, other certificate, or reached special education maximum age
3. Off-track (graduated & continuing)- completed high school with a regular diploma in more than four years, or did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school
4. Dropout- left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown

A student is counted toward the graduation rate of the final building or district that the student attended during the four-year cohort period. "On-track graduated" is counted as the numerator and divided by the total count of all status categories. The total of the status categories is the 2007 Cohort Total.

$$\frac{\text{On-Track Graduated}}{\text{2007 Cohort Total}}$$

## Reading the graduation report

The 2007 four-year cohort graduation rate report includes data for the state, every district, and every building that graduates students and is divided into ten columns. The columns include:

**Table 1**

<b>Column Name</b>	<b>Column Definitions</b>
District/Building Name (Code)	This is the alphabetical listing, beginning with local education agencies (LEAs), then intermediate school districts (ISDs), and then public school academies (PSAs), of the districts and buildings included in the report. The district-level data are identified in shaded rows. The buildings that comprise the district appear below the district name. Building names appear in non-shaded rows with a slight indentation.
First Time 9th Grade in Fall 2003	Total number of students who were identified as first-time 9th graders in fall 2003, which was the group of students who initially formulated the 2007 cohort.
(+) Transfers In	Total number of students who transferred into the state, district, or building at any time during the four-year cohort period and remained there.
(-) Transfers Out & Exempt	Total number of students who transferred out of the district, building, or public school system (out of state, to non-public school, or home-school) at any time during the four-year cohort period and did not return. Deceased students are also exempt.
2007 Cohort	Total number of students in the 2007 cohort for the state, for each district, and for each building after adjustments were made for transfers in, transfers out, and exempt students.
On-Track Graduated	Total number of students in the 2007 cohort who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less.
Dropout (Reported & MER)	Total number of students who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (MER; missing expected records).
Off-Track (Graduated & Continuing)	Total number of students who completed high school with a regular diploma in more than four years, or did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school.
Other Completer (GED, etc.)	Total number of students who earned a GED, other certificate, or reached special education maximum age.
Graduation Rate	The percentage, calculated as On-Track Graduated over 2007 Cohort, of the total number of students in the 2007 cohort who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less.

For many districts, the building totals do not sum to the district total. Buildings that educate students who have been ordered by the court to attend are not included in the district's rate, only the building's rate. Students must also be present for at least 2 count dates (the September and February days that schools report attendance to the state for funding purposes) in order to be counted in a building rate. A student who is present for just one count date is only included in the district rate. Students who are claimed in a district, but were not present for any count days are only included in the state rate.

It should also be noted that a cell containing "< 10" indicates there were more than 0 and less than 10 total students in the cohort or status at the building for two count days or the district for one count day.

## Four-Year Cohort Dropout Rate

**There is no national standard for calculating four-year cohort dropout rates.** Michigan has chosen to maintain consistency by using the cohort methodology recommended by NGA to calculate this rate as well. A building or district's dropout rate is not equivalent to subtracting the graduation rate from 100% because that method counts students who are an "other completer" or "off-track continuing" as dropouts.

The four-year cohort dropout rate is calculated using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Dropouts}}{\text{2007 Cohort Total}}$$

## Reading the dropout report

The dropout report includes data for the state, every district, and every building that enrolls students sometime during the cohort period and is divided into six columns. As with the graduation rate report, some building totals will not sum to the district total as the result of court ordered facilities and count dates. The columns include:

**Table 2**

<b>Column Name</b>	<b>Column Definitions</b>
District/Building Name (Code)	This is the alphabetical listing, beginning with local education agencies (LEAs), then intermediate school districts (ISDs), and then public school academies (PSAs), of the districts and buildings included in the report. The district-level data are identified in shaded rows. The buildings that comprise the district appear below the district name. Building names appear in non-shaded rows with a slight indentation.
Grades and Settings	These are the grades <u>currently</u> being taught in the building as reported to CEPI in the School Code Master database. These grades do not necessarily match the grades taught to students in the 2007 cohort when they were in this building. Grade ranges are indicated by the number equivalent and the settings are categorized as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Alt. = alternative education</li> <li>b. Spec = special education</li> <li>c. AE = adult education</li> </ol>
2007 Cohort Total	Total number of students in the 2007 cohort for the state, for each district, and for each building after adjustments were made for transfers in, transfers out, and exempt students.
Dropouts (Reported & MER)	Total number of students who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (MER; missing expected records).
# of High School Grades in School or District	Total number of years a building educated a cohort of students at the end of year 2007.
Dropout Rate	This is the percentage, calculated as Dropouts over 2007 Cohort Total, of the total number of students in the 2007 cohort who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (MER; missing expected records).