

Graduation Rate: 4-Year Cohort
Proposed talking points—internal audience

Question: *What changes can we expect with the release of the 2006-07 graduation rate data?*

- This is the first year Michigan is able to use better student tracking data to report districts' graduation rates. This information gives us a much clearer picture of how many students graduate on time and how many never graduate at all.
- In addition, the state is using a new formula recommended by the National Governor's Association to calculate graduation and drop out rates.
- The old and new formulas are very different and may yield substantially different results. (see MDE Fact Sheet for more detail.)
- The new formula calculates the graduation rate by counting only students who graduate "on time" in four years. In previous years, students such as those with special needs, health concerns or in alternative education were counted as graduates even if they took more than four years to earn their diploma.
- Due to this new method of calculation, the reported state graduation rate is anticipated to decline. In our district, reported graduation rates [fill in district specific information].
- Michigan will now be able to fully comply with NCLB and be able to provide graduation rates for NCLB subgroups (e.g. migrant, special education, Limited English Proficiency, racial/ethnic groups.)

Question: *Is this change in graduation rates caused by higher standards and the Michigan Merit Curriculum?*

- No, the students described in this year's report graduated in June 2007. These students were not required to take the Michigan Merit Curriculum.

Question: *Does this mean that the district's drop out rate will increase?*

- Not necessarily. You can't calculate drop out rates by subtracting the graduation rate from 100%. We know that in our district [--% of the student cohort] will graduate within the next year or so. Another [--%] have transferred to other schools. Only about [--%] have actually dropped out.

Question: *What about special education students? Where will they get counted?*

Many students receiving special education services will graduate with their 4-year cohort, with the help of support services provided by the district. Students whose learning or other disabilities cause them to need more time to complete the Michigan Merit Curriculum might be granted an exception and be reported later, if approved by the Office of Special Education & Early Intervention Services.* A limited number of students with the most severe disabilities might receive certificates of completion rather than diplomas. Michigan law allows students who receive special education services access to a free and appropriate education up to age 26.**

Question: *How does the exception actually work?*

All exceptions remove the student from their original cohort and place them into the following year cohort. When they finish the subsequent year, they are reported as part of that year's cohort. (If a student that was in the 2007 cohort receives an exception, they will be reported with the 2008 cohort).

Question: *How does this effort affect our ability to make adequate yearly progress (AYP)?*

- In the short term, this might make it harder for our high school to make AYP.
- Some students, on a case by case basis, may obtain a 1-year extension to the 4-year requirement: students enrolled in middle colleges, English language learners, students with disabilities, and medically fragile students.
- In addition, the state is currently appealing to the federal government to allow some schools, on a case-by-case basis, to waive the 4 - year requirement or obtain an extension for students who are in "drop-out recovery" programs.
- Over time, we believe that new and earlier interventions will begin to improve the number of our students who are able to finish in 4 years.
- This formula helps the state meet one of its obligations under NCLB, which requires states not only to show adequate yearly progress in student test scores but also to raise graduation rates.

* For the 2007 cohort, districts can request a one-year exception via the GAD application. Guidance pertaining to when exceptions are appropriate will be provided by the MDE. Approvals will be granted by the OSE-EIS. This process will also apply for the 2008 cohort class. Beginning with the 2009 cohort, the appropriate data will be collected via the student data collection system (SDS).

NOTE: Districts will only want to use this exception for those students who really need one extra year. It will not be a benefit if a student needs 2-3 more years because that student will not be considered an on-time graduate regardless.

** CEPI has not entered discussions at this time of reporting those students who complete at the age of 26.

Question: *Why did the state adopt this new process?*

- This new calculation provides a more accurate rate to ultimately help greater numbers of students to succeed in school and earn a diploma. In addition, in order to comply with *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* the state of Michigan must move to an accountability system for high schools in which a graduation rate includes only “on-time” graduates who earn diplomas in four years. The methodology used to comply with NCLB is based on the national standards set forth in the National Governors Association (NGA) “Graduation Counts Compact.”
- Until now, every state has had its own way of deciding which students to count as graduates or dropouts. This new formula will for the first time provide a common measurement and make state-to-state comparisons possible.
- The first step in improving our high schools is to capture and report accurate data on how many students graduate on time and how many never graduate at all.
- With more accurate information, we can generate stronger more effective policies and, ultimately, help greater numbers of students to succeed in school and earn a diploma. Prior calculations were based on estimates and a formula using retention rates. This allowed some students to slip through the cracks.
- More accurate data will also provide a basis to determine which reforms are working.
- The federal government requires states to report our graduation rates every year for all high school students, disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, limited English proficiency, gender, and migrant status. This new accounting method allows the state to effectively calculate and report that data.
- Current economic realities compel schools to lower the dropout rate and help as many students as possible to earn a diploma that truly signifies readiness for college and the modern workforce.

Question: *Why didn't the state address this issue decades ago?*

- The state's new accurate data tracking system had to be in place for a minimum of five years, in order to follow the first student cohort's progress from first entering ninth through 12th grade.
- While we have always tried to keep good track of students as they move through the education pipeline, Michigan like every other state in the country, has had a hard time keeping up with the pace of recent societal and economic changes.
- Americans are much more mobile than they used to be, and when families move from district to district or state to state, it becomes harder than ever to collect accurate student enrollment data. And with the growth of charter schools, early college high schools, and other educational options, students have become far more likely to change schools both inside and outside the district.

Question: *How does Michigan compare to other states?*

- Similar initiatives are underway in a number of states, including Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, Arizona and Mississippi. These states have the same goal—increasing high school graduation rates statewide.
- The new graduation rate formula has been adopted by all 50 states.
- The new formula is scheduled to take effect in at least 39 states by 2010, with the remaining states to follow in subsequent years.

Question: *What's next?*

- It's extremely important that we send accurate data to the Center for Educational Performance Information (CEPI) regarding the status of our students
- In addition, before April 2008 the [insert appropriate staff here] will carefully review the 2007 Graduation Cohort Status report from CEPI to ensure it is accurate and complete. (see CEPI fact sheet for more detail.)
- The good news: when districts keep "clean" Unique Identification Codes (UICs) CEPI is able to credit schools when a student coded as a dropout actually enrolled somewhere else.
- More accurate data will help us to make better decisions as to where we invest our resources.
- Given the importance to today's students of earning a meaningful high school diploma, we will continue to explore ways to intervene early in the education of students who get off track for graduation.

Tips for the district's CEPI authorized user:

- Review the 2007 Graduation Cohort Status report released by CEPI in December 2007. You can access that report again at the cohort section of the CEPI website at http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-986_47594---,00.html.
- **Timeline:** (see accompanying document entitled "CEPI-grad rate timeline.pdf") For detailed descriptions of each of the steps required by LEAs, visit the SRSD section of CEPI website at http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-986_10481---,00.html. Manuals and help documents here will explain procedures. Authorized users for the application receive email notices from CEPI noting submission milestones.

Additional talking points:

- A solid high school education is essential for success in college, job training, and the 21st century workforce.
- While "on time" graduation is important, we believe that all students deserve a chance to graduate, even if life circumstances or early bad choices slow them down.
- One third of America's students do not graduate from high school on time. Even more disturbing, approximately half of all African-American and Hispanic students do not graduate on time.
- Students who don't graduate on time are less likely to graduate.
- The impact of not graduating is profound. Dropouts are 15 percent less likely to be employed, and those who do find jobs earn 30 percent less than their peers who hold a regular diploma or GED.
- A recent report entitled "The Costs and Benefits of Excellent Education for America's Children" (2007, Columbia University Teachers College), found that American taxpayers could reap \$45 billion annually if the number of high school dropouts were cut in half. The savings would be achieved via extra tax revenues; reduced costs of public health, crime, and justice; and decreased welfare payments.