

Graduation Rate Calculations in Washington State



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The methodology behind graduation rates in Washington State is changing. Washington has traditionally used one method to determine graduation rates, but this year introduced another calculation that is prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education and will create a uniform measure across states. Both methods will be on the Report Card site as Washington transitions to the new formula. In February 2013, OSPI will again report graduation rates using both methods for 2011-12, but subsequently will only report the new calculation. The 2010-11 Graduation and Dropout Rate Report and accompanying data are available here: (<http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx>)

Estimated Annual Calculation (traditional method)

Washington's traditional method of calculating the graduation rate is based on a composite cohort of students, using data from a single school year. The *estimated* annual graduation rate applies a compilation of dropout rates across the four high-school grade levels to the number of that year's 12th graders. This rate also has an adjustment for students who continue to be enrolled after four years. For example, students who are in 9th grade during 2010-11 and drop out in that year are factored into the 2011 graduation rate. The same is true for 10th, 11th, and 12th graders enrolled in those grades during 2010-11.

Adjusted Cohort Calculation (new method)

The *adjusted* cohort methodology follows a single cohort of students over four and five years, as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education. This method makes no modification for students whose expected graduation timeframe is longer than four years. In other words, it does not allow "cohort reassignment" for special education or limited English proficiency students. The calculation also adjusts for students who transferred into a Washington public high school for the first time and joined the cohort. Similarly, students who are confirmed transfers out of public school in Washington are removed from the calculation.

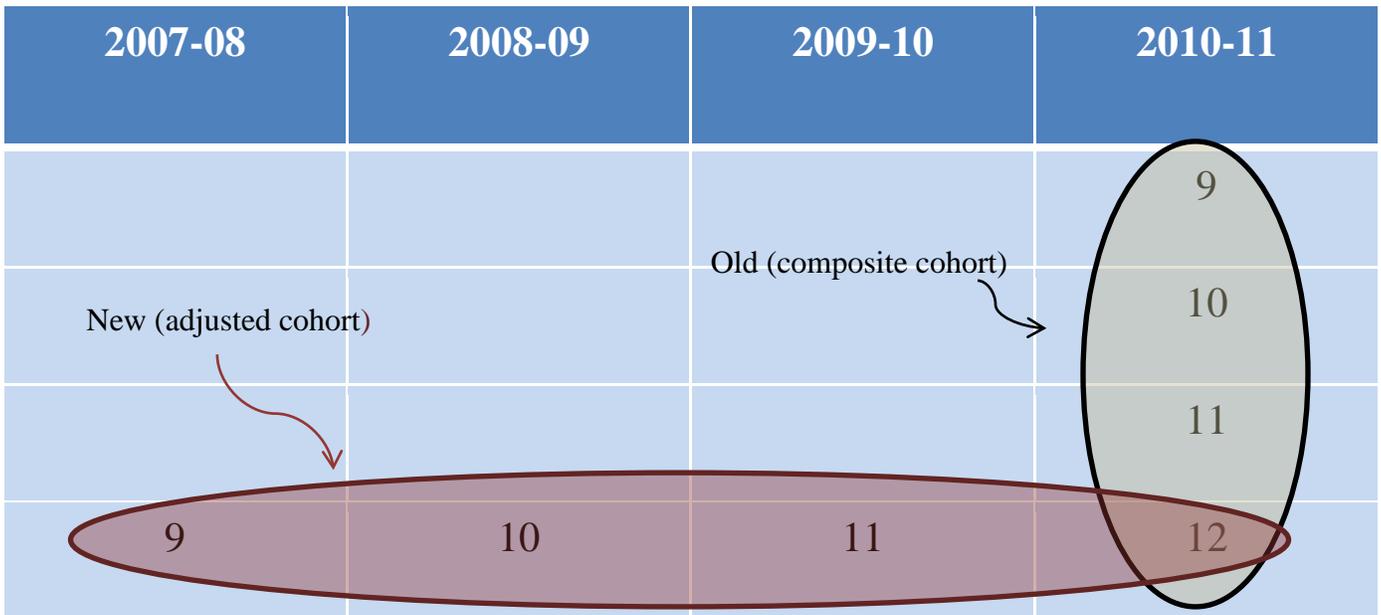
The key is that students are placed in a cohort based strictly on their first time entering ninth grade; thus it is a more rigorous metric than Washington's traditional graduation calculation. Students are permitted to take additional time to graduate, but will not be counted as on-time graduates if it takes longer than four years to complete, and will not be considered five-year graduates if they take longer than five years.

The adjusted cohort method is outlined in the Non-Regulatory Guidance issued by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for all states beginning with school year 2010-11. A copy of the Guidance can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf>.

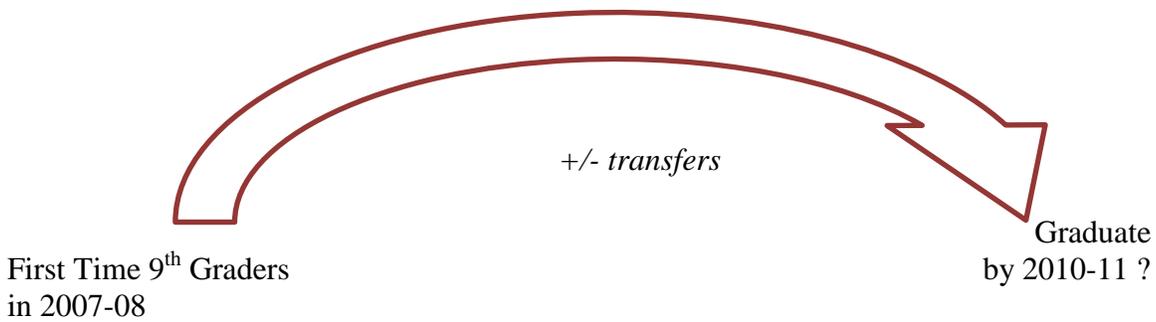
How do they differ?

Estimated Cohort (old method)	Adjusted Cohort (new method)
Is a composite cohort. Uses dropout rates for all grades within one school year to determine an estimate of the number of students graduating.	Is an actual cohort; individuals are tracked over 4 years with adjustments made for transfers in/out.
Allows for alternate expected graduation year for students in special education or ELL programs.	Imposes concept of four-year timespan. There are no adjustments for Special Ed or Limited English students who are expected to take longer.
May adjust for deficient credits.	All students are expected to graduate four years after first entering 9 th grade. Transfers from out of state or other districts who are credit deficient may not be reclassified into a lower grade.

- The new method generally aligns with what most people think of as a graduation rate: among a group of students who started high school together, how many graduated in four (or five) years?
- The old method may have benefited districts that assigned grade level by credit:
 - The rate applied dropouts from all grades to that year's 12th grade enrollment.
 - 9th – 11th grades would increase in size because students would remain in lower grades if they were credit deficient. Thus the dropout rates for those grades would be lower. Lower dropout rates across grades leads to a higher graduation rate.
 - 12th grade would be smaller because students remained in lower grades. A smaller denominator with the same number of graduates leads to a higher graduation rate.
- The old method is a composite cohort and thus would reflect the most recent year's dropout improvements in lower grades. The new method takes time to reflect improvements in a given cohort.



Or, another way to illustrate the new graduation rate:



Graduation Rate Results

Estimated Cohort (traditional method)	On-time	Extended
2010-11 school year	75.0%	81.0%
2009-10 school year	76.5%	82.6%

Adjusted cohort (new calculation)	4-Year Actual Adjusted	5-Year Actual Adjusted
Class of 2011	76.6%	n/a
Class of 2010	75.4%	78.2%

Frequently Asked Questions

- With the new adjusted cohort method, is there a way that students can be counted as a graduate if they take longer than four years?

Yes. Washington's adjusted cohort method has two timeframes: four years and five years. The methodology is the same, but students can be counted if they complete within five years of first entering ninth grade.

- Which rate will be used for AYP?

For the AYP determinations that will be posted in August of 2012, the Adjusted Cohort Calculation applied to the class of 2011 students will be used. OSPI will be requesting that the five year rate be used for AYP, but that approval has not yet been given by the Department of Education.

- Which field in CEDARS establishes the student's cohort – is it Expected Year of Graduation, Grad Requirements Year, or Grade?

Using P210 data from past years, the calculation searches for all students with an Expected Year of Graduation equivalent to the cohort graduation year, or with no Expected Year of Graduation at all (since it was not always a required field). It subsequently removes students from the calculation if they were in ninth grade earlier than three years before the cohort graduation year. In the future, when there is a longer history of CEDARS data, the Graduation Requirements Year field may be used to establish a student's cohort.

- Some Special Ed students are not expected to graduate within four years. Do they count favorably toward the grad rate if they graduate in six or seven years?

No. Per new federal guidelines, students are only included as a graduate in their cohort if they graduate within the four (or five) year timeframe. Their cohort's graduation year, if they are Special Ed or LEP, is unchanged and is four years after they first enter ninth grade.

- We have a highly mobile student population and receive many transfers who are behind on credits. Can we adjust their cohort year?

No. The cohort definition is based solely on students' first entry into ninth grade, and can not factor in credits or revised grade level.

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