

Study on the Accuracy of the Graduation Data of Students with Disabilities in the LAUSD, 2008-2009 School Year

Office of the Independent Monitor

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the study on the accuracy of the graduation data of students with disabilities (SWD) in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The study measures the accuracy of the District's data of all 12th grade SWD who graduated with a high school diploma in accordance with Outcome 3: Graduation Rate, of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD). The study also collected data of SWD who received a certificate of completion, aged out or dropped out. These data were used to validate data associated with Outcome 4: Completion Rate.

The report provides a brief background on the outcome targets, methodology of the study and findings.

Background

The MCD includes two outcomes that are aimed at increasing the rate of SWD who graduate with a diploma and/or complete high school. The outcomes are intended to increase the number of SWD completing high school, while decreasing the number of students with disabilities who drop out.

The outcomes are as follows:

Outcome 3: Graduation Rate

The District shall increase the number of grade 12 students with disabilities who receive diplomas to 39.79% by 6/30/2008 using the State of California methodology for calculating the graduation rate for students with disabilities. If the State's diploma requirements change, the Independent Monitor shall meet with the parties to discuss the impact of the change and may revise this outcome if appropriate.

Outcome 4: Completion Rate

The District's completion rate shall increase based on an increase in the number of students who graduate with a diploma, receive a certificate of completion, or age out, as compared to the total number of students with disabilities who graduate with a diploma, receive a certificate of completion, age out, or drop out (grades 7-12).

OIM Study of the Accuracy of the District's Graduation Data 2008-2009

To verify the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the 2008-2009 school year, the Office of the Independent Monitor (OIM) conducted a validation study to verify the graduation status of all SWD identified as 12th grade students. This study aimed to identify sources of error within the

data and establish an accurate¹ graduation rate for the 2008-2009 school year. The study consists of a verification of the District's data by visiting all secondary schools that reported graduation data, and reviewing all available sources of data to obtain the most accurate outcome for each student.

Data Collection of Graduation Rates by the Research Unit, Office of Data and Accountability

To determine the graduation rates of SWD, consistent with years past, the District provided all schools with a list of the 12th grade SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2008. These lists required schools to report the graduation and enrollment status of each student by indicating whether a student had: completed the requirements of a diploma; received a certificate of completion; aged out; dropped out; did not graduate but continued to be enrolled; or transferred to another District school, out of a district school or non-public school. Schools were also instructed to add any additional students who enrolled and graduated from their school during 2008-2009. Data were collected through October 2009, therefore allowing for student graduation and passage of the CAHSEE through the end of the extended school year. Upon completion of this data collection, the District provided the OIM copies of the graduation data as reported by schools. These data were then entered into a database developed by the OIM to determine graduation rates.

Methodology

To validate the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the entire population of 12th grade SWD, the OIM visited all of the District's schools that reported graduation data for SWD enrolled on December 1, 2008. The objective of the site visit was to review the various sources of data used by schools for reporting graduation data. This included reviewing: student transcripts in the Secondary Student Information System (SSIS); various data fields within the SSIS; and, counselor/administrator records used for tracking student graduation requirements and issuing a diploma.

The instrument utilized for the 2008-2009 school year study for validating graduation data included student demographic information such as the student's identification number, date of birth and eligibility code. Several options were included for verification to capture the outcome of each student (i.e. graduated with a diploma, received a certificate of completion, aged out, dropped out, transferred to another LAUSD school, transferred out of district/within state, transferred out of state, transferred to a non public school, continued enrollment, and/or status unknown). This year, a modification was made to the data collection instrument to identify students who were enrolled for the purposes of participating in the CAHSEE, but not attending classes. Using the data reported by schools, the instruments contained the outcome as reported by schools above the corresponding verification box on the instrument. For instance, if a school had reported that a student graduated with a diploma, "YES" was indicated above the verification box marked "Diploma." If the school presented evidence of a student receiving a diploma, the box was checked to indicate a match. If the school reported a different outcome than a diploma for the student, such as having received a certificate of completion, the corresponding box was marked. In addition, a comment section was provided for each student for additional relevant information. Data on the leave "L" code were collected to identify discrepancies within the SSIS

¹ This graduation rate only reflects those SWD enrolled on December 1, 2008 with 12th grade status.

system. The instrument was modified to include the “L” code uploaded centrally, and data were collected to identify the “L” code observed during the site review. Finally, information regarding passage of the CAHSEE was verified at schools.

Graduation with a diploma was verified in the following ways:

- Year-end flag code of A (graduation with diploma)
- L7 code (culmination) within the SSIS system using the graduation requirement screen (TR04) indicating that the student met all of their requirements and the minimum of 230 cumulative credits
- A code of 90 accompanying the L7 code indicating culmination with a diploma
- Verification of diploma based on counselor graduation logs
- In some instances, if conflicting information was observed within the data system, counselor verbal reports that the student graduated with a diploma with demonstrated evidence that the student met the minimum of 230 cumulative credits (in many instances the data systems were not updated).

For students who received certificates of completion, the following data indicators were used to verify the provision of a certificate of completion:

- The year-end flag within the SSIS of C (certificate)
- The 421 field (non-standard exit) of the SSIS indicating issuance of a certificate
- The L7 code with an accompanying code of 92 (culmination with a certificate).

For students who were reported as having transferred to another LAUSD school or out of the District, information was obtained regarding their subsequent school of enrollment. For students who were reported as having continued enrollment, verification of enrollment was obtained from their class schedule (CL54) screen within the SSIS. An additional verification of continued enrollment was conducted by cross-referencing an October 1, 2009 enrollment data obtained from the SSIS.

Sample/Population

This outcome measures the graduation rate of SWD in the LAUSD by first obtaining a fixed count of students identified as 12th graders receiving special education services. This cohort serves as the population for determining the graduation rate for the 2008-2009 school year. The population also includes students who may not be considered “diploma track” and therefore it is assumed that the population does not have the potential for graduating all students with a diploma. However, outcomes for non-diploma track students are counted for Outcome 4, which includes students who may have received a certificate of completion, aged out, or are still enrolled. Data on outcomes for non-diploma track students were also reported by schools and the accuracy of the data were verified by the OIM within this study.

The population includes 3,335 students from 177 sites, local districts (1-8), charter (R), options (S) and innovation/partnership schools (T) (Table 1). This includes 58 comprehensive high schools, 13 special education centers and 106 magnet, charter, partnership and options schools. Students who leave the District to attend another school district in California (L3), a non-public

school (L4) and/or leave the state (L5) are dropped from the sample. This resulted in a final sample of 3,230.

TABLE 1. Analyzed Sample by Local District

| Local District | Total Grade 12 SWD | Left the District L3, L4, L5 | Total Students in Analyzed Sample | Percent of Analyzed Sample |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 585 | 17 | 568 | 100% |
| 2 | 476 | 9 | 467 | 100% |
| 3 | 314 | 11 | 303 | 100% |
| 4 | 395 | 6 | 389 | 100% |
| 5 | 271 | 3 | 268 | 100% |
| 6 | 225 | 6 | 219 | 100% |
| 7 | 193 | 14 | 179 | 100% |
| 8 | 345 | 15 | 330 | 100% |
| R | 147 | 16 | 131 | 100% |
| S | 29 | 1 | 28 | 100% |
| T | 355 | 7 | 348 | 100% |
| Total | 3,335 | 105 | 3,230 | 100% |

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Findings

The validation study had two primary goals. The first was to determine the number of SWD who received a diploma, certificate of completion, aged out or dropped out. The second was to identify sources of error associated with the data as reported by schools. It is important to note that the number of students attending innovation schools represents a small portion of the entire population of SWD and comparisons should be made with caution. The performance of option schools are not included within the discussion below to focus such comparisons on comparably sized local districts.

Graduation Rate by OIM

During the 2007-2008 school year, 42.81% of SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2008 graduated with a diploma (Table 2). Graduation rates by local district indicate that charters (64.89%) and Local District 1 (51.58%) had the highest rates of graduation for SWD. Local District 5 (31.72%), Local District 6 (33.79%) and Local District 7 (30.73%) had the lowest rates of students receiving a diploma.

TABLE 2. Number and Percentage of SWD that Received a Diploma, by Local District

| Local District | Total 12 th Grade SWD | Received a Diploma | % Received a Diploma | Did Not Receive a Diploma | % Did not Receive a Diploma |
|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | 568 | 293 | 51.58% | 275 | 48.42% |
| 2 | 467 | 215 | 46.04% | 252 | 53.96% |
| 3 | 303 | 127 | 41.91% | 176 | 58.09% |
| 4 | 389 | 151 | 38.82% | 238 | 61.18% |
| 5 | 268 | 85 | 31.72% | 183 | 68.28% |
| 6 | 219 | 74 | 33.79% | 145 | 66.21% |
| 7 | 179 | 55 | 30.73% | 124 | 69.27% |
| 8 | 330 | 132 | 40.00% | 198 | 60.00% |
| R | 131 | 85 | 64.89% | 46 | 35.11% |
| S | 28 | 10 | 35.71% | 18 | 64.29% |
| T | 348 | 157 | 45.11% | 191 | 54.89% |
| Total | 3,230 | 1,384 | 42.85% | 1,846 | 57.15% |

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Outcomes for SWD receiving a Certificate of Completion and/or Aged Out

For those students who did not receive a diploma, 36.90% of the 12th grade SWD received a certificate of completion or aged out (Table 3). Local District 5 shows the highest rate of students receiving a certificate of completion or who aged out (54.10%), while charters (18.32%) had the lowest rate. It is important to point out that some local districts contain more students with moderate to severe disabilities who attend special education centers, therefore impacting the number of students who receive a certificate of completion.

TABLE 3. Number and Percentage of SWD Receiving a Certificate of Completion/Aged Out by Local District.

| Local District | Total 12 th Grade SWD | Received Certificate/Aged out | % Received Certificate/Aged out |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | 568 | 182 | 32.04% |
| 2 | 467 | 162 | 34.69% |
| 3 | 303 | 110 | 36.30% |
| 4 | 389 | 156 | 40.10% |
| 5 | 268 | 145 | 54.10% |
| 6 | 219 | 96 | 43.84% |
| 7 | 179 | 64 | 35.75% |
| 8 | 330 | 134 | 40.61% |
| R | 131 | 24 | 18.32% |
| S | 28 | 3 | 10.71% |
| T | 348 | 116 | 33.33% |
| Total | 3,230 | 1,192 | 36.90% |

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Table 4 shows the percentage of SWD enrolled on December 1, 2008 who dropped out (5.23%). Local District 4 (6.43%) and Local District 7 (6.70%) demonstrate the highest rates of student dropout, while Local District 5 (1.87%) had the lowest. It is important to restate that this table only reflects students who were part of the graduation study cohort for the purposes of monitoring Outcome 3: Graduation, and is not representative of the total number of dropouts (grades 7-12) reported for Outcome 4.

For students reported as having transferred to a school within LAUSD, information on completion status was not reported by any other school for 109 students. As was noted in the methodology, schools were required to include any additional SWD who enrolled in their schools and who did not appear on the December 1, 2008 count. Since neither enrollment nor graduation outcomes could be verified for students reported as having transferred within LAUSD, an additional 3.37% of all 12th grade SWD were counted as not having received a diploma and identified as status unknown or dropout.

TABLE 4. Number and Percentage of SWD who Dropped Out or with Unknown Status, by Local District.

| Local District | Total 12 th Grade SWD | Reported as Dropped Out | % Reported as Dropped Out | Transferred within LAUSD-Not Reported | % Transferred within LAUSD-Not Reported |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 568 | 32 | 5.63% | 19 | 3.35% |
| 2 | 467 | 25 | 5.35% | 14 | 3.00% |
| 3 | 303 | 12 | 3.96% | 14 | 4.62% |
| 4 | 389 | 25 | 6.43% | 14 | 3.60% |
| 5 | 268 | 5 | 1.87% | 1 | 0.37% |
| 6 | 219 | 11 | 5.02% | 10 | 4.57% |
| 7 | 179 | 12 | 6.70% | 10 | 5.59% |
| 8 | 330 | 15 | 4.55% | 7 | 2.12% |
| R | 131 | 7 | 5.34% | 2 | 1.53% |
| T | 28 | 1 | 3.57% | 10 | 35.71% |
| S | 348 | 24 | 6.90% | 8 | 2.30% |
| Total | 3,230 | 169 | 5.23% | 109 | 3.37% |

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Sources of Error of Graduation Data as Reported by Schools

The validation study noted some inaccuracies with the completion data maintained in the Student Information System (SIS). These inaccuracies are mainly due to school variables such as inconsistent data entry and maintenance. While many of the inaccuracies pertaining to the leave codes noted in the past have improved considerably, instances of students having met their requirements but who had not been updated and a diploma issued continued to be observed.

The main concern this year was the inconsistent data entry of leave codes for students who had completed class requirements but did not pass the CAHSEE. In some schools, these students had a leave code indicating a certificate of completion (L7, 92) or an unknown (L8) for the 2008-2009 school year, while also showing the student as re-enrolled and active for the 2009-2010 school year. While these students had been coded as re-enrolled for the purpose of participating in the CAHSEE exam for the 2009-2010 school year, they were not attending classes. Concerns arise regarding the reconciliation of data and leave codes between both years so that students are not counted twice, once as a dropout or having received a certificate of completion, and again as a graduate.

Summary

During the 2008-2009 school year, the District had a substantial increase in the number of 12th grade SWD (cohort) with a high school diploma, certificate of completion, aged out or dropped out. Despite an increase in the number of seniors, the percentage of students receiving a high school diploma remained similar to that of the 2007-2008 school year (29.9% vs. 30.5%).

However, the number of students who received a diploma is considerably higher (1,061 to 1,384). This is positive since these students passed both sections of the CAHSEE in order to receive a diploma. This number should continue to increase as a result of the State Board of Education's decision to reinstate the CAHSEE exemption for SWD who met all of their high school requirements but did not pass the exit exam in the years 2008 and 2009. This means that many of the 1,171 students who received a certificate of completion this year will now be eligible to receive a high school diploma. As of January 2010, the District and schools have been contacting these students to issue them a diploma. A final count of graduates should be available by the end of June 2010. However, this should have no impact on the results of Outcome 4 since these students are considered "completers."

Overall, the District's efforts appear to be resulting in more students staying in school to complete their requirements, and in a higher number of students passing the CAHSEE. The District has continued to increase the number of students completing school with either a diploma, certificate of completion and/or aging out. These findings are encouraging and offer evidence of the District's commitment to helping students complete high school. The District should continue the efforts to better track and maintain student data, and prepare students for participation and passage of the CAHSEE.