

Office of the Independent Monitor
Los Angeles Unified School District

Analysis of Dropouts

The Impact of Dropouts on Outcome 4 of the Modified Consent Decree

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis of the existing data for students with disabilities (SWD), in order to inform LAUSD's performance on Outcome 4 of the Modified Consent Decree. The goal of Outcome 4 is to increase the number and percentage of SWD who complete high school with either a diploma or a certificate of completion.

The percentage of SWD completing high school is calculated from the total number of students regarded as having completed high school, divided by both the number of students having completed high school as well as the number dropping out. Specifically, the formula for calculating Outcome 4 is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of students who completed high school (by receiving a certificate of completion or diploma or aging out)}}{(\text{Number of students in the numerator}) + (\text{the number of students in grades 7 - 12 who dropped out})}$$

In order to accurately assess Outcome 4, this report focuses on the following four questions, for which the outcome may have a significant impact on the number of SWD included in the numerator or denominator or both:

1. Why has there been a significantly larger number of 12th grade students with disabilities (SWD) in the past two years?
2. Which students are placed into the initial drop-out file generated by LAUSD, and which students remain in the final drop-out file?
3. What impact does the difference between the initial and final drop-out files have on the denominator for Outcome 4, and the overall completion rate for SWD?
4. How are students who are reported to transfer to another LAUSD school who never actually reenroll, i.e., "lost transfers," included in the drop-out totals?

Why has there been a significant increase in the number of 12th grade SWD over the course of the past two years?

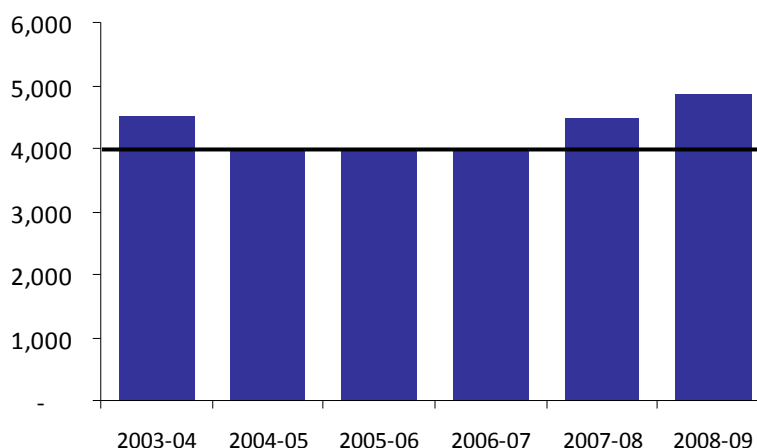
As shown in Table 1, the number of SWD enrolled in grades 7-12 has remained relatively stable over the course of the past two years, while the number of 12th grade SWD has increased by over 20% since 2006-07 (see also Chart 1).

Table 1: Number of SWD in High School and Grade 12 by Year

	# of 12th grade SWD	# of SWD in grades 7-12	% of SWD in grades 7-12 in 12th grade
2003-04	4,498	37,843	11.9%
2004-05	3,996	37,435	10.7%
2005-06	4,001	37,441	10.7%
2006-07	3,970	37,335	10.6%
2007-08	4,477	37,572	11.9%
2008-09	4,850	37,257	13.0%

Source: December CASEMIS

Chart 1: Number of Students With Disabilities in 12th Grade, By Year



To explore why the number of 12th grade SWD has increased over time, the student-level cohort indicator was matched to each student in the OIM's database of 12th grade SWD for the past three years. The cohort indicator, also known as the "class of" indicator, is used to signify when a student is expected to finish high school. For example, if a student began high school in the fall of 2009, then s/he would be expected to graduate in June of 2013, so the class of indicator for this student would be '2013.'

Table 2 suggests that there have been two significant trends among 12th grade SWD. First, the number of SWD with moderate/severe disabilities has remained nearly constant while the overall number of 12th grade SWD has been increasing over the course of the past two years. As a result, SWD with moderate to severe disabilities made-up a smaller percentage of the 12th grade cohort in 2008-09 than in 2006-07. Second, the number and percentage of 12th grade SWD remaining in high school for a fifth-year has increased substantially, from less than 10% in 2006-07, to over 20% in 2008-09.

Table 2: Number of Years in High School for SWD in OIM Grade 12 Cohort, By Year

	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
12 th grade SWD is in 4 th year of high school	1,961	49.4%	2,256	50.4%	2,373	48.9%
12 th grade SWD is in 5 th + year of high school	385	9.7%	738	16.5%	1,081	22.3%
12 th grade SWD has moderate/severe disability*	1,263	31.8%	1,226	27.4%	1,193	24.6%
Missing cohort indicator	361	9.1%	257	5.7%	203	4.2%
Total 12 th grade SWD	3,970		4,477		4,850	

*Includes SWD with mental retardation or traumatic brain injury, as well as SWD enrolled in a special education center.

Which students are placed into the initial dropout file generated by LAUSD, and which students remain in the final dropout file?

Students are added to the potential dropout list in the event that their transfer to another California school cannot be verified, or when their school reports that they dropped out of school. With the arrival of CALPADS, the new student tracking system to be used by the CDE, school staff are being encouraged to ensure that a student's SSID remains the same at their new school, so that the student can be successfully tracked. If a student has two different SSIDs at two different schools, it becomes much more likely that the student will be erroneously counted as a dropout by the CDE, because the CDE will be unaware that the two IDs belong to the same student.

The District provides the following information to schools (see Memorandum 4920) to enable schools to reduce their number of potential dropouts, and ensure that students who leave a school can be successfully followed to another California school:

- Students reported as transferring to another California public school, but are not found to be enrolled in another California public school on CBEDS Information Day are considered “lost transfers” and counted as dropouts. Conversely, reported dropouts who re-enrolled in another California school on CBEDS Information Day will be subtracted from the school’s dropout count.
- To reduce the possibility of a transferring student being counted as a lost transfer, if the Parent Assurance Letter indicates that the student will be transferring to another California public school outside the District or if the record request is from another district, schools are advised to include the SSID on all records requested to ensure that the next California public school uses the same SSID. If the student’s SSID at the next school is different, the school is instructed to fax the discrepancy to the School Information Branch.
- To assist schools identify students who may be reported as dropouts, the School Information Branch distributes Potential Dropouts lists three times a year, in February, May and September. Schools should review these lists, obtain and enter the most accurate withdrawal information in SIS by the specified deadline. Complete withdrawal information includes the following: the student’s leave code, leave reason, and leave code, leave reason and leave date in ID22; records requested field 212 and next school field 201, if known, in ID01.

How are students who are reported to transfer to another LAUSD school who never actually re-enroll, i.e., “lost transfers,” included in the dropout totals?

Since 2002-03, California and LAUSD have been using the definition of a dropout used by the National Center for Education Statistics¹ (see Table 3). While the dropout definition remains unchanged, the increased capability of California to track students has led to greater accuracy in the identification of LAUSD dropouts.

¹ For more information, see the following documents: Bulletin No. Z-74 (2002-03), Reference Guides 1965 (2004-05), 3239 (2005-06), Reference Guides 3525, 3677, 3919 (2006-07), Reference Guides 4115, 4456, (2007-08) and Memoranda 4766, 4920 (2008-09).

Table 3: LAUSD Dropout Definition and Exclusionary Criteria

Dropout Definition for a Given Year:
<p>A. Did not begin attending the next grade (7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12) in the school to which he or she was assigned or at which he or she had pre-registered and/or was expected to enroll/attend by Norm Day of the following year (i.e., “<i>No Show</i>” students).</p> <p>B. Was enrolled in grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12 at some time during the given year but did not returned to school as of Norm Day of the following year.</p>
Exclusionary Criteria (Note: 2008-09 definition given below, but the same basic six exclusionary criteria have been applicable since 2002-03.)
<p>Students may be cleared if the school has documentation on file of the following and appropriate exit information entered in SIS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The student has received a high school diploma or its equivalent (General Education Development [GED] exam, California High School Proficiency Exam [CHPSE], or adult education high school diploma program). 2. The student has transferred to and is attending another public or private educational institution leading toward a high school diploma or its equivalent. This definition does not include adult education programs¹. 3. The student has transferred to and is attending a college offering a baccalaureate or associate’s program. 4. The student has moved out of the United States. 5. The student is enrolled in juvenile hall, camp, or hospital school. 6. The student has died.
<p>¹Students enrolled in adult education programs leading to high school diploma or GED were counted as dropouts in 2002-03, due to inability of LAUSD to track these students. However, as early as 2005-06, the following procedure was adopted:</p> <p>Students under the age of 21 who enroll in adult education programs are to be counted as dropouts unless they are enrolled and attending an adult education program leading to a high school diploma or GED. After the October Norm Day, the School Information Branch runs a data match of the dropout list with the Adult Student Information System and the Alternative Education Work Centers (AEWK) to identify students who are enrolled in a LAUSD Adult and Career Education program leading to a high school diploma. The dropout status of these students will not be determined until the student has completed the program at the adult school. If the student drops out of the adult education program, the student will be counted as a dropout at the last K-12 school attended.</p>

There has been a significant increase in the dropout rate for SWD, due to improved tracking of “lost transfers.” In 2006-07, the California Department of Education [CDE] began requiring school districts to submit individual student level records for all students who are believed to have transferred to another California public school. The CDE then checks to ensure that the students are, in fact, enrolled in another school, and if not, they are added to the school’s count of “lost transfers.” As stated in Reference Guide 4456 for 2007-08:

To calculate dropout rates, the CDE tracks students who transfer to public schools in California [including LAUSD] by using the Statewide Student Identifiers (SSIDs). If the students do not re-enroll in a California public school, they are counted as dropouts at the originating school (last school of attendance). These students are called “lost transfers.” If the originating school reports a student as a dropout and the CDE finds the student re-enrolled at another California school, that student will be subtracted from the school’s dropout count. This new calculation will lead to a more accurate dropout rate. *However, it is anticipated that it will increase the dropout rates at each of the high schools* (emphasis added).

The analysis of the dropout data at the District level seems to confirm the notion that an improved ability to track lost transfers has increased the dropout rates, including those for SWD (see Table 4). The dropout rate for SWD, calculated as the number of SWD dropping out during a one-year period divided by the total number of SWD enrolled in grades 7-12, more than doubled between 2004-05 and 2007-08. Furthermore, lost transfers in 2006-07 and 2007-08 accounted for approximately 30% of all dropouts.

Table 4: LAUSD Dropout Rates for SWD By Year

	SWD enrolled in grades 7-12	# of SWD dropouts (OIM)	SWD Dropout rate
2004-05	37,435	778	2.1%
2005-06	37,441	988	2.6%
2006-07	37,335	1354	3.6%
2007-08	37,572	1654	4.4%

What impact does the difference between the initial and final dropout files have on the denominator for Outcome 4, and the overall completion rate for SWD?

Once the list of LAUSD dropouts is submitted to the CDE, the final dropout rate could increase or decrease, making it difficult to predict the final dropout rate. As part of the new method of calculating graduation and dropout rates, LAUSD now tracks its lost transfers *within* district. Once a student cannot be located at another District school, his/her name is added to the list of potential dropouts. This list is then sent to the CDE, who looks to see if the student is found at another school within California. Due to the high rate of mobility within LAUSD, one can imagine that there may be a long list of such students, either for a given school or for the District as a whole. If the CDE finds the missing student at another California school, his or her name is *removed* from the District's list. As a result, dropout totals can actually go down over time. Conversely, students can be added to the list; any student with a leave code of L3 who does not re-enroll in another California school may be added to the District's list of dropouts, thereby increasing the number of dropouts.

For these reasons, it is difficult to project whether the final dropout total will go up or down. Using the final LAUSD dropout files, the SWD dropout rates for 2006-07 and 2007-08 were re-calculated. The actual number of dropouts *decreased* in both years, from the totals reported by the OIM (see Table 5). The dropout file for 2006-07 used by the OIM was very close to being the final file, so the difference between the two totals is negligible (less than 3%). However, the difference between the files in 2007-08 was larger, and exceeded 10%. Clearly, neither of these differences was large enough to impact the final calculation for Outcome 4, but it is important to note that the dropout totals can and do vary over time.

Table 5: Number of SWD Dropouts from Preliminary and Final Dropout Files

Year	OIM reported	Final dropout file
2006-07	1,354	1,317
2007-08	1,654	1,458

The CDE's usage of CALPADS, which is scheduled to be used for the first time in 2009-10, could also impact the District's dropout rates. Beginning this year, public schools in California will be required to submit student-level information for all enrolled students. As stated in Memorandum 4868:

Beginning 2009-10, student level information will be submitted year-round to the new statewide data system known as the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). Districts must submit each

and every enrollment change within 14 calendar days of enrollment and/or exit throughout the year to keep CALPADS data as current as possible. Using the data in CALPADS, the CDE will determine the official enrollment, dropout and graduate counts as of CBEDS Information Day. Enrollment totals printed on the CBEDS Enrollment Report will be adjusted if there are enrollment conflicts such as overlapping enrollment between two schools.

The use of CALPADS for tracking all students enrolled in K-12 schools longitudinally over time will be beneficial. Nevertheless, like most other electronic tracking systems, it is dependent upon the quality of the data that is put into the system. If school personnel are not diligent in tracking students who leave and where they go, e.g., students who have transferred to and are attending college, then the dropout rate reported by CALPADS may not provide an accurate calculation of the dropout rate, either at the school or District level.