

Study on the Accuracy of the Graduation Data of Students with Disabilities in the LAUSD, 2009-2010 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, findings and recommendations.

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 2009-2010

To verify the accuracy of the District's graduation data for the 2009-2010 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 2009-2010 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, 2010. 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 2009-2010. Data were collected through October 2010, 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, 2009. The objective of the site visit was to review the various sources schools use 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 (see Attachment A) utilized for the 2009-2010 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. 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 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 system. The instrument also included the "L" code uploaded centrally, and data were collected to identify the "L" code observed during the site review.

Graduation with a diploma was verified in the following ways:

¹ This graduation rate only reflects those SWD enrolled on December 1, 2009 with 12th grade status.

- 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 his or her requirements and the minimum of 230 cumulative credits
- A code of 90 or 96 (CAHSEE exemption) accompanying the L7 code indicating culmination with a diploma
- Verification of diploma based on counselor graduation logs, if available
- 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 October 1, 2010 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 2009-2010 school year. The population also includes students who are on an alternate curriculum and receive a certificate of completion. Therefore, this population includes students that do not graduate with a diploma. 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 5,028 students from 185 sites, local districts (1-8), charter (R), options (S) and innovation/partnership schools (T) (Table 1). 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 4,889 students.

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	850	84	841	17.2%
2	653	47	633	12.9%
3	490	53	468	9.6%
4	552	92	547	11.2%
5	392	29	373	7.6%
6	331	20	327	11.2%
7	276	23	269	7.6%
8	597	73	580	6.7%
R	418	14	395	5.5%
S	62	1	60	11.9%
T	407	36	396	8.1%
Total	5028	472	4889	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. The performance of option schools is not included within the discussion below to focus such comparisons on comparably sized local districts.

Graduation Rate by OIM

During the 2009-2010 school year, 49.5% of SWD enrolled as of December 1, 2009 graduated with a diploma (Table 2). Graduation rates by local district indicate that charters (64.89%) and Partnership/Innovation schools (64.9%), Local District 2 (53.7%), Local District 6, (51.7) and Local District 4 (50.1) had the highest rates of graduation for SWD. Local District 7 (35.7%) and Local District 8 (35.7%) 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	841	410	48.8%	431	51.2%
2	633	340	53.7%	293	46.3%
3	468	202	43.2%	266	56.8%
4	547	274	50.1%	273	49.9%
5	373	151	40.5%	222	59.5%
6	327	169	51.7%	158	48.3%
7	269	96	35.7%	173	64.3%
8	580	208	35.9%	372	64.1%
R	395	279	70.6%	116	29.4%
S	60	35	58.3%	25	41.7%
T	396	257	64.9%	139	35.1%
Total	4889	2421	49.5%	2468	50.5%

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

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

This year, due to the CAHSEE exemption, more students graduated with diplomas resulting in a decrease in the percentage of students receiving a certificate of completion by over two-thirds from last year. During the 2009-2010 school year, 9.65% of the 12th grade SWD received a certificate of completion or aged out (Table 3). Local District 4 (16.82%), Local District 8 (12.59%) and Local District 3 (11.32) show the highest rate of students receiving a certificate of completion. It is important to point out that some local districts contain more students with moderate to severe disabilities who attend special education centers, which impacts 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	841	84	9.99%
2	633	47	7.42%
3	468	53	11.32%
4	547	92	16.82%
5	373	29	7.77%
6	327	20	6.12%
7	269	23	8.55%
8	580	73	12.59%
R	395	14	3.54%
S	60	1	1.67%
T	396	36	9.09%
Total	4889	472	9.65%

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Table 4 shows the percentage of 12th grade SWD enrolled on December 1, 2009 who dropped out (14.93%). Local District 6 (29.97%), Local District 5 (23.32%), Local District 2 (17.38%) and Partnership/Innovation schools (16.67%) demonstrate the highest rates of students dropping out. 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 480 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, 2009 count. Since neither enrollment nor graduation outcomes could be verified for students reported as having transferred within LAUSD, an additional 9.82% of all 12th grade SWD were counted as not having received a diploma and identified as status unknown or drop-out.

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	841	76	9.04%	65	7.73%
2	633	110	17.38%	70	11.06%
3	468	61	13.03%	32	6.84%
4	547	77	14.08%	104	19.01%
5	373	87	23.32%	25	6.70%
6	327	98	29.97%	31	9.48%
7	269	34	12.64%	13	4.83%
8	580	78	13.45%	48	8.28%
R	395	32	8.10%	46	11.65%
S	60	11	18.33%	2	21.67%
T	396	66	16.67%	11	8.33%
Total	4889	730	14.93%	480	9.82%

R – Charters; S –Options; T- Partnerships

Sources of Error of Graduation Data as Reported by Schools

The validation study continued to observe inaccuracies with the completion data maintained in the SSIS that have been reported in the past. These inaccuracies are mainly due to school variables such as inconsistent data entry and maintenance. This year, schools noted reductions and/or bumping in staffing of both clerks and administrators as an area of concern in maintaining completion data. Another factor contributing to these inaccuracies is the failure to update the SSIS upon students completing credits throughout summer. As in the past, instances of students having met their requirements but who had not been updated and a diploma issued continued to be observed.

This year, as a result of these continued discrepancies, the OIM provided the District all the data collection sheets highlighting those students with discrepancies between what schools reported and the leave codes within SIS. Students with credits close or above the 230 credit requirement were also highlighted for additional follow-up. Of the 185 schools in the study, 104 updated their rosters. A total of 518 students had information updated to their transcripts and/or records within the SSIS.

To illustrate these discrepancies and the positive impact of the District’s follow-up, an additional 376 students were identified and/or confirmed to have earned and/or received a diploma than were previously reported by the SIS system. Of these, 238 students were erroneously coded as drop-outs, while 39 had been coded as receiving a certificate of completion. The study also found 328 students who had been reported by both schools and the SIS system as unknown or drop-outs. Upon follow-up, 23 students now have diplomas, two received a certificate of

completion and 28 were recoded to indicate a transfer to another school, district or state. These findings are evidence that the system fails to both maintain and update completion data accurately. These findings also imply that the District is over-estimating the number of drop-outs reported.

Overview of Processes for Maintaining and Reporting Completion Data

Past reports have focused on the problems and nuances of leave codes and fields within the SIS. A broader examination of the processes for maintaining and reporting completion data reveals that the District's current policy, processes and data system contain considerable shortcomings that contribute to inaccurate data. The following discussion will provide an overview of these problems. While this discussion is limited to SWD, these problems can more than likely be generalized to all students.

First, it is District policy² that the official transcript for all students is the paper file known as the cumulative folder. Schools are required to complete and close each student file at the end of each school year. In past years, the validation study included the review of these paper cumulative files. However, in many instances, schools were unable to provide these files as the cumulative records were packaged and stored by the end of the summer. This practice meant that the official transcript may have been stored prior to students' completing their requirements, resulting in the official transcript not being updated and/or the cumulative file not being closed. In some instances, the electronic transcript may have been updated upon completion of all requirements resulting in a discrepancy between the data on the cumulative file and the transcripts in the SIS system.

Per District policy, schools hold these cumulative files for a period of five years before they are transferred to the Student Records Center. This office notes that these records are not reviewed to ensure they were properly closed and/or cross-referenced with the records maintained in the SIS. The Student Records Center also reports that it does not have access to data within SIS and only appears to act as a storage and retrieval service of student records. This office reports that on average, one to two students a week have incomplete records and are directed back to their former school to obtain confirmation of credits completed and/or proof of diploma.

In addition to the cumulative file transcripts, schools maintain student records within the SSIS system. These records have several fields that capture completion data such as course credits, CAHSEE scores, leave codes and reasons, and a year-end flag that also captures completion or leave data. Previous reports have focused on the multiple problems with the data collected in these fields. While the District has made attempts to address some of these issues, the design of the SSIS system continues to lack the necessary safeguards against incorrect data entry. It also lacks the necessary edits to prevent conflicting completion data from being entered. For example, schools may enter any leave code and/or reason regardless of the number of required credits a student completed. This means that a student with 200 credits can be coded as a graduate with a diploma without the system recognizing that the student does not have the 230 necessary credits. Similarly, a student with 240 credits can be coded as an "unknown" or "drop-out" even if the student received a diploma.

² Cumulative Record Handbook for Secondary Schools, Revised January 2005

Overall, the District's policy requiring the cumulative file as the student's official transcript does not appear to be adhered to by schools. This policy seems to be outdated and incongruent with the practices noted in the field. In addition, the SSIS system for collecting and reporting completion data continues to have basic problems that contribute to inaccurate data for many students and an over reporting of dropouts by the District. The District's efforts continue to fall short of remedying these problems and do not seem to consider the limitation and practices of school personnel responsible for entering and maintaining completion data.

Summary and Recommendations

During the 2009-2010 school year, the District had a substantial increase in the number of 12th grade SWD with a high school diploma from the 2008-2009 school year. This is due primarily to the CAHSEE Exemption granted by the State Board of Education. While the District's efforts appear to be resulting in more students staying in school to complete their course requirements, the District continues to have problems within the policies, procedures and practices for collecting, maintaining and reporting completion data. While the District has repeatedly acknowledged these problems and made attempts to improve these processes, the data continues to contain considerable issues that result in outdated and inaccurate data. In addition, there appears to be a lack of accountability for maintaining accurate data both at schools and centrally.

The District should consider convening a team of all responsible parties and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan to address the deficiencies of its policies, procedures and practices. This team should consist of various departments such as the Division of Student Accountability, ITD, the Division of Special Education, Drop Out Recovery and the Student Records Center. This team should review the current limitations of these processes and produce a comprehensive plan that encompasses necessary changes to its policies, data systems and procedures for entering and maintaining data at schools. The District should consider consulting with local universities, as these institutions manage student data from different schools and disciplines and generally have a central office that oversees student progress of course requirements and diploma verification.

Office of the Independent Monitor
 Los Angeles Unified School District
 12th Grade Students Enrolled 12/1/2009

86XXXX	XXXX HS	LOCAL DISTRICT: 1	Completion Status	Continue	Credit	Left School	L Code	L Reason	L Date	In Dec File
090191Fxxx	9/1/1991	SLD	D	N	250	N	L7	90	6/18/10	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
011590Fxxx	1/15/1990	SLD	D	N	240	N	L7	96	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
082489FxxxI	8/24/1989	SLD	D	N	235	N	L7	90	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
072690Fxxx	7/26/1990	SLD	D	N	230	N	L7	96	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
021491Mxxx	2/14/1991	SLD	D	N	230	N	L7	96	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
030791Fxxx	3/7/1991	SLD	D	N	247	N	L7	96	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
120292Fxxx	12/2/1992	OHI	D	N	230	N	L7	90	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							
021191Mxxx	2/11/1991	SLD	D	N	236	N	L7	90	6/18/2010	Yes
Comments:			<input type="text"/>							