



The Dropout/ Completion/Graduation Rates

School districts and schools are held accountable for various measures of high school completion:

Dropout Rate: Middle schools and school districts are held accountable for their 7-8th grade dropout rate under the state accountability system. For the 2007-08 school year, the state standard for the dropout rate is two percent or lower. But, because of the “school leaver” provision (explained below), the dropout rate did not factor into the state accountability ratings for the 2006-07 school year and will not affect the 2007-08 ratings, either.

Completion Rate: High schools and school districts are held accountable for their grades 9-12 completion rate under the state accountability system.

Graduation Rate: High schools and districts are held accountable for their graduation rate for purposes of determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The federal accountability system does not consider dropout or completion rates.

Who is a *dropout*?

In 2003, the Texas Legislature adopted the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) definition of “dropout” for computing the dropout rate: *a dropout is a student who was enrolled in a Texas public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to the public school the following fall within the school start window (i.e., by the last Friday in September), was not expelled, did not graduate, receive a GED, continue school outside the public school system, begin college or die.* A summer dropout is a student who completes the school year but does not return in the fall. Summer dropouts are attributed to the school year just completed for state accountability purposes.

The new “dropout” definition was implemented beginning with the 2005-06 dropout rate calculations. Annual dropout rates for *prior* school years are not comparable to those beginning with the 2005-06 school year. To conform to the new “dropout” definition, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) modified the “leaver codes” used to categorize students who have left a public school for accountability purposes. As a result of the new definition and “leaver” codes, students who were not previously classified as dropouts under the prior state definition are counted as dropouts beginning with the 2005-06 school year.

The dropout rate represents the percentage of students who drop out of school during one school year. For purposes of state accountability, the annual dropout rate is calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{\# of students who dropped out during the school year}}{\text{\# of students enrolled at any time during that same year}}$$

The state accountability system considers the annual dropout rate for grades 7-8 in determining campus and district ratings. Campuses and districts *that are dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out of school* may choose to register for alternative accountability evaluations. The alternative state accountability system considers the grades 7-12 annual dropout rate. Because the public thinks of a dropout rate as measuring the percentage of students who drop out during their high school career (rather than just between two grade levels), TEA also calculates a dropout rate for two other grade spans. The statewide dropout rates for the 2006-07 school year were:

- Grades 7-12: **2.7 percent** (increased by .1 percent from previous year)
- Grades 9-12: **3.9 percent** (increased by .2 percent from previous year)
- Grades 7-8: **0.4 percent** (unchanged from previous year)

Who is a completer?

A student counts as a “completer” if he/she (1) graduates, or (2) continues in high school after his/her anticipated graduation date. If the school or district is rated under the alternative state accountability system, then a student who receives a GED certificate by August 31 is also counted as a “completer.”

The completion rate is the percentage of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who graduate or continue in high school. The completion rate used for the regular state accountability system (Completion Rate I), is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Completion Rate I: } \frac{\text{\# of graduates + continuers}}{\text{\# of graduates + continuers + GED recipients + dropouts}}$$

Campuses and districts that are dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out and are rated under the alternative state accountability system are subject to a different completion rate calculation, which includes GED recipients as “completers” according to the following formula:

$$\text{Completion Rate II: } \frac{\text{\# of graduates + continuers + GED recipients}}{\text{\# of graduates + continuers + GED recipients + dropouts}}$$

Who is a graduate?

A student is classified as a “graduate” in the year in which he or she receives a high school diploma. However, school districts do not report the data to TEA until the fall after the student’s anticipated graduation date.

Factors Affecting Dropout/Completion/Graduation Rates:

“School Leaver” Provision: Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Texas schools enrolled a high percentage of highly mobile students. TEA recognized that the influx of highly mobile students would lead to artificially high dropouts rates for the 2005-06 school year, which would negatively impact the schools’ 2006-07 accountability ratings. Also, to allow schools and districts time to adjust to the new dropout definition and leaver codes, TEA issued the “school leaver” provision. This provision provides schools and districts with a one-year reprieve from having their grades 7-8 dropout rate and 9-12 completion rate count towards the state accountability ratings. TEA continues to identify schools and districts that would have received an “academically unacceptable” rating if the school leaver provision were not in effect and requires those districts and schools to establish technical assistance teams. TEA extended the school leaver provision for an additional year, so that the 2006-07 dropout and completion rates will not affect the 2007-08 state accountability ratings.

School-Start Window: Students must enroll in a public school before the last Friday in September in order not to be counted as a dropout from the previous school year. If a student delays a return to school until after the end of September, then the student still is considered a dropout – even though he/she may actually be attending class by the time the data are reported to the state. However, migrant students who return after the school-start window are not counted as dropouts. Previously, school districts had until the January submission of their Fall PEIMS data to update coding of dropouts and “leavers” from the prior school year.

GED Certificate Recipients: The General Educational Development (GED) certificate is a high school equivalency certificate originally developed for returning veterans of World War II whose high school education was interrupted by military service. When a student drops out of school, he/she will be considered a “GED certificate recipient” rather than a dropout IF the student passes all five portions of the GED test by August 31 of the year in which the student dropped out of school.

GED certificate recipients do not count as graduates or “completers” under the Completer I rate, but are included as “completers” under the Completer II rate (which applies only if the school or district is held accountable under the alternative accountability system).

Repeat TAKS Test Takers: In order to graduate, a student must complete the required number of course credits (beginning the 2007-08 freshman class, students must earn 26 credits for the Recommended High School Program) *and* pass all of the exit level TAKS tests. A student who fails may repeat the TAKS tests multiple times. A student is classified as a “continuer” if he/she has not graduated and enrolls in the public Texas school in the fall – within the “school start window” – after his/her anticipated graduation date. However, many students who earn their course credits but cannot pass the TAKS tests refuse to re-enroll in high school after their anticipated graduation date and are therefore considered “dropouts.”

Previous Dropouts: Students who drop out, then return to a school and drop out again are counted in the annual dropout rate each year they drop out of school.

Summary

- (1) If a student graduates on time, the student is:
 - a. not a “dropout”
 - b. a “completer” under any completion rate calculation
 - c. a “graduate” under the federal graduation rate

- (2) If a student drops out but gets a GED by August 31, the student is a “GED recipient” and:
 - a. not a dropout
 - b. not a completer under the Completion I rate
 - c. a completer under the Completion II rate (for alternative state accountability system)
 - d. not a graduate under the federal graduation rate

- (3) If a student drops out and does not get his/her GED by August 31, the student is:
 - a. a dropout
 - b. not a completer under any calculation of the completion rate
 - c. not a graduate under the federal graduation rate

In short, if a student graduates, the student is a graduate and a completer, not a dropout.

If a student drops out but gets his/her GED by August 31, the student is not a dropout and will be considered a completer IF the student’s campus qualifies for the alternate accountability system. Under the standard accountability system, however, the student would be a dropout and not a completer. A GED recipient is never considered a graduate.

If a student drops out and does not get a GED by August 31, he/she is a dropout, not a completer and not a graduate.