

# 2021 Graduation Cohort Protocol

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## Section 1: Document Intent and Overview

This document helps districts navigate the graduation rate process. Please send detailed feedback as to how we can improve this resource to [TNEducation@tn.gov](mailto:TNEducation@tn.gov).

Graduation rate calculations require the transformation of many data points. This document outlines the timeline, withdrawal code guidance, and specific steps districts should take at each stage of the process. For more resources and guidance regarding appeals and change requests, please access the “Instructions” page of the Cohort application.

Some one-off situations fall outside the scope of this document. Please consult the resources on the Cohort application before addressing questions to [TNEducation@tn.gov](mailto:TNEducation@tn.gov).

### 1.1 Background and Calculations

Federal law requires students to count in graduation rate calculations based on the year in which they first entered grade 9. Graduation rates are calculated using on the U.S. Department of Education four-year adjusted cohort formula listed below.

$$\text{Graduation Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of graduates included in cohort}}{\text{Number included in graduating cohort}}$$

The *number of graduates* is defined as the number of students who earn a regular diploma including those students earning an alternate academic diploma<sup>1</sup> (i.e., completion types 1, 11, 12, or 13) within four years and a summer of entering grade 9 for the first time. The *number in the graduating cohort* is defined as the number of students entering grade 9 for the first time four years prior, removing withdrawn students and adding in any students who join that cohort in later years (e.g., a student who enters grade 10 in a Tennessee public school for the first time in the fall of 2017 would be placed into the 2017 cohort, expected to graduate in spring 2021).

Additionally, dropout rates reflect the number of dropouts divided by the number of students in the graduation cohort, rounded to one decimal place. Dropouts include students who:

- Have withdrawal codes of 0<sup>2</sup>, 1, 3, or 4 and did not receive a regular diploma, **or who**
- Have neither a withdrawal code nor completion type<sup>3</sup> and were not enrolled in a Tennessee public school as of October 1 of the following school year.

Students with neither withdrawal nor completion data who have withdrawal codes of 0, 1, 3, or 4 in the most recent enrollment of the following school year will also count as dropouts.

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<sup>1</sup> Students entering grade 9 in 2017-18 qualify for this diploma if they participate in the alternate assessment and meet certain [criteria](#).

<sup>2</sup>For more information please reference the services for minors’ [policy](#) for those students enrolling in an adult education program.

<sup>3</sup> This also includes students with completion type 5, as this completion type indicates students did not earn a completion document of any kind. Please consult [EIS Appendix I](#) for more information.

## Section 2: Timeline

The graduation process occurs in four phases. Districts report and correct student information and upload required documentation during **Phase I**. Districts report summer graduates and appeal the inclusion of certain students during **Phase II**. Districts review appeals decisions and preliminary graduation rates in **Phase III**. Districts review final graduation rates during **Phase IV** before they are published on the state's Report Card.

The timeline below highlights key dates and tasks for each phase of the graduation rate process.

Phase	Estimated Dates	Tasks to be Completed
I	Oct. 29–June 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request removal of students from the cohort (e.g., duplicate students, students in middle school, students who never attended, students in the wrong cohort, etc.); (<a href="#">submit Cohort Change Request</a>).</li> <li>Correct/submit withdrawal codes and upload required documentation for withdrawn students. Guidance can be found in <a href="#">section 3</a>.</li> <li>Document early graduates with withdrawal code 12 and appropriate completion type, date, and period.</li> <li>Submit completion information to EIS.</li> <li>Reconcile enrollments with receiving schools for students withdrawn using codes 3 or 4 and for whom there is no subsequent enrollment in EIS.</li> <li>Review appeals guidance in preparation for Phase II.</li> </ul>
II	July 19–Aug. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit appeals only for appealable situations.</li> <li>Report summer graduates in EIS.</li> <li>Upload required documentation for seniors withdrawing since the last week of Phase I <b>only</b>.</li> </ul>
III	Aug. 23–Sept. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address any summer graduate discrepancies.</li> <li>Review preliminary graduation rates published in the Cohort application.</li> </ul>
IV	Sept. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review final graduation rates published in the Cohort application.</li> </ul>

## Section 3: Withdrawal Code Guidance

### 3.1 Column Definitions

The “WITHDRAWAL REASON” column reflects students’ withdrawal codes. The “STATUS” column indicates whether the department approved (1) or denied (2) the document the district submitted. For more information regarding values included in the file, please reference our [Cohort File Layout](#).

### 3.2 Documentation Submission and Review

Federal law only allows students to be removed if they enroll in another program that awards regular diplomas. The department will deny documentation that does not meet the requirements below.

Data in the Cohort application are updated nightly during Phase I. Districts must correct withdrawal codes or other data in EIS and wait until the correction loads in the Cohort application before uploading documentation.

The tables below outline the process for documentation review and decisions based on different withdrawal codes.

Withdrawal Code	Description	Cohort Action	Requirements/Details of Adequate Supporting Documentation
00	Dropout, under 18	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districts changing this withdrawal code must submit adequate documentation for the new withdrawal code as outlined in this document.</li> </ul>
01	Dropout, 18 and over	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districts changing this withdrawal code must submit adequate documentation for the new withdrawal code as outlined in this document.</li> </ul>
02	Transferred to a state institution with an education program culminating in a regular high school diploma	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transfer must be to an approved DCS school or institution (please consult the list of <a href="#">DCS-approved schools</a>); <b>AND</b></li> <li>Written acknowledgement on official letterhead from an administrator at the state institution that the student is receiving educational services that culminate in a regular high school diploma.</li> <li>Please note: An age waiver signed by DCS <b>does not</b> meet requirements for use of this withdrawal code.</li> </ul>
03	Transferred to another Tennessee public school district	Included in cohort unless receiving school reports subsequent enrollment in EIS; counted as dropout if there is no subsequent enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receiving school enrollment must be entered in EIS.</li> </ul>
04	Transferred to and enrolled in another school in the same district	Included in cohort unless receiving school reports subsequent enrollment in EIS; counted as dropout if there is no subsequent enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receiving school enrollment must be entered in EIS.</li> </ul>

05	Transferred out of state	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written records request from receiving out-of-state public or private high school, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Written acknowledgement on official letterhead from an administrator at the receiving school confirming enrollment, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Official records/transcripts from the receiving out-of-state public or private high school</li> <li>• If a student has moved out of the country, written confirmation from the parent or a school administrator's documented conversation with the parent will be accepted if any of the above three types of documentation are unavailable.</li> <li>• For foreign exchange students, a copy of the official exchange program paperwork reflecting the year of participation on exchange agency letterhead.</li> </ul>
06	Transferred to and enrolled in a non-public school in Tennessee	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written records request from receiving non-public school; <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Written acknowledgement on official letterhead from an administrator at the receiving school confirming enrollment</li> <li>*The list of non-public schools is located on the Cohort application.</li> </ul>
07	Withdrawal due to permanent illness or incapacitation where no return to school is anticipated and the withdrawal is considered permanent	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This withdrawal code should only be used for students who are so sick or incapacitated (in the written opinion of a physician licensed by the State Board of Medical Examiners) that no return to school is anticipated and the withdrawal is considered permanent.</li> </ul>
08	Deceased	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An obituary or funeral program.</li> <li>• Official written documentation, such as a death certificate, is <b>not</b> necessary.</li> </ul>
09	Deleted	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts changing this withdrawal code must submit adequate documentation for the new withdrawal code as outlined in this document.</li> </ul>
10	Withdrawal to home school	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Official Intent to Home School form<sup>4</sup></a> must be signed by the parent or guardian.</li> </ul>
11	Court-ordered placement or other government-mandated placement, such as jail or prison	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written copy of the court order or judgment decision should be kept on file with the district.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> This form may be used for home school students both in Tennessee and other states.

12	Early graduates who receive a regular high school diploma in less than four years	Included in cohort; counted as graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early graduates require <b>both</b> withdrawal code 12 <b>AND</b> a completion type with a graduation date in EIS.</li> </ul>
13	Permanent dismissal from TN voluntary pre-K program	Not applicable to cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program must provide the state with a written request and justification for permanent dismissal of any child from Tennessee's voluntary pre-K program. No student should be permanently dismissed without consultation and agreement between the grantee and the Tennessee Department of Education.</li> </ul>
15	TEIS transition, non-eligible for special education services	Not applicable to cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student assigned to grade P3 who are transitioning from Tennessee Early Intervention Services may be withdrawn due to non-eligibility for special education services.</li> </ul>
16	Permanent withdrawal of students with disabilities (SWD) who received a completion document but remained in school (up to age 22) under the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) provision	Only included in the graduation rate of <b>one</b> cohort based on year entered grade 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This code only applies to SWD who were included in a prior cohort's graduation rate and returned to school after previously receiving a special education completion document.</li> </ul>
17	Transferred to and enrolled in out-of-state online school	Excluded from cohort <b>only if</b> adequate documentation is provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written records request from the online school; <b>OR</b></li> <li>Written acknowledgement on official letterhead from an administrator at the online school confirming enrollment</li> <li>Withdrawal code 17 should <b>only</b> be used for students who withdraw from traditional bricks-and-mortar schools to enroll in a school in which the content is delivered via the Internet and the school location is not in Tennessee.</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Other Codes and Situations

The table below outlines additional codes or situations that may appear in the Cohort application. Please review the documentation required for the actions described.

Withdrawal Code	Description	Cohort Action	Requirements/Details of Adequate Supporting Documentation
14	Withdrawn under public school choice (Title 1, part A, Section 1116)	Included in cohort unless receiving school reports subsequent enrollment in EIS; counted as dropout if there is no subsequent enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The receiving school enrollment must be entered in EIS.</li> </ul>

<i>none</i>	Student's year entered grade 9 is not for the current cohort	Included in other cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the student has withdrawn, please use the appropriate code and upload supporting documentation, if applicable.</li> <li>Please submit a <a href="#">Cohort Change Request</a> if the student's data were incorrect and s/he should count in the current cohort.</li> </ul>
<i>none</i>	The student has no withdrawal code, however the student transferred to another Tennessee public school	Included in cohort; counted as dropout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district must withdraw the student using code 3 and work with the receiving school to report the student's subsequent enrollment in EIS.</li> </ul>
<i>none</i>	The student never showed up for school on the first day of grade 9; the school has never served the student and has no knowledge of where she/he went.	Included in cohort unless districts confirm the student never attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districts must submit a <a href="#">Cohort Change Request</a> with a letter on letterhead from a school or district administrator that confirms the student(s) in question never attended school during grade 9 or higher in the district.</li> </ul>

## Section 4: Phase I

### 4.1 Required Actions

The first phase of the 2019-20 graduation cohort process closes on **June 11, 2021**. During this time, districts must submit the following information to the Cohort application through extracts from their SIS packages or through the Cohort application itself:

1. Completion information
2. Withdrawal information
3. Supporting documentation confirming withdrawal

Any data that remain incorrect at the end of Phase I cannot be corrected afterward. **That is, withdrawal or completion information that is neither corrected nor submitted by the end of Phase I will be incorrect in districts' final graduation rates.** The following sections detail the specific steps and potential pitfalls for districts to consider as they submit completion and withdrawal information to ensure data are as accurate as possible.

#### 4.1.1 Submitting Completion Information

Completion information submitted from districts' SIS packages must contain the following pieces of information in order to be accepted into EIS and into the Cohort application.

1. Completion document type (e.g., 1 for regular education diploma, 3 for special education diploma, 11 for regular education diploma with foreign language waiver, etc.)
2. Completion date
3. Completion period

Please note that EIS will return an error if a submitted completion date falls outside of the date parameters of the student's enrollment (e.g., a completion date of 6/12/2021 for an enrollment that ends on 5/30/2021 will return an error and the student will consequently **not** be counted as a graduate if the error remains uncorrected). The only instance in which a completion date may postdate a student's enrollment end date is if the completion period is listed as "SU" for summer, indicating that the student graduated after the official end of the school year and before the start of the following year. Please consult the [EIS site](#) for more information.

#### 4.1.2 Submitting Withdrawal Information and Supporting Documentation

Withdrawal information submitted from districts' SIS packages must contain a withdrawal reason and a withdrawal date. Please note that students are only **eligible** to be removed from the cohort if they have a withdrawal code of 02, 05, 06, 08, 10, or 17 **and** the district uploads adequate supporting documentation **before the Phase I deadline**, which is **5 p.m. CT on June 11, 2021**. In other words:

1. No students are automatically removed from the cohort (with the exception of students who have a withdrawal code of either 03 or 04 who **also** have a subsequent enrollment in EIS in another district or school, respectively).
  - a. Please note that students with withdrawal codes of 03 or 04 and **without** subsequent enrollments in EIS will count as non-graduates in the district and school in which they were last enrolled. The department encourages districts to reach out to the receiving district and/or school for more information in such cases.
2. Students with withdrawal codes of 02, 05, 06, 08, 10, or 17 will **only** be removed from the cohort if they:
  - a. Have correct withdrawal information submitted **before the Phase I deadline AND**
  - b. The district uploads documentation through the Cohort application that satisfies the requirements

for the corresponding withdrawal code (for more information about what constitutes adequate supporting documentation, please consult [section 3](#)).

Districts should send new withdrawal codes and upload new documentation if students' withdrawal circumstances change. For example, districts should change the withdrawal code from 5 to 17 if they thought a student was transferring to an out-of-state public school and they consequently receive an enrollment confirmation from an out-of-state online school. These withdrawal changes will update in the Cohort application the following morning. Districts should then upload the appropriate supporting documentation.

#### **4.1.3 Requesting Changes to a Cohort**

Starting in 2018-19, the department implemented a new process for requesting manual changes to cohort data (e.g., moving a student to a different cohort, requesting a student's exclusion outside of the process of withdrawal documentation submission, etc.). The Change Request Instructions and Worksheet can be located on the "Instructions" page of the Cohort application. Districts must submit change requests according to the specific format and timeline outlined in the instructions on the Cohort application.

## **4.2 Potential Pitfalls and Data Errors**

Below we outline common pitfalls and data errors, explaining how these situations might arise, how they will be reflected in the Cohort application, and the steps districts should take to resolve these errors.

The department recommends that all districts download their student-level cohort data to resolve discrepancies between their list of expected graduates and the list of students who will form the denominator of their graduation rate. Districts can download their student-level data by employing the following steps.

1. Navigate to the [Cohort application](#) or log in through single sign on.
2. Select the "User" option under "Logon As..." for the Cohort application.
3. Read the News and Timeline sections on the Instructions page of the Cohort application.
4. Click the checkbox that says "I agree / I acknowledge that I have read the news."
5. Click the "Show Data" button.
6. Click the "Download CSV File" link.

Districts should filter these files for included students<sup>5</sup> who have completion types other than 1, 11, 12, or 13. These students will count against districts' graduation rates. Districts should compare these students to data in their SIS packages to ensure all students count correctly.

### **4.2.1 Students Missing from Cohort**

Occasionally students are missing from the current cohort. This can happen for a couple of reasons:

1. Students' enrollment information may not have been loaded correctly in EIS.
2. Students are included in another cohort.

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<sup>5</sup> Students are included in the cohort if: 1) they have a value of "Y" in the REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column, 2) they have a value of "Y" in the INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column and no REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column, 3) they have a value of "P" in the INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column and no value in the REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column, or 4) they have a value of "Y" in the INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column and either no value or a value of "Y" in the REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column.

To resolve this, districts should first check that the student does not appear in another cohort. To do this, districts can change the dropdown field of “Graduation Cohort” on the Cohort Data page. If students appear in one of the other active cohort years, districts should email [TNE.D.Graduates@tn.gov](mailto:TNE.D.Graduates@tn.gov) providing confirmation (e.g., a transcript copy) of the first year the students entered grade 9. If students do not appear in any of the active cohort years but should be listed based on districts’ data, please contact [TNE.D.Graduates@tn.gov](mailto:TNE.D.Graduates@tn.gov) using the Change Request Worksheet following the instructions found on the Cohort application.

#### **4.2.3 Students with Withdrawal Information but Missing Documentation**

Any student who has an eligible withdrawal code (i.e., 02, 05, 06, 08, 10, or 17) and no corresponding documentation will remain in the cohort. Common situations may include but are not limited to: middle school cohort roll-over where a student never attended, students in other schools (elementary or middle), students receiving special education services, etc. As such, the department recommends that districts filter their student-level files by withdrawal reason to ensure they have uploaded documentation for all eligible students. **Please note that the department will automatically deny any documentation to remove students submitted after Phase I.**

#### **4.3 Final Checks**

As a final check, districts should ensure they can answer ‘yes’ to the following questions before the Phase I deadline.

1. Did the district submit completion information for all graduates and verify that the information loaded into the Cohort application?
2. Did the district submit withdrawal information for all applicable students and verify that the information loaded into the Cohort application?
3. Did the district upload documentation for all students with withdrawal codes of 02, 05, 06, 08, 10, and 17 that satisfies the requirements outlined in the guidance documents?
4. Did the district verify that the list of students in the Cohort application matches the list of expected graduates in the district’s SIS package (i.e., there are no students who, by virtue of a data entry error, were entered into the incorrect cohort)?

## Section 5: Phase II

### 5.1 Required Actions

Phase II of the graduation cohort process allows districts to review and appeal the department's decisions as to which students will be included in graduation rate calculations. Please consult the appeals guidance documents available on the Instructions page of the Cohort application for more information.

During Phase II, districts should pay special attention to students whose removal from the cohort was denied. These students show a value of "Deny" in the "Status/Comments" field. The department recommends that districts download their student-level data (please see [section 4.2](#) for more information) and filter the worksheet for values of "Y" for the REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT column. Please note that not all of these students may be appealed.

#### 5.1.1 Summer Graduates

Districts should also submit completion information for summer graduates and verify that the data load correctly in the Cohort application during Phase II. Summer graduates must have a completion date **after** the Phase I deadline **and** a completion code of **SU**. Please note that completion information for summer graduates will not load into the Cohort application automatically from EIS<sup>6</sup>, as these data require a manual process. Please also note that the data will be updated manually each week even though the Cohort application may list the date the data were last updated as mid-June.

Districts can estimate their preliminary graduation rates during Phase II. Please note that these preliminary rates will not reflect any appeals the district submits. Districts can estimate their rates using the following steps.

1. Download the student-level file following the steps in [section 4.2](#).
2. Remove any rows from the spreadsheet where the student has a value of "N" for the field of REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT.
3. Remove any rows from the spreadsheet where the student have a value of "N" for INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT and has a blank value (or a value of "N") in the field of REVISED\_INCLUDED\_IN\_COHORT.
4. Count the number of students who have a completion type of 1, 11, 12, and 13.
5. Divide the number in step 4 by the number of students left in the spreadsheet after completing steps 2 and 3. This rate will be the preliminary graduation rate, though it will not reflect the results of any appeals that districts have submitted.

### 5.2 Potential Pitfalls and Data Errors

The most common complications during Phase II involve the submission of completion information for summer graduates. Due to the completion date for summer graduates often exceeding the date bounds of the enrollment, districts must list the completion period as "SU;" failure to do so will cause an error in EIS that will prevent the data from loading correctly into the Cohort application. Completion documents may have any date **prior to the Attendance Start** date of the following school year. However, **the End of Service Action** date must be **before the Attendance End** date of the school year in which the student is graduating. Also, summer graduates **should not** have a new enrollment for summer school. This will create an error and not allow for the student to be pulled from EIS into Cohort when manually updated. Please refer to [section 4.1.1](#) for more details about submitting completion information.

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<sup>6</sup> Issues with EIS should be reported to the District Technology Help Desk at [DT.Support@tn.gov](mailto:DT.Support@tn.gov).

### 5.3 Final Checks

As a final check, districts should ensure they can answer all of the following questions affirmatively before the Phase II deadline.

1. Did your district submit completion information for all summer graduates and verify that the information loaded into the Cohort application?
2. Did your district submit withdrawal information for all students who withdrew since the last week of Phase I **only** and verify that the information loaded into the Cohort application?
3. Did your district submit appeals for applicable students following the format of the appeals guidance documents?

## Section 6: Phases III and IV

### 6.1 Required Actions

During Phase III, districts can view their preliminary graduation rates. During this phase of the process, districts should review and verify their preliminary graduation rates. Districts that wish to calculate their preliminary graduation rates may do so following the steps in [section 5.1](#).

During Phase III, districts should also review the appeals response letters sent to the directors of schools for districts that submitted appeals. These letters detail the department's appeals decisions as well as provide process recommendations for ensuring that districts' graduation rate data are as accurate as possible.

### 6.2 Final Checks

As a final check, districts should ensure they can answer all of the following questions affirmatively before the Phase III deadline.

1. Did your district submit appeals for applicable students (i.e., students withdrawing since the last week of Phase I and summer graduates) following the format of the appeals guidance documents?
2. If your district submitted appeals, did your district review and retain the appeals response letter sent to your director of schools?

### 6.3 Phase IV

Phase IV serves the purpose of a public release of the finalized cohort rates. After the Phase III deadline, and once data are reported publically, all data are final.

## Section 7: Conclusion

We hope this guide helps navigate the graduation cohort process. Please feel free to provide feedback on this document or to note any additional resources that would help your district. Thank you for your continuing efforts to ensure that your districts' graduation rate data are as accurate as possible.