



Department of  
**Education**

# 2020 Graduation Cohort Appeals Guidance

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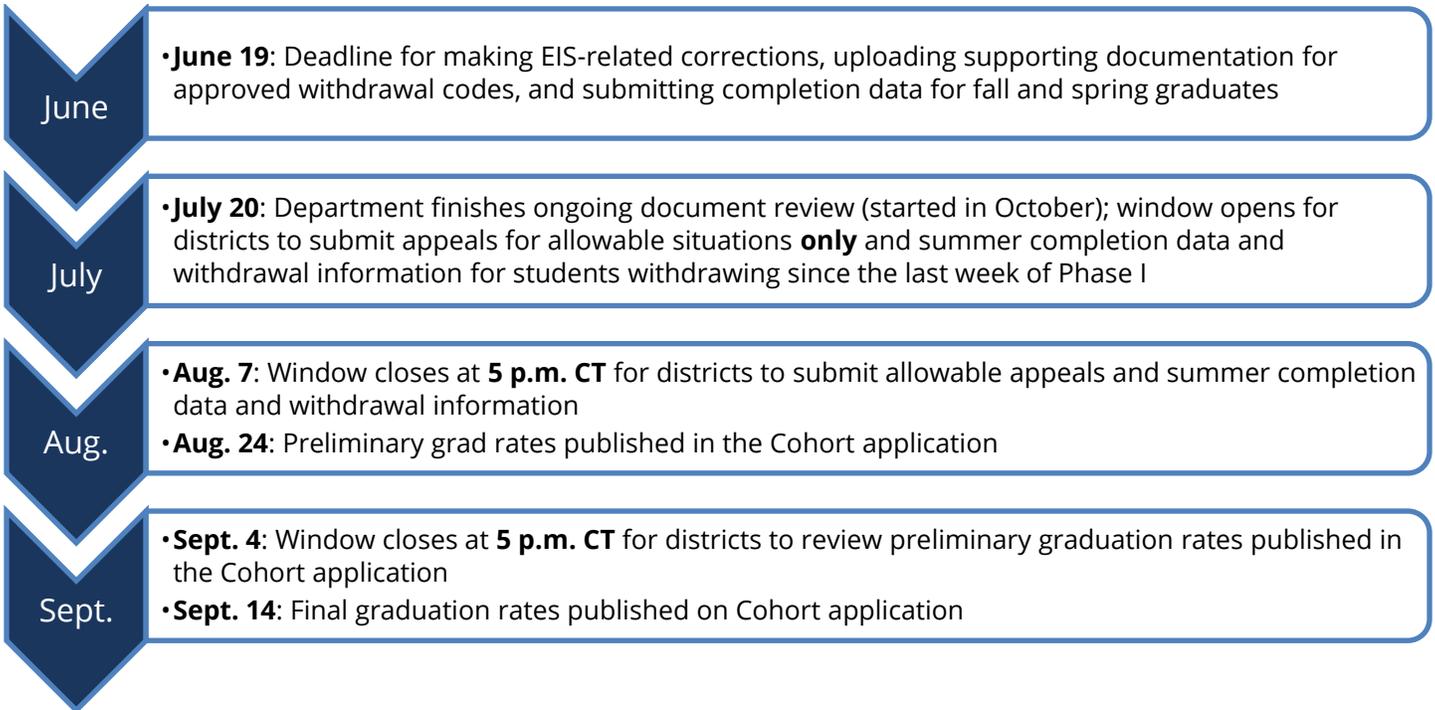
## Section 1: Overview

The appeals process allows districts to resolve issues related to graduation cohort calculations within state and federal guidelines. This document explains what, how, and when districts may appeal. Districts must correct all non-appealable issues according to the timeline in [section 2](#).

## Section 2: Cohort Process Timeline

The 2018-19 cohort appeals window will **begin on Jul. 20** and will **conclude at 5 p.m. CT on Aug. 7**. Districts **may not** submit cohort appeals outside of the window. Detailed instructions for submitting appeals are posted on the Cohort application.

The timeline below outlines important dates in the cohort process.



## Section 3: Cohort Appeals Parameters

### 3.1 Appealable and Non-Appealable Situations

Districts may submit appeals for the situations below.

Appealable cohort issues:

- Department Errors
  - The district has **written confirmation of approval** that the department committed to making a cohort update but did not do so (e.g., moving students from the current cohort to next year's cohort).
  - The district's EIS extracts failed to process **before** the submission deadline.
  - The department denied documentation that meets the criteria in the [2020 Graduation Cohort Protocol](#) for students withdrawn with code 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, or 17.
- Special Circumstances
  - The district has documentation<sup>1</sup> that a student who was remanded to jail or prison received an on-time regular diploma.
  - The district has documentation that a student withdrew directly to a home school in another Tennessee district. The district should submit a copy of the signed Intent to Home School form on file in the receiving district.
  - The district has documentation that a student who withdrew directly to the adult or alternative high school of another Tennessee district received an on-time regular education diploma.<sup>2</sup>
  - The district has documentation that a student who withdrew to Job Corps received an on-time regular education diploma.
  - The district has documentation that a student who was enrolled for less than 60 days of the most recent school year should be reassigned to the high school at which the student was enrolled for the greatest proportion of school days in grades 9–12.
    - [TCA §49-1-601](#) requires the department to count these students in the cohort of the school and district in which the student was enrolled for the greatest proportion of days during high school.<sup>3</sup>

Non-appealable cohort issues:

- The district did not upload documentation before the deadline. The department will deny requests to review documentation that was submitted for the first time during the appeals window.
- The district did not enter required completion data before the deadline.
- The district did not correct inaccurate data elements (e.g., withdrawal code, race/ethnicity, year entered grade 9, economically disadvantaged, etc.) before the deadline.

### 3.2 Common Cohort Scenarios and Department Guidance

The following page details common cohort scenarios and provides guidance for resolving them.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the following page for more information about official documentation.

<sup>2</sup> Adult high schools and alternative high schools do not have official cohorts.

<sup>3</sup> Such students may only be moved during the appeals process. Consequently, preliminary graduation rates released on Aug. 26 may include students that did not appear in districts' cohorts as of the June 14 deadline, as required by state law. The department will send notifications to any districts affected by such changes.

Scenario	Guidance
The department did not apply an approved cohort change request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is documentation (e.g., email correspondence, cohort change request submission, etc.) that the department committed to making the update.</li> </ul>
The district's EIS extracts failed to process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is evidence that the extract failed <b>before</b> the deadline.</li> <li>A screenshot of the extract submission error message, including the date and time stamp, may be used to document the error.</li> </ul>
The department denied documentation for students withdrawn via code 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, or 17.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal <b>only if</b> there is evidence that the documentation satisfies the guidelines in the <a href="#">2020 Graduation Cohort Protocol</a>.</li> </ul>
The student was remanded to jail or prison.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is official documentation<sup>4</sup> from the jail or prison that the student earned an on-time regular diploma.</li> <li>The student counts as a dropout if there is no official documentation.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to a home school in another Tennessee district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if it has a copy of the official Intent to Home School form signed by the parent or guardian.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to an adult high school in the same district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student counts as a dropout unless she/he earns an on-time regular diploma, in which case the district should re-enroll the student in her/his former regular high school and submit corresponding completion data to EIS.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to an adult high school in another Tennessee district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is official documentation that the student earned an on-time regular diploma.</li> <li>The student counts as a dropout if there is no official documentation.</li> </ul>
The student was remanded to an alternative school in the same district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student counts as a dropout unless she/he earns an on-time regular diploma, in which case the district should re-enroll the student in her/his former regular high school and submit corresponding completion data to EIS.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to an alternative high school in another Tennessee district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is official documentation that the student earned an on-time regular diploma.</li> <li>The student counts as a dropout if there is no official documentation.</li> </ul>
The student transferred to another district in TN and the receiving district never enrolled the student (and may or may not have requested corresponding student records).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student counts as a dropout.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to Job Corps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if there is official documentation that the student earned an on-time regular diploma.</li> <li>The student counts as a dropout if there is no official documentation.</li> </ul>
The student withdrew to a GED program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student counts as a dropout.</li> </ul>
The student was enrolled less than 60 days in the most recent year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The district may appeal if the student was enrolled in another district for a greater proportion of days in grades 9–12.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> A copy of one of the following may serve as official documentation: 1) Student's official diploma, 2) Letter on official letterhead from the corresponding school/program/facility reflecting the date the student received a regular education diploma, or 3) Student's official transcript reflecting the date the student received a regular education diploma

## Section 4: Federal Graduation Rate Guidelines

The department calculates four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates based on the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The law in its entirety is available [here](#).<sup>5</sup>

### **How are four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates calculated?**

Divide the number of students who earn a regular diploma<sup>6</sup> by the total number of students in the cohort to calculate four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates.

### **Which students form the cohort?**

The cohort of students is “the number of students who form the original cohort of entering first-time students in grade 9 enrolled in the high school no later than the date by which student membership data must be collected annually...adjusted by—(I) adding the students who joined that cohort, after the date of the determination of the original cohort; and (II) subtracting only those students who left that cohort, after the date of the determination of the original cohort...”

### **Which students may be “removed” from a cohort?**

“To remove a student from a cohort, a school or local education agency shall require documentation, or obtain documentation from the State educational agency, to confirm that the student has transferred out, emigrated to another country, or transferred to a prison or juvenile facility, or is deceased.”

### **What is the definition of a “transfer”?**

“[T]he term ‘transferred out’ means that a student, as confirmed by the high school or local education agency...has transferred to—(I) another school from which the student is expected to receive a regular high school diploma; or (II) another educational program from which the student is expected to receive a regular high school diploma or an alternate diploma...”

### **Why must districts submit documentation for each withdrawn student?**

“The confirmation of a student’s transfer to another school or educational program...requires documentation of such transfer from the receiving school or program in which the student enrolled...A student who was enrolled in a high school, but for whom there is no confirmation of the student having transferred out, shall remain in the adjusted cohort.”

### **Can students who earn GEDs be removed or can students be moved to later cohorts?**

“[A] student who is retained in grade or who is enrolled in a program leading to a general equivalency diploma, or other alternative educational program that does not issue or provide credit toward the issuance of a regular high school diploma, shall not be considered transferred out and shall remain in the adjusted cohort.”

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<sup>5</sup> The sections relating to graduation rates can be found on pages 395–397 of the linked document.

<sup>6</sup> Federal law allows students who earn alternate diplomas and take the alternate assessment to count as graduates. However, Tennessee does not have a diploma that meets the federal criteria for an alternate diploma. As such, no students can count as alternate diploma graduates for the 2016-17 school year.

## 4.1 Alternate Academic Diploma

ESSA allows students who earn alternate diplomas and take the alternate assessment to count as graduates. The department has worked with the State Board of Education to develop an alternate diploma that meets the criteria of the law. Beginning in 2018, students may begin working toward this alternate diploma by participating in the alternate assessment and meeting graduation criteria. These students would be expected to graduate in 2021.

## Section 5: Frequently Asked Questions

### **Who is granted access to the Cohort application, and where can I access the Cohort application?**

Only district-level (central office) employees whose roles include graduation cohort-related responsibilities are eligible for access to the Cohort application. Eligible personnel can access the Cohort application via Single Sign On ([SSO](#)).

### **How is the graduation rate calculated?**

The four-year graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduate within four years and a summer with a regular education high school diploma by the number of students who form the cohort for that graduating class, which does not include any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or pass away). Please see [section 4](#) for more details.

### **Under what circumstances may a district submit an appeal?**

Please see [section 3](#) for appeals parameters.

### **What is the process for submitting an appeal?**

Please reference the [Appeals Submission Instructions](#) for details.

### **What is the deadline for submitting an appeal?**

Aug. 7, 2020 is the deadline for submitting district appeals.

### **If the department denies a district cohort appeal, may the district appeal the denial?**

No, the department's appeals decisions are final.

### **To whom should districts address any questions or concerns relating to graduation rates or the Cohort application?**

Districts should submit all cohort-related inquiries to [TNEducation@tn.gov](mailto:TNEducation@tn.gov).