

Colorado Department of Education's Graduation Rate Amendment Request Proposal

The Colorado Department of Education seeks to use four-year, five-year and six-year graduation rates for AYP accountability purposes. Colorado is dedicated to graduating students ready for postsecondary and workforce success, whether it takes four years, six years or longer. We know that for many students, especially those with the greatest challenges, the traditional four-year trajectory does not provide adequate time for College and Career Readiness (CCR). We encourage schools and districts to create pathways for all students to reach CCR, knowing that for many students they might extend past four years. Thus, our accountability system should reflect these values and not create disincentives for keeping students in school beyond four years, in order that all students may reach a graduation goal.

Specifically, for AYP calculations:

1. Districts, schools and disaggregated groups will be accountable for meeting the four-year on-time target: 63% or increasing their graduation rate by 2% points from the prior year's four-year on-time rate. The four-year on-time goal for Colorado is 80%.
2. Any districts, schools or disaggregated groups not able to meet the above target can meet the five-year target of 65%, in order to make AYP.
3. If districts, schools or disaggregated groups are not able to meet the four-year or five-year targets, they will need to meet the six-year target of 67% in order to make AYP.

All districts, schools and disaggregated groups that meet the minimum N of 30 will be required to meet one of the above targets, in order to make AYP.

This proposal has been developed with staff across the Colorado Department of Education, including staff in the following offices:

- Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
- Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement
- Language, Culture and Equity
- Performance and Policy
- Information Management Services
- Federal Programs Administration
- Learning Services and Results- Health and Wellness

Additionally, the NCLB Committee of Practitioners has discussed and approved this amendment request.

Data Overview

CDE has just completed the calculations on the four-year on-time graduation rate. The department was able to run the formula on previous years' data in order to get a sense of trends in graduation rates.

	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate
2009-10	72.4%
2008-09	70.7%
2007-08	70.2%

Overall, we are seeing increases in the percent of students graduating based on the four-year on-time graduation rate from 2007-08 to 2009-10. Additionally, we see the same basic trend when we disaggregate by race/ethnicity. We are seeing greater increases for the groups of students who are furthest away from meeting graduation rate goals, Hispanic and Black, specifically. Native American students are showing a contradictory trend that the state is investigating. However, there were 873 Native American students (1.4%) in the 2009-2010 graduation cohort and the trend did not hold true when looking at four- to five- to six-year rates.

	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate White Students	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate Hispanic Students	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate Native American Students	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate Asian Students	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate Black Students
2009-10	80.2%	55.5%	50.1%	82.4%	63.7%
2008-09	79.1%	51.8%	51.1%	81.8%	59.3%
2007-08	79.1%	49.2%	52.5%	80.1%	57.9%

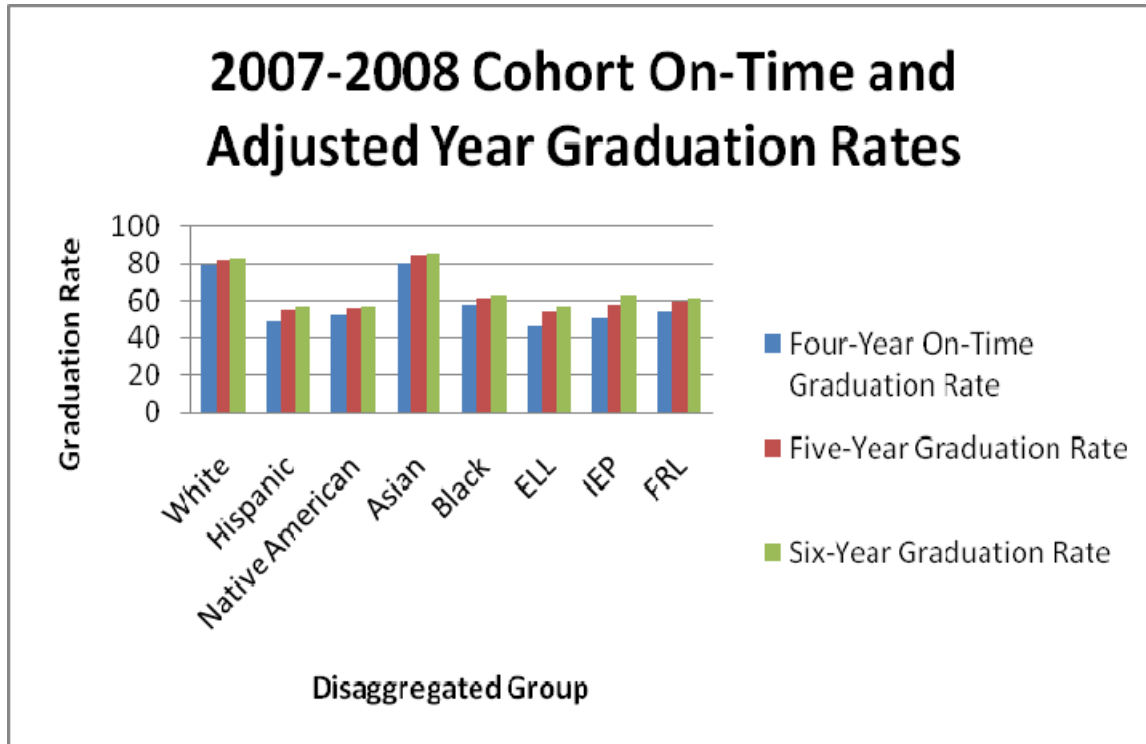
Additionally, when we look at the graduation rates for students with unique learning challenges- English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students, we see gains in four-year on-time graduation rates from 2007-08 to 2009-10.

	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate
	English Language Learners	Students with Disabilities	Economically Disadvantaged
2009-10	49.2%	52.0%	58.9%
2008-09	47.1%	50.5%	55.3%
2007-08	46.2%	50.5%	54%

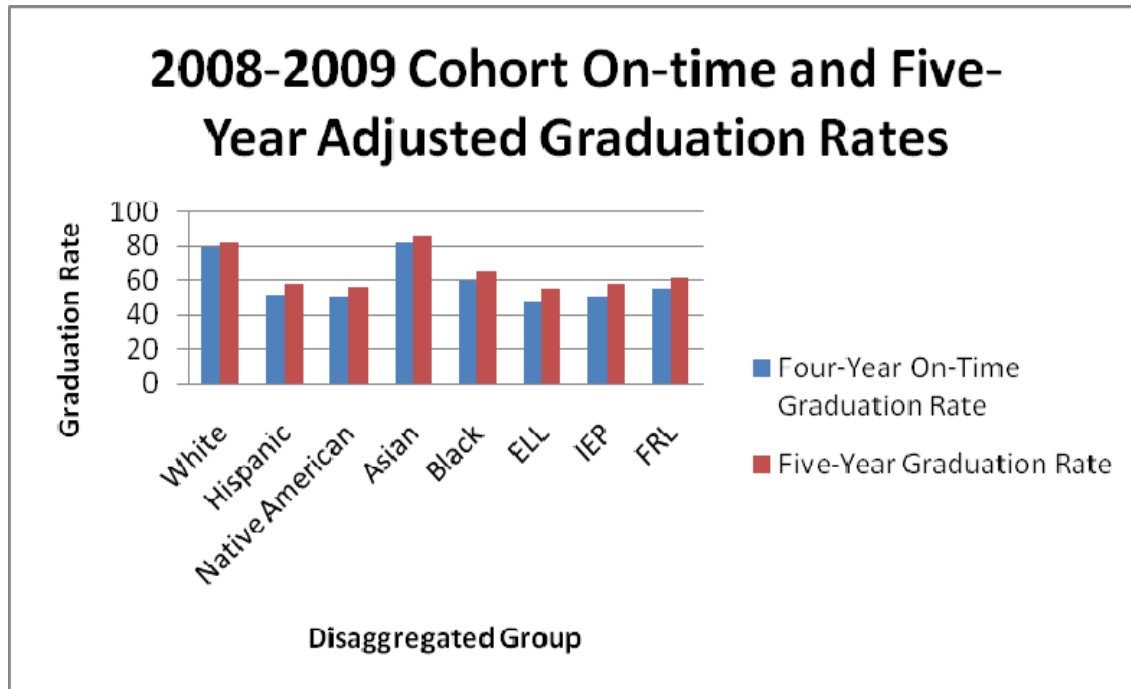
Not only do we show increasing four-year on-time graduation rates from 2007-08 to 2009-10, but we also are graduating more students overall, and for all disaggregated groups when we look at the four-year, five-year and six-year rates. Since we are seeing increases in the graduation rate each year, we needed to look at a single cohort's four-year, five-year and six-year rates, in order to see the trends over time. The 2007-2008 cohort is the most recent year for which we have four-year, five-year and six-year rates available. When looking overall, we see that the overall graduation rate increased 4.5% points by six years.

	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate	Five-Year Graduation Rate	Six-Year Graduation Rate
2007-08	70.2%	73.7%	74.7%

As the chart below shows, increases occur for all disaggregated groups when looking from the four-year, five-year to six-year rates. Although, the chart also shows the large disparities in graduation rates we see for different student groups in Colorado.



While we only have two years of data, the four-year and five-year rates, for the 2008-09 cohort, the same pattern can be seen.



The state has considerable work ahead in order to meet our 80% graduation rate goal for all groups of students. However, the trends we see in the data- both the four-year rate over time, and the adjusted rates for the same cohort, are hopeful.

Rationale- Overview

While a student's demographic group does not define their outcomes, we know students with certain characteristics might, as a general rule, need more time to graduate. **Students with disabilities** have unique learning challenges. Allowing them more time to meet achievement requirements is a common strategy in many IEPs. **English language learners** also have the additional challenge of mastering English while also mastering course content. English language learners who enter U.S. schools later in their school careers with little English fluency and in some cases little educational background, especially benefit from additional years in high school to meet CCR goals. Likewise, **students experiencing poverty**, who must overcome transience and the emotional stress of their unique situations can benefit from additional time in school to reach CCR. For mobile students, including **homeless students**, research from the College of William and Mary shows that it takes students an average of four to six months to academically recover for each school move during the academic year. Hence, the higher rate of mobility has a dramatic impact on student achievement, credit accrual and on-time advancement for graduation. As the data above showed, with additional time, more students do graduate from high school.

Additionally, Colorado recently revised the concurrent enrollment legislation to broaden access to and improve the quality of concurrent enrollment programs statewide. The new Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act of 2009, allows students to be enrolled in a local education agency and in an institute of

higher education or career and technical courses simultaneously. The goal is to enroll students from low-income and traditionally underserved populations into postsecondary education and reduce the state’s drop-out rate. Additionally, the legislation helps high schools provide the necessary infrastructure for concurrent enrollment to motivate young people to take seriously the need to become postsecondary and workforce ready and to accelerate students’ progress toward a postsecondary degree. These programs will never graduate students in four years, as they are structured around a five-year program. However, Colorado believes strongly that Concurrent Enrollment will benefit students and the state.

Colorado needs to ensure that its accountability system is aligned with our values for CCR education for all students, by using extended-year graduation rates. It is extremely important that schools and districts have incentives to continue working with students in their fifth and sixth years so that they can meet the goal of graduating. We wouldn’t want to put accountability measures in place that do not recognize this important work.

Rationale- Students with Disabilities

Not only does it make sense to allow students with disabilities to take additional time to graduate from high school, if necessary; it is legislated. Specifically, 34 CFR §300.101 says:

- (a) *General.* A free appropriate public education must be available to all children residing in the State between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive, including children with disabilities...

Additionally, the Preamble to the IDEA (2004) says:

The calculation of graduation rates under the ESEA for AYP purposes (34 CFR 200.19(a)(1)(i)) does not alter the exception to FAPE provisions in § 300.102(a)(3) for children with disabilities who graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma, but not in the standard number of years. The public agency must make FAPE available until age 21 or the age limit established by State law, even though the child would not be included as graduating for AYP purposes under the ESEA. In practice, though, there is no conflict between the Act and the ESEA, as the Department interprets the ESEA title I regulations to permit States to propose a method for accurately accounting for students who legitimately take longer than the standard number of years to graduate.

Based on Colorado’s four-year on-time graduation rate calculations, the following are the overall state graduation rates for students with disabilities.

Four-year On-time Graduation Rate	Class of 2007-08	Class of 2008-09	Class of 2009-10
Students with disabilities	50.5%	50.5%	52%

This outcome data is saddening, as students with disabilities had a 20% point lower graduation rate than the overall rate for the state of Colorado. However, when we look at the additional students who graduate in five or six years, we see that more students gain the opportunities that are included with a high school diploma. For the 2007-08 cohort, the graduation rate increased 12.3% points from the four-year to the six-year rate.

Students with Disabilities	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate	Five-Year Graduation Rate	Six-Year Graduation Rate
2009-10	52.0%		
2008-09	50.5%	58.2%	
2007-08	50.5%	58.1%	62.8%

When you dig into it and see the ages of the graduates, we see how important it is to include five-year and six-year rates for accountability. Of students with disabilities who graduated from Colorado schools, on average, about 22 percent did so at age 19 and beyond, according to the CDE Special Education End-of-Year data collection. While age and grade do not align exactly, the data below support the four-, five-, and six-year rate data presented above. When given more time to complete their education, many additional students with disabilities graduate.

Percent of graduating students with IEPs	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Age 18 and younger	78.6%	78.4%	77.2%
Age 19-21	21.4%	21.6%	22.8%
19 year olds	9.7%	10.0%	11.2%
20 year olds	9.7%	9.0%	9.2%
21 year olds	2.1%	2.6%	2.4%

As a result, CDE seeks an accountability system that reflects the values of these laws, of graduating all students college and career ready, regardless of timeframe, by allowing the use of five or six-year graduation rates.

Rationale- English Language Learners

As with students with disabilities, federal legislation and guidance supports an extended education time frame for English language learners. The US Department of Education defines LEP students in Title 9 of ESEA and through the EDFacts Workbook as students:

(A) who are ages 3 through 21;

(D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individuals (who are denied i or ii or iii)

(i) the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement on state assessments described in section 1111(b)(3);

(ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or

(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.

By definition, these students need additional time to gain English proficiency and content proficiency. When looking at the on-time graduation rate for English language learners (ELLs), although the four-year on-time rate is rising, it is still less than 50%. For the 2007-08 cohort, the graduation rate for ELLs increased 10.5% points with the two additional years. In the 2008-09 cohort, the graduation rate for ELLs increased 8.2% points in just one additional year.

	Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rate ELL	Five-Year Graduation Rate ELL	Six-Year Graduation Rate ELL
2009-10	49.2%		
2008-09	47.1%	55.3%	
2007-08	46.2%	54.6%	56.7%

English language learners made up 8.45% of the 2009-10 graduation base count. Clearly, our accountability system needs to recognize the time needed for ELLs to graduate, and encourage schools and districts to work with students for more than four years, if necessary, to make this happen.

Rationale- Expanded Pathways to Higher Education

In order to fulfill the Colorado Promise of doubling the number of postsecondary degrees earned by Coloradans and reducing by half the number of students who drop out of high school, Colorado recently created the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act of 2009. The Act allows a student to be simultaneously enrolled in a local education agency and an institute of higher education or career and technical courses. The Act also created the “5th year” Accelerating Students through Concurrent ENrollment (**ASCENT**) program for students retained by the high school for postsecondary instruction beyond the senior year. Before ASCENT program enrollment, the students must have completed or must be on schedule to complete at least twelve credit hours of postsecondary course work prior to the completion of his or her twelfth-grade year. Additionally, the postsecondary course work must align with his or her postsecondary goals recorded in the individualized career and academic plan. The alignment between coursework and his or her future plans helps decrease the number of students who do not complete high school as well as increases the number of educational pathways available to students.

The ASCENT programs will never graduate students in four years, as they are structured around a five-year program. However, Colorado believes strongly that the ASCENT program will benefit outcomes for students and the state. As shown in the table below, the ASCENT program is quickly becoming a valued option for students.

Projected Participants to Actual Enrollment for the ASCENT Program

Projected ASCENT Participants 2011-12 Academic School Year	Actual ASCENT Enrollment 2010-11 Academic School Year
2,481	98

Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, districts were able to participate in the ASCENT program. The ASCENT program permits eligible students to participate in a “5th year” of high school while concurrently enrolled in high school and postsecondary course work. Districts with ASCENT students will receive a fixed amount of “per-pupil operating revenue.” ASCENT participants shall not be considered high school graduates until they have completed their participation in the ASCENT program and any remaining graduation requirements.

During the spring of 2011, the Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board will examine the possibility of creating an option for students to participate in the ASCENT program for a sixth year through a waiver process, if they:

- a. Were so designated in the year directly following the year in which they were enrolled in the twelfth grade of a local education provider;

- b. Require fifteen or fewer credit hours of postsecondary course work to achieve a postsecondary credential; and
- c. Are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch pursuant to the federal “National School Lunch Act”, 42 U.S.C. sec. 1751 et seq.

Conclusion

In Colorado, we recently have revised our state accountability system to ensure that the measures and targets are aligned with the outcomes we most value. In light of that work, it is crucial that our graduation rate measures and targets are aligned with what we value for students. The state is working toward increasing our graduation rates, re-engaging students, decreasing our drop-out rates, and encouraging postsecondary education. The state accountability system will also incorporate four-year, five-year, and six-year graduation rates. We do not want to limit students from reaching our goal of CCR by requiring unrealistic deadlines.

By including optional five- and six-year graduation rate targets into AYP determinations, we can ensure that our accountability system is aligned with the best outcomes for students and does not create any disincentives for districts and schools to re-engage students.

We look forward to working with ED on this proposal to create meaningful graduation rate accountability for our districts and schools. If additional information or data are needed from the state, please contact Alyssa Pearson (pearson_a@cde.state.co.us).