Changes to the Calculation of the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires States to annually calculate and publish the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) at the subgroup, school, district, and state level. The ESSA regulations require that all students included in the calculation’s numerator have met the same graduation requirements. New Jersey’s current graduation assessment requirements require all graduates to either demonstrate proficiency on the statewide assessment, meet the designated cut score on the alternate assessment, or demonstrate proficiency through Portfolio Appeals. To calculate the ACGR, the ESSA divides the number of students in the cohort who received a diploma aligned with state standards by the total of all students in the adjusted cohort:

\[
\frac{\text{Numerator}}{\text{Denominator}} = \text{ACGR}
\]

- **Numerator**: Students in the Cohort who Received a Diploma Aligned with State Standards
- **Denominator**: All Students in the Adjusted Cohort

In accordance with New Jersey regulations, students who meet all of the credit, curriculum, and attendance requirements and who demonstrate competency by meeting the proficiency score on the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) or substitute competency such as the SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB, or through the Portfolio Appeals Process receive a State-endorsed diploma.

**Current Practices and Requirements for Students with Disabilities**

Under current practice and as allowed by existing State regulations, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team of a student with a disability may provide specific accommodations and modifications to a student with a disability who participates in the Statewide assessment. An IEP team may also determine that a student with a significant intellectual disability who meets specific eligibility criteria should participate in the alternative assessment for students with disabilities, which in New Jersey is the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Assessment. Finally, state regulations also allow a student’s IEP team may determine that the student should be exempt from demonstrating proficiency on a Statewide or districtwide assessment and the student is able to satisfy the graduation assessment requirements by meeting alternate requirements specified in their IEP. Additionally, under New Jersey State regulations, in the appropriate circumstance, a student’s IEP team may waive the statewide graduation course requirements and/or locally established attendance requirements necessary for graduation. Students with disabilities who are exempted from participating in a Statewide or districtwide assessment, meeting course requirements or meeting locally established attendance requirements have historically received a State-endorsed diploma.

**Changes in the ACGR Calculation**

In 2019, the United States Department of Education (USED) conducted a Performance Review of New Jersey’s Title Programs under the ESSA. The final report, issued by the USED in April 2020, concluded that students with disabilities who receive a high school diploma, but have not yet met the State’s graduation assessment, course, or attendance requirements (i.e. because those requirements were specifically waived in the student’s IEP), may not be included in the numerator when calculating the ACGR. While these students will continue to receive a State-endorsed diploma, beginning with the Class of 2021, students with disabilities who have been exempted from meeting either the course requirements or the attendance requirements will not be included in the numerator when calculating the ACGR. Additionally, under Executive Order No. 214 (Murphy, 2021), all graduation assessment requirements were waived for 2021 graduates so beginning with the Class of 2022, students who do not meet the graduation assessment, course, or attendance requirements but instead meet alternate requirements in their IEPs will not be included in the numerator when calculating the ACGR.

Importantly, please note that USED’s findings only modify how NJDOE calculates graduation rates for federal reporting, they do not affect requirements to earn a diploma or the type of diploma that the State awards to
Students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who meet the graduation assessment requirement by receiving a proficient score on the NJSLA or substitute competency or demonstrate proficiency through the Portfolio Appeals Process will be included in the numerator when calculating the 2022 ACGR. For additional details, please see the “Additional Details: Calculation of the ACGR” table below.

To assist districts with planning to address the change to the ACGR calculation, the NJDOE reminds districts that students with disabilities who participate in the NJSLA should continue to be provided supports and interventions to prepare them for the assessment. Students who do not receive a proficient score on the NJSLA should be encouraged to attempt to meet the graduation assessment requirement through participation in substitute competency tests (e.g., SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB) or through using the Portfolio Appeals Process. It is the role of the student’s IEP team to specifically address the graduation requirements the student must meet in order to graduate.

Accordingly, student IEP teams should reserve the exemption of the statewide assessment graduation requirement for students with significant intellectual disabilities and for students with disabilities who have made repeated unsuccessful attempts to meet statewide assessment requirements through the NJSLA, a substitute competency test, or the Portfolio Appeals Process. Districts are encouraged to begin to convene meetings of the student’s IEP team, which includes the student, and the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) to discuss the student’s specific graduation requirements for graduation in the Class of 2022.

**Stakeholder Outreach, Parent Information Sessions, and District Training Opportunities**

In the coming months the NJDOE will conduct a series of stakeholder outreach events, including parent information sessions, and district training opportunities. Additional guidance concerning changes to district level data reported and collected in the NJSMART system will be forthcoming. Staff from the NJDOE Office of Special Education and the Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution are available as resources to support districts, educators, and families. More information is available on the NJDOE [Special Education webpage](#).

### Additional Details: Calculation of the ACGR

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Included in the Current Numerator</th>
<th>Updated Numerator</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students whose IEPs waive the local attendance requirements</td>
<td>Will <strong>not</strong> be included in the numerator beginning with the class of 2021</td>
<td>Not currently collected, will be added to the NJSMART End of Year collection for 2020-2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students whose IEPs waive the course credit requirements</td>
<td>Will <strong>not</strong> be included in the numerator beginning with the class of 2021</td>
<td>Not currently collected, will be added to the NJSMART End of Year collection for 2020-2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students whose IEPs waive the requirement to pass the State assessment <strong>and the district reports them as meeting either the ELA or Mathematics graduation assessment requirements through “Alternate requirements specific in IEP” in NJSMART</strong></td>
<td>• Will not be included in the numerator beginning with the class of 2022 (this will begin with the class of 2022 because under Executive Order No. 214 (Murphy) (2021), all state graduation assessment requirements were waived for all 2021 graduates.</td>
<td>• This information is currently collected in NJSMART. Districts report how each student met the ELA and Mathematics graduation assessment requirements. Districts can either indicate which assessment was passed, whether the student used a portfolio appeal, or if the student met “Alternate requirements specific in IEP” in NJSMART.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If a student with an IEP that waives the</td>
<td>• All students whose IEPs waive the requirement to</td>
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Included in the Current Numerator | Updated Numerator | Data Collection
--- | --- | ---
assessment requirement sits for the assessment and passes, the district should report the student using the pathway corresponding to the assessment that was passed, not through “Alternate requirements specific in IEP.” | pass the State assessment and who are reported as meeting either the ELA or Mathematics graduation assessment requirement through “Alternate requirements specific in IEP” in NJSMART will be removed from the numerator. This includes any such students who participated in the State graduation proficiency test, a substitute competency test, or portfolio appeals, even if the student demonstrated proficiency through those means. Accordingly, student IEP teams should reserve the exemption of the statewide assessment graduation requirement for students with significant intellectual disabilities and for students with disabilities who have made repeated unsuccessful attempts to meet statewide assessment requirements through the NJSLA, a substitute competency or the Portfolio Appeals Process. | specific in IEP.”

- The Graduation Pathways entered into NJSMART for each student will be used for the ACGR calculation. The Department does not override the data submitted by the districts.
- Districts have an opportunity to appeal graduation data, including pathway information, in September.