Date: September 11, 2024

To: Local Educational Agency Leads

Route To: School Business Administrators, Web User Administrators, Principals and School Leads

From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
              Division of Educational Services

Deadline: October 4, 2024 5 p.m.

Action Required: Review 2024 Graduation Data and Submit Graduation Appeals

Beginning Monday, September 16, local educational agencies (LEAs) can view preliminary graduation rates based on the NJ SMART SID Management snapshot captured on August 30, 2024. LEAs can submit graduation appeals to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in NJ SMART starting on September 16. All appeals and any required documentation must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Friday, October 4, 2024.

SID Management is the management system that establishes students' unique identification numbers, compiles demographic data, and tracks graduation data and the pathways students use to meet the graduation assessment requirements.

LEA graduation rates, which include four-year, five-year, and six-year rates, will be reported in the 2023-2024 School Performance Reports which will be released in spring 2025. For accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), graduation rates from the prior year are used, so the 2024 graduation rates will be included in the ESSA Accountability Profiles in fall 2025. The 2024 ESSA Accountability Profiles and the 2023-2024 ESSA accountability process will use the finalized 2023 graduation rates from fall 2023.

Graduation Appeals Process
The graduation appeals process provides LEAs a final opportunity to resolve issues due to incorrect or missing information in their graduation data before it is finalized and used for reporting and accountability purposes. The Graduation Appeals User Guide provides details on the process, reasons for appeals, how to identify issues and fix errors, and the required documentation for each type of appeal. The Graduation FAQs answer common questions about the appeals process. The Graduation Data Quality Checklist can help LEAs review their graduation data and determine if there are errors that need to be corrected during the appeals process.

Key actions
Starting on September 16, LEAs should take the following steps to ensure accurate school and district graduation rates:

1. Ensure all graduation data is reported correctly by making sure that:
   - All students who graduated by August 30, 2024, are reported as graduated with the correct school exit date;
   - All students who have transferred out of the district have the appropriate exit withdrawal code; and
   - The IEP Graduation Course Requirement and IEP Graduation Attendance fields are coded correctly to reflect whether students with disabilities did not meet course and/or attendance requirements because of modification or exemptions in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

2. Use the NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile district report to:
   - Review cohort 2024 four-year, cohort 2023 five-year, and cohort 2022 six-year graduation rates;

- Check the graduation rates and data for each school and the overall district;
- Ensure that all students have the correct cohort, cohort status, and accountable school and district;
- Review both the state and federal versions of the graduation rates;
- Review students in the Transfer Out – Unverified category to determine if students have the correct exit withdrawal code or if they were reported by another district using a different state identification number, which may require a SID merge.

3. Submit graduation appeals by 5 p.m. EST on October 4, 2024 and ensure that:
    - Data is corrected in NJ SMART SID Management prior to filing an appeal, where necessary;
    - Appeals include clear explanations and appropriate documentation; and
    - Appeals are submitted as early as possible during the appeals period and appeal statuses are monitored regularly during the appeals period.
        - The NJDOE will be reviewing appeals on a roiling basis and may request additional information to review an appeal.

If an LEA needs to appeal data to correct the Cohort 2023 4-year or Cohort 2022 5-year graduation rates that were finalized in fall 2023 and will be used for accountability for the 2023-2024 school year, contact gradappeals@doe.nj.gov after submitting your appeals to ensure that approved appeals are incorporated into the graduation data that will be used in the 2023-2024 Accountability Profiles.

Final Graduation Data
The NJDOE will review all appeals that have been submitted by 5 p.m. on October 4, 2024 and make final decisions by mid-October. Districts can review the status of appeals in NJ SMART on the Graduation Appeals page. If the NJDOE needs additional information about an appeal, districts may receive an email notifying them to review the appeal in NJ SMART.

Final graduation rate data reflecting all approved graduation appeals will be available at the end of November in NJ SMART District Reports. Districts will be notified by NJ SMART when the data is available.

Graduation Rate Reporting and Accountability
The NJDOE calculates and reports two versions of graduation rates:
- **State version**: Includes all students who earn a state-endorsed diploma as graduates (in the numerator) in the calculation.
- **Federal version**: Includes only students who earned a state-endorsed diploma and met the state course, local attendance, and, depending on the year of graduation, assessment graduation requirements; pursuant to federal rules, the federal version does not include students with disabilities who receive a state-endorsed diploma but instead met alternate requirements specified in their IEPs.

State regulations allow the IEP team of a student with disabilities to exempt a student from graduation requirements or modify the requirements that a student must meet to graduate. ESSA does not allow students who have not met the state's graduation assessment, course, or attendance requirements because of a modification or exemption in the student's IEP to be included as graduates in the graduation rates used for federal reporting and accountability. As such, students with disabilities who earn a state-endorsed diploma but have not met all the graduation requirements because of modifications or exemptions in their IEPs are counted as graduates in the state version of the graduation rate but are not counted as graduates in the federal version of the graduation rate. The adjusted cohort (denominator) is the same for both the state and federal versions of the graduation rate.

The NJDOE uses the IEP Graduation Course Requirement and IEP Graduation Attendance fields in SID Management to identify students with disabilities who did not meet the state course and/or local attendance requirements, respectively. The ELA and Math Graduation Pathway Indicator fields in SID Management are used

to identify students with disabilities who did not meet the state graduation assessment requirements but instead met alternate requirements specified in their IEPs. If there were any errors in these data fields as of the August 30, 2024 snapshot, LEAs should submit appeals to correct the data by the October 4 appeals deadline.

The NJ SMART High School Graduation Cohort Profile district reports have been updated for 2024 so that LEAs can view both the state and federal versions of the graduation rate in the same report.

Graduation Resources
Several graduation resources are available to support LEAs in reporting graduation data, explaining how graduation rates are calculated, answering frequently asked questions, understanding the appeals process, and describing how to use the associated district reports. These resources include:

- Introduction to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculation in New Jersey
- User Guide to High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile
- NJ SMART Graduation FAQs
- NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide
- Understanding Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates
- School Exit Withdrawal Codes and Graduation Cohort Status Overview
- Graduation Data Quality Checklist
- NJ SMART High School Graduation Training eLearning Video

Additional resources and trainings for NJ SMART submissions are available under Documents for Download and eLearning Videos & Webinars.

Contact Information
Contact the NJ SMART help desk at (800) 254-0295 or njsmart@pcgus.com with any questions about NJ SMART reports or technical issues with the appeals process. Contact gradappeals@doe.nj.gov with any questions about your district's graduation data or the graduation appeals process.

c: Members, State Board of Education
     NJDOE Staff
     Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
     Garden State Coalition of Schools
     NJ LEE Group