FAQ – ESSA Identification for Low Graduation Rate

This resource was developed to support districts and schools in understanding ESSA-Identification for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CS) based on Low Graduation Rate. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the Federal legislation that requires each state to identify all public high schools with graduation rates below 67%. In Colorado, schools identified in this category are identified as *Comprehensive Support - Low Graduation*.

1. What methodology is used for identifying high schools for Comprehensive Support - Low Graduation Rate (CS-Low Grad Rate)?

Beginning in the fall of 2025, only the 7-year graduation rate will be used for identification of schools for CS-Low Grad Rate support and improvement. Until that point, schools were identified based on the 4- and 7-year graduation rates. When the weighted average of the three most recent 7-year graduation rates is below 67%, the high school will be identified for support and improvement as CS-Low Grad Rate.

2. How long are schools identified as CS-Low Grad Rate and how do they exit this category?

Schools will remain CS-Low Grad Rate for at least 3 consecutive years to allow time to implement improvement strategies. Schools that are not re-identified during those 3 years will continue to be eligible for supports and services and will be categorized as "CS - Low Graduation Rate - On Watch" on the list of identified schools. Identified schools will exit when they earn a graduation rate of at least 67% on the average of three most recent 7-year graduation rates at that time and have not been re-identified for 3 consecutive years. For more information, visit the Methods for Identification and Exit Criteria for ESSA Support and Improvement webpage.

Prior to fall 2025, schools exited when either the 4- or 7-year graduation rates were above 67%.

3. Which students are counted in the 4-, 5-, 6-, and 7-year graduation rate?

Graduation Rates are cohort-based calculations, based upon students in a school/district with the same (AYG). The year a student is expected to graduate high school is based upon the year they first begin attending a Colorado public high school. An unchanging AYG is assigned to a student as part of the Student End of Year data collection by adding three years to the school year when the student first begins ninth grade in the state of Colorado. Students with a disruption in their education who enter a Colorado high school for the first time will be included in a cohort based on their most recent educational attainment.

For more information, visit the Graduation/Completion Rate Calculations section of the Graduation/Completion Statistics: Calculation, Definitions and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) webpage.

4. How is the graduation rate calculated in Colorado?

Graduation Rate is calculated as follows: The number of students in the Anticipated Year of Graduation (AYG) cohort receiving a regular diploma divided by the total number of students in the AYG Cohort. Graduation Rates include any students who have already graduated, including those returning to participate in a Postsecondary Program (ASCENT, P-TECH, TREP) or Special Education 18-21 Transition services. When students are returning for Postsecondary Programs or 18-21 Transition services, the graduation date listed on their high school diploma/transcripts will reflect the point they complete their program/services, but students will be counted as graduates in the year in which they meet graduation requirements. Resource: See this video for a more detailed description.

5. What is the completion rate and how is it different from the graduation rate?

CDE defines a graduate as a student who received a regular high school diploma upon completion of location graduation requirements (e.g. course work and assessments) and met Colorado's Graduation Guidelines. CDE defines a completer as a student who graduates with a regular high school diploma, receives a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED), or receives a non-diploma certificate of completion. It is important to note the definition of completer includes graduates. This means the counts and rates associated with completers will always be equal to or greater than the graduation counts and rates.

For more information, visit the Graduation/Completion Rate Calculations section of the Graduation/Completion Statistics: Calculation, Definitions and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) webpage.

6. How are graduation and completion rates used in identifying high schools for improvement?

A. ESSA Identification CS-Low Grad Rate: Per Federal statute, completion rate cannot be used for identifying schools for support and improvement. Beginning in Fall of 2025, a weighted average of the most recent three years of the 7-year graduation rate will be used for ESSA Identification. Prior to that, ESSA identification included both the 4- and 7-year graduation rates. Graduation rates used in ESSA identification are based on the three most recent years available at the time calculations are conducted.

All high schools are included in the identification methodology for low graduation rate. Detailed information on the methodology can be located on CDE's Methods for Identification and Exit Criteria for ESSA Support and Improvement webpage.

B. School Performance Framework - High School
Due to different publication timelines, the graduation rates included in the 2024 performance framework are based on the 2023 graduation statistics published by CDE's Data Services Unit. For the performance frameworks, calculations associated with the 4-, 5-, 6-, and 7-year cohorts are all evaluated to determine the overall rating. For each student group included on the performance framework the graduation rate that is used to determine the rating is the highest of the rates associated with the 4-, 5-, 6-, and 7-year cohorts. The value listed in the 'Best Rate' field indicates which cohort had the highest rate and so was used to determine the rating.

C. School Performance Framework - Alternative Education Campus (AEC)
The best completion rate is used for all AEC frameworks. The best of a 4-, 5-, 6-, or 7-year rate (aggregated over the most recently available three years of data) will be used and the Department has provided approved metrics and cut-points for exceeding, meeting, approaching, and not meeting Alternative Education Campus PWR norms. Graduation is one of the optional measures within the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) indicator. Details of these norms can be found in the [Calculation Guidance for Alternative Education Campuses](#).

7. Our AEC school received a Performance Rating (Green) on the SPF and is also ESSA Identified for Comprehensive Support- Low Graduation Rate. Why does the school have two different ratings?

The SPF and ESSA look at different metrics for school performance identification:

State Identification: The AEC School Performance Framework includes data from four categories (Academic Achievement, Academic Growth, Student Engagement, and Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness) that are combined to calculate an overall rating. Within the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness sections, best-of completion rate aggregated over the most recently available three years of data is a required state measure for all AECs for the and cut points are normed across AECs. In the AEC frameworks, graduation rate is an optional measure. Thus, the state accountability system uses a different metric with different expectations than is used for the ESSA frameworks.

Federal Identification: Under ESSA, all public high schools, including AECs, must be evaluated based on graduation rate. Schools with a graduation rate less than 67% are identified for Comprehensive Support-Low Graduation.

Since the state and federal systems use slightly different measures, this may result in the "performance" rating on SPF and ESSA identification for Comprehensive Support-Low Graduation Rate.

8. Where can I locate my school's graduation and completion rates used in the School Performance Framework?

Graduation and completion rates are updated annually every January, using the prior academic year's data.

The [Colorado Graduation and Completion Rate Dashboard](#) shows the state, district, and school level graduation and completion rates across the state of Colorado each year. Users can use dropdown for data on student groups.

The [District and School Dashboard](#) includes 4-, 5-, 6-, 7-year graduation rates and completion visualizations with state average reference lines.

Note that both dashboards present data by year. The AEC School Performance Framework uses a three year aggregate, so investigating multiple years of data is recommended.

9. Where can I locate my school's graduation rates used in the ESSA identification?

The best resource to view the 7-year graduation rates used in ESSA identification is the school's ESSA Profile which is shared with the LEA via Syncplicity at the beginning of each school year. For support on

accessing the ESSA School Profile, please contact your LEA's ESEA Authorized Representative (or Consolidated Application Authorized Representative).

10. What happens if a high school does not exit CS-Low Grad Rate identification after three years?

ESSA requires "more rigorous State-determined action" in a school identified for CS that does not meet the statewide exit criteria after 3 years. CDE denotes this designation as CS-Y3+ meaning that the school has been identified for more than three years and has not yet met the exit criteria.

ESSA gives flexibility to states to differentiate activities in this category, especially in respect to Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) who are serving children who are returning to education who may be significantly behind on credit. Two convening sessions are held each year, in which the State, District, and School collaborate to determine the action steps to support the school in their improvement. CS-Y3+ are given high priority for state EASI Grants to support evidence-based interventions.

11. If I have additional questions, where can I reach out?

Graduation and Completion Rate: Reagan Ward (ward_r@cde.state.co.us)

State SPF Rating: CDE Support Lead assigned to the district

ESSA Identification: Tina Negley (negley_t@cde.state.co.us) or Anna Rowan (rowan_a@cde.state.co.us)

CS-Y3+ Implications: Sue Miller-Curley (miller-curley_s@cde.state.co.us) or Laura Meushaw (meushaw_l@cde.state.co.us)

Resources:

Graduation Statistics – CDE Webpage

Short Byte: Short Byte: Graduation and Completion Rates and PowerPoint: Graduation and Completion Rates

Webinar: Federal Identification CS Y3+: Understanding Identification and Implications (AECs) and PowerPoint: Federal Identification CS Y3+: Understanding Identification and Implications (AECs)

Webinar: Graduation, Dropout and Completion Rates: Understanding Use for Continuous Improvement and PowerPoint: Graduation, Dropout and Completion Rates: Understanding Use for Continuous Improvement