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## ***New Federal Formula Figures Four-Year "On-Time" Graduation Rate For Colorado***

Using a new formula established by the U.S. Department of Education, data released today at <http://bit.ly/i0SQfj> by the Colorado Department of Education sets the state's "on-time" graduation rate for the Class of 2010 at 72.4 percent.

The new four-year formula defines "on time" as only those students who graduate from high school four years after entering ninth grade. **It is important to note that this new formula yields a rate that cannot be compared directly with prior year data.** With the old system, students who took longer than four years to graduate were factored into the formula.

Under this four-year "on-time" formula, a student is assigned a graduating class when they enter ninth grade. The graduating class is assigned by adding four years to the year the student enters ninth grade. In other words, the formula anticipates that a student entering ninth grade in fall 2010 will graduate with the Class of 2014.

CDE will also calculate a five-year and a six-year "on-time" rate to provide a more complete picture when the data are available in 2012 and 2013.

The shift to the new graduation rate is required in order to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The formula and methodology are based on the standards set by the National Governors Association "Graduation Counts Compact." By the end of the 2011, 48 states are expected to have adopted this approach to measuring graduation rates.

"The data establish a new baseline for the state," said Commissioner Robert Hammond. "The new rate gives us a chance to see what's working well in other states and what can be applied here in Colorado. We all know there is

more to be done to keep students engaged in school and to help them realize that a high school diploma is a meaningful ticket to college or career success.”

Last year, using the previous formula, the statewide graduation rate for the Class of 2009 stood at 74.6 percent. Had the previous formula been applied to the current data for the Class of 2010, the official statewide graduation rate would have slipped to 73.3 percent.

The new “on-time” formula can also be applied to the previous year’s data. CDE calculations reveal the “on-time” graduation rate for the Class of 2009 would have been 70.7 percent.

“As we transition between formulas this year, we want to present a complete picture of performance for both years,” said Deputy Commissioner Sirko, who added that every school district has received data sets that include graduation rates for the classes of 2009 and 2010 calculated with both the old and new formulas.

“In some cases, the new formula would appear to penalize districts that are making a concerted effort to keep students in school,” said Sirko. “If a district runs a strong concurrent enrollment program, for instance, they could be doing a terrific job of keeping students engaged in school but the new on-time rate makes it look as if their overall performance has dropped. The new formula is not designed to send a message about the pros or cons of efforts to provide safety nets or genuine alternatives for students. The new formula provides a common definition nationwide for comparability’s sake—and that’s all.”

To ensure this is the case, CDE plans to use a four-, five- and six-year rate for state accountability purposes. “We want to give districts credit for whatever rate is highest,” said Associate Commissioner Richard Wenning. “This reinforces the principle of allowing time to become a variable given Colorado’s expectation that all students will leave high school prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce.”

Sirko added: “We laud every effort to give students options and help them succeed. Not all successful students graduate from high school on a four-year schedule. These data continue to highlight our challenges in keeping students engaged but we don’t want a new formula to dampen district enthusiasm for supporting programs that reach out to all students.”

The new "on-time" formula allows for students who legitimately transfer into the school. For instance, a student entering the school as a 10th-grade transfer is given three years to graduate.

The new formula also allows for students who transfer out of one school or district and into another. Students who leave to complete a GED course are not considered transfers.

Similarly, late graduates (those who interrupt their coursework for a semester or more for work, health issues or any reason at all) are not considered four-year "on-time" graduates.

"It's important to understand, too, that a number of the students who don't graduate in four years are continuing to pursue their high school diploma," said Judith Martinez, director of the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement.

"Many students are in five-year programs that incorporate college-level work. Others, such as recently re-engaged dropouts or students from migrant families, are challenged with finishing high school in four years," she added. "A 72.4 percent graduation rate does not mean that 27.6 percent of students are dropping out of school. This new formula simply tells us how many students are graduating from high school in four years, how many others require additional time and how well we are doing as a state in reducing the drop-out rate or re-engaging students."

### **Dropout Rate**

The 2009-2010 annual drop-out rate improved to 3.1 percent, .5 percentage points less than the 3.6 percent rate posted in 2008-2009.

The dropout rate reflects the percentage of all students enrolled in grades seven-12 who leave school during a single school year. It is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts by a membership base, which includes all students who were in membership any time during the year. Between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, the number of students counted as dropouts declined from 14,975 to 13,147.

The cost of not graduating, said Martinez, is profound. Research data shows that dropouts are 15 percent less likely to be employed, and those who do find jobs earn 30 percent less in wages than their peers who hold a regular diploma or GED. American taxpayers could reap \$45 billion annually if the number of high school dropouts were cut in half. The savings would be achieved via extra tax revenues; reduced costs of public health, crime, and justice; and decreased welfare payments.

## **On-Time Graduation Data**

Individual district data is available at <http://bit.ly/i0SQfJ>. This data is also disaggregated in the following categories:

### **Racial/Ethnic Groups**

Among ethnic groups, the on-time graduation rate for the 2009-2010 school year was 50.1 percent for Native Americans; 82.4 percent for Asian students; 63.7 percent for black students; 55.5 percent for Hispanic students; and 80.2 percent for white students.

### **Male/Female**

Statewide, the on-time graduation for females was 76.3 percent and the male graduation rate was 68.7 percent.

### **Completer Rate**

Using the new on-time formula, the 2009-2010 completer rate was 75.8 percent. Had the new on-time formula been applied to the 2008-2009 data, the completer rate would have been 74.2 percent. Completers are all graduates plus those students who are not considered graduates but who receive a certificate, a designation of high school completion or a GED certificate.

### **The Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement**

CDE's Office of Dropout Prevention supports local education providers to enhance and strengthen efforts to prevent students from dropping-out and to re-engage out-of-school youth.

The office is in the process of identifying priority schools and districts that could benefit from additional services and support from CDE. The priority schools and districts will be identified by June 2011.

In addition, the office is working in partnership with the governor's office and community-based efforts, such as the Colorado Graduates Initiative, to address barriers to graduation and advance effective strategies across the state. At present the office is analyzing state data to gain a better understanding of how districts re-engage students who have dropped out. This information is scheduled to be released in March 2011.

**For more information, contact** Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

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