

## METHODOLOGY

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### Population and Data Source

Massachusetts retention data were based on the public school population that included all students enrolled in grades one through twelve in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. The sources for the data presented were the October 2006 and October 2007 Student Information Management System (SIMS), which were used to collect student level data on all publicly funded school students in Massachusetts. In addition to SIMS, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results are also cited in the MCAS section of the report.

### Data Definitions and Calculations

The number of students retained represents students who were reported as repeating the same grade as the prior school year. The Department defines retention in this report as any student reported to be enrolled in the same grade in both the October 2006 and October 2007 SIMS. In this report, retention data are reported as both a number and a rate (the number of students retained divided by the enrollment).

**Figure 1: State Retention Rate Calculation**

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Annual retention rate =            | $\frac{\text{Retention count}}{\text{October 2007 Grade 1-12 enrollment}} * 100$ |
| <i>Example:</i>                    |  |
| State retention rate for 2007-08 = | $\frac{20,989}{868,428} * 100 = 2.4 \%$  |

### Limitations

There are two main limitations to consider regarding the statewide retention data in this report:

- 1) Every district uses its own criteria to determine when grade retention is appropriate.
- 2) Accurate data are dependent on correct district reporting of student level information.

Since every district in Massachusetts has its own criteria for retaining students, it is likely that there are policy differences between the districts. Therefore, it is not possible to determine from this data whether an increase or decrease in retentions or differences between districts, are due to a student achievement change or a policy change.