

**Overview of the Annual Performance Report Development:**

<b>Monitoring Priority: FAPE in the LRE</b>
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**Indicator 2:** Percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.

(20 U.S.C. 1416 (a)(3)(A))

<b>Measurement:</b> States must report using the dropout data used in the ESEA graduation rate calculation and follow the timeline established by the Department under the ESEA.
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FFY	Measurable and Rigorous Target
2008	Students with IEPs Dropout Rate of 5.1%

**Actual Target Data for FFY 2008 (as reported in the FFY 2009 Annual Performance Report (MA APR) based on the instructions for a one year data lag):**

FFY 2008	# of Students Enrolled (Grades 9-12)	# of Dropouts (Grades 9-12)	FFY 2008 Dropout Rate
Students with IEPs	44,693	2,246	5.0%

**Discussion of Improvement Activities Completed and Explanation of Progress or Slippage that occurred for FFY 2008 (2008-2009):**

Explanation of Progress or Slippage

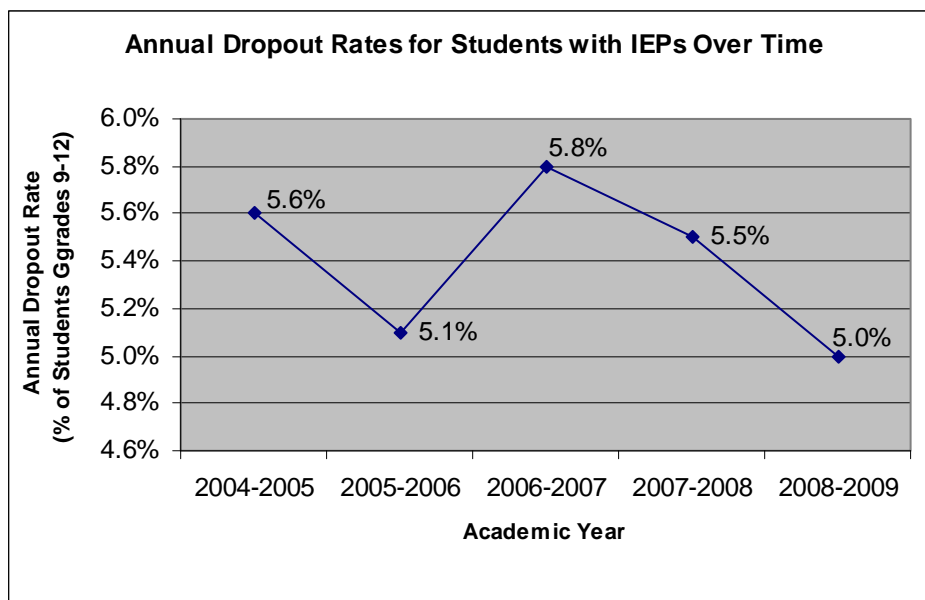
MASSDE is pleased that it has exceeded its measurable and rigorous target of 5.1% by 0.1 percentage points. Consistent with the requirement to report data source and measurement aligned with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), this report uses the dropout data used in the ESEA graduation rate calculation and follows the timeline established by the Department under the ESEA. In this FFY 2009 reporting year, MASSDE is required to describe the results of its examination of data for the year before the reporting year, and compare the results to that measurable and rigorous target (i.e., to use a “data lag”). Therefore, this report reflects data collected during the 2008-2009 school year. In addition, this report only addresses dropout data for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Prior to the FFY 2008 report, MASSDE was required to compare the data for youth with disabilities to that of all students.

In Massachusetts, a dropout (regardless of disability status) is defined as a student in grades 9-12 in a public school who leaves school prior to graduation for reasons other than a transfer to another public school, and who does not re-enroll before the following October 1. MASSDE amends dropout data used to calculate this rate, obtained through the Student Information Management System (SIMS), after districts submit their enrollment reports on October 1, and omits from the final count students identified as enrolled on October 1 who earned a General Educational Development (GED) credential. MASSDE also identifies “summer dropouts” and adds their total into the count. Additional information is included in the overview of Indicator 2 in the Massachusetts Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) for FFY 2005-2012.

As reported in FFY 2008 data collection, the dropout rate for students with IEPs was 5.0%, which represents a significant decrease from the FFY 2007 dropout rate of 5.5%. Moreover, this decrease in

the number of students with IEPs dropping out of school (2,246, compared to 2,429 in the last reporting year) occurred at the same time that the total number of students with IEPs in schools has increased (44,693, compared to 44,448 in the last reporting year). MASSDE is encouraged by this rate, not only because it represents a second year of decline in the dropout rate of students with IEPs, but also because the rate falls below the target set at 5.1% for FFY 2008.

As illustrated in the graph below, there has been fluctuation in dropout rates for students with IEPs since MASSDE reported baseline data for FFY 2004. Over time, MASSDE has revised its methods of collecting and verifying collected data. As described in previous reports on Indicator 2, the use of new codes leading to better identification of dropouts may have contributed to a noted increase in dropout rates between FFY 2005 and FFY 2006. This system of identification is now standard and has resulted in the collection of more accurate data. Since the 2006-2007 academic year, MASSDE notes that there has been a steady decrease each year in the dropout rate for students with IEPs. This trend, which is also noted in the statewide dropout rate for all students (see the report [High School Dropouts 2008-09, Massachusetts Public Schools](#) for more information), demonstrates that the statewide and targeted dropout prevention initiatives have had a direct effect on reducing the number of students in Massachusetts that leave school prior to graduation.



MASSDE and its partners will continue to focus on improvement activities targeted to maintaining the decline in the dropout rate for students with IEPs. We look forward to reporting continued improvement in the FFY 2010 reporting period.

#### Improvement Activities

During FFY 2009, MASSDE engaged in the following improvement activities targeted for dropout prevention or reduction for students with IEPs through the Special Education Planning and Policy Development Office (SEPP), the Student Support, Career and Education Services Unit (SSCE) and the Center for School and District Accountability:

- **[American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\) - IDEA](#)** - Activities funded through the ARRA-IDEA grant were to be designed to ensure that students with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE), by providing services and programs that met students' unique needs and prepared them for further education, employment, and independent living. Funds were to be used for 1) recovery purposes (to sustain and support existing special education programming), and 2) investment purposes (to improve educator quality and

effectiveness; support schools, districts, and students; for assessment and data; and to promote college and career readiness).

Many of the districts directed their ARRA allocations to new and/or expanded programs designed to improve school climates and create alternative strategies to suspension and expulsion of students with IEPs. They also allocated funds for credit recovery programs for students returning to school. Some examples include:

- o hiring consultants to evaluate their programs and practices regarding suspensions and expulsions and provide technical assistance for designing systemic changes to improve their programs and practices;
  - o collaborating with other districts to develop and implement programs, including credit recovery programs, virtual and other alternative high schools for students with behavior and/or emotional problems who have high rates of suspension and expulsions; and
  - o hiring support staff such as guidance counselors, school social workers, school adjustment counselors, with particular therapeutic and counseling skills for this population.
- **[The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\) Title II-D Technology Competitive Grant Program: Online Courses and Modules Grant for At-Risk High School Students.](#)** This grant funded projects that work collaboratively with MASSDE to create, implement, and evaluate online courses/modules for underserved high school students in alternative education, credit recovery, or credit acceleration programs. Grant recipients may adapt an online course/module or partner with an organization to design and develop the online courses/modules that align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks or the Massachusetts High School Program of Studies (MassCore).

MASSDE is providing funding to high-need districts or collaborating districts with at least one high-need district to pilot one or more online courses that serve high school students in alternative education programs or schools (including education collaboratives) or students participating in credit recovery or credit acceleration options. This student population includes students who have dropped out and are returning to school, while at the same time, offering supports to students at risk for dropping out. During the first round of this grant two awardees were special education collaboratives, each of which serviced students from several school districts.

- **Massachusetts Task Force on Behavioral Health and Public Schools** is an interagency initiative of the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Health and Human Services whose mission is to strengthen, expand and integrate Massachusetts state services into a comprehensive, community-based system of care, to ensure that families and their children with significant behavioral, emotional and mental health needs obtain the services necessary for success in home, schools and community. These wraparound services provide substantial and specific supports to students who are at high risk for dropping out of school, and to students who have already dropped out and need assistance in returning to school.

The following improvement activities started in FFY 2008 or before, and continued in FFY 2009:

- In partnership with the **Central Massachusetts Communities of Care (CCMC) Positive Behavioral Interventions (PBIS) Grant** (SEPP), MASSDE provided grant funds to support districts in Worcester County with the development and implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and with developing "wrap-around" mental health services and supports, for which students at risk for dropping out or those returning to school would be eligible. The participating districts receive professional development as well as onsite assistance in the development and implementation of the principles of PBIS. In the first year of the program, four districts totaling six schools and over 50 school personnel (including teachers, administrators, related service providers, paraprofessional, parents, and students) participated. In the second year, this first cohort of districts moved from the planning stage to implementation, and the

second cohort of six districts entered the first stage. In the third year of the grant, the second cohort completed the implementation stage and a third cohort of four districts and six schools began the initial, planning stage. Now, in the fourth year, these districts are in their implementation stage.

- **Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission Activities**
  - **The Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission** was charged with examining current statewide policies and making recommendations on how to retain at-risk students. The Commission's final report, [Making the Connection](#), was released in October, 2009 and several of its recommendations have been incorporated into the work of the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Work Group.
  - **The Dropout Prevention and Recovery Work Group's** (SSCE) focus is to support district team action planning and to facilitate the sharing of promising practices in order to prevent student dropouts. In FFY 2009, the group's work was expanded to all 77 urban districts that had at least one high school that exceeded the state's dropout rate. This accounts for over half of the State's students who drop out. There were 133 high schools in the state that met this criterion. This year's activities included encouraging districts that wished to demonstrate their promising programs, policies and practices regarding attendance, discipline, homework, and related activities that were showing progress in reducing the dropout rate for students with IEPs to host the groups' face-to-face meetings. Three districts volunteered to do so.
  - **The Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery Website** (SSCE) includes an extensive collection of graduation and dropout prevention related news and trainings, articles/reports, and websites for students, parents, and educators.
- **Massachusetts FOCUS Academy (MFA)** (SEPP) provides online, graduate level coursework to middle and high school educators across the state. Two content areas, *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* and *Differentiated Instruction*, have significant impacts on supporting all students, but especially those with disabilities. The courses enable educators to gain a better understanding of how disabilities affect student learning and behavior, and provide educators with improved skills in the areas of curriculum design, instruction, evaluation, and technology. These skills translate into improved student outcomes, which will lead to decreased dropout rates. Additional MFA courses that positively affect student success and promote decreased dropout rates include *Positive Behavioral Supports*, *Collaborative Teaching*, *Family Engagement*, and *Post-Secondary Transition*.
- **National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) Professional Development Series** (SEPP) - The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), with support from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), provides the NASDSE Professional Development Series. These telecasts bring nationally recognized experts to the Commonwealth using technology, providing an affordable means of quality personnel development for a variety of stakeholders. In FFY 2009, 106 entities participated in the series and the topics were: *Seclusion and Restraint the Impact of Federal and State Policy in the Classroom*; *Healthy, Physically Fit and Ready for Action: Addressing Physical Education and Activity Needs of Individuals with Disabilities*; and *Connecting Educational Standards to Student Learning Plans and Policy to the Classroom*.
- **Secondary Transition- TransitionWorks: Innovative Strategies for Transitioning Youth with Disabilities from School to Work** – The **TransitionWorks** project is an interagency partnership developed to create and deliver innovative and non-traditional career development, job placement and career advancement activities for over 750 transition age students with significant disabilities in the cities of Boston, Springfield and Worcester. Helping students plan for the future is a major factor in maintaining their interest and purpose for staying in school. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), in partnership with MASSDE, the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN), Urban Pride, the Massachusetts Workforce Development System, the Commonwealth

Corporation, and the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) is addressing the unmet transition, career development and employment needs of young adults with significant disabilities aged 16-26.

- [Trauma Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) (SSCE) – Through this initiative MASSDE is working to bring “trauma sensitive” practices to schools across the Commonwealth. These efforts include annual trainings and technical assistance around safe and supportive student learning environments for reducing barriers that affect classroom behavior, relationships, and academic performance thereby creating a climate that encourages students to stay in school. The research shows that a high percentage of students who drop out of school have experienced or witnessed trauma in their lives.
- [Educational Proficiency Plans \(EPP\)](#) (SSCE) - The purpose of the EPP is to increase the support and services students need in order to stay in school and meet graduation standards, as well as gained the requisite skills needed for post-secondary success. Districts are required to develop an EPP for any student who does not meet the minimum criteria on the English language arts and Mathematics tests of the Massachusetts Comprehensive assessment system.
- [Work-Based Learning Plans \(WBLP\) for Students with Disabilities](#) (SSCE) - Through work-based learning experiences, students have an opportunity to learn about various career areas and try different work styles, find out what type of work they enjoy, find out how they learn best in a workplace setting, and find out what natural supports are available. By providing the opportunity to explore a variety of career areas and discover what type of work they enjoy in the context of their academic environment, the WBLP promotes students with disabilities staying in school.
- [Early Warning Indicator Index \(EWII\)](#) - The FFY 2009-FFY 2010 Index is the continuation of work begun by the Department in cooperation with districts and other partners in May 2008, designed to identify ninth grade students who are at risk of not graduating in four years. Based on statewide-data from the seventh and eighth grades, MASSDE sorts students into five levels of at-risk categories and distributes their names to the appropriate district for them to design targeted student-centered interventions. Students at risk for not graduating on time are also at risk for dropping out of school. By providing individualized supports and services as early as possible, dropout rates should decline.
- [District and School Assistance Centers \(DSACs\)](#) – MASSDE has opened six regionally-based DSACs to help identified districts and their schools access and use professional development and targeted assistance to improve instruction and raise achievement for students with and without disabilities. MFA courses (see above), including *Universal Design for Learning*, *Creating Positive Classroom Environments*, *Differentiated Instruction*, *the Collaborative Co-Teaching Model*, and *Transition Planning* have been integrated into the menu of professional development options available to districts. These courses are designed to help teachers reach all students, especially by identifying and supporting students at risk for failure and dropping out of school. The planning for this work began in FFY 2009-FFY 2010. District/cohort-based teams are presently participating in the above courses.

Many of the factors that contribute to student dropout are consistent for students with IEPs as well as their peers without IEPs. Therefore, MASSDE has combined efforts within the agency and in cooperation with stakeholders to develop a series of dropout prevention initiatives targeted toward at-risk youth and the communities in which they reside. The following activities include those that are underway as well as projects planned for the future. Each of the initiatives allows for inter/intra-agency collaboration, program development for students with IEPs, as well as professional development.

- Collaboration with Stakeholders
- [Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Summit](#)
- [Secondary School Reading Grant](#)
- [Special Education Professional Development Institutes](#)

For detailed information about these activities, please see Appendix A.

MASSDE continues to report dropout data publicly, and data are available at [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/special\\_ed.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/special_ed.aspx).

MASSDE will continue to focus its efforts on decreasing the dropout rate for students with IEPs, and looks forward to reporting the results of these efforts in the FFY 2010 APR.

**Revisions, with Justification, to Proposed Targets / Improvement Activities / Timelines / Resources for FFY 2009 (2009-2010):**

Targets, improvement activities, timelines, and resources for Indicator 2 have been amended in the Massachusetts Part B State Performance Plan (MA SPP). They include targets for FFY 2011 and FFY 2012. These targets were developed in consultation with the Massachusetts Statewide Special Education Steering Committee. Please see the Indicator 2 MA SPP for more information.