Guidance for Reporting Students from Prior Cohorts as Graduates in SIMS

The following guidance is intended to help districts correctly report formerly enrolled students from prior graduation cohorts who may now be awarded a high school diploma as the direct result of recent changes to the state’s competency determination (CD) requirement.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Background

In November 2024, the passage of Ballot Question 2 resulted in changes to the state’s graduation requirements. Specifically, as now outlined in the law, a student who has not yet earned a CD must *demonstrate “mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge..., by satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified****by the student's district****as showing mastery of the skills, competencies and knowledge contained in the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in the areas measured by the MCAS high school tests described in section one I administered in 2023.”*

Districts are now responsible for awarding the CD based on the requirements of the amended law and applicable regulations, and for reporting information related to these new graduates to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) via the Student Information Management System (SIMS) collection.

More information about changes to the CD is available [on our website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/2024-1211student-cd-update.html).

# Questions and Answers

**Q: Are districts required to accommodate former students who have not earned a CD and who are currently not enrolled?**

A: Yes. Individuals who have not earned a CD must be afforded a process for earning the CD. District processes must allow former students who satisfactorily completed the relevant requirements to earn a CD. DESE can no longer offer that opportunity through an MCAS assessment.

**Q: Who is eligible?**

A: An eligible student is one who was:

1. Previously enrolled in the district; and
2. Previously met the criteria for a Certificate of Attainment[[2]](#footnote-2) (i.e., they met local graduation requirements but did not receive a high school diploma because they did not earn a CD); and
3. Not previously reported as a graduate in any district’s Student Information Management System (SIMS) submission.

Any student who has not previously met the criteria for a Certificate of Attainment (indicating that they did not meet all local graduation requirements when they exited high school) must meet the current CD and local graduation requirements of the district.

**Q: Should these former students be reported as graduates in SIMS if the district awards a diploma now?**

A: Yes, if the district awards a diploma to a newly eligible student, the student should be reported in SIMS.

**Q: How should the SIMS record be reported?**

A: To be included in SIMS, the student must have a current school year enrollment record with an exit code of ‘04’ in DOE012 (Enrollment Status at Time of Data Collection). The entry and exit dates should be the date when the diploma was issued. DOE017 (Days in Attendance) should be reported as ‘0’, and DOE018 (Days in Membership) should be reported as ‘1’. DOE033 (High School Completer Plans) and DOE037 (Graduate, Completed Massachusetts Core Curriculum) must also be populated.

**Q: Will cohort graduation rates from prior years be adjusted to include the new graduates?**

A: No. These students did not graduate as part of their original cohort, and DESE will not change any previously published graduation rates.

**Q: Who should I contact if I have questions about reporting these students in SIMS?**

A: Please reach out to your district’s [Data Collection Support Specialist](https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/fts.html) for assistance.

1. [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1D](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1d) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Students meeting this criterion were previously reported in SIMS DOE012 (Reason for Reporting) as either *’10’ – Certificate of Attainment* or ‘*11’ – Completed grade 12 and district-approved program (District does not offer a Certificate of Attainment)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)