Attendance and Dropout Reporting Guidance

The following guidelines are intended to answer questions district staff may have in reporting student attendance and dropout data to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The guidelines apply to public school students, including students with disabilities who are placed by the district in public or private special education schools, and students in Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities.

# Attendance

For the purposes of state reporting, student attendance information reported in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) collection **should only reflect days of attendance and membership considered part of the regular school year and should not reflect any attendance recovery efforts.**

To be counted as present (i.e., “in attendance”), a student must be at school, at a school-related activity (e.g., field trip), or receiving academic instruction for **at least half the school day**. Students who are not physically present at school but are receiving academic instruction from the district for at least half the school day should be counted as present. Examples of academic instruction include tutoring or distance learning. Examples of activities not considered academic instruction are taking home classwork or doing homework.

# Enrollment

A student is enrolled in a school if he/she/they is/are attending the school or receiving academic instruction from the school on a full-time basis.

# Dropout

For purposes of reporting data to DESE, a dropout is defined as a student in grade six through twelve who:

1. Was enrolled in school at some point during the current school year;
2. Is not enrolled on the report date;
3. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district-approved educational program; and
4. Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
   1. Transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program;
   2. Temporary school-approved absence due to suspension or illness; or
   3. Death.

In reporting October SIMS data, any student who was enrolled in the district the prior year, was expected to return for the current year but has not, and does not meet conditions 3 and 4 above, should be reported as a dropout (DOE12=36).

# Reporting Transfers

A school may not report a non-attending student as transferred without **evidence in writing** that the student does not intend to return to school. In order to report a student as transferred in SIMS (DOE012= 20,21,22,23,24), the school must have written documentation of the student’s whereabouts. Documentation could be confirmation from the parent/guardian that the student is transferring and/or a records request for the student from another school.

# Investigating and Recording Extended Absences

Each district/school must have a procedure for investigating extended absences and must document reasonable efforts to locate the student and determine the reason for not attending. The procedure should include attempts to contact the parents/guardians by phone, email, through certified mail, or by a home visit. If attempts to locate a student or confirm whereabouts are unsuccessful, the student should be reported as a dropout/student status or location is unknown (DOE012 = 36).

MGL c. 76 §18 states that “No student who has not graduated from high school shall be considered to have permanently left public school unless an administrator of the school which the student last attended has sent notice within a period of 5 days from the student's tenth consecutive absence to the student and the parent or guardian of that student in both the primary language of the parent or guardian, to the extent practicable, and English. The notice shall initially offer at least 2 dates and times for an exit interview between the superintendent, or a designee, and the student and the parent or guardian of the student to occur prior to the student permanently leaving school and shall include contact information for scheduling the exit interview. The notice shall indicate that the parties shall agree upon a date and time for the exit interview, and that interview shall occur within 10 days after the sending of the notice.”

The table on the following pages lists several possible scenarios and the appropriate SIMS reporting outcomes for each. Please contact your district’s Data Collection Support Specialist if you have specific questions about reporting student enrollment or attendance information.

| **Scenario** | **Reporting Outcome** | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grades K – 5 | Grades 6 – 12 |
| 1. The student is out for an excused absence for an extended period of time (e.g., verified medical reason). | The student should be recorded as absent. If the student is receiving academic instruction during the excused absence, then the student should be recorded as present on those days. | The student should be recorded as absent. If the student is receiving academic instruction during the excused absence, then the student should be recorded as present on those days. |
| 1. The student is not at school because of an unexcused absence. | The student should be recorded as absent. The absence should be investigated as outlined above. | The student should be recorded as absent. The absence should be investigated as outlined above. |
| 1. The student attends a district-managed program to make up or “buy back” an absence for local grade or credit recovery purposes. | Daily attendance must reflect who was present in school on the day in question. For the purpose of state reporting, the student should be reported absent for the original missed day of school. The district should not change previous absences even if the student makes up the day at a later time. | Daily attendance must reflect who was present in school on the day in question. For the purpose of state reporting, the student should be reported absent for the original missed day of school. The district should not change previous absences even if the student makes up the day at a later time. |
| 1. The student is expected to be in membership, but fails to show up at the start of the school year. | The student should be recorded as absent. The absence should be investigated as outlined above. If the student does not show up by October 1 and the district is unable to locate the student, he/she should be reported as “student status/location unknown”   DOE012 = 36 (Dropout and/or student status/location unknown) | The student should be recorded as absent. The absence should be investigated as outlined above. If the student does not show up by October 1 he/she should be reported as a dropout. If DESE finds the student reported as enrolled in another district, the dropout will not be counted for the first district.  DOE012 = 36 (Dropout and/or student status/location unknown) |
| 1. The student has dropped out of school. | Not applicable | The student should be reported as a dropout. If younger than 16 years old, the student should be treated as truant (not a true dropout).   **Students older than 16:** DOE012 = 30 through 36 **Students younger than 16:** DOE012 = 36 (Dropout and/or student status/location unknown) |
| 1. The student has transferred to another school (demonstrated in writing through a records request from the new school or documentation of notice of transfer from the parent or guardian). | The student should be reported as a transfer.  DOE012 = 20 (transfer in-state public school) DOE012 = 21 (transfer in-state private school) DOE012 = 22 (transfer out-of-state) | The student should be reported as a transfer.  DOE012 = 20 (transfer in-state public school) DOE012 = 21 (transfer in-state private school) DOE012 = 22 (transfer out-of-state) |
| 1. The student has moved to another city/town or state and as a result is no longer attending school in your district. There is no documentation or indication that the student has enrolled in school elsewhere. | The student should be reported as “student status/location unknown”  DOE012 = 36 (Dropout and/or student status/location unknown) | The student should be reported as a dropout. If he/she returns to school, or the school receives documentation that the student is enrolled somewhere else after the reporting date, the enrollment status should be corrected or updated in the next SIMS submission.  DOE012 = 36 (Dropout and/or student status/location unknown) |
| 1. The district has documentation that the student has moved out of the United States, to another country or to one of the US territories. | The student should be reported as transferred out of state.  DOE012 = 22 (transfer out-of-state) | The student should be reported as transferred out of state.  DOE012 = 22 (transfer out-of-state) |
| 1. The student is known to be residing and receiving education services in a DYS Facility. | The student should be reported as outplaced to DYS facility.  **DOE015 for General Education:** 09200300 **DOE015 for Special Education:** SEIS – Institutional Programs codes for DYS locations | The student should be reported as outplaced to DYS facility.  **DOE015 for General Education:** 09200300 **DOE015 for Special Education:** SEIS – Institutional Programs codes for DYS locations |
| 1. The student receives an in-school-suspension. | The student is not recorded as absent. | The student is not recorded as absent. |
| 1. The student receives an out-of-school suspension or expulsion. | The student is recorded as absent, except for each day that he/she receives academic instruction from the district for more than half the school day.   Students who are suspended should remain enrolled. Students who are expelled and still receiving instruction should remain enrolled.   Students who are expelled and not receiving instruction should be reported as expelled in SIMS.  DOE012 = 05 (expelled) | The student is recorded as absent, except for each day that he/she receives academic instruction from the district for more than half the school day.   Students who are suspended should remain enrolled. Students who are expelled and still receiving instruction should remain enrolled.   Students who are expelled and not receiving instruction should be reported as expelled in SIMS.  DOE012 = 05 (expelled) |
| 1. The student leaves school to attend an alternative school/program. | If the school/program is part of the district, the student should be reported as enrolled in SIMS.   If the district is out-placing the student to a private alternative school/program, the student should be reported outplaced in SIMS.  If the school/program is in another district, the student should be reported as transferred.  DOE012 = 20 (transfer in-state public) | If the school/program is part of the district, the student should be reported as enrolled in SIMS.   If the district is out-placing the student to a private alternative school/program, the student should be reported outplaced in SIMS.  If the school/program is in another district, the student should be reported as transferred.  DOE012 = 20 (transfer in-state public) |
| 1. The school is made aware with documentation that the student will be out of the country for an extended period of time during the school year. | If parents/guardians do not formally withdraw the student, the student should remain enrolled and marked absent. | If parents/guardians do not formally withdraw the student, the student should remain enrolled and marked absent. |
| 1. The student is enrolled in a HiSET program. | Not applicable | The student should be reported as a dropout.   If a student who has been reported as dropout for a given school year passes the HiSET by the following October 1, the student will not be counted in the final dropout count for the district.   DOE012 = 30 (dropout– enrolled in a non-diploma granting adult education or HiSET program) |
| 1. The student is incarcerated in a House of Correction. | Not applicable | The student should be reported as a dropout.  DOE12 = 33 (dropout – incarcerated, district no longer providing educational services)  If the student is receiving educational services from the district at the facility then the student should be reported as outplaced to a correctional facility.  DOE015 = 09200500 |
| 1. The student leaves the MA public school system to attend an adult education program. The program leads to a high school diploma. | Not applicable | The student should be reported as transferred to an adult ed program.  DOE012 = 24 (transfer - adult diploma program, leading to MA diploma) |
| 1. The student leaves the MA public school system to attend Job Corps. | Not applicable | The student is reported as a dropout.  DOE012 = 31 (dropout – entered Job Corps) |
| 1. The student leaves the MA public school system to be home-schooled. The home-school program is approved by the local school committee. | The student should be reported as transferred to home-school.  DOE012 = 23 (transfer home-school) | The student should be reported as transferred to home-school.  DOE012 = 23 (transfer home-school) |

# Dropout Data Reporting

The Department, in compliance with the United States Department of Education, reports an **event** dropout count – the number of students who leave school during a particular year. DESE reports two measures, the unadjusted dropout rate and the adjusted dropout rate. Any student who is a dropout as of the last day of school will be counted in the ***unadjusted*** dropout data. Of these students, any student who does not re-enroll in school by the following October 1 will be counted in the ***adjusted*** dropout data. Therefore, there are students who may be reported to the Department as dropouts during the year who are not considered to be dropouts in the final counts (unadjusted and adjusted) for a given year. For example, if a student drops out of school in February, the district should report the student as a dropout in the March 1 SIMS data. If that student re-enrolls in school any time before the end of the school year, he/she will not be counted as a dropout for that district. If instead he/she remains a dropout for the rest of the school year, but returns by the following October 1, he/she will not be counted in the district’s adjusted dropout count. As another example, if District A reports a student as a dropout, but District B reports the same student as enrolled, the student will not be counted as a dropout for District A.

# Understanding Dropout Calculations

The dropout rate for any given year is impacted by five different SIMS data collections (boxes 1 through 5 below). This can create confusion because some of the activities for calculating the dropout rates for different years overlap one another. The picture below illustrates the process of calculating the dropout rate for any given school year (in the gray box).

**The final dropout rate =** [(Summer Dropouts + School Year Dropouts) - Returned Dropouts] / High School Enrollment

