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**New High School Graduation Rate Introduced**

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**April 10, 2012** – Adhering to a 2008 update to federal education regulations, the Georgia Department of Education released the new, four-year public high school graduation rate -- **67.4%**. The new calculation, known as the adjusted cohort rate, will allow states to uniformly compare graduation rates across the nation.

Historically, states have calculated graduation rates using varying methods, creating inconsistent data from one state to the next. The new calculation means that the graduation rate may appear dramatically different even if the number of students who actually graduate hasn’t changed.

Momentum for all states to produce a comparable four-year graduation rate began in 2005 with the leadership of the National Governors’ Association. Governors of all 50 states made a commitment to a common method for calculating each state’s high school graduation rate by signing the Graduation Counts Compact.

"The new formula provides a more accurate, uniform look at how many students we are graduating from high school," said State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge. "I believe that in order to tackle a problem you have to have honest and accurate data. We will be able to use this new data as a baseline to see how our important initiatives are impacting graduation rates in the future. We’ve known for some time and communicated that this new formula would show a lower graduation rate than the rate under the previous formula; however, regardless of calculation formula, the state has significantly raised graduation rates over the last several years, but there is still much work to do."
Echoing that statement, Tara N. Tucci, a senior research and policy associate at the Washington-based advocacy group Alliance for Excellent Education, said, “It's important that it gets out that these drops aren't the result of a state doing worse. Now we have an accurate picture.”

The primary difference in calculating the new graduation rate from the state’s current method is in the definition of the cohort.

The new “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” defines the cohort based on when a student first becomes a freshman. The rate is calculated using the number of students who graduate within four years and includes adjustments for student transfers.

In contrast, Georgia’s current graduation rate calculation defines the cohort upon graduation, which may include students who take more than four years to graduate from high school. Over the past five years, the state’s traditional graduation rate has gradually increased, rising from 70.8 percent in 2006 to 80.9 percent in 2011.

The new rate, which also includes subgroups, will be used for federal accountability purposes this school year. However, Georgia has received approval from the U.S. Department of Education to use a five-year cohort graduation rate for 2012.

“We know that not all students are the same and not all will graduate from high school in four years, so we asked for the U.S. Department of Education’s permission to use a five-year cohort graduation rate for federal accountability purposes,” said Superintendent Barge. “Ultimately, our goal is to ensure each child will graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and a career, regardless of how long it takes.”

**Judy’s comments** — At the time of this article, national figures to compare states were not yet available. But, according to the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, “Neighboring South Carolina and North Carolina went to the new formula several years ago and have 73.56 percent and 77.9 percent grad rates, respectively.

According to several sources, school systems with high transient numbers, graduation rates according to the new method of calculation will drop more drastically when comparing the old method to the new. This is because under the old system, it was not a requirement to track students who left school without reporting an intent to dropout. Districts will have to tighten up on how these students are tracked to determine if they enroll in another system or are truly a dropout.

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