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## **Four-Year Graduation Rates**

- The graduation rate is one of the critical pieces of performance information for parents, principals, superintendents, community members and all taxpayers.
- The method Colorado uses to calculate the graduation rate is changing.
- The major change involves a shift to a four-year “on time” graduation rate.
- Under the new approach, a student is assigned a graduating class when they enter ninth grade.
- The graduating class is assigned by adding four years to the year the student enters ninth grade. In other words, the formula anticipates that student entering ninth grade in the fall of 2010 will graduate with the Class of 2014.
- Late graduates (those who interrupt their coursework for a semester or more, for whatever reason) are not considered under the formula as “on time” graduates. (Note that early graduates—those who might receive a diploma in fewer than four years—are included in the four-year rate.)
- The new formula does allow for students who legitimately transfer into the school and those who transfer out to attend another school. Students who leave a school to complete a GED course are not considered transfers.

- Under the new formula, the state's overall graduation rate is expected to decline.
- Under the old formula, which contained no such "on time" provision, the state's graduation rate was 74.6 percent for the Class of 2009.
- According to Administrative Rule (CCR 301-1) for the Administration of the Accreditation of School Districts, the Colorado Department of Education shall ensure, to the extent practicable, that Districts, the Institute, and Public Schools are not penalized for re-engaging students and ensuring that all students successfully graduate.
- The graduation rate serves as one of three indicators in the state's accountability system for measuring how well schools and districts are preparing students for college and career success. The other two indicators are the dropout rate and ACT scores.

### **Reasons For The Change**

- The shift to the new graduation rate is being made in order to comply with *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Under that act, the state of Colorado must move to an accountability system that measures and reports the "on-time" graduation rate.
- The formula and methodology is based on the national standards determined by the National Governors Association "Graduation Counts Compact."
- Already, 26 states have adopted this approach to graduation rate calculations. At the end of 2011, 48 states (including Colorado) will report a "4 year on-time" graduation rate.
- The federal government is asking all states to implement an on-time, four-year graduation rate so that data will be more consistent in comparing state performance.
- Previously, states used a variety of methods to calculate graduation rates, making comparisons difficult or impossible.
- The new formula provides a more accurate, consistent rate that will allow schools and districts to make good decisions about

ways to intervene early in the education of students who fall behind.

### **Making Comparisons With Previous Years**

- The Colorado Department of Education does not plan to publish historical on-time rates as points for prior year data.
- School districts will be provided with information about how to calculate a graduation rate using the old formula (if they choose to do so with their own district's data).

### **Students Transferring At Higher Grade Levels**

- Students transferring to a school after their ninth-grade school year are handled in the following manner:
  - An entering tenth-grade student is given three years.
  - An entering eleventh-grade student is given two years.
  - An entering twelfth-grade student is given one year.
  - Students who may have attended a year's worth of classes but have not earned enough credits to move to the next grade should be assigned with the grade level that matches the number of credits earned.
- Only the ninth-grade entry point is a factor in calculating the "on time" graduation rate. The age of the student (if they were retained, for instance, in third grade) is irrelevant.

### **Reasons Why Students Might Not Graduate "On Time"**

- Many students don't typically graduate from high school in four years. They include:
  - Students participating in five-year programs such as ASCENT;
  - Students participating in special programs such as Title I, Bilingual or English as a Second Language;
  - Students considered homeless;
  - Students who receive services through Migrant Education Programs;
  - Some special education students;
  - Some highly mobile students;
  - Re-engaged dropouts.

## **The Cost Of Dropping Out**

- The impact of not graduating is profound.
- In Colorado, education reform efforts support the belief that all students deserve a chance to graduate even if life events or other circumstances result in taking longer than 4 years to graduate.
- Dropouts are 15 percent less likely to be employed, and those who do find jobs earn 30 percent less in wages than their peers who hold a regular diploma or GED.
- Students who don't graduate on time are less likely to graduate.
- American taxpayers could reap \$45 billion annually if the number of high school dropouts were cut in half. The savings would be achieved via extra tax revenues; reduced costs of public health, crime, and justice; and decreased welfare payments.