**Revised Guidance on Continuous Enrollment Data Fields**

The Unit of Accountability has issued revised guidance on the definition of “continuous enrollment” that will take effect beginning with the 2015-16 school year. This guidance is intended to clarify the rules that CDE uses to determine which assessment records are included in annual accountability calculations, and to provide the field with a common set of guidelines for distinguishing between continuous and non-continuous enrollments. Implementing these changes will help to ensure that accountability measures are comparable across districts.

Background

Information on continuous enrollment is collected in the “Continuous in District” and “Continuous in School” fields that appear in the Student-School Association files that districts submit through Data Pipeline, and through the student demographic files that are submitted as part of the Student Biographical Data review processes that accompany each assessment administration. The values reported in these fields are intended to indicate whether students have been continuously enrolled over the course of the academic year leading up to the administration of state assessments.

Definitions of Continuous Enrollment: Federal versus State Accountability

In the past, CDE guidance on the “Continuous in District” and “Continuous in School” fields reflected the fields’ use in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations. For AYP, CDE defined continuous enrollment as enrollment from the date one year prior to the opening of a given assessment window to the testing date; continuous enrollment meant continuous enrollment over a full calendar year. With the implementation of the ESEA Flexibility Waiver, CDE changed the way it defined continuous enrollment. Based on an analysis of achievement results, and in consideration of the weight given to growth measures within the state performance framework, CDE determined to use a more inclusive definition of continuous enrollment. For the state performance frameworks, the unit decided to reference the “October New to School” field rather than solely relying on the existing continuous fields. The “October New to School” field indicates not whether a student has been enrolled for a full calendar year, but whether the student has been enrolled since October 1 of the current academic year.

Effectively, under the state accountability system, October 1 has functioned as the starting point for making continuous enrollment determinations for both the school and district performance frameworks. The revised guidance acknowledges this fact by redefining the “Continuous in District” and “Continuous in School” fields to mean continuous enrollment since October 1. In doing so, the unit hopes to eliminate a layer of confusion from accountability determinations. Redefining the “Continuous in School” field in this way will also allow the unit to do away with the “October New to School” field, as it will be redundant.

Enrollment Breaks

Ensuring comparability in the measures that are used to evaluate school and district performance across the state is a central concern of CDE. This concern is reflected in the definition of enrollment breaks that is included in the revised guidance on continuous enrollment. In comparing how students were coded in the continuous fields included in assessment score records with how their enrollments were reported in the end-of-year enrollment data submission (EOY), the Unit of Accountability found that **there was not a common practice among districts for identifying enrollment breaks**. Under the revised guidance to be implemented beginning with the 2015-16 school year, the Unit of Accountability has established a threshold of 10 instructional days or classifying an enrollment gap as an enrollment break.

Identifying enrollment breaks comes into question for students who are enrolled in the same district or school at the designated starting point and at time of testing, but who have a gap in enrollment at some point in between. The table below shows the range of practices for identifying such gaps as enrollment breaks. This table represents the results of an analysis that compared how students were reported in the “Continuous in District” and “Continuous in School” fields for the 2014 TCAP reading assessment with how they were reported for the EOY enrollment submission. For students who were reported as non-continuous, the analysis looked at the length of any associated enrollment gap reflected in the EOY submission. The table shows that for the “Continuous in District” field the majority of districts did not code students as non-continuous until an enrollment gap reached or exceed six weeks. However, for the “Continuous in School” field, districts seemed to have a much lower threshold, with more than half coding students as non-continuous once an enrollment gap reached three weeks. (Note that the percentages associated with each range of enrollment gap are not cumulative; the percentage associate with any given range represents the proportion of students with gaps falling within that specific range that were coded as non-continuous.)

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| **Enrollment Gap Reflected in EOY Records** | **Continuous Enrollment Coding from  2014 TCAP Reading** | |
| **Continuous in District = No** | **Continuous in School = No** |
| **0 to 6 DAYS** | **2%** | **4%** |
| **1 WEEK +** | **10%** | **23%** |
| **2 WEEKS +** | **14%** | **46%** |
| **3 WEEKS +** | **28%** | **55%** |
| **4 WEEKS +** | **23%** | **72%** |
| **5 WEEKS +** | **35%** | **79%** |
| **6 WEEKS +** | **65%** | **81%** |

District Input Process

Decisions on the revised guidance for continuous enrollment were based on analysis of current reporting practices, like the one shown above, and on feedback gathered from district representatives and from representatives of vendors who provide districts with student information systems. Stakeholders were given opportunities to share information about existing practices for identifying enrollment breaks and to provide feedback on the proposed guidance for continuous enrollment in a series of town halls facilitated by the Data Pipeline team. Town Halls were hosted April 30, 2015, May 21, 2015, and June 17, 2015. During the Town Hall discussions, the Unit of Accountability also made open invitations for continuing questions and feedback. Following these invitations, additional discussions with districts and vendors were conducted via phone and email throughout May and June 2015.

The majority of districts that participated in these discussions indicated agreement with the proposal to move the start-point for determining continuous enrollment to October 1. Many districts indicated that **they did not have clearly defined practices for defining enrollment breaks**. **For the districts that did have established practices, there seemed to be a common threshold for identifying breaks of either two calendar weeks or 10 instructional days**. Given this information, the Unit of Accountability determined that districts would not object to changing the start-point for continuous enrollment to October 1, and that establishing a threshold of 10 instructional days would cause little disruption to existing district practices. The Unit of Accountability determined that these changes would **allow CDE to establish common guidelines for defining continuous enrollment that should lead to improvements in the quality and consistency of data-reporting across the state.**

Summary

Under the revised guidance to be implemented beginning with the 2015-16 school year, CDE will define continuous enrollment as enrollment from October 1 to the testing date without an enrollment gap of 10 or more instructional days. In terms of overall numbers of students included for accountability, the impacts of these changes will be minimal. Simulations carried out using the 2014 TCAP reading data indicate that under the revised guidelines 96.02% of the state’s approximately 507,000 assessment records would have been included in district performance framework achievement calculations and 95.06% would have been included in school performance framework achievement calculations. Under the previous guidelines, 96.37 % of records were included in district calculations and 95.18% were included in school calculations. While these impacts are minimal, the Unit of Accountability will have much greater confidence that the criteria for excluding records from accountability calculations are consistent across the state, ensuring greater comparability in reporting measures.