

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education**  
**Progress Monitoring Report – Performance Summary (Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate)**  
**February 2022**

**Introduction – What is Being Monitored**

A goal of Strategic Plan 2024 is to increase the percent of students that graduate with their 9<sup>th</sup> Grade cohort in four years from 89% in October 2017 to 95% by October 2024. Graph 1 below outlines annual targets and actual performance from the first school year of the strategic plan (SY2018-19) to the final school year of the plan (SY2023-24).

It is important that we clarify what is meant by “graduation cohort.” The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2021) states that:

The number (numerator) of total students earning a regular high school diploma before, during, or at the conclusion of the fourth year of high school or the summer session immediately following the fourth year completed by the date published by the NCDPI, is divided by the total number (denominator) of students expected to graduate within four years.

According to the [Every Student Succeeds Act,] ESSA, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate “shall not include any students awarded a recognized equivalent of a diploma such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credential.”

The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is calculated by creating an initial cohort of students who are tracked upon entering the 9th grade and are then expected to graduate within four-years. Under the [Every Student Succeeds Act,] ESSA, the denominator, or total number of students expected to graduate in the current year’s cohort, “consists of the number of students who form the original cohort of entering first-time students in grade 9.” Membership in the denominator is determined by a collection date defined by the NCDPI...The denominator is adjusted by adding and removing students as permitted by Section 8101 [20 U.S.C. 7801]....

Using PowerSchool, the NCDPI extracts each school’s student enrollment data on the twentieth (20) day of school. This data collection sets the initial cohort for the school....

The initial cohort is adjusted by adding students who joined the cohort after the original cohort was determined (transferred into the cohort) and subtracting only those students who during the years covered by the cohort are confirmed and documented to have transferred out, emigrated to another country, transferred to a prison or juvenile facility, or are deceased.

Transferring into the cohort occurs when a student enrolls into a high school after the initial cohort has been set. Students are added to the cohort throughout the initial cohort year and each of the subsequent years, including the fourth year. Students are added through PowerSchool enrollment data that is captured in scheduled data collections....

Removal from the cohort is limited to the specified circumstances defined under the ESSA (the student transferred out, emigrated to another country, transferred to a prison or juvenile facility, or is deceased). Each removal from the cohort requires the school or LEA to either collect appropriate documentation or obtain documentation from the NCDPI to verify the removal. (pp.1-3)

**Evaluation of Current Performance: Off-Track**

Currently, the four-year cohort graduation rate is 82.6%<sup>1</sup>. Though the final rate projects to be higher than this current calculation, we are projected to complete the school year off-track. Four-year cohort graduation rates by racial subgroup and for English Learners can be found in Table 1 (see below).

Graph 1.

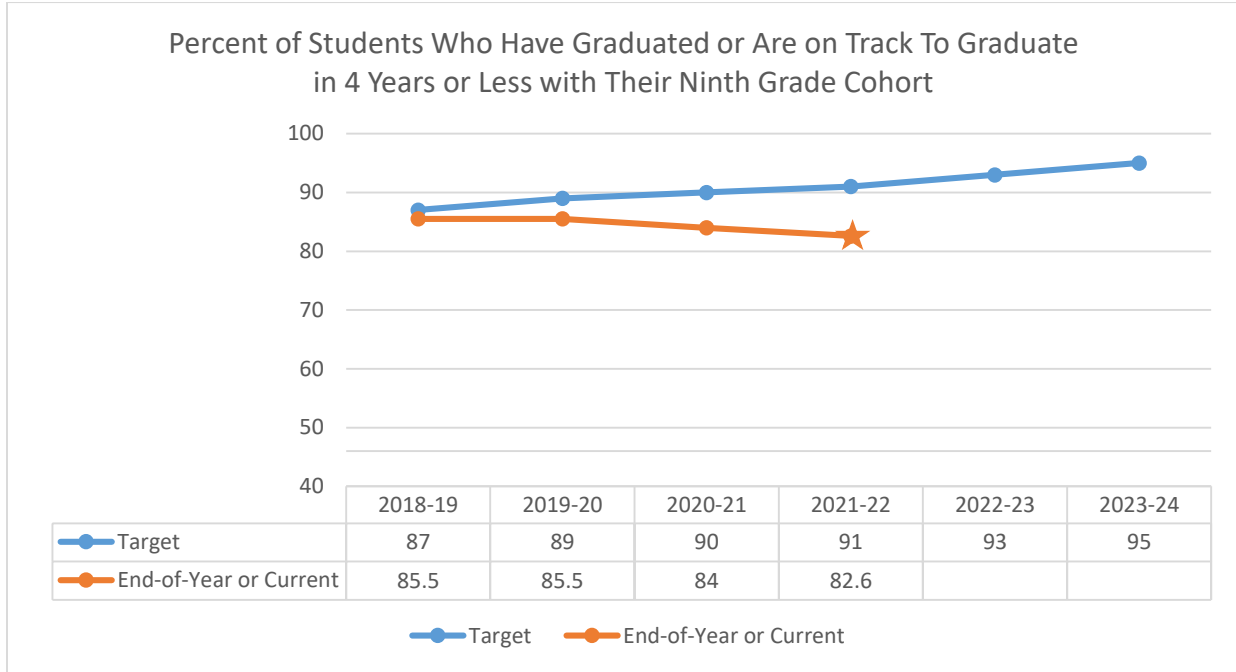


Table 1. Percent of Students Who Graduated in 4 years or Less with their 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Cohort

	2021 Actual	2021 Target	2022 Current	2022 Target
All	84.4	90	82.6	91
Asian	91.8	93	92.4	93
Black	82.6	90	80.0	91
Hispanic	73.9	82	73.8	86
Two or More Races	84.7	----	82.7	----
White	92.9	93	91.6	93
English Learner (EL)	59.0	----	65.0	----

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Supporting Data**

A change in business rules in the 2017-18 school year, the school year after our baseline was set, had a considerable impact on declines in four-year cohort graduation rates and subsequent missed targets. Statewide business rules were revised, requiring schools and school districts to account for students graduating on-time, even if they were entered the school or school district substantially off-track. This revised rule applied to every student entering the district, even if she or he entered the district in the

<sup>1</sup> The number of students considered in the cohort will change as appropriate documentation is collected, changing the projected and eventual four-year cohort graduation rate.

last month of her or his senior year. The change in business rules in 2017-18 directly contributed to a three percentage point decline from 2016-17. Additionally, far fewer students that transferred into CMS off-track in 2017-18 caught up with their entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort for an on-time graduation. The percent of students that transferred into the district off-track, and caught up with their entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort, declined from 62.3% in 2016-17 to 39.4% in 2017-18, a decline of 22.9% percentage points.

Notwithstanding this change in business rules, particular indicators, many of which are reflected in the Board’s goals and guardrails, point to opportunities and challenges to improve future four-year cohort graduation rate figures. One indicator is student absenteeism. In reviewing the attendance patterns of students that graduated with their 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort, and those that did not, dramatic differences in absenteeism rates can be observed. Students that graduated with their 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort in the 2020-21 school year had relatively steady attendance. Specifically, twenty percent (20%) of students that graduated with their 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort in the 2020-21 were chronically absent. Students that did not graduate with the with their 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort in the 2020-21 school year predictably had higher rates of absenteeism. Specifically, seventy-six percent (76%) of students that did not graduate with their 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort in the 2020-21 were chronically absent.

A second indicator is social-emotional skills. Students with specific social-emotional skills, such as self-efficacy, engagement, self-management, are more likely to graduate on-time with their entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort. The Panorama Student Survey is designed to assess student perceptions of these skills. Results from the Fall 2021 Panorama Student Survey were analyzed for students in Grades 9-13 and XG. The overall response rate for the Panorama survey among high school students during the Fall 2021 administration was fifty-six percent (56%).

Trends in responses were similar across grades 9-11. In the area of engagement, a minority of students surveyed reported being engaged. Only twenty-six percent (26%) of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, twenty-five percent (25%) of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and twenty-four percent (24%) of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported being engaged. In the area of self-efficacy, forty percent (40%) of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, thirty-nine percent (39%) of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and thirty-eight percent (38%) of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported having self-efficacy. In the area of self-management, a majority of students surveyed reported having solid self-management. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, seventy percent (70%) of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and seventy percent (70%) of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported having solid self-management skills. These results can be seen in Table 2 (see below).

Table 2. Percent of Students Providing a Positive Response by Social-Emotional Learning Domain

	Engagement	Self-Efficacy	Self-Management
Grade 9	26	40	69
Grade 10	24	38	70
Grade 11	25	39	70

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

A third culminating indicator is dropout rate. Dropout counts statewide for the 2020-21 school year are still being finalized and have to be reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Data from 2016-17 (our baseline year) through 2019-20 have fluctuated. Dropout rates hit their five-

year low in 2019-20, declining to 2.11 (see Table 3). However, during this period we averaged approximately 1,000 students dropping out annually. Considering that our graduating cohorts have recently ranged from 10,500 – 11,500 students, this number of dropouts reflects approximately 9% of an average cohort. A disproportionate percentage of students who dropout annually, approximately 40-45%, are Hispanic. If we do not stem dropouts, we cannot meet future four-year cohort graduation rate targets.

Table 3. Percent and Number of High School Students Dropping Out

	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
All Students	980	2.20	1,035	2.26	1,068	2.35	958	2.11

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

### Needed Strategic Moves

There are two sets of strategic moves required to increase performance in this area:

1. Grade 12: Short-term next steps, and
2. Grade 10 and 11: Intermediate-term next steps.

#### Grade 12: Short-Term Steps (next 90 days)

There are existing practices that have to be prioritized, supported, and reinforced. In the next 90 days we will work intentionally with schools in three critical areas: 1) monitoring progress, 2) supporting students, and 3) confirming students in the cohort. Specifically, we will:

- Ensure counselors have reviewed the graduation status – on/off track – of each senior, using Graduation Success Initiative (GSI) reports and processes as well as other available digital tools.
- Extend learning time – after-school, summer, etc. – for students that need additional time to complete coursework successfully, or time to take new courses or “recover” credits.
- Begin planning for summer school now, moving up the start date of Summer Session 1 to provide additional instructional time for the cohort in the month of June.
- Reinforce existing processes and systems for cohort accuracy assurance, providing targeted support to schools needing assistance with “cleaning up” their cohort data.
- Monitor student absenteeism and course failure for seniors closely, intervening early to prevent chronic absenteeism and course failure, utilizing existing social workers and partners (i.e., Communities in Schools).
- Work with seniors to clarify and/or develop post-secondary next steps to incentivize on-time course completion and graduation.
- Deploy available central office staff to support/mentor seniors in targeted schools that have been identified as exhibiting drops in course performance and/or attendance in second semester.
- Continue and deepen supports for non-English speaking families.

#### Grades 10 and 11 – Intermediate-Term Next Steps

Past practice has emphasized supports for and monitoring of seniors’ progress toward an on-time graduation. Moving forward, efforts in grades 9-11 will be required to achieve increases in four-year

cohort graduation rate. Specifically, we will need to apply the approach applied to seniors - 1) monitoring progress, 2) supporting students, and 3) confirming students in the cohort – to students in grades 10 and 11. Given the supporting data shared, we will prepare to do the following next year for students expected to graduate in 2023 and 2024:

- Be explicit about our end goal, how we want to get there, and the tools, processes and systems available to staff to pursue those goals.
- Provide students with the time, tools, processes and guidance to track their own progress toward graduation, and make sure that information is shared with parents.
- Utilize existing Early Warning Indicator (EWI) monitoring tools, as well as course grade performance monitoring tools, to identify and direct support to struggling students.
- Reinforce structures to address these emerging cohorts, including -
  - a. Funding for credit recovery for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders,
  - b. Reinstatement of graduation coaches to oversee the high school matriculation process across all cohorts,
  - c. Prioritizing bilingualism in the hiring of staff to help all students, particularly in schools with linguistically diverse student bodies.
- Deliberately use social workers, external partners and other appropriate school staff to both monitor student absenteeism and provide student/family supports for struggling students in the targeted cohorts.
- Integrate the teaching of social-emotional skills (self-management and self-efficacy) into the teaching of content areas.
- Be clear about scheduling students in alignment with graduation requirements, which may require some schools to revise their respective 4-year course cards.

To attain targets in SY2022-23 and SY2023-24, the above efforts will be essential.