
COHORT GRADUATION RATE AUDITS

VERIFYING STUDENTS REMOVED FROM THE COHORT

STUDENTS REPORTED AS DECEASED OR PERMANENTLY INCAPACITATED

In 2015, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) contracted with the Oregon Public Health Division to acquire a file of all Oregon deaths (mortality data) between July 1, 2010 and August 31, 2015, for individuals who were school-aged at the time of their deaths. The purpose of this contract was to check the accuracy of our current reporting, and investigate potential uses of the mortality data for use in future cohort graduation rate generations. We cross referenced this list against four-year cohort outcomes for the 2011-12 cohort, and five-year cohort outcomes for the 2010-11 and 2009-10 cohorts. Because there are relatively few students reported as deceased in each year (typically less than 100), it was possible to do a significant amount of research on each case beyond basic matching procedures.

Our results indicated that nearly all students reported as deceased or permanently incapacitated (indistinguishable outcomes in ODE's data set) were reported accurately. A small number of students appeared in the mortality file, but not in data reported by Oregon schools and districts, and this number gets smaller in more recent cohorts.

2011-12 Cohort

44 students were reported to ODE as deceased or permanently incapacitated in this cohort. Of those 44, 9 had outcome dates outside of the available mortality data, leaving 35 potentially verifiable. 33 students (94%) were verified with the help of the mortality data file, and investigations of publicly available records for the remaining two cases reveal one who was permanently incapacitated but not deceased, and one whose death occurred in Washington.

An additional 5 students in this cohort had been reported as non-completers to ODE, but were likely deceased based on the mortality data available.

2010-11 Cohort

56 students were reported to ODE as deceased or permanently incapacitated in this cohort. 53 students (95%) were verified with the help of the mortality data file. Of the remaining 3, an obituary was located for one student, indicating that the student's actual death occurred outside the dates of the available mortality data (on a date after the reported outcome in ODE's data). Two student outcomes were not verifiable.

An additional 17 students in this cohort had not been reported to ODE, but were likely deceased based on the mortality data available. Of these 17, 10 were graduates or completers (for whom K-12 districts were no longer responsible at the time of their deaths), and 7 were reported to ODE as non-completers.

2009-10 Cohort

62 students were reported to ODE as deceased or permanently incapacitated in this cohort. 5 students had outcome dates outside of the available mortality data, leaving 57 potentially verifiable students. Of those, 52 students (91%) were verified with the help of the mortality data file, and investigations of publicly available records for the remaining cases reveal one whose death occurred in Washington. The remaining 4 outcomes were not verifiable.

An additional 58 students in this cohort had not been reported to ODE, but were likely deceased based on the mortality data available. Of these, 42 were graduates or completers, and 3 were transfers out of Oregon public education, leaving 13 who had been reported to ODE as non-completers.

Conclusions

ODE's mortality reporting is highly complete. Reported data largely agree with vital records data, and only a small number of outcomes are potentially missed. Small discrepancies do not justify continued purchase of mortality records for future reporting purposes.

STUDENTS REPORTED AS TRANSFERS TO HOMESCHOOLING, TRANSFERS TO PRIVATE SCHOOL, TRANSFERS TO K-12 EDUCATION IN ANOTHER STATE, OR EMIGRATING TO ANOTHER COUNTRY

No secondary data source was available to verify transfer outcomes, and with more than 5,000 reported in each cohort, it was not possible for ODE to investigate all, or even most, of the reported outcomes. Oregon rules and federal guidance require districts to document in writing each transfer event that they report, however, so to assess the accuracy of the reports, a sample of students was chosen and a copy of transfer records was requested from their last district.

Districts or schools who reported more than 18 percent of their unadjusted cohorts (and at least three total students) as transfers (a rate more than twice the state's overall transfer out rate) were selected. From these institutions, a random sample of one to three reported transfers was selected from each institution's four-year cohort, and the institution was asked to provide documentation of the transfer event. It should be noted that this sample was selected from districts with a higher than average likelihood of improperly documented events, and so the results may not be generalizable to the state as a whole.

A total of 56 students, across 25 districts, were selected. 19 districts were able to provide acceptable documentation for all of their transfers. Five districts were able to provide acceptable documentation for two of the three selected students. Of the five students whose outcomes were not documented:

- One attended a privately-run program that had closed, and the records could not be located
- One had a documented outcome, but the transfer was to a non-diploma granting institution (Oregon rules require that transfers be to a diploma-granting institution in order to remove students from accountability to a district)
- One had returned to a previous state, but the school received a notification from that state indicating that the student had not re-enrolled in a diploma-granting institution
- One had potentially had documentation at one time, but the institution did not retain records appropriately
- One had no documentation

The remaining institution provided a local withdrawal form for one student, and no documentation for the other two. ODE is following up with this institution.

All remaining students had appropriate documentation, including transcripts and records requests from schools in other states; documentation that the students were attending as part of foreign exchange programs; ESD homeschooling registrations; records requests and diplomas from private schools; or written notification from a parent that the student was moving to another country.

Conclusions

ODE is encouraged by the generally high level of documentation revealed by this audit, and will continue to work towards our goal of appropriately documenting outcomes for all students. We would like to thank the many dedicated staff members at Oregon's schools and districts who worked hard to respond to this audit, even as their institutions experienced severe weather closings, as well as the many more who work hard every day to ensure that Oregon's data are complete and accurate. We could not produce quality reports to inform efforts throughout the state without your support.