



GRADUATION AUDIT

Board of Education

September 13, 2022

Background

- Students are required by NYS Education Department (NYSED) to obtain a minimum of 22 credits to earn a High School Diploma.
- Requirements include a distribution of credits in English, Math, Social Studies, Science, Electives, World Language, Health and Physical Education.
- There are also specific Regents exams that must be passed with a few alternate pathways to meet the State criteria.

Graduation Requirements

- A student is placed in a cohort for their school in the year they enter 9th grade. Only under specific circumstances can a student be removed from the cohort.
- The District's graduation rate is calculated based on the number of students who graduated divided by the number of students who entered the 9th grade cohort 4 years earlier.
- There are adjustments to the cohort for certain authorized purposes.
- **The graduation rates for the District were 63%, 68% and 64% for 2015, 2016 and 2017 cohorts, respectively.**

Scope of Work

To conduct a review of historical graduation information and related processes from cohorts 2015 -2017 (2019 -2021 graduates). The results are intended to improve operating procedures and monitoring of graduation readiness.

- Our testing and analyses encompassed data from pre to post pandemic.
- We reviewed policies and procedures, credit requirements, Regents requirements, cohort tracking, historical grades, earned credits, GPA, course offerings, and historical changes.

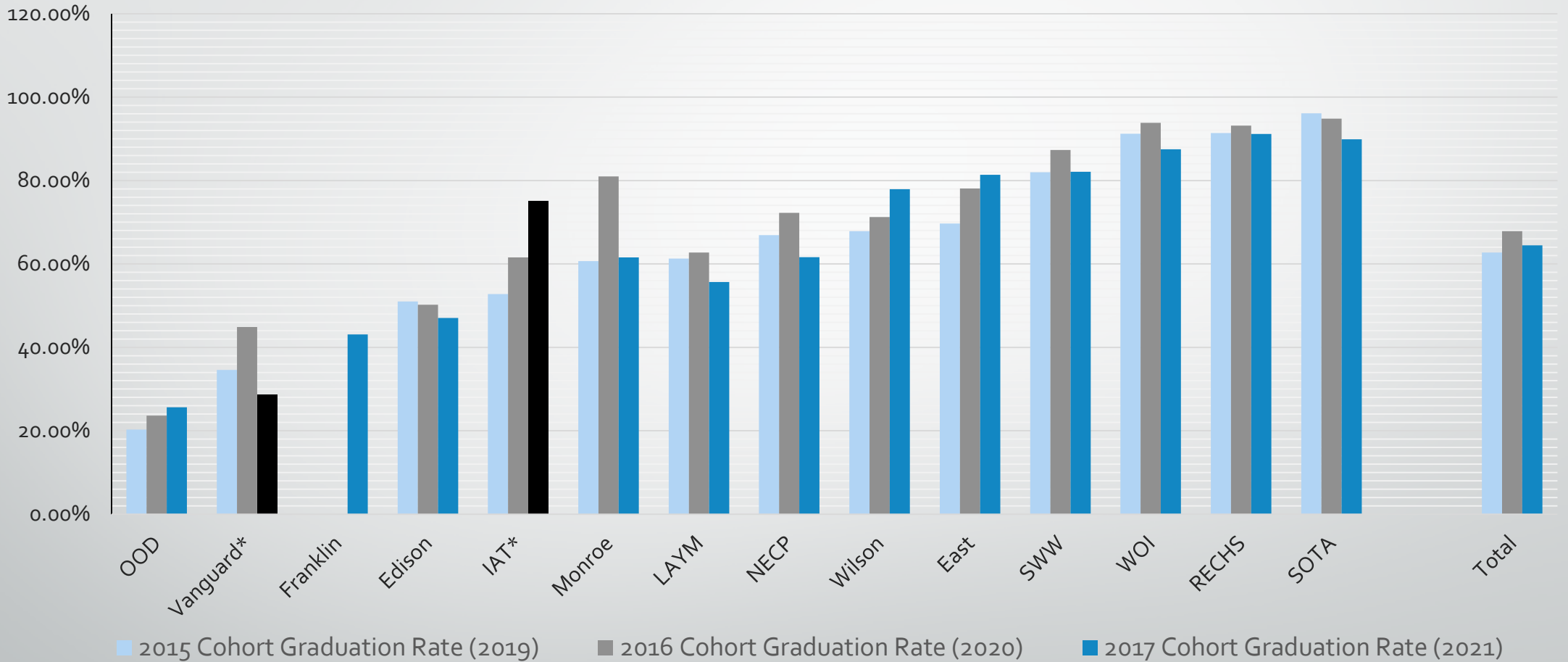
Approach for Review

- We obtained graduation data from the NYS database.
- We obtained individual student records from the PowerSchool system.
- We performed detailed testing for 8 schools.
- We visited 6 schools.
- We obtained District guidance and processes for cohort tracking, graduation rate validation, grade changes and course entry.
- We performed analyses utilizing data for all cohort enrollments, graduates and schools.

Graduation Rates

School	2015 Cohort Graduation Rate			2016 Cohort Graduation Rate			2017 Cohort Graduation Rate		
	Enrollment	Grads	Grad Rate	Enrollment	Grads	Grad Rate	Enrollment	Grads	Grad Rate
East	178	124	69.7%	169	132	78.1%	177	144	81.4%
Edison	445	227	51.0%	450	226	50.2%	387	182	47.0%
Franklin	-	-	-	-	-	-	225	97	43.1%
IAT	127	67	52.8%	143	88	61.5%	12	9	75.0%
LAYM	93	57	61.3%	102	64	62.8%	88	49	55.7%
Monroe	201	122	60.7%	147	119	81.0%	156	96	61.5%
NECP	157	105	66.9%	119	86	72.3%	125	77	61.6%
RECHS	81	74	91.4%	88	82	93.2%	68	62	91.2%
SOTA	179	172	96.1%	174	165	94.8%	178	160	89.9%
SWW	61	50	82.0%	63	55	87.3%	67	55	82.1%
Vanguard	188	65	34.6%	165	74	44.9%	14	4	28.6%
Wilson	221	150	67.9%	212	151	71.2%	172	134	77.9%
WOI	91	83	91.2%	97	91	93.8%	96	84	87.5%
OOD	64	13	20.3%	55	13	23.6%	39	10	25.6%
Total	2,086	1,309	62.8%	1,984	1,346	67.8%	1,804	1,163	64.5%

Graduation Rate By Cohort Year



■ * These schools were closed in 2017, but there were students remaining in cohort.

Summary of Key Areas

- Policies, Regulations and Protocols/Procedures
- RCSD Course Catalog
- PowerSchool Student Management System
- Grade Point Average and Grading Policies
- Graduation Requirements
- Covid-19 Impact
- Cohort Tracking

Policies, Regulations and Procedures

Recommendations 1, 2, 27

Appropriate governance through policies, regulations and procedures do not exist for graduation-related activities and data.

Policies, regulations and procedures for administration, grading practices, and graduation are not consistently documented, reviewed or updated.

- Grading standards
- Cohort tracking and parent communication standards
- Graduation requirements and ceremony participation
- General education credential requirements
- Grading information systems
- Student transfer practices (Managed Choice)

Policies, Regulations and Procedures

Recommendations 1, 2, 27

Consider Board Policies for significant graduation-related activities.

- ***Graduation requirements and ceremony participation***
- ***General education credential options***
- ***Grading, grade changes and audit trails***
- ***Grading information systems***
- ***School Without Walls model***

Reevaluate Managed Choice Policy to minimize student transfers for high school students in 11th and 12th grade.

Academic Standards and Assessment Procedures

Recommendation 3

Academic Standards and Assessment Procedures (ASAP) provides guidance for core curricula, instructional practice, grading, promotion, acceleration, special education, NYS assessments and Regents, attendance and accountability.

- ASAP has not been formally updated since July 2012.
- Procedures were not disseminated or readily accessible.

Evaluate, update, implement and communicate the Administrative Guidelines for Academic Standards and Assessment Procedures (ASAP) document to clarify District standards and expectations. Update annually and ensure it is readily accessible.

Policies, Regulations and Procedures

Recommendations 4 & 5

Historical written educational standards, manuals and course catalogs are not formally retained.

Create a centralized repository for graduation requirements, Academic Standards and Assessment Procedures, course catalogs and other specific information and organize by year, or cohort.

Clearly defined roles, responsibilities and deliverables did not exist for various graduation readiness and tracking functions.

Define roles and responsibilities for School Chiefs, Principals, Counselors, Teachers, Office of Accountability and Registrars.

RCSD Course Catalog

Recommendations 6 & 7

- Current courses taken by students were not included in the course catalog.
- Documented prerequisites were not always adhered to.
- The course listing in PowerSchool contained errors and incomplete information.

RCSD Course Catalog should be reviewed at least annually and updated as changes occur. Verify course description, instructional area, prerequisites, substitutions, credits, course level and added value.

When the Course Catalog is updated, ensure the course listing in PowerSchool accurately reflects updated courses.

PowerSchool Data Integrity

Recommendations 8-12

Data integrity in PowerSchool was not consistent:

- Documentation supporting grade and credit changes did not consistently exist.
- Various school-based data input errors and omissions were noted.
- Key reports did not include all student data.
- Calculations on system reports were not consistently accurate.
- Audit history was not available in the system until September 2020.
- System logic was not implemented to identify data entry errors.

PowerSchool Data Integrity

Recommendations 8-12

- *Ensure documentation and approval exists for grade and credit changes.*
- *Implement a biannual building level review process for data entry to ensure accuracy and completeness. Utilize reporting to identify potential data entry issues.*
- *System users/departments should verify reports and system information for accuracy and completeness.*
- *Critical calculations on system reports should be verified for accuracy.*
- *Implement access controls to limit access to historical records or implement reporting to monitor changes.*
- *Whenever possible, system logic should be implemented to identify data entry errors.*

GPA Testing

To assess the GPA calculation to understand how GPA is calculated and determine its accuracy.

- Recalculated the unweighted and weighted GPA for 42 students.
 - 10 were randomly selected using the GPA analysis population for 2015, 2016 and 2017 cohorts.
 - 30 current 12th grade students with the highest GPAs were selected from 5 schools.
 - 2 were judgmentally selected:
 - One was a student with out-of-district courses.
 - One had a unweighted GPA over the 4.5 maximum.
- Calculated the potential GPA if pass (P) or pass with distinction (PD) grades given in 2019-20 were included in the GPA.

Grade Point Average (GPA) & Added Value

Recommendations 13 & 14

The District's unweighted GPA scale goes from 0 to 4.5 instead of a more commonly used 4-point scale.

- Added value (additional weight) is provided to the 4.5 scale for students taking Regents, honors and Advanced Placement classes.
- Regents classes are receiving additional value, but students are expected to take Regents classes in core areas to graduate.
- We noted art, music, drama, PE and theater tech courses coded as Regents classes with added value.
- Based on the practices above, all GPAs are inflated.

RCSD Grade Point Scale

Grade	Honors Class	Regents Class	Non-Regents Class
A+	6.5	5.5	4.5
A	6.0	5.0	4.0
B+	5.5	4.5	3.5
B	5.0	4.0	3.0
C+	4.5	3.5	2.5
C	4.0	3.0	2.0
D	3.0	2.0	1.0
F	0.0	0.0	0.0

Grade Point Average (GPA) & Added Value

Recommendations 13 & 14

- *Develop and adopt a plan to adjust the grading scale and unweighted Grade Point Average (GPA) scale to a 4-point scale.*
- *Update School Profiles when grading changes are made.*
- *Ensure that the East EPO participates in planning and communication activities for this change.*
- *Discontinue the practice of adding value to the GPA for Regents level courses and reassess if added value will be utilized for classes with more rigor.*
- *Ensure the Course Catalog and systems reflect any changes.*

Student Grade Point Averages

Recommendation 15

- For graduated students we reviewed, we noted GPAs ranging from less than 1 to 4.5.
- Approximately 34% of Rochester City School District students from 2015 to 2017 cohorts graduated with final GPAs below a grade of C, or between 0.41 and 1.99 on a 4.5 point scale.
- Schools are focused on students acquiring the required 22 credits and Regents exams with little focus on grades.
- RCSD should consider minimum GPA requirements for graduates and/or alternate instruction to ensure that students leave RCSD with a basic level of required knowledge.

Change the current practice of focusing exclusively on obtaining 22 credits and implement practices to start increasing student performance in classes.

Analysis – GPA

Utilized cohort students from 2015 - 2017 and obtained GPA data from PowerSchool.

GPA Range	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort	2017 Cohort	Total	Percent
0.00 - .049	0	2	0	2	0.1%
0.50 - 0.99	22	46	19	87	2.4%
1.00 - 1.49	156	174	135	465	12.7%
1.50 - 1.99	231	246	193	670	18.3%
2.00 - 2.49	228	238	235	701	19.2%
2.50 - 2.99	267	231	206	704	19.2%
3.00 - 3.49	198	187	150	535	14.6%
3.50 - 3.99	102	110	110	322	8.8%
4.00 - 4.49	55	57	60	172	4.7%
4.5	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	1,259	1,291	1,108	3,658	100.0%

GPA Calculation

This depicts how a student can have a GPA lower than a 1.0:

School Year	Class	Earned Grade	Potential Credit	GPA Scale Point	Earned Point Value
2016-17	Living Environment	F	1	0	0
2016-17	Global I	F	1	0	0
2016-17	English I	D	1	1	1
2017-18	Living Environment	D	1	1	1
2017-18	Global I	D	1	1	1
2017-18	English I	F	1	0	0
2018-19	Earth Science	F	1	0	0
2018-19	Global II	F	1	0	0
2018-19	English II	D	1	1	1
2018-19	PE	D	0.5	1	0.5
2019-20	Earth Science	D	1	1	1
2019-20	Global II	D	1	1	1
2019-20	English III	D	1	1	1
Total			12.5		7.5

GPA Calculation (Earned Point Value / Potential Credit)	
Earned Point Value	7.5
Potential Credit	12.5
$7.5/12.5=$.60

Credit and Regents Requirement Testing

- To determine graduates have the required credits, Regents and passing grades to graduate.
- 8 secondary schools were tested.
- 88 graduated students were sampled for testing.
- Students tested were in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 cohorts.
- Selected students with a GPA of 1.0 or less for testing, assuming these students were the most likely at risk of not graduating.
- Tested compliance with NYS Diploma Requirements – credit and Regents requirements.
- Utilized PowerSchool's Counselor Dashboard and Historical Grades.

NYS Graduation Requirements

Recommendations 16 & 17

- We were unable to obtain evidence that one student in our sample met the credit requirements to graduate.
- Buildings are responsible for ensuring students meet graduation requirements.
- Accountability manually verifies the school graduation list for accuracy.

Establish formal review procedures with sign-off evidencing who performed each student verification for graduation.

Ensure PowerSchool is properly updated with student grades and credits.

Automate the verification process.

Exit Summary and Prior Written Notice (PWN)

Recommendation 18

- Graduated students with disabilities did not consistently receive the mandated Student Exit Summary and Prior Written Notice for diploma.
- Mandated documents should summarize the student's academic achievement, functional performance, and recommendations on meeting post-secondary goals.
- PWN is required to inform parents of a change in service.

Implement procedures that ensure the Student Exit Summary and Prior Written Notices are completed and sent for students with disabilities.

Management has implemented procedures starting in May 2022 after the audit period. Audit will test the process for fidelity after 3 graduation dates are available for testing.

COVID Impact

Recommendation 19

- Students were “Held Harmless” during the 2020 Covid pandemic.
- In 2019-20, no student could receive a grade lower than a D in the third quarter. Students could only receive a Pass, Pass with Distinction or Incomplete as a grade in the fourth quarter.
- NYSED guidance required that students meet the standards assessed in the provided coursework to be granted diploma credit.
- District guidance was inconsistent with NYSED.
- Students who were failing their courses prior to the pandemic received passing final grades (i.e. F, F, D, INC with a final passing grade).
- Many students ended the year with a final grade of Incomplete.

COVID Impact

Recommendation 19

Develop a plan to minimize the risk of learning loss. Determine the impact of student learning loss as a result of the pandemic and align resources to provide students in need of assistance to be successful in future courses.

Develop a process to monitor and verify all incomplete grades are changed to a passing or failing grade. Ensure credit is not received for courses that have an incomplete grade.

Cohort Tracking Testing

- Received and reviewed 2017 and 2018 cohort tracking documents from 12 secondary schools/programs.
- Visited 6 schools to obtain an understanding of their cohort tracking methodology.
- Tested students in the 2018 cohort tracking that were determined to be at-risk or off-track to assess the student's four-year graduation plan, student/parent contact and detailed plans to get the student back on track to graduate.

Cohort Tracking

Recommendations 21 -26

Comprehensive monitoring and oversight were not consistently performed for student cohort performance for academic success.

- Tracking exists across school buildings with various levels of fidelity and different methodologies. Standards are needed across RCSD.
- Automation should be implemented for cohort tracking.
- There is a system to identify at-risk or off-track students, but no scale exists to ensure that same definitions exist across schools.
- Reporting should be readily available and proactive monitoring for 9-12th should occur throughout the year to identify status of all students, student/parent contact and plans to remediate those that are off track.

Cohort Tracking

Recommendations 21 -26

Develop detailed written guidance for the entire cohort tracking process.

- *Include a cohort tracking template.*
- *Criteria for assigning students as on-track, at-risk and off-track.*
- *Frequency for assessing students.*
- *Student and parent contact standards.*
- *Documentation and reporting requirements.*
- *Create reporting from PowerSchool and a dashboard for ease of reporting.*
- *Provide access to School Chiefs for regular monitoring.*

Conclusions

- District graduation rates were materially correct for the years tested.
- The infrastructure and control environment for graduation related activities identified significant opportunities to reassess and restructure the District to improve operating practices, expectations, and standards.
- Many practices were in place prior to the current administration, but have continued to occur.
- Board Policies and Superintendent Regulations should be considered for significant graduation-related activities. Academic Standards and Assessment Procedures should be reviewed, updated and communicated annually.
- Roles and responsibilities within the entire student monitoring and graduation process must be clearly defined and formalized.

Conclusions

(continued)

- The District's course catalog and the course listing in PowerSchool should be evaluated for accuracy and completeness.
- PowerSchool errors in reporting should be evaluated and corrected while minimizing the impact on the integrity of data and reporting.
- Data entry errors should be minimized by implementing a review process to ensure accuracy and completeness.
- Access controls should be established to limit changes once a student has graduated.
- Schools should consistently track academic progress for all students starting in ninth grade to facilitate an on-time graduation.

Conclusions

(continued)

- A district-wide cohort tracking process should be developed, with templates, automation, training and effective monitoring to ensure consistency of performance and completeness.
- The GPA scale should be revised to a commonly accepted 4-point scale and discontinue weighing Regents classes.
- District personnel should consistently evaluate student GPAs as part of determining student success.
- The District should evaluate the impact COVID had on students and develop an academic plan to reduce learning deficiencies.