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## *NJ SMART Graduation Rate Appeals: User Guide*

Each year, districts are able to appeal their 4-year and 5-year high school graduation rate data in NJ SMART. Appeal requests are meant as a last-resort opportunity for districts to resolve issues found in their August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshots. Since graduation data is available to districts year-round through District Reports, districts are expected to profile their data prior to August 31<sup>st</sup> to fix any errors possible and are expected to inactivate graduates in time for the August 5<sup>th</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup> deadlines.

### **Timeline**

<b>Early July</b>	<i>Begin inactivating 2015-2016 graduates and transfers in SID Management</i>
<b>Early August</b>	<i>2015-2016 School Year Graduates – SID Management Inactivation Deadline</i>
<b>End of August</b>	<i>2015-2016 School Year and Summer Graduates – SID Management Inactivation Deadline</i>
<b>Mid-September</b>	<i>Preliminary August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot Available; Appeals Period Opens</i>
<b>Early October</b>	<i>Appeals Period Closes 5PM Deadline</i>
<b>Late November</b>	<i>Final August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot available, all approved appeals processed</i>

***\*Check the NJ SMART Events Calendar for official dates\****

### **Guidelines**

- Appeal requests may only be made regarding graduation rates based off of the official graduation snapshot generated that school year. For example, in 2016, only Cohort 2016's 4-year graduation rate and Cohort 2015's 5-year graduation rate are subject to appeal requests.
- Districts are responsible for the submission and maintenance of their own data in the NJ SMART system. By participating in the NJ SMART Appeals Period, districts are able to make changes to data in the August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot, which is used to calculate high school graduation rates; however, ***districts are expected to ensure that this data is reflected in their submissions prior to filing an appeal*** (e.g., if an appeal request indicates that a student's Exit Code should be "L" in the Graduation Report, then the student's current status in SID Management should be "L")
- In order to make an appeal request, please navigate to the Graduation Appeals page found on the Reporting tab in the NJ SMART portal.
- All requests must be made at the individual student level with explanations for each student.
- All information must be submitted as required in the appeals request form. Please note that incomplete appeal requests cannot be considered.

- If the NJDOE requires further information from your district on an appeal request, you will be required to submit documentation to the NJ SMART Help Desk at [njsmart@pcgus.com](mailto:njsmart@pcgus.com) with the subject line; Appeal Request Documentation: District XXXX, with your district's 4-digit district code in the title . A response from the district will be required in time for the Appeals Period deadline, or the request will be declined.
- The NJDOE evaluates each individual request that is submitted based on the information provided.
- The NJ SMART Graduation Appeals process is specific to the NJ SMART data included in the August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot. This process is unrelated to the NJDOE's AHSA appeals process.
- The Graduation by Assessment Report is **not** subject to appeal through this process.
- If you have any appeal requests that are not relevant to the Appeal Request Form, please contact the NJ SMART Help Desk for assistance.

## Types of Appeal Requests

Appeal requests are only considered for data items that are officially reported on to the state for the graduation report. Currently, data and scenarios that can be appealed include the six following Reasons for Appeal:

**A. Cohort Status:**

Student's status (active/inactive) or exit withdrawal code is incorrect (Not including Requested Exit Codes: T3; T8; T9; or TP)

**B. Cohort Status:**

Student transferred to a private school or out-of-state school (Only Includes Requested Exit Codes: T3; T8; T9; or TP) Please note: This type of appeal requires that the LEA has documentation to support this claim.

**C. Transfer Cases:**

Student transferred to another NJ SMART-submitting LEA in New Jersey prior to August 31st

**D. County, District, School Codes:**

Student is still within district but CDS codes are incorrect (Attending; Receiving; Resident; or Accountable)

**E. Cohort Year:**

Student's Cohort Year is incorrect

**F. Entering Values:**

Student's Entering Values are incorrect (Race; Gender; Lunch Status; LEP Status; Special Education Classification; Migrant Status; or Homeless Status)

Appeal requests for any other data points will not be considered. Please abide by the requirements below for each type of request.

## 1. Cohort Status

REASON FOR APPEAL = A or B	
<b>Description:</b>	A student's Cohort Status is defined by their Student Exit Withdrawal Code (for inactive students) or Grade Level (for active students). Districts can request to change a student's inactive status from one exit code to another, can request to inactivate an active student, or can request to activate an inactive student in the August 31 <sup>st</sup> Snapshot.
<b>Most frequent issue:</b>	A district entered the incorrect Exit Code or uploaded the student as inactive after August 31 <sup>st</sup> .
<b>Where to look:</b>	Beyond the Graduation Report, districts can view these students in SID Management (if they have kept inactive records in their file uploads). Student's Cohort Statuses are also viewable in their Enrollment Records, accessed by drilling down through the High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile Report.
<b>How to fix data errors:</b>	<p>Districts have full control over their students' Cohort Statuses since SID Management is open all year round. To activate a student, districts must submit the student as Status = A to SID Management. To inactivate a student, districts must submit the student as Status = I, with Exit Code, Exit Date, and Cumulative Days information filled out.</p> <p>To change the exit code of an inactive student, <u>districts must first submit the student as Active to SID Management and then inactivate them again with the new Exit Code. (If you do not first activate the student, then the change to the Exit Code will not be recorded!)</u></p> <p>Appeal requests for Cohort Status changes will require significant justification by districts regarding why they were unable to make these edits prior to August 31<sup>st</sup>.</p>
<b>Requirements:</b>	<p>Before making an appeal request to change a student's Cohort Status, the district user must first update the student's Status and/or Exit Code and Exit Date in SID Management with the desired status and exit code (or none). Before an appeal request will be approved for application to the August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot, <u>the NJDOE will verify the request against the student's current status in SID Management.</u> If the request does not match the student's current status, it will not be approved. (Please contact the Help Desk if you require assistance in making these updates.)</p> <p>Districts cannot request to change a student from one active Cohort Status to another (e.g., On-Track Continuing to Off-Track Continuing), as</p>

	<p>these active statuses hold equivalent meaning in the graduation rate calculations.</p> <p>Requests to change a student’s exit code to T3, T8, T9, or TP will require <u>additional documentation</u> (i.e., transfer card, letter from a parent/transfer district) from the district. District must email this attachment to <a href="mailto:njsmart@pcgus.com">njsmart@pcgus.com</a> on the same day that they submit the appeal request. In the email’s subject line, write "Appeal Request Documentation: District XXXX" with your district's 4-digit district code in the title, and the student's SID number in the body of the email.</p>
<b>Change implementation:</b>	<p>NJ SMART will change a student’s Cohort Status in the August 31, 2016 submission. The appeals change <u>will not</u> persist beyond this snapshot. It is the district’s responsibility to make the necessary changes within SID Management prior to requesting an appeal, in order to ensure the sustainability of this change. For example, if the district was unable to inactivate a student with an exit code of “L” by the 8/31 deadline, they should first make this change in SID Management as soon as possible. Then, they can request an appeal from the NJDOE; if approved, NJ SMART will apply this Exit Code retroactively to the August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot.</p>

## 2. Transfer Cases

REASON FOR APPEAL = C	
<b>Description:</b>	Districts may claim that a Transfer Out-Unverified student actually did transfer to another public school district in New Jersey. In another case, districts may have errantly coded a student as “T4” (Transfer Out-Unverified) when “T3” or “T8” actually applied (Excluded from Cohort).
<b>Most frequent issue:</b>	The “pick-up” district failed to upload the student in a timely fashion. In another case (e.g., requesting T3/T8), the district may have input the exit code incorrectly.
<b>Where to look:</b>	Districts can view their Transfer Out-Unverified students in the High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile Report and view CDS codes in the Enrollment Record.
<b>How to fix data errors:</b>	In cases where the “pick-up” district failed to upload the student in a timely manner, districts should contact the other district and instruct them to upload the student. Districts should work together to resolve these issues prior to the August 31 <sup>st</sup> deadline.

	If the district inputs the incorrect Transfer Exit Code, they should follow the directions in the above <i>Cohort Status</i> section. Documentation will be required for these students.
<b>Requirements:</b>	<p>For any transfer request, the student must be uploaded to SID Management by the “pick-up” district by the time the appeal request is made. <u>The NJDOE will verify the request against the student’s current status in SID Management.</u> NJ SMART will not upload students to another district; however, NJ SMART will retroactively apply that change to the August 31, 2016 Snapshot. If there is any situation in which the “pick-up” district is not cooperating, the district should contact NJ SMART for assistance.</p> <p>Be sure to input the correct CDS Codes for the student in the Appeal Request Form (Section 3), in addition to indicating the new Submitting District, so that Accountability is accurately calculated.</p>
<b>Change implementation:</b>	NJ SMART will place a student in the transfer district for the August 31 <sup>st</sup> Snapshot, but will not apply this change to other snapshots. The “pick-up” district must have already activated this student in SID Management, before this appeal change will be applied.

### 3. County, District, School (CDS) Codes

REASON FOR APPEAL = D	
<b>Description:</b>	Users can request a change to a student’s Attending, Receiving, or Resident CDS Codes. The Accountable CDS Codes for a student are derived by NJ SMART, based on these submitted codes, and are also subject to appeal.
<b>Most frequent issue:</b>	For the most part, appeal requests related to CDS Codes are due to data entry error and impact accountability.
<b>Where to look:</b>	Districts can view their students’ Attending, Receiving, and Resident CDS Codes in SID Management and can view their Accountable students in the Graduation Report. Please refer to the <i>High School Graduation Accountable Rules</i> document on the NJ SMART Help tab for additional information.
<b>How to fix data errors:</b>	<p>Districts can edit Attending, Receiving, and Resident CDS Codes in SID Management.</p> <p>Accountable Codes: If districts feel that the students’ CDS Codes have been correctly inputted but still feel that the Accountability Codes have</p>

	<p>been derived incorrectly, the district cannot make this change. The district should contact the NJ SMART Help Desk.</p> <p>Appeal requests for CDS Code changes will require significant justification by districts, as districts are able to edit these codes themselves (in most cases) through August 31<sup>st</sup>.</p>
<b>Requirements:</b>	<p>Students' CDS Codes should be updated in SID Management with the requested codes, prior to the district's appeal request. Before an appeal request will be approved for application to the August 31<sup>st</sup> Snapshot, the <u>NJDOE will verify the request against the student's current CDS Codes in SID Management</u>. If the request does not match the student's current codes, it will not be approved. (Please contact the Help Desk if you require assistance in making these updates.)</p>
<b>Change implementation:</b>	<p>NJ SMART will change a student's CDS Codes in the August 31, 2016 snapshot. The appeals change <u>will not</u> persist beyond this snapshot for Attending, Resident, and Receiving CDS Codes. It is the district's responsibility to make the necessary changes within SID Management prior to requesting an appeal, in order to ensure the sustainability of this change. As for Accountable CDS Code changes, these will be applied to official snapshots for 4-year and 5-year graduation rates.</p>

#### 4. Cohort Year

REASON FOR APPEAL = E	
<b>Description:</b>	<p>Cohort Years are assigned to students by NJ SMART based on the first school year in which they are submitted with a high school grade level. Once a student is assigned a Cohort Year, they stay in that same Cohort Year for the remainder of their student career.</p>
<b>Most frequent issue:</b>	<p>The most frequent reason for this appeal is user error in initially assigning the student Grade Level = 9.</p>
<b>Where to look:</b>	<p>In order to figure out why a student was assigned to a given cohort, the district can examine (a) the student's Enrollment Record (which shows grade levels submitted in June submissions) or (b) submitted State data from the State Submission Release History page (which shows all October and June data submitted). <b>NOTE:</b> for the 2016 cohort you need to look at your State Submission data released in the 2012-2013 school year.</p>

	Tip: To assess whether the Cohort Year assigned is appropriate, check the student's Assessment Record to see what year they took their grade-level assessments. (ie. NJ ASK 8 <sup>th</sup> grade)
<b>How to fix data errors:</b>	Districts cannot change a student's cohort year. They must appeal the record in the NJ SMART Appeals Period.
<b>Requirements:</b>	If you are requesting a Cohort Year prior to 2011, please contact the NJ SMART Help Desk.
<b>Change implementation:</b>	If your request is approved, the student's Cohort Year will be permanently changed in NJ SMART affecting all other iterations of graduation reports.

## 5. Entering Values

REASON FOR APPEAL = F	
<b>Description:</b>	LEAs can submit appeal requests to change a student's value for one of the officially reported subgroup variables: Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Special Education Classification, Lunch Status, Homeless Status, Migrant Status, and LEP Status. In the Graduation Report, Entering Values for subgroup categories are reported; thus, the subgroup categories will reflect the values submitted for the student when they were first assigned a Cohort Year (usually in Grade 9).
<b>Most frequent issue:</b>	The most frequent reasons for this type of appeal are (1) user data entry error in the submission in which the student entered the Cohort Year or (2) district users not understanding the difference between Entering Values and what was most recently submitted for the student.
<b>Where to look:</b>	<p>Besides your High School Graduation Cohort Status Profile, districts can view this information in:</p> <p>Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Free and Reduced Rate Lunch Status, Homeless Status*, and LEP Status (SID Management) – Only the most recent SID Management Snapshot is available for district viewing, so districts will be unable to see their students' Entering Values in SID Management.</p> <p>Migrant Status (State Submission) – Districts can look at past State Submission data on the State Submission Release History page. Districts should examine subgroup data from the submission in which the student was first assigned a Cohort Year.</p>

	<p>*Note: Homeless Status was first collected in June 2011, so for any student who entered a cohort prior to that time, their Homeless Entering Value is taken from the June 30, 2011 State Submission.</p> <p>Special Education Classification (Special Education Submission) – Districts should look to the October 15<sup>th</sup> Special Education Submission of the same year in which the student entered the cohort. For example, if the student entered in October 15<sup>th</sup> State Submission, check the October 15<sup>th</sup> Special Education Submission. If the student entered in the June 30<sup>th</sup> State Submission, check the subsequent October 15<sup>th</sup> Special Education Submission.**</p> <p>**Note: Special Education data is collected once per year, while State Submission data is collected twice per year.</p>
<b>How to fix data errors:</b>	Districts cannot change a student’s Entering Value. They must appeal the record in the NJ SMART Appeals Period.
<b>Requirements:</b>	<p>Districts can only request to change the student’s Entering Value to their most recently submitted (“Most Recent”) value (from the prior June 30<sup>th</sup> Snapshot).</p> <p>For all fields except Special Education Classification, the Most Recent Values would come from the prior June 30<sup>th</sup> Snapshot; for Special Education Classification, the Most Recent Value would come from the prior October 15<sup>th</sup> Snapshot. Please note that values are only changed under extenuating circumstances.</p>
<b>Change implementation:</b>	If your request is approved, the student’s subgroup value will be changed in the August 31 <sup>st</sup> Snapshot.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How is accountability determined?

Accountability CDS Codes are derived based off of business rules supplied by the NJDOE and checked against the *Accountable High School List*. Please see the NJ SMART Help and Support Tab for this documentation.

### Does the NJDOE monitor districts’ *Excluded from Cohort* counts?

Yes, the NJDOE regularly monitors districts’ *Excluded from Cohort* counts. As the Exit Codes associated with the *Excluded from Cohort* status should not occur regularly, the NJDOE will contact any districts that have unusually high counts to investigate these students further.

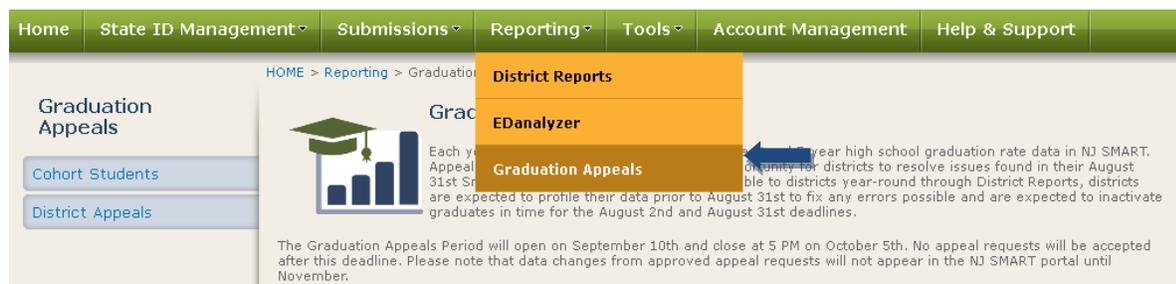
## Does the NJDOE monitor districts' *Graduate* counts?

Yes, the NJDOE monitors districts' *Graduate* counts in two ways. First, the NJDOE evaluates adherence to the early August deadline for regular school-year students and will reach out to district superintendents if it appears that their district missed the deadline. As with last year, the NJDOE will also monitor compliance with the August 31<sup>st</sup> deadline. Secondly, the NJDOE will look into any graduates that are not matched with assessment data, as shown in the Graduation by Assessment report (available as a District Report in NJ SMART).

## How to Submit an Appeal

In order to request a graduation appeal, district users must navigate to the *Graduation Appeals* page, which can be found under the *Reporting* tab in the NJ SMART portal (see Figure A). In order to view the *Graduation Appeals* page, users must have District Reports access; to obtain this access, users should contact their district's Web User Administrator (WUA). On the *Graduation Appeals* page, users will find two subpages: *Cohort Students* and *District Appeals*.

Figure A



## Cohort Students Page

This page lists all students that have been submitted by your district who are currently assigned to a Cohort Year. Use filtering, sorting, and exporting options to explore this data.

- If you click on the LID of a student, you will be taken to the *Cohort Student Details* page.
- From this page, you can click the *Create Appeal* button to open the record's *Appeal Request Form*.

## District Appeals Page

This page lists all student records appealed by your district and indicates their NJDOE Decision Status.

- If you click on the LID of a student, you will see the appeals request form submitted for that record as well as notes from the NJDOE once a decision is made.
- The possible Decision Statuses are:
  - Submitted: The default status upon submitting a request.
  - Pending: The NJDOE has reviewed the request but not yet made a decision.
  - Declined: The NJDOE has declined the request.

- Declined (Open to Edits): The NJDOE has declined the request however is willing to reconsider if the appeal is revised.
- Approved: The NJDOE has approved the request.

## Appeal Request Form

For the 2016 appeals period, the appeals form has been updated to only display relevant fields based on the reason for appeal selected. Select the appropriate reason for appeal from the drop down menu and the form will update itself to show the required fields. Users must fill in all highlighted fields. Please ensure that the information that you submit is accurate as each student can only be appealed once.

**Appeal Request**

**NJ SMART Graduation Appeal Request**  
Please refer to the NJ SMART Graduation Appeals User Guide for full instructions on how to fill out this form. All users are expected to have read this guide prior to submitting any graduation appeals.

**Reason for Appeal (1)**  
Please choose the scenario that best describes your reason for appealing this student's graduation data.

A. Student's status (active/inactive) or exit withdrawal code is incorrect (Not Including Requested Exit Codes: T3; T8; T9; or TP).

**Reason for Appeal (2)**  
If applicable, please choose the second scenario that describes your reason for appealing this student's graduation data, if more than one situation exists.

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**COHORT STATUS APPEALS**

Requested Status:  Requested Exit Code:

Requested Exit Date (YYYYMMDD):

*If your requested Exit Code = T3, T8, T9 or TP, then documentation is required to verify this request. On the same day that your appeal request is submitted, email the documentation as an attachment to njsmart@pcgus.com with the following subject line: "Appeal Request Documentation: District XXXX" with your district's 4-digit district code in the title, and the student's SID number in the body of the email. If these instructions are not followed or documentation has not been submitted by the time the request is reviewed by the NJDOE, the appeal request will not be considered.*

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**ALL APPEALS**

**Explanation of Request**  
Please explain your scenario in 500 characters or less. An explanation is required for each selected Reason for Appeal; without an explanation, the request will not be considered.

**Explanation of Missing the 8/30 Deadline**  
*IF YOUR REASON FOR APPEAL = A, B, C, or D, please explain why you were unable to edit this student information prior to the August 30th deadline in 500 characters or less.*

**Requesting District's Contact Information**  
Please fill in the contact information of the person in your district who is responsible for monitoring this appeal.

Contact First Name:  Contact Last Name:

Contact Phone Number:  Contact Email Address:

By clicking the SUBMIT APPEAL button, you will submit your appeal request to the NJDOE. In doing so, you are verifying that the information that you have included above is correct. By clicking the CANCEL button, you will cancel this request.

Note: Items highlighted in yellow are required fields.