

To: Boston School Committee  
From: Monica Hogan, Chief of Data, Information and Systems Improvement  
CC: Mary Skipper, Superintendent  
Date: November 14, 2025  
Subject: Understanding Graduation Data: Annual Graduate Count vs. Four-Year Cohort Rate

This memo outlines the distinction between two frequently used, but very different, graduation metrics: the total number of students who graduate in a given year and the official four-year cohort graduation rate. It also provides an update on the number of students who graduated in June 2025.

1. **Annual Graduate Count:** The Annual Graduate Count is a simple "snapshot" of all diplomas conferred in one year.
  - a. **What it is:** A raw count of students who received a high school diploma within a specific academic year (e.g., diplomas issued between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025).
  - b. **Who it includes:** This number includes graduates from that 12-month period, regardless of how long it took them to complete their studies. This means the count includes students who graduated in four years, as well as those who may have taken five or more years.
2. **Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate:** The Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate is a more complex metric required by federal and state reporting. This metric is a longitudinal measure that assesses if a school or district is graduating a specific group of students "on time".
  - a. **What it is:** This rate tracks a specific group of students, or a "cohort," who all entered 9th grade for the first time in the same school year. The rate is the *percentage* of those students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within four years.
  - b. **Who it includes:** For example, the "Class of 2025" cohort rate tracks students who began 9th grade in the fall of 2021. The cohort is adjusted over the four years by adding students who transfer in and removing students who transfer out (e.g., to another district, a private school, or by emigrating).

It is important to understand that the official four-year cohort graduation rate is not available immediately upon a class's June graduation. The calculation is complex and requires final data on all students in the cohort, including those who may graduate in the summer (August) following the June ceremony. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) must collect and validate this data from all districts across the state. Official four-year cohort graduation rates for a class that graduates in June are not typically released until the following winter or spring. For example, the official cohort rate for the "Class of 2025" (who graduated in June 2025) will not be publicly available until sometime in February/March

2026.

The following table compares the number of 12th-grade students who graduated in a given year with the number of graduates included in the DESE 4-year cohort.

School Year	# of Oct 1 Gr 12 Students	# of Oct 1 Gr 12 Graduates	BPS Sr Class Grad Rate	# of Students in DESE 4-Year Cohort	# of Graduates in DESE 4-Year Cohort	DESE 4-Year Cohort Grad Rate	Percentage Point Difference (DESE - BPS)
SY18-19	3957	3190	80.6%	4347	3181	73.2%	-7.4
SY19-20	3651	3023	82.8%	3923	2958	75.4%	-7.4
SY20-21	3851	3197	83.0%	3867	3049	78.8%	-4.2
SY21-22	3840	3071	80.0%	3593	2911	81.0%	1.0
SY22-23	3882	3121	80.4%	3767	3032	80.5%	0.1
SY23-24	3726	3020	81.1%	3711	2959	79.7%	-1.4
SY24-25	3877	3322	85.7%	-	-	-	-

#### Data Notes

- The “# of Oct 1 Grade 12 Students” is based on students identified in the Oct 1 senior enrollment count. As such, this does not capture students who entered BPS in grade 12 after Oct 1 and graduated.
- The “# of Oct 1 Gr 12 Graduates” include seniors who graduated between 10/1 and 9/30 of the indicated school year. For example, for SY18-19, this includes seniors who graduated between 10/01/18 and 09/30/19.
- Data does not include Horace Mann Charter schools.