



NEW ENGLAND
SECONDARY SCHOOL
CONSORTIUM

Common Data Project

2015 Procedural Guidebook

Improving the Quality and Comparability of State Educational Data in New England

The New England Secondary School Consortium

Common Data Project 2015 Procedural Guidebook



The procedures outlined within this document were developed by Research in Action, Inc. under contract with the Great Schools Partnership. This document's primary purpose is to record the process used to collect, review, and publish data submitted by the five member states of the New England Secondary School Consortium.



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Purpose Statement

The *Common Data Project 2015 Procedural Guidebook* provides participating state agencies with a clearly articulated record of the agreed-upon business rules, decision logic, and quality controls used in the execution of the New England Secondary School Consortium’s Common Data Project. The guide is intended to facilitate understanding, compliance, ease of use, and professional development across the participating member states (Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). The guidebook also serves to help education leaders, stakeholders, and the general public understand the technical details associated with the Common Data Project.

List of Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	FULL TERM
ACGR	Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate
CRI	College Readiness Indicator
EDEN	Education Data Exchange Network
ELL	English Language Learners
FERPA	Family Education Rights and Privacy Act
F/R	Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch
FTP	File Transfer Protocol
GED	General Educational Development
GSP	Great Schools Partnership
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
NCES	National Center for Educational Statistics
NESSC	New England Secondary School Consortium
NGA	National Governors Association
NSC	National Student Clearinghouse
SEA	State Education Agency
SPC	Statistical Process Controls
SpEd	Special Education
SWD	Students with Disabilities
UMDI	University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute

SECTION I

GOALS, KEY TASKS, AND SELECTED METRICS

1.0 Background

The New England Secondary Schools Consortium (NESSC) is a five-state partnership that works to promote forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education throughout the New England region. The NESSC vision—which was created and endorsed by education officials and state leaders from Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—seeks to ensure that every adolescent graduates from a new generation of high-performing, internationally competitive high schools prepared for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of our interconnected global society.

The NESSC was established in the fall of 2008 with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The NESSC has established performance goals to be achieved in each of the five states by 2016:

1. Increase graduation rates across the five states.
2. Decrease annual dropout rates across the five states.
3. Increase the percentage of students enrolling in two- and four-year college degree programs or pursuing industry certified accredited post-secondary certificates.
4. Increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school college-ready.

To track and measure progress in relation to its stated goals, the NESSC brings together data experts from each state to form its Data Team. The initial charge of the team was to discuss data collection across the states, identify current methods used to analyze data, and specify how states could report common indicators of student success related to the NESSC's four goals.

In 2011, the Data Team hired an independent Data Coordinator (Research in Action, Inc.). Drawing on materials from previously published technical reports, meeting notes, and RIA's corporate experience, the Data Coordinator helped the Data Team establish standardized guidelines for state data submission. The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) developed templates that each state used to submit data for each performance indicator. Finally, RIA modified its data-auditing procedures for use with the NESSC's procedures and data. The Data Coordinator and staff checked the data for consistency and accuracy, flagged data discrepancies using an internal quality-control procedure, and coordinated with state education agency (SEA) representatives to revise and update any inaccuracies. After the data-verification procedures were completed, RIA transmitted the data to the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute. UMDI received the data from the states via RIA and reported on each NESSC indicator. The data submitted were then compiled and published in the *Annual Evaluation* and *Phase III Technical Report*.

In this guidebook, key indicators were compared with statistics from the prior two years to measure progress toward the initiative's desired outcomes. UMDI staff also attended Data Team meetings and debriefed with the team's facilitator from the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) and consultants from RIA. To verify the reported information, UMDI provided an initial draft of the report tables to all team members for feedback and revisions. Once the corrections were implemented, UMDI published the final report and presented its findings to the Data Team.

In 2012, UMDI completed its role as external evaluator. Given this change, the Data Team began to streamline the procedures used to collect and report on its performance goals. The data-collection template, the procedures used to establish data comparability, and consistent reporting methods were incorporated into the formal business procedures outlined in this document.

In 2013, the Data Team continued to implement and report data associated with the graduation-rate and dropout-rate indicators. The participating states also began examining postsecondary enrollment and success indicators. All states agreed to a common point in time (early February) to request data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)—a necessary quality-assurance measure because the NSC continuously updates its databases. After seeking guidance from NSC staff, the Data Team established a request window of 15 days from February 1 to February 15. The strategies increased data comparability across the member states, but quality concerns necessitated a preliminary reporting in the spring of 2013, with states requesting time to double check the results. The Data Team used an end-user-verification control approach (the Annual Report), which the states created, reviewed, and approved prior to publication. The team observed and corrected several minor errors within the established review and correction window.

In 2014, the Data Team conducted several additional refinements of the data submitted over the past years to ensure the trend statistics reflected publically released information. Exceptions in earlier years, such as in 2009 when one SEA estimated dropout rates, were reexamined and annotated in the Annual Report. Further, the Data Coordinator clarified and validated the three baseline cohorts used to establish the denominators among the indicators. Specifically, the high school freshman cohort was used as the denominator for both the graduation and dropout indicators. For postsecondary enrollment, the high school graduate cohort was used as the denominator. This cohort included all students graduating with a standard diploma in four or more years. Thus, students who graduated with a standard diploma in five, six, or seven years are members of the high school graduate cohort. The final cohort—the denominator of the persistence and completion indicators—is the number of first-time freshman enrolled in postsecondary education.

1.1 Goal

The Data Team works to promote data comparability for each performance indicator used by the NESSC member states. This goal is partially achieved by implementing standardized procedures that eliminate unwanted variance resulting from the misinterpretation of agreed-upon business rules and from computational errors introduced during aggregation. The team also uses the Data Coordinator as a quality control and support mechanism for the NESSC member states. Each year, the Data Team reviews and revises this guidebook to reflect evolving needs and requirements, refine common business rules and procedures, and improve data quality, consistency, and comparability.

1.2 Key Tasks

In collaboration with the Great Schools Partnership and the Data Coordinator, the Data Team agreed to implement the following procedural tasks, which are organized into four phases:

1. PHASE I (PLANNING): All parties (a) identify procedures from the prior year that need improvement, and (b) establish milestones for data collection, quality review, and report production.
2. PHASE II (PRE-EXECUTION): The Data Coordinator (a) amends the procedural documents, (b) establishes state-centric timelines, (c) develops coordination and communication guidelines, and (d) promulgates data collection tools and techniques. The Data Team then (a) reviews the procedural guidelines, (b) reports any inconsistencies, (c) establishes internal timelines, and (d) identifies data coordinators in each state.
3. PHASE III (EXECUTION): The Data Coordinator (a) receives updated Data Templates, (b) implements quality controls, (c) monitors timelines, (d) identifies data issues, (e) provides corrective suggestions, (f) finalizes data elements, and (g) reports progress to GSP and others. During this phase, SEA representatives are (a) populating the Data Templates, (b) reporting any known data anomalies, (c) seeking clarification on business rules, (d) monitoring internal timelines, (e) requesting technical assistance, and (f) correcting any erroneous data.
4. PHASE IV (REPORTING): The Common Data Project begins public reporting of data that have been reviewed, finalized, and placed into the reporting tool, which allows end users to view each available metric. The Data Coordinator (a) populates the reporting tool, (b) conducts internal quality controls on data charts and tables, and (c) amends report narratives to match the displayed data. All parties (a) review the data displays, and (b) provide feedback for a draft report. Once completed, the SEAs release the public reports on their websites.

1.3 Selected Indicators

The NESSC has established four performance goals to be achieved in each of the five states: (1) increase high school graduation rates, (2) decrease dropout rates, (3) increase the percentage of students enrolling in two- and four-year postsecondary programs or pursuing industry-certified and accredited postsecondary certificates, and (4) increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school prepared for college. The Data Team, in conjunction with external third parties, created five performance indicators based on the agreed-upon metrics described in this document. The common metrics, in conjunction with a standardized set of business procedures and rules, allows the reported data on each indicator to be comparable across NESSC states. To our knowledge, only the federal government, via the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), has attempted to provide the public with comparable metrics on key educational initiatives.

1.3.1 Graduation Rate [Status: Operational] [Baseline Year: 2009]

Graduation rates have been computed using the formula articulated in 34 C.F.R. §200.19. The rate relies on the identification and tracking of a four-year graduation cohort. All states in the Consortium currently report the federal graduation rate. The following formula is used for calculating the graduation rate:

$$\text{(\# of Graduates with a Standard Diploma)} \div \text{(\# of First-time Freshman +/- Transfers In or Out)}$$

1.3.2 Dropout Rate [Status: Operational] [Baseline Year: 2009]

The NESSC dropout data is closely linked to the data used in calculating the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). Data Team members recognize that, as the graduation rate and dropout rate have often been reported using disparate methods, a clearer relationship between these measures would be helpful. The National Governors Association (NGA) offered guidance on the dropout rate by recommending that dropouts be counted as those students who have not completed high school and are no longer enrolled in high school. This rate is calculated as a cohort formula using the same adjusted freshman cohort used for the graduation rate. The following formula is used for calculating dropout rate:

$$\text{(\# in Adjusted Freshman Cohort)} - \text{(Graduates + Students Still Enrolled + Other Completers)} \\ = \text{Dropouts} \mid \text{Dropout Rate} = \text{Dropouts} \div \text{Adjusted Freshman Cohort}$$

1.3.3 College Enrollment [Status: Operational] [Baseline Year: 2009]

The rationale for collecting postsecondary-enrollment data is to determine the percentage of students who go on to further education after completing high school. All five NESSC states use data collected by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), and NSC reports are run during a common reporting window to reduce variance associated with ongoing updating of the national NSC database. The following formula is used for calculating postsecondary enrollment:

$$\text{(\# of Students Enrolled in College)} \div \text{(\# of High School Graduates)}$$

1.3.4 College Persistence [Status: Operational] [Baseline Year: 2011]

The final business rule states: “The number of college freshman (by cohort) that remain enrolled in a two-year or four-year college in the third semester after initial enrollment.” The freshman college cohort is defined as those high school graduates [who graduated 3-5 years prior] earning a regular diploma who enroll in postsecondary education for the first time.

$$\text{(\# of Students Enrolled in 3rd Semester)} \div \text{(\# of Freshman College Cohort)}$$

1.3.5 College Success [Status: Operational] [Baseline Year: 2011]

Postsecondary success is determined by the percentage of the freshman college cohort who attend two- or four-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) and graduate/complete. The data reported by this indicator does not reflect all students starting and completing their postsecondary education “on time.” For that reason, the postsecondary-success rate will be computed over a six-

year period. The national standard for measuring college completion allows for 150% of the length of the program—six years for baccalaureate degrees, three years for two-year degrees. All NESSC states use data collected by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The following formula is used for calculating postsecondary success in four-year programs (the same formula is modified for two-year programs):

$$\text{(# of Students Completing College within 6 Years)} \div \text{(Freshman College Cohort)}$$

1.3.6 College-Readiness Index (CRI) [Status: Pending] [Baseline Year: TBD]

Since college readiness is such a complex and important metric to capture, the Data Team recommended that the NESSC use multiple measures to create a “college-readiness index.” The NESSC’s college-readiness index is currently under development, and the Data Team is collaborating with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation at the University of Southern Maine (for more information, see pages 15–16). The team agreed on working definition of college readiness for the purposes of creating a college-readiness index that utilizes multiple measures. The following formula is used as a working definition of college readiness:

Completion of 24 credit hours of college coursework and a GPA of 2.5 or enrollment in a third semester of college (two- or four-year programs)

SECTION II

DATA COLLECTION, BUSINESS RULES, AND QUALITY CONTROLS

2.0 Overview

This section describes the five key performance indicators for which data is being collected and reported, along with the quality controls used to ensure the comparability of the data. The production of statistical information based upon identified performance indicators requires a well-defined set of business rules that describe what the indicator is intending to measure and the metric by which results are produced. Business rules are further augmented by data definitions, which operationalize and codify the data-collection processes. Agreed-upon operational definitions articulate how to process raw data into reported statistics. The business rules reported within this section define the parameters and data necessary for NESSC to meet its objectives.

Most states use a combination of statistical process controls (SPC), internal audit procedures, and/or end-user-verification opportunities within their quality-assurance framework. These processes help to ensure that reported data and statistics are valid representations of actual performance, rather than errors. The Data Team's overarching goal of comparable data across states can only be actualized by the prevention of unwanted errors from entering the early stages of the reporting cycle. Each member state has, within their student-information systems, internal processes to detect and correct irregularities, such as duplicate records, missing data fields, illogical data, and multiple memberships. Support to local districts—such as developing data-acquisition calendars, training IT and school staff, and improving communication with local officials—are typical approaches used by states to promote data quality.

Each NESSC member state has agreed to adhere to the guidelines and business rules outlined in this guidebook. The role of the Data Coordinator is to ensure the aggregated data submitted in the Data Template is both credible and comparable—i.e., that the data points were derived through the correct interpretation of the NESSC business rules. All member states data are reviewed on the same quality criteria using the Data Coordinator's revised internal audit procedures.

2.1 Data Collection

The Data Team established its original data collection procedures with UMDI at the beginning of 2009. A straightforward method was developed by which member states aggregated data from their student-information systems, along with data from the NSC, and reported those data using a customized Excel spreadsheet. Once populated, the SEAs sent the spreadsheet to the UMDI for use in developing the annual NESSC report.

Beginning in 2013, the data-collection spreadsheet was streamlined to reduce the time burdens on team members and eliminate unreported data (i.e., data not directly linked to the five performance areas). These changes reduced the number of Data Elements to seventeen, but the number of variables per element increased slightly to seventeen. This increase was a result of the team's decision to report the Asian/Pacific Islander student subgroup in two distinct categories, which is consistent with federal reporting requirements. Furthermore, minor changes to the nomenclature within the Data Template were applied to the 2013 version. In 2014, detailed cohort data associated with the denominators used for the five different indicators were added to the data templates to improve comparability among the member states.

All Data Elements will be collected and reported for each of the following student subgroups:

CATEGORY	SUBGROUP
Gender	All
	Male
	Female
Ethnicity	Hispanic
	Non-Hispanic
Race	White
	Black
	Native American
	Asian
	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
	Multiracial
Income	Eligible F/R
	Not Eligible F/R
Language	ELL
	Non-ELL
SpEd	SWD
	Non-SWD

2.1.1 Data Element: Number of Students Graduating in Four Years

The number of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in four years or less.

2.1.2 Data Element: Percentage of Students Graduating in Four Years

The percentage of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in four years or less.

2.1.3 Data Element: Number of Students Graduating in Five Years

The number of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in five years or less, adjusted for transfers in and out all five years.

2.1.4 Data Element: Percentage of Students Graduating in Five Years

The percentage of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in five years or less, adjusted for transfers in and out all five years.

2.1.5 Data Element: Number of Students Graduating in Six Years

The number of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in six years or less, adjusted for transfers in and out all six years.

2.1.6 Data Element: Percentage of Students Graduating in Six Years

The percentage of students graduating from high school with a standard diploma in six years or less, adjusted for transfers in and out all six years.

2.1.7 Data Element: Number of High School Dropouts

The number of students exiting high school prior to earning a regular diploma, including students exiting to enroll in a GED program.

2.1.8 Data Element: Percentage of High School Dropouts

The percentage of students exiting high school prior to earning a regular diploma, including students exiting to enroll in a GED program.

2.1.9 Data Element: Percentage of Students Enrolling Early in Postsecondary Education

The number of high school students that earn a regular diploma before the end of their fourth year in high school who enroll in postsecondary education.

2.1.10 Data Element: Number of Students Enrolled in Two-Year Programs [Immediately]

The number of high school graduates earning a regular diploma and enrolling in a two-year postsecondary-education program in the fall semester (no later than October 1) immediately following graduation.

2.1.11 Data Element: Number of Students Enrolled in Four-Year Programs [Immediately]

The number of high school graduates earning a regular diploma and enrolling in a four-year postsecondary-education program in the fall semester (no later than NLT October 1) immediately following graduation.

2.1.12 Data Element: Number of Students Enrolled in Two-Year Programs [Delayed]

The number of high school graduates earning a regular diploma and enrolling in a two-year postsecondary-education program after October 1 but prior to August 15 of the second summer following graduation.

2.1.13 Data Element: Number of Students Enrolled in Four-Year Programs [Delayed]

The number of high school graduates earning a regular diploma and enrolling in a four-year postsecondary-education program after October 1 but prior to August 15 of the second summer following graduation.

2.1.14 Data Element: Number of Students Persisting in a Two-Year Programs

The number of college freshman (by cohort) enrolled in a postsecondary-education program in the third semester after initial enrollment. Meaning, for a given cohort of college freshman, how many students are still enrolled in postsecondary-education program in the third semester.

2.1.15 Data Element: Number of Students Persisting in a Four-Year Programs

The number of college freshman (by cohort) enrolled in a postsecondary-education program in the third semester after initial enrollment.

2.1.16 Data Element: Number of Students Completing Two-Year Programs

The number of college freshman (by cohort) that earn a diploma/certification by completing a two-year postsecondary-education program within three years.

2.1.17 Data Element: Number of Students Completing Four-Year Programs

The number of college freshman (by cohort) that earn a diploma/certification by completing a four-year postsecondary-education program within six years.

2.2 Business Rules

The business rules are further augmented by data definitions, which operationalize and codify the data-collection processes. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) publishes data definitions that are used by state education agencies (SEAs) to report on federal performance indicators. Many of these data definitions are found in the National Data Model used to collect and store federally mandated data via the Education Data Exchange Network (EDEN) and ED Facts.

The Data Team uses data definitions consistent with federal reporting, except when noted within this document. Additionally, some definitions are unique to the NESSC given the focus of the performance indicators. For example, graduation rates are reported using the most recent federal reporting formats and data definitions; however, a “six-year” rate required a new data definition. The Data Team created seventeen data variables to display aggregated performance data by gender, ethnicity, race, income (free and reduced lunch eligibility status), language (English-language learners), and special education (students with disabilities).

2.2.1 Graduation Rate

In addition to the common four-year graduation rate, the NESSC decided to report five- and six-year graduation rates. The Data Team decided against “freezing” the number of students in a graduating cohort (the denominator in the equation), which means that graduation rates will rise as graduates (adjusted for transfers in and out) are added in the fifth and sixth years of the cohort. For the purpose of baseline data, the adjusted cohorts in the fifth and sixth years will be applicable once the baseline cohort (2009) reaches the five-year mark. No exemptions will be included for English-language learners or students with disabilities.

The graduation rate is calculated using a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), defined as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class. For those high schools that start after ninth grade, the cohort is calculated based on the earliest high school grade.

- The term “adjusted cohort” means students who enter ninth grade (or the earliest high school grade) and any students who transfer into the cohort in grades nine through twelve minus any students removed from the cohort.
- The term “students who transfer into the cohort” means students who enroll after the beginning of the entering cohort’s first year in high school, up to and including grade twelve.
- Transfers into the cohort and out of the cohort used in the ACGR are tracked using entry and exit coding found within an SEA’s student-information systems, such as the examples below:

ENTRY CODE	DEFINITION	COUNTS AS A TRANSFER-IN
01	New to education system	YES

02	Continuous in same school with no interruption	NO
10	Grade reassignment within same school	NO
11	Transfer from a public school within same district	NO
12	Transfer from a non-district site	YES
13	Transfer from a public school in a different district	YES
14	Transfer from a different state/country	YES
15	Transfer from a non-public school	YES
16	Transfer from home-based education	YES
17	Transfer from a GED program	YES
18	Transfer from a vocational program	YES
19	Transfer from state facility	YES
40	Reentry after dropping out from same district	NO
41	Reentry after dropping out from different district	YES
42	Reentry after dropping out from different state/country	YES
50	Reentry after expulsion from same district	NO
51	Reentry after expulsion from different district	YES
52	Reentry after expulsion from different state/country	YES

EXIT CODES	DEFINITION	CLASSIFICATION TRANSFER OUT (TO) DROPOUT (DO) GRADUATE (GR)
1	Transfer to public school in the same district	TO
2	Transfer to public school in different district	TO
3	Transfer to public school in a different state	TO
4	Transfer to private non-religious school, same district	TO
5	Transfer to private, non-religious, different district	TO
6	Transfer to private non-religious, out-of-state	TO
7	Transfer to private religious school within district	TO
8	Transfer to private, religious, different district	TO
9	Transfer to private, religious, different state	TO
10	Transfer to school outside of the country	TO
11	Transfer to an institution	TO
12	Transfer to a charter school	TO
13	Transfer to home schooling	TO
14	Matriculation to another school	TO
15	Graduated with regular, advanced diploma	GR1
16	Completed school with other credentials	GR2
17	Death	TO
18	Illness	DO

19	Expulsion	DO
20	Reached maximum age for services	DO
21	Discontinued schooling	DO
23	Transfer to GED program	DO
24	Transfer to a postsecondary education	TO
25	Moved, not known to be continuing	DO
97	Reason unknown	DO
98	Close of year	TO/DO (Summer)
99	Other	DO

To remove a student from the cohort, a school or local education agency (LEA) must confirm in writing that the student transferred out, emigrated to another country, or died. A student who is retained in a grade level, enrolls in a GED program, or leaves school for any other reason may not be counted as having transferred out—and must therefore remain in the adjusted cohort—for the purpose of calculating the graduation rate.

- The term “students who graduate in four years” means students who earn a regular high school diploma at the conclusion of their fourth year, before the conclusion of their fourth year, or during a summer session immediately following their fourth year.
- The term “regular high school diploma” means the standard high school diploma that is awarded to students in the state and that is fully aligned with the state’s academic content standards or a higher diploma, which does not include a GED credential, certificate of attendance, or any alternative award.

An “extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” is defined as the number of students who graduate in four years or more with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate—provided that the adjustments account for any students who transfer into the cohort by the end of the given year of graduation minus the number of students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die by the end of that year.

- Students are aggregated into the <Language–ELL> and <SpEd–SWD> variables if a student has received services at any time during high school.
- Students are aggregated into the Race variable <Multiracial> is based on state-developed definitions.

2.2.2 Dropout Rate

A student is considered a dropout if any one of the following occurs: (1) the student is over 16 years of age, withdraws from school, and does not enroll in any other school; (2) the student withdraws and the school does not know where the student has gone; (3) the student withdraws and enrolls in a GED program; or (4) the student has not officially withdrawn and the school does not know where the student has gone.

The term “dropout” is used to describe both the event of leaving school before completing high school and the status of an individual who is not in school and not a high school completer. High school completers include both regular graduates of school programs and those completing high

school through equivalency programs such as the GED. Transferring from a public school to a private school, for example, is not regarded as a dropout event.

A student who drops out of school may later return and graduate, but is called a “dropout” at the time he or she leaves school. Measures to describe these frequently complicated behaviors include the *event dropout rate* (or the closely related *school-persistence rate*), the *status dropout rate*, and the *high school completion rate*. A clear distinction was made between students who complete a high school program that requires students to meet state standards and those who receive a general educational development (GED) diploma. Since a variety of alternative high school diplomas exist in the region, the Data Team decided:

- Only programs that required students to meet state standards would be allowed to count for the graduation and dropout rates.
- GED completers are counted as dropouts, since they do not complete a program that requires students to meet state standards.
- The adjusted freshman cohort would serve as the denominator.

The following dropout reasons are typically found within student-information systems used by SEAs (yet the actual coding varies among states):

CODE	REASON	DESCRIPTOR
1	Academic	Left school because of problems in academics
2	Behavior	Left school because of problems in behavior
3	Dislike experience	Left school because of dislike of experience
4	Economic	Left school because of economic reason
5	Employment	Left school to seek employment
8	Curriculum	Left school because lack of appropriate curriculum
9	Childcare	Left school because of childcare
10	Transportation	Left school because of transportation
11	Language	Left school because of language
12	Marriage	Left school because of marriage
13	Military	Left school because of military
14	Needed at home	Left school because needed at home
18	Pregnancy	Left school because of pregnancy
19	Religion	Left school because of religion
20	Substance abuse	Left school because of substance abuse

2.2.3 Postsecondary Enrollment

The Data Team considered whether the denominator for the postsecondary-enrollment rate should be the number of high school graduates or the number in the freshman (high school) cohort, since the measure seeks to report the effect of policy and program changes being implemented over the course of a student's high school career. The Data Team determined that the denominator would be based on the number of high school graduates earning a regular (i.e., standard) diploma. The Team further delineated two enrollment (or numerator) conditions: (1) immediately upon graduating from high school or (2) delayed up to sixteen months from high school graduation.

The team has, on many occasions, discussed the validity of data related to college enrollment if decision rules beyond “any instance” of enrollment are not in place. That is, “any instance” could include students enrolled at any time and enrolled for less than one day. In March 2011, the Data Team agreed to the “any instance” criteria, as most states received this data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and is therefore subject to NSC’s data-reporting guidelines.

- The NCS identifies students as part of the “Immediate Enrollment” subgroup (Immediate) when the student enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution with an enrollment status of full-time, half-time, or less than half-time in the fall semester immediately following graduation. The fall semester immediately following graduation is defined as any term that begins before October 1 of the graduation year and ends after October 1 of the graduation year. Therefore, the student must be enrolled by October 1 and for at least ten days.
- The NCS identifies students as part of the “At a Later Date” subgroup (Delayed) when the student enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution with an enrollment status of full-time, half-time, or less than half-time between October 2 of the fall immediately following graduation and August 15 of the second summer following high school graduation. This period includes the fall and spring academic terms in the year following graduation, as well as terms ending in the subsequent academic year (including all semesters, quarters, trimesters, and periodic collegiate terms within the two-year window). Therefore, the student must be enrolled by August 15, two academic years after high school graduation, and be enrolled for at least ten days.

***NOTE:** The NSC guidelines presented here differ from criteria specified by the Data Team on March 22, 2011. The “Immediate Enrollment” metric has added the caveat of *at least ten days*. The “At a Later Date” enrollment metric extends the enrollment period from a sixteen-month window to two academic years following graduation.

2.2.4 Postsecondary Persistence

The Data Team initially organized the persistence indicator into two- and four-year postsecondary programs. For two-year postsecondary institutions, the college freshman cohort was evaluated to determine if they (the students) maintained their enrollment in the third semester. Subsequently, for four-year postsecondary institutions, the cohort was evaluated to determine if they continued their enrollment into the fifth semester. After several meetings in which the persistence data for both groups was evaluated, it was determined a common metric (third semester) would be the most applicable, and the following business rule was adopted:

The number of college freshman (by cohort) enrolled [by **October 15**] in a postsecondary-education program in the third semester [by **October 15** of the subsequent year] after initial enrollment.

2.2.5 Postsecondary Success

The Data Team was concerned about accurately representing students in its postsecondary-success rate. One concern was based on the group of students who delay (or defer) entering college. If the calculation for postsecondary success was predicated on students going directly from high school to college, this population would be misrepresented as “unmatriculated” rather than simply starting school at a later date. For this reason, the decision was made to create a new freshman (college) cohort each fall. Students would belong in the cohort in which they started their postsecondary education. For example, a student who graduated in 2009, but did not start college until fall of 2011, would be assigned to the 2011 college cohort.

2.2.6 College Readiness Index (CRI)

The Data Team organized its College Readiness Indicators (CRIs) into four dimensions: (1) performance, (2) preparatory, (3) behavioral, and (4) attitudinal. Potential indicators were screened and vetted by the team based upon the indicator’s degree of objectivity, research foundation, comparability, and data availability.

After considerable deliberation, the following CRIs were approved for testing: (1) SAT/ACT participation rates, (2) completion of Algebra II, (3) course completion and scores in dual enrollment/early college, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses/programs, (4) SAT/PSAT/ACT scores, (5) state assessment results, (6) high school GPA, (7) attendance rates in high school, (8) completion of FAFSA, and (9) completion of four years of mathematics.

The above indicator definitions are currently under development and being beta-tested by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. The Data Team agreed in June 2011 that the CRI data would be collected at the student level and aggregated to two units of analysis: (1) school and (2) state.

***NOTE:** Further development is contingent on targeted funding.

2.2.7 Student Categories

The Data Team referenced the requirements within federal statutes (see 20 U.S.C. §6311) in developing the student categories for which data would be collected, aggregated, and reported. The team selected six student data categories:

1. GENDER
2. ETHNICITY
3. RACE
4. INCOME
5. LANGUAGE

6. SPECIAL EDUCATION

2.2.7.1 Gender

1. Defined as a student's reported gender as either MALE or FEMALE.
2. Missing data are reported within the variable <Gender ALL> on the Data Template.

2.2.7.2 Ethnicity

1. HISPANIC OR LATINO: A student of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
2. NON-HISPANIC: A student ethnicity other than HISPANIC OR LATINO.

2.2.7.3 Race

1. WHITE: Students having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
2. BLACK (African American): Students having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
3. NATIVE AMERICAN (American Indian or Alaska Native): Students having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and South America (including Central America) who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community attachment.
4. ASIAN: Students having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
5. NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER: Students having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
6. MULTIRACIAL: Students with a biracial or mixed-race heritage. The category also encompasses students with generationally distant genetic admixtures of more than one race in their DNA. NESSC states will report multiracial students as their data systems evolve to include this category. The following describes each member state's reporting preference:
 - Connecticut (CT) will report multiracial. These students will not be counted in any other race category.
 - Maine (ME) will report multiracial. These students will not be counted in any other race category.
 - New Hampshire (NH) will report multiracial. These students will not be counted in any other race category.
 - Rhode Island (RI) will report multiracial. These students will not be counted in any other race category.
 - Vermont (VT) will include multiracial students in the race categories in which they self-identify (i.e., some students may be counted in more than one category).

Vermont has agreed to aggregate these students and report them as part of the multiracial category at their discretion.

2.2.7.4 Income: Economically Disadvantaged (ED)

1. ELIGIBLE F/R: Students eligible at any time to receive free or reduced-priced school meals.
2. NOT ELIGIBLE F/R: Students not eligible at any time to receive free or reduced-priced school meals.

2.2.7.5 Language: English Language learner (ELL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP)

1. ELL: Students who meet each SEA's ELL-enrollment criteria. All ELL students participate in statewide assessments and are required to take language-proficiency assessments. Students are counted as ELLs if (a) they are determined by states to be "non-English proficient" (NEP), (b) if they are eligible for ELL services but parents have withdrawn them from ELL services, or (c) if they are identified as "fully English proficient" (FEP) but are within the two-year transition period. Students are identified as ELL if they received or were eligible to receive services at any time during their secondary school years. The following describes two member-state reporting preference:
 - Maine identifies ELL students at the time of graduation for its graduation-rate indicators.
 - Vermont identifies students as ELL/LEP if they received services at any time between ninth and twelfth grades (the states does not include "monitoring").

2.2.7.6 Special Education (SpEd)

1. SPECIAL EDUCATION: Students with individual education plans (IEPs) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Students with significant cognitive disabilities participating in statewide alternate assessments are also included. Students are identified as SpED or students with disabilities (SWD) if they received or were eligible to receive services at any time during their secondary school years. The following describes one member state's reporting preference:
 - Maine identifies SpEd/SWD students at the time of graduation for its graduation-rate indicators.

2.3 Timelines

As a management tool for producing its annual report, the Data Team has developed a cross-state timeline. Each fall, the team reviews the upcoming calendar, starting with the desired publication date for the annual report, and then identifies and agrees upon common milestone dates and deadlines.

1. Data submission timelines and process discussed, modified, and tentatively adopted by NESSC Team: December 18, 2014.
2. Data tables revised as necessary by Research in Action, Inc. and sent to SEA Data Teams; preliminary posting on NESSC site of the *Common Data Project 2015 Procedural Guidebook*: January 20, 2015.
3. Data requested from National Student Clearinghouse: February 10–28, 2015.
4. *Common Data Project 2015 Procedural Guidebook* finalized; data submission process reviewed and modified, if necessary, at NESSC Data Team Meeting: March 31, 2015.

5. Data tables completed and submitted by SEAs to Research in Action, Inc. for *2015 Annual Report School Year 2013–2014*: May 28, 2015.
6. Data review and refinements completed by Research in Action, Inc. in collaboration with each SEA: June 30, 2015.
7. Draft of *2015 Annual Report School Year 2013–2014* distributed to Data Team for review: July 10, 2015.
8. Written response to *2015 Annual Report School Year 2013–2014* draft due by: July 17, 2015.
9. *2015 Annual Report School Year 2013–2014* and the *Common Data Project 2015 Procedural Guidebook* published by Research in Action, Inc. and distributed to the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and NESSC: July 31, 2015.

2.4 Quality Controls

Quality-control practices are critical to producing comparable and credible data across selected performance indicators. Quality approaches in most states constitute a combination of externally reported data, internal-review procedures (i.e., field specifications and error reports), and data-verification techniques. These processes allow agency officials to assert that their performance statistics are valid representations of events within the state, and the judicious application of control measures is one approach within an overall quality-assurance framework. Control procedures are used to evaluate data elements during the collection and production cycle and mitigate unwanted variance and error. Without such control procedures, valid inferences about performance cannot be made for the given year. The controls must be sensitive enough to detect slight changes in the performance indicators, while also discerning actual change from natural variability and non-systematic error.

All state data contain some anomalies—some are valid, while others do not represent actual facts. Several critical areas, such as primary and secondary “keys” used to link multiple years of data for a student, require differing levels of error detection and controls. State and local officials have limited time and human resources to investigate each and every data point in their information systems. However, some data elements require more effort than others because of their overall influence on the final result. Accounting for every student within a state is a complex task made more difficult by diverse programs, student mobility, changing policies, political demands, and secondary/external data sources (e.g., the National Student Clearinghouse).

In examining the collection and production procedures necessary to report on each NESSC performance indicator, the first step is for the SEA to implement its own internal controls. These controls are used to identify and reduce unwanted error, thus improving data quality. In addition to these internal controls, the NESSC Data Team has developed a series of external and cross-state check for quality. Each member state provides data in accordance with the guidelines and business rules agreed upon by the Data Team, and each Data Template is reviewed using the same quality-control criteria. Three quality-assurance techniques are implemented to ensure that the reported information is both accurate and comparable.

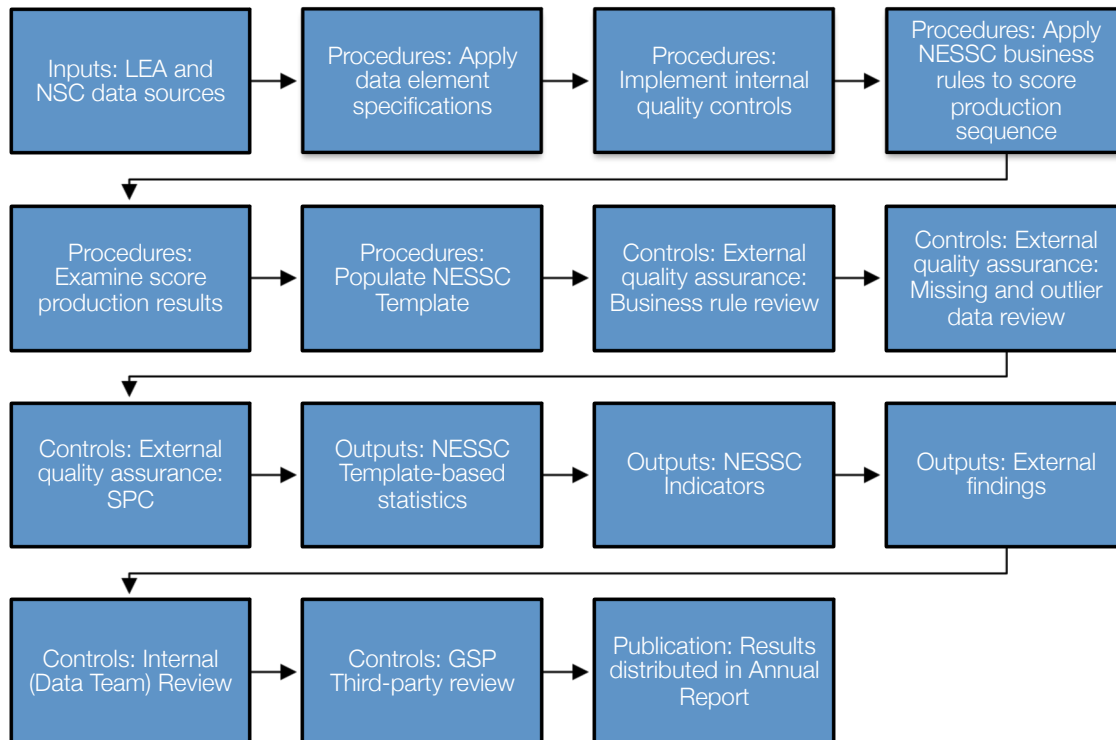
- **Business-Rule Fidelity:** A qualitative approach developed to define the parameters and conditions necessary to satisfy the NESSC objectives, while also promoting transparency and improved comparability.

- Data-Quality Checklist: A standardized, qualitative procedure used to audit the data for its comprehensiveness by ensuring each metric is responded to correctly.
- Statistical Process Control (SPC): A quantitative procedure that requires multi-wave data to test hypotheses associated with the likelihood that the observed data point represents actual performance.

***NOTE:** The data submitted by each state agency will be handled in accordance with regulations outlined in the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). To maintain the confidentiality of the submitted data, Research in Action has set up a secure .ftp server to allow each SEA to transfer data securely. PII data is not transmitted under any conditions.

2.4.1 Common Workflow

Data quality is improved when a common workflow is implemented by independent production sequences. This occurs when data inputs are acquired at agreed timeframes, standardized procedures are implemented, internal quality controls are operational, outputs are evaluated externally, and a common reporting template is applied to all statistical outputs. The below figure demonstrates the macro-level workflow used for this project:



2.4.2 External Procedures

The Data Team and Coordinator follow a set of standard operating procedures to ensure “raw data” are validated and manipulated in such a manner that score inferences from one year to the

next are supported. This is conducted, in part, through the implementation of the following control procedures:

1. Compile the business rules and document the quality-control techniques implemented by the NESSC Data Team. Review the business rules and quality-control process with the team and provide clarification as required.
2. Obtain Data Template from the Data Team representative submitted via secured internet transmission.
3. Apply the Quality-Control Checklist (Appendix A) to each data template by documenting the state's name on the template. Screen the data submitted and annotate on the checklist to identify any missing data based on the elements and subgroups identified in the provided template.
4. Compare the prior three years of N-counts in the template submitted with the current year's N-counts in the original template provided. Identify and notate in the quality-control checklist any changes made to prior year N-counts.
5. Identify possible anomalies in N-counts by summing subgroup N-counts and ensuring the subgroup total equals the full student population. Annotate in the quality-control checklist any N-count anomalies identified in totaling subgroup N-counts.
6. For each data point submitted, apply a 10% (+/-) threshold and/or 95% confidence interval to a weighted three-year average and compare the resultant to the current year.
7. Annotate in the quality-control checklist any N-count (subgroup) that falls outside of the 10% (+/-) threshold and/or 95% confidence interval as a possible "red flag."
8. Finalize the state's quality-control checklist. Send an email with the completed quality-control checklist to the respective SEA for investigation. Each SEA representative will investigate and resubmit data/responses based on the identified anomalies.
9. Review and validate the resubmitted data based on the anomalies identified (quality-control checklist).
10. Migrate the finalized data into the reporting tool.

SECTION III

ANNUAL REPORT

3.0 Overview

The Data Team conducts post-hoc analyses on the targeted performance indicators using both current and past data. These descriptive statistics are used to examine different aspects of the educational systems across the five member states. Expanding on the early work of UMDI, the Data Team created a purposeful analytical framework that will be applied each year to examine how the current year's data compare with data from previous years. Overall, performance indicators for each state are examined and represented graphically. Multiyear results are used for comparative purposes and to provide a context for the current year's results. Trend data are provided graphically for five indicators, and other data are reported using comparative tables.

The *Common Data Project Annual Report* uses a data analytic framework based upon a “question” and “answer” structure. In this framework, a major question is presented for each of the five sections: (a) graduation rates, (b) dropout rates, (c) college enrollment rates, (d) college persistence rates, and (e) college completion rates. After the question is presented, the current year's data is displayed for all NESSC states. The “answers” are reflected in the “major findings” listed below the figure. These narrative statements assist in the accurate interpretation of the displayed data. The findings address the data range for the given year, the overall median rate and the SEA rate at the low and high end of the distribution. Finally, a statement is made that reflects how the SEA's performance compares to the long-term goal established at the beginning of this project.

The *Common Data Project Annual Report* provides other additional data that demonstrates the SEAs' trend for a particular indicator. Information about the relative performance of three subpopulations of students is also provided, they include (1) economically disadvantaged students, (2) English-language learners, and (3) students with disabilities. The aforementioned subpopulations are those articulated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 for accountability and reporting. All NESSC members report on these subpopulations in several reporting structures, including federal and state mandated reports. The following is the table of contents used in the *Annual Report*.

ABOUT THE COMMON DATA PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECTION I: GRADUATION RATES

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- 1.2 Economically Disadvantaged Students
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- 1.4 Students with Disabilities

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SECTION III: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES

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SECTION IV: COLLEGE PERSISTENCE RATES

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SECTION V: COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES

APPENDIX A

QUALITY-CONTROL CHECKLIST

KPI #1. Graduation Rate

WBS	MEASURE	COMPLETION STATUS	QUALITY STATUS	FINDINGS
1.1	Four-Year Rate: Graduates			
1.2	Fifth-Year Rate: Graduates			
1.3	Six-Year Rate: Graduates			
1.4	Demographics: Gender			
1.5	Demographics: Race/Ethnicity			
1.6	Demographics: Income (ED)			
1.7	Demographics: Language (ELL)			
1.8	Demographics: Special Education (SpEd/SWD)			
1.9	Baseline-First Time High School Freshman			

KPI #2. Dropout Rate

WBS	MEASURE	COMPLETION STATUS	QUALITY STATUS	FINDINGS
2.1	High School Dropouts			
2.2	Demographics: Gender			
2.3	Demographics: Race/Ethnicity			
2.4	Demographics: Income (ED)			
2.5	Demographics: Language (ELL)			
2.6	Demographics: Special Education (SpEd/SWD)			
2.7	Baseline-First Time High School Freshman			

KPI #3. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate

WBS	MEASURE	COMPLETION STATUS	QUALITY STATUS	FINDINGS
3.1	Early Enrollment in Postsecondary (On-Time Graduates Only)			
3.2	Enrolled in a Two-Year Program/College (Immediately)			
3.3	Enrolled in a Four-Year Program/College (Immediately)			
3.4	Enrolled in a Two-Year Program/College (Delayed)			
3.5	Enrolled in a Four-Year Program/College (Delayed)			
3.6	Demographics: Gender			
3.7	Demographics: Race/Ethnicity			
3.8	Demographics: Income (ED)			
3.9	Demographics: Language (ELL)			
3.10	Demographics: Special Education (SpEd/SWD)			
3.11	Baseline-High School Graduates			

KPI #4. Postsecondary Persistence Rate

WBS	MEASURE	COMPLETION STATUS	QUALITY STATUS	FINDINGS
4.1	Students Persistent [3rd semester enrolled]-2 Year Program			
4.2	Students Persistent [3rd semester enrolled]-4-Year Program			
4.3	Demographics: Gender			
4.4	Demographics: Race/Ethnicity			
4.5	Demographics: Income (ED)			
4.6	Demographics: Language (ELL)			
4.7	Demographics: Special Education (SpEd/SWD)			
4.8	Baseline-First-time College Freshman			

KPI #5. Postsecondary Success Rate

WBS	MEASURE	COMPLETION STATUS	QUALITY STATUS	FINDINGS
5.1	Completion of Two-Year Program			
5.2	Completion of Four-Year Program			
5.3	Demographics: Gender			
5.4	Demographics: Race/Ethnicity			
5.5	Demographics: Income (ED)			
5.6	Demographics: Language (ELL/LEP)			
5.7	Demographics: Special Education (SpEd/SWD)			
5.8	Baseline- First-time College Freshman			

About the Common Data Project

Recognizing the critical importance of high-quality data to effective school improvement, the five state education agencies from Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont have been collecting, calculating, and reporting graduation rates, dropout rates, and postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and success rates using consistent procedures and methodologies developed by a regional team of data specialists from the five departments of education. To our knowledge, the New England Secondary School Consortium's Data Project is the first initiative of its kind in the United States.

To promote more accurate and reliable data comparability across the member states, the Data Project develops and implements standardized procedures designed to eliminate unwanted variance that may result from divergent data systems, the misinterpretation of agreed-upon rules, or computational errors. The Data Project has also created a series of quality-control mechanisms that further improve the reliability and comparability of state-reported data.

FMI: newenglandssc.org/resources/common-data-project



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