

Why are cohort default rates important?

Defaulted federal student loans cost taxpayers money. Cohort default rate sanctions and benefits provide an incentive to schools to work with their borrowers to reduce default. Sanctions also can prevent a school with a high percentage of defaulters from continuing to participate in the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL), William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan), and Federal Pell Grant programs. As a result, cohort default rates help save taxpayers money.

Why is it important to review the data for DRAFT cohort default rates?

Although there are no sanctions or benefits associated with a *draft* cohort default rate, it is important to review the data used to calculate the rate for accuracy, because this data forms the basis of a school's *official* cohort default rate. A school that fails to challenge the accuracy of its draft cohort default rate data through an Incorrect Data Challenge (see Chapter 4.1) may not contest the accuracy of that same data when it receives its official cohort default rate. Therefore, it is critical that all schools review their draft cohort default rate data when the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) releases it.

In addition, in certain circumstances a school may be able to avoid the sanctions associated with its official cohort default rate by submitting a successful Participation Rate Index Challenge (see Chapter 4.2) based on its draft cohort default rate.

Will a school's DRAFT and OFFICIAL cohort default rate data be the same?

No, a school's *draft* cohort default rate data and *official* cohort default rate data will not necessarily be the same. The National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS), which contains the data used to calculate cohort default rates, is updated regularly. As a result, a school's draft cohort default rate data may differ from its official cohort default rate data even if the school does not challenge the draft cohort default rate data.

It is critical that all schools review their draft cohort default rate data.

Regulatory citations:
34 CFR 668.187
34 CFR 682.603
34 CFR 682.604
34 CFR 685.301
34 CFR 685.303

Are there any benefits for schools with low official cohort default rates?

Yes, there are two benefits available to schools with a low official cohort default rate, as described in the chart below.

☰ Benefits for schools with low official cohort default rates

Eligible School	Benefits
A school whose most recent official cohort default rate is less than 5.0 percent and is an eligible home institution that is certifying or originating loans to cover the cost of attendance in a study abroad program	<p>May deliver or disburse loan proceeds in a single installment to a student studying abroad regardless of the length of the student’s loan period.</p> <p>May choose not to delay the delivery or disbursement of the first installment of loan proceeds for first-year first-time borrowers studying abroad.</p>
A school with a cohort default rate of less than 10.0 percent for each of the three most recent fiscal years for which data are available, including eligible home institutions and foreign institutions,	<p>May deliver or disburse, in a single installment, loans that are made for one semester, one trimester, one quarter, or a four-month period.</p> <p>May choose not to delay the first disbursement of a loan for 30 days for first-time, first-year undergraduate borrowers.</p>

These benefits take effect as soon as the school receives its official cohort default rate notification letter or notification of a successful adjustment and/or appeal from Default Prevention and Management (DPM).

Schools no longer qualify for these benefits starting 30 calendar days after receiving notice from DPM of an official cohort default rate that exceeds the benefit threshold.

Are there any sanctions associated with high official cohort default rates?

Yes, sanctions apply when a school's official cohort default rate is at or above certain percentages.

☰ Sanctions for schools with high official cohort default rates

School	Sanctions
A school's three most recent official cohort default rates are 25.0 percent or greater.	Except in the event of a successful adjustment or appeal, such a school will lose FFEL, Direct Loan, and Federal Pell Grant program eligibility for the remainder of the fiscal year in which the school is notified of its sanction and for the following two fiscal years.
A school's current official cohort default rate is greater than 40.0 percent.	Except in the event of a successful adjustment or appeal, such a school will lose FFEL and Direct Loan program eligibility for the remainder of the fiscal year in which the school is notified of its sanction and for the following two fiscal years.
<i>NOTE: A school is not subject to the loss of Federal Pell Grant Program eligibility if, prior to October 7, 1998, the school requested in writing to withdraw from or lost its eligibility to participate in the FFEL and/or Direct Loan programs and has not subsequently participated in those programs. In addition, a school is not subject to the loss of Federal Pell Grant Program eligibility if it did not certify any FFELs and/or originate any Direct Loans on or after July 7, 1998. A school that resumes participation in the FFEL or Direct Loan programs is no longer eligible for either of these Federal Pell Grant Program exemptions.</i>	

Can a school avoid the sanctions associated with high official cohort default rates?

If a school is notified that it is subject to sanction, the school may submit an adjustment or appeal to attempt to avoid that sanction. Adjustments and appeals are available to schools after the release of the official cohort default rates. Challenges are available to schools after the release of the draft cohort default rates.

The following chart summarizes the actions a school may take. Schools not subject to loss of eligibility and schools subject to provisional certification based on cohort default rates may only take a limited number of these actions. See Chapter 3.1, “Reviewing Rates and Loan Data,” for an overview of the actions schools may take. For more information, including detailed explanations of each action and the timeframes for taking an action, see Part IV of this Guide, “Challenges, Adjustments, and Appeals.”

☰ School actions in response to cohort default rates

Draft/ Official	Type of Action	Purpose
Draft	Incorrect Data Challenge	Correct data before the official cohort default rates are released.
Draft	Participation Rate Index Challenge	Demonstrate a low borrower participation rate to avoid an anticipated sanction with the official cohort default rate.
Official	Uncorrected Data Adjustment	Contest a data error that was agreed upon in the draft process but is still reflected in the official cohort default rate data.
Official	New Data Adjustment	Contest official cohort default rate data that was not included in draft cohort default rate data or that is different from the draft cohort default rate data.
Official	Erroneous Data Appeal	Contest official cohort default rate data that was not included in the draft cohort default rate data (new data) and/or contest the data manager's decision (disputed data).
Official	Loan Servicing Appeal	Contest servicing of the borrower's loan account.
Official	Economically Disadvantaged Appeal	Demonstrate a high number of low-income students and high placement or completion rates.
Official	Participation Rate Index Appeal	Demonstrate a low borrower participation rate.
Official	Average Rates Appeal	Demonstrate a low number of borrowers.
Official	Thirty-or-Fewer Borrowers Appeal	Demonstrate a low number of borrowers.

Are there any consequences if a school submits adjustments and/or appeals but fails to avoid sanctions?

In addition to losing eligibility, a school that submits adjustments and/or appeals but fails to avoid sanctions is liable for certain costs associated with the FFELs it certified and delivered and/or the Direct Loans it originated and disbursed during the adjustment and appeal process. Liabilities are not calculated for loans that were delivered or disbursed more than 45 calendar days after the school submitted its completed adjustment or appeal to the Department. Schools may avoid this liability if they choose not to certify or originate loans during the adjustment and appeal process.

If a school is subject to a sanction, when does the sanction take effect?

The effective date of the sanction is dependent upon whether or not the school timely submitted an adjustment or appeal, and the current sanction status of the school. The chart below summarizes the effective date of sanctions based upon these circumstances.

Effective date of sanctions

	School is NOT Currently Under Sanction	School IS Currently Under Sanction
School Does Not Timely Submit Adjustment or Appeal	The school's participation ends 30 calendar days after the date the school first receives notice that it is subject to the loss of eligibility.	The school's previous loss of eligibility remains in effect and the school will receive an additional sanction.
School Does Timely Submit Adjustment or Appeal, but Adjustment or Appeal is Unsuccessful	The school's participation ends on the date that the school received the Department's final decision indicating that the adjustment and/or appeal was unsuccessful. A school may choose not to participate during the period to avoid incurring a liability.	The school's previous loss of eligibility remains in effect and the new loss of eligibility is effective when the school receives the Department's final decision indicating that the school's adjustment or appeal was unsuccessful. The new loss of eligibility does not replace the previous loss but it does extend the length of time that a school is unable to participate in the FFEL, Direct Loan, or Federal Pell Grant Program.
School Does Timely Submit Adjustment or Appeal, and Adjustment or Appeal is Successful	The Department will withdraw the notification that the school is subject to a loss of eligibility.	The Department will withdraw the notification that the school is subject to an additional loss of eligibility. However, the previous loss of eligibility remains in effect.

A school that loses eligibility may continue to honor unpaid loan commitments and make certain second disbursements after notification of the loss of eligibility if the school meets certain criteria listed in the CFR. The criteria can be found at 34 CFR 668.26(d).

The official cohort default rates must be released no later than September 30th. If, however, cohort default rates are not issued until after that date, a school's loss of eligibility would continue only for the remainder of the fiscal year in which the cohort default rates are issued and for the following fiscal year. For example, if the Department issues cohort default rates for FY 2004 on October 2, 2006, then a loss of eligibility that is based on the FY 2004 cohort default rate would continue only for the remainder of FY 2006 (the fiscal year in which the cohort default rates were issued) and to the end of FY 2007.

How does a school withdraw from or reapply for participation in the Title IV loan programs?

A school should contact the School Participation Team at 1-202-377-3173 for information on withdrawing from the FFEL Program and COD School Relations at 1-800-848-0978 for information on withdrawing from the Direct Loan Program.

A school that loses FFEL, Direct Loan, or Federal Pell Grant eligibility may reapply for participation when the sanction period ends. A school should apply online at <<http://www.eligcert.ed.gov>>.