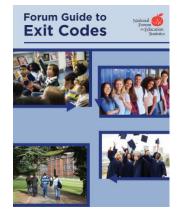# Forum Guide to Exit Codes

Exit codes allow schools and education agencies to track data about when students transfer, drop out, graduate or complete equivalency requirements, or exit the education system in another fashion. Although schools and agencies may develop their own sets of exit codes, adopting a common set of exit codes permits sharing and communicating these data across multiple agencies and states, and it allows education agencies to track student progress without losing vital information, even when a student's education is interrupted by environment, circumstance, or geography.

The National Forum on Education Statistics (Forum) developed the *Forum Guide to Exit Codes* as an update to the 2006 publication *Accounting for Every Student: A Taxonomy for Standard Student Exit Codes*. Written for an audience of education agency leaders, from data managers and school registrars to administrators and policymakers, the current guide deepens and expands upon the earlier version's examination of the benefits of a sound, thorough, well-defined exit code taxonomy. The guide presents such a taxonomy in close detail and examines it item by item. It then discusses best practices for education agencies using student exit codes, including the broad range of situations in which students may exit the education system. The guide also discusses important considerations for creating withdrawal processes, assigning and validating exit codes, supporting exit codes through data governance, and maintaining the quality of exit code data.

The guide is organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction to Exit Codes** defines exit codes and reviews their use in an education agency. The chapter discusses the need for a taxonomy that accounts for 100 percent of enrolled students and explains how the taxonomy was developed.
- **Chapter 2: The Exit Codes Taxonomy** presents the taxonomy of exit codes.
- **Chapter 3: Best Practices in Exit Coding** discusses best practices and methods for addressing specific challenges when collecting exit codes data.
- **Chapter 4: Case Studies** provides examples from state and local education agencies that have successfully implemented and used exit codes, including those that have navigated exit code challenges in unique ways.
- **Appendix A: Characteristics of Sound Exit Code Taxonomies** lists features of well-designed exit code taxonomies.

The *Forum Guide to Exit Codes* is a product of the National Forum on Education Statistics and is available on the Forum website at https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2020132.asp. The information and opinions published in the guide are the product of the National Forum on Education Statistics and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, or the National Center for Education Statistics.