

ABOUT APPARENT RETENTION RATES

Apparent retention rates (ARR) are calculated based on aggregate enrolment data and provide an indicative measurement of student engagement in secondary education. The Department of Education (DE) computes and publishes ARR data at a state-wide and DE region level only.

The ARR for year 7 to 12 (ARR 7-12) refers to the Year 12 enrolment expressed as a proportion of the Year 7 enrolment five years earlier. For example, the calculation of the 2023 ARR 7-12 is as follows:

$$\text{ARR 7-12} = \frac{\text{Total Year 12 FTE Enrolments in 2023}}{\text{Total Year 7 FTE Enrolments in 2018}} \times 100$$

The ARR for year 10 to 12 (ARR 10-12) refers to the Year 12 enrolment expressed as a proportion of the Year 10 enrolment two years earlier. For example, the calculation of the 2023 ARR 10-12 is as follows:

$$\text{ARR 10-12} = \frac{\text{Total Year 12 FTE Enrolments in 2023}}{\text{Total Year 10 FTE Enrolments in 2021}} \times 100$$

The term "apparent" retention rate reflects that retention rates are influenced by factors not taken into account by this measure such as:

- Student repeating year levels.
- Interstate and overseas migration.
- Transfer of students between education sectors or schools.
- Student who have left school previously, returning to continue their school education.

The Department has found that computing ARR at geographical areas smaller than DE regions (e.g. LGA, Postcode) can produce erratic and misleading results that are difficult to interpret or make use of. There are influencing factors such as:

- The movement of secondary school students from one area to another.
- The level of provision/availability of secondary school education in such areas.
- Smaller enrolment numbers.
- The effect of relatively small changes in enrolment numbers which can create large rates and movement in such rates.

The influences of such factors are mitigated at the state-wide and DET region level.

The following paragraphs are a representation of how the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines the apparent retention rate it calculates for the Schools, Australia collection. Please note that the ABS calculates apparent retention using the number of full-time school students only whereas at the DE we use the number of full-time equivalent school enrolments. Data reported in the ABS Schools, Australia collection is based on enrolment data collected in August by all jurisdictions.

Apparent retention rates provide an indicative measure of the number of full-time school students who have stayed in school, as at a designated year and grade of education. It is expressed as a percentage of the respective cohort group that those students would be expected to have come from, assuming an expected rate of progression of one grade per year.

In small populations, relatively small changes in student numbers can create large movements in apparent retention rates. These populations might include smaller jurisdictions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and subcategories of the non-government affiliation. There are a number of reasons why apparent rates may generate results that differ from actual rates. These reasons include, but are not limited to:

- Students progressing at a faster or slower than expected rate of one grade a year.
- Students changing between full-time or part-time study.
- Migration (interstate/international).
- Inter-sector (affiliation) transfer.
- Enrolment policies (which contribute to different age/grade structures between states and territories).
- Students who attend school in a state/territory different to that in which they live.
- A different reference period used in calculating ERP (30 June) verses that used as the reference in the school system (1 August).
- The children of diplomats, short term international exchange students and possible other anomalies, where students are counted in one statistic (school attendance) but not in another (ERP).
- Other sources of inconsistency between data sources that may lead to non-sampling error.

Changes in such factors outlined above may be more noticeable in these populations.