Among first-time degree-seeking Virginia Community College System students entering in 1999, percentages who completed within six years, by age and enrollment status.
What Is Measured?
Percentage of students who completed a certificate or associate degree or transferred to a four-year institution within six years

Who Is Counted?
First-time degree-seeking students who entered the Virginia Community College System in 1999

What It Tells Us
Among students who first enrolled in the Virginia Community College System in 1999, about 35 percent attained a certificate or associate degree or transferred to a four-year institution without earning a certificate or degree within six years. Overall, a greater percentage of students attained associate degrees (19 percent) than completed a certificate or transferred (3 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Students age 22 or younger were more likely to attain a subbaccalaureate credential or transfer than older students (38 percent vs. 26 percent). Students enrolled full time attained or transferred at nearly double the rate of part-time students (42 percent vs. 22 percent).

Why It’s Important
At community colleges, graduation means attainment of a certificate or associate degree. However, many students attend community colleges to take lower-division courses for a bachelor’s degree, and some transfer to a four-year institution without obtaining a credential. From the perspective of the community college, these students have finished a curriculum that prepared them for transfer and, therefore, should be considered as having completed. Some states even track and report which community college students graduate from other institutions. Most sources, however, do not specify what proportion of transfer students have finished the coursework required for upper-division standing at the four-year college, and research suggests that many students transfer without reaching this threshold (Moore, Shulock, & Offenstein, 2009, table 3). A completion rate that combines transfer and degree attainment is sometimes referred to as a “success rate.”

ABOUT THE DATA
Degree-seeking students: include students who selected a certificate, diploma, or associate degree program of study during their initial registration or enrollment process.

Full-time students: include students who took at least four-fifths of a full course load in their first term, equivalent to at least 12 out of 15 units.

Part-time students: include students who did not meet the criteria for full-time enrollment.

Estimates are based on data collected during the initial registration enrollment process. Certificate programs vary in length and include short Career Studies Certificates (CSC) requiring 9 to 29 credit hours as well as longer-term certificates that require at least 30 credit hours. CSC completers who earned a certificate during their first year in college are excluded, as are students who did not identify their program of study.

DATA SOURCE