

# Graduation Rates

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How is Virginia's new graduation rate calculated?

The Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate is based on four years of individual student-level data tracked over time in the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) Educational Information Management System (EIMS). Unlike estimated rates based on comparisons of graduates with ninth-grade enrollment four years earlier, the Virginia On-time Graduation Rate is an actual rate that takes into consideration student mobility, changes in enrollment, and promotion and retention policies and decisions. The new formula also recognizes that some students are allowed more than the standard four years to earn a diploma while still being counted as "on-time" graduates. Simply put, the graduation rate equals [on-time graduates in year x] divided by [(first-time entering 9th graders in year x minus 4) plus (Transfers in) minus (transfers out)]

OR

$$\frac{\text{On-time Graduates in Year } x}{[(\# \text{ of 1st time entering 9th graders in year } x - 4) + (\text{Transfers In}) - (\text{Transfers out \& deceased})]}$$

*Aggregate and disaggregated graduation rates will be calculated and reported at the state, division and school levels.*

### Who is considered an on-time graduate?

An on-time Virginia public school graduate is a student who earns one of five Board of Education recognized diplomas - Advanced, Standard, Modified Standard, Special or General Achievement Diploma - within four years of the first time he or she entered the 9th grade.

### How does Virginia track who graduates on time?

Virginia's Educational Information Management System follows students through Virginia's public schools by assigning a unique number to every student. This number, known as a "state-testing identifier," stays with the student throughout his or her PK-12 career.

### What is a Cohort?

A cohort is a group of students who enter the ninth grade for the first time together with the expectation of graduating within four years. Students who transfer to a new high school are subtracted from the cohort of their original school and added to the cohort of the receiving school. Students who leave the commonwealth's public schools also are subtracted from the cohort. Students who graduate in fewer than four years are counted as on-time graduates and are included in the graduation rate calculated for their original ninth-grade cohort.

### Why has Virginia adopted a cohort graduation rate as its official graduation rate?

Educators and policy makers have long recognized the need for accurate and comparable data on high school graduation and completion.

In 2005, the National Governors Association (NGA) task force proposed a graduation-rate formula that would provide "a measure of on-time completion, with most students, but not all, expected to finish in four years." The nation's governors (led by then Virginia Governor Mark Warner) endorsed the formula.

In 2006, the Board of Education studied seven widely discussed graduation rate formulas and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of each. The Board concluded that only the NGA rate was an actual measure based on individual student progress over time and that the other six formulas were estimates.

### **What are the benefits of calculating graduation rates based on longitudinal data?**

Cohort graduation rates such as the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate provide a more accurate picture of what happens to high school students as they move toward graduation. Schools, school divisions and the state can use longitudinal data to identify students who require additional assistance or targeted intervention to earn a diploma and graduate. In addition, longitudinal data provides educators and policy makers with vital information to support decisions about accountability and improve educational outcomes for all students.

### **What about students who take longer than four years to graduate?**

The Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate recognizes that under state and federal law, students with disabilities and those of limited English proficiency may take longer than the standard four years to graduate and still count as "on-time" graduates. The cohort assignments of these students are adjusted based on when they graduate, complete or otherwise exit high school.

Will graduation rates be disaggregated by student subgroups?

Yes. Graduation rates are reported by the following student populations:

- All students
- Limited English Proficient
- Economically disadvantaged
- Students with disabilities
- Black
- White
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Male
- Female

### **What happens to students retained in their grade?**

The student's cohort does not change if he or she is retained in grade. Therefore, the retained student remains in the denominator and does not count as an on-time graduate in the four-year rate unless they catch up with their class and graduate in four years. The success of students who do not catch up but earn a diploma in more than four years will be reflected in five-year graduation rates that VDOE will report when data are available.

### **How are summer graduates included in the graduation rate calculations?**

Summer graduates are included as if they graduated in June of the same calendar year.

### **How are out-placed students included?**

A child with a disability who is placed by a local school division in a private special education school or facility is assigned a cohort by either their local public school or local school division.