

## The Need for a New Index

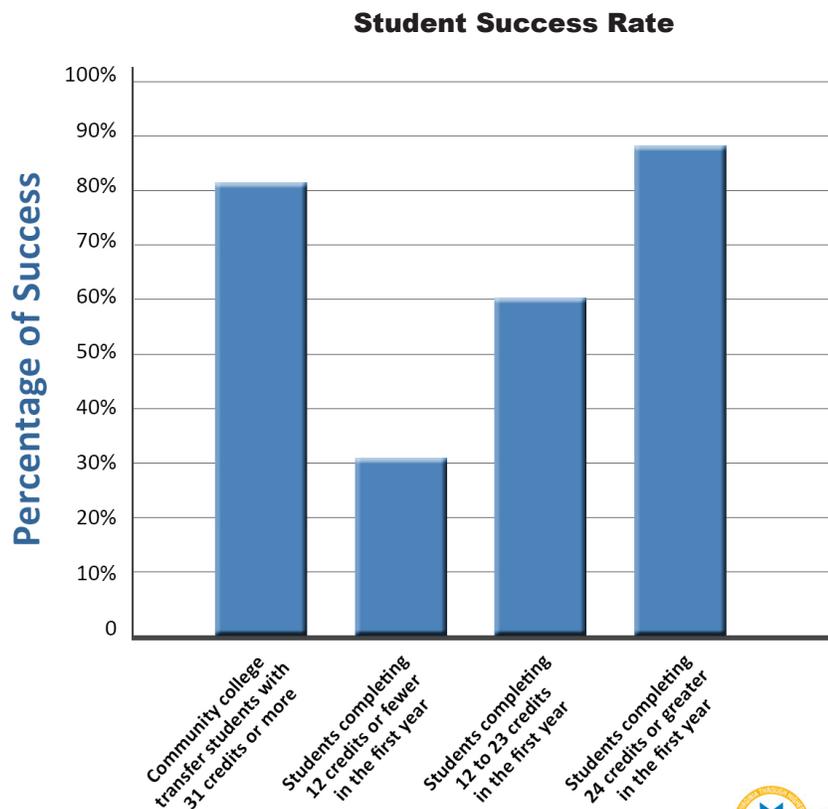
The existing graduation rates used by the U.S. Department of Education and collected in the Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) measures only first-time freshmen beginning college full-time in the fall term. Further, the rate calculations include only those students who go on to graduate from the institution at which they begin their studies. Due to these limitations, the six-year federal graduation rate that is most widely reported can be considered an incomplete, if not questionable, measure for many institutions, especially community colleges. It is in response to these shortcomings that SCHEV developed a more holistic measure of student completion and success.



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## Student Success Revealed

More than 70 percent of undergraduate students entering Virginia's public four-year institutions of higher education in Virginia complete or persist toward a degree. The figure is based on a new Student Success Index, which SCHEV developed to recognize more fully the patterns of student enrollment. Comparison of various cohorts of students based on the new Student Success Index yields the following success rates:



## Student Success Understood

Such outcomes align with findings in current literature on college completion, as well as the work of such organizations as Achieving the Dream and Complete College America. These results also help the higher education community better understand the nuances of student success and completion that can be obscured by the older methods of measurement (see box on front page).

Just as the Student Success Index highlights successful student groups, it also clearly identifies student groups warranting greater levels of attention and support. For example, it reinforces the importance of the first year of college in projecting student completion. Students who enroll part-time or pass fewer than 12 credits in the first year, are at significant risk for not completing a degree.

The Student Success Index also reveals that students transferring to public four-year institutions having successfully earned 31 credits or more (regardless of how long it took to earn those credits) demonstrate success at rates almost as high as those students enrolling originally at the four-year institution and successfully completing 24 credits or greater in the first year. This finding reinforces the value of Virginia's community colleges.

## Student Success Redefined

These graduation rates are revealed in a new Student Success Index constructed by SCHEV. This index presents a composite measure of student success that allows comparison of all four-year institutions whether they serve primarily traditional or non-traditional students. Unlike previous methods of data collection, SCHEV's Student Success Index counts all students entering a Virginia four-year institution in a given year, including both first-time and transfer students, regardless of the term in which they begin classes. It includes both full- and part-time students, and contains separate standards for completion for each of the four possible combinations of student:

- First-time in College, Full-time at Entry: 6 years to complete
- First-time in College, Part-time at Entry: 8 years to complete
- New Transfer, Full-time at Entry: 5 years to complete
- New Transfer, Part-time at Entry: 7 years to complete

The measure is blind as to which institution awarded the degree, thus accounting for students who transfer before completion. Finally, SCHEV's metric includes students who are still enrolled during the standard completion year for their cohort (as described in the above bullets) since they are clearly still persisting toward a degree.

SCHEV has compiled these and additional measures at the state and institution level to assist decision-makers in pinpointing areas of concern and success as the Commonwealth's institutions pursue the goal of 100,000 additional degrees by 2025.