

For Immediate Release

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81.3 Percent of Class of 2008 Graduate On Time

New “Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate” Accounts for Student Mobility and Retention

More than 81 percent of the students in the class of 2008 graduated on time with a diploma, according to data reported today by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

The graduation rates for the commonwealth, school divisions and high schools were calculated for the first time by tracking individual students from year to year using the commonwealth’s longitudinal student data system. This new, more accurate statistic is known as the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate.

“Effective programs to improve outcomes for students are driven by accurate data,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright. “With the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate, we are replacing estimates with hard information that will shape local and statewide strategies to increase the likelihood that young people graduate with a diploma.”

The Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate is a cohort graduation rate that expresses the percentage of students who earn a Board of Education-approved diploma within four years of entering ninth grade for the first time. It is calculated using a formula endorsed in a 2005 compact signed by the nation’s governors and subsequently adopted by the General Assembly and Board of Education.

Percentages are based on longitudinal student-level data and account for student mobility and retention practices. Students with disabilities and English-language learners are counted as “on-time” graduates even if they require more than the standard four years to earn a diploma.

For a fifth consecutive year, the number of Virginia students graduating with an Advanced Studies Diploma increased and the number of advanced diplomas awarded exceeded the number of Standard Diplomas.

Of the 96,979 students in this year’s cohort, 78,805, or 81.3 percent, earned a Board of Education-approved diploma. Of these on-time graduates, 41,888, or 53.2 percent, earned an Advanced Studies Diploma; 33,151, or 42.1 percent, earned a Standard Diploma; 1,820, or 2.3 percent, earned a Modified Standard Diploma; 1,930, or 2.4 percent, earned a Special Diploma; and 16 students earned a General Achievement Diploma. Modified Standard Diplomas and Special Diplomas are available only to students with disabilities. General Achievement Diplomas are earned by overage students.

“The fact that better than eight of ten students in Virginia graduate on time with a diploma is gratifying given that estimates relied on in the past were much lower,” Board of Education President Mark E. Emblidge said. “But even as we recognize this success we must do more to raise graduation rates, especially in schools serving minority and low-income communities.”

(more)

Statewide, the following percentages of students in the class of 2008 graduated on time with a Board of Education-approved diploma:

- Female students — 84.3 percent
- Male students — 78.3 percent
- Black students — 72.6 percent
- Hispanic students — 70.4 percent
- White students — 85.3 percent
- Asian students — 92.9 percent
- Students with disabilities — 81.1 percent
- Disadvantaged students — 69.8 percent
- Limited English proficient students — 68.5 percent
- Migrant students — 72.9 percent
- Homeless students — 58.7 percent

In releasing the new graduation rates, Dr. Wright cautioned against misinterpreting the data, noting that thousands of students who entered the ninth grade in 2004 remain in school and continue to work toward finishing their diploma requirements. Other students completed high school with a GED or a locally awarded certificate of completion. “The drop out rate is not the inverse of the graduation rate,” Dr. Wright said.

VDOE will release cohort dropout rates for schools, school divisions and the commonwealth in early 2009.

In July, the National Governors Association (NGA) reported that 16 states had published cohort graduation rates based on the NGA formula, which is contingent on the development of a longitudinal student-level data system and the accumulation of four years of data.

North Carolina, the only neighboring state that has implemented the NGA formula, reported a cohort graduation rate for 2008 of 69.9 percent. Massachusetts, which is often ranked with Virginia in state-by-state comparisons, reported a rate of 80.9 percent for 2007.

The graduating class of 2008 is the first cohort for which there are four years of longitudinal data in Virginia’s Educational Information Management System (EIMS). EIMS follows students as they transfer in and/or transfer out of Virginia public schools by assigning a unique, randomly selected number to every student. This number, known as a “state testing identifier,” stays with the student throughout his or her PK-12 career.

Using each student’s identifier, the records of students who entered the ninth grade for the first time in 2004 were linked to their records four years later to determine their graduation or completion status and calculate the 2008 Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate for schools, school divisions and the commonwealth. Students who transfer into a school are added to the cohort and students who transfer to another school are subtracted. Division-level cohorts and the state-level cohort are adjusted in the same manner to account for student mobility.

[Virginia On-Time Graduation Rates](http://www.doe.virginia.gov) for school divisions, high schools and other schools with a graduating class are available in the Virginia School Report Card section of the VDOE Web site (www.doe.virginia.gov).

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