



## Frequently Asked Questions

### How is the Virginia On-Time 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 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 9<sup>th</sup> graders in year x minus 4) plus (Transfers in) minus (transfers out)]

OR

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

Aggregate and disaggregated graduation rates are 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 Studies Diploma
- Standard Diploma
- Modified Standard Diploma
- Special Diploma
- 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. Using each student’s identifier, the records of students who enter the ninth-grade for the first time together are linked to their records four years later to determine their status and calculate the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate for schools, school divisions and the commonwealth. The graduating class of 2008 was the first high school cohort for which there are four years of longitudinal data.

### 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.

(more)

### **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.

### **How are students assigned to cohorts?**

Students are assigned to cohorts based on when they first enter grades 9-12 in a Virginia public school. For example, a student who entered grade 9 for the first time during the 2009-2010 school year is part of a cohort of students expected to graduate in the spring or summer of 2013.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and students with disabilities, who may take more than the standard four years to earn a diploma while still being considered on-time graduates, are assigned to cohorts based on when they graduate, complete or otherwise exit high school.

### **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.

### **How are transfer students counted?**

Student records are coded to reflect when and why students enter or exit a Virginia public school. By tracking individual students over time, EIMS provides the data necessary to produce an actual graduate rate that accounts for student mobility.

- Students who transfer in to a Virginia public school for the first time are assigned to a cohort based on the year and grade in which they first entered a Virginia public high school (grades 9-12).
- Students who transfer out of a Virginia public school are removed from the cohort and assigned an exit code identifying them as a student who has transferred to another public school in Virginia, a school in another state or a private or home school.
- Students who are incarcerated are counted as transfers as they leave and re-enter the system.
- Incarcerated students who re-enter Virginia public schools are assigned to a cohort based on the year and grade at the time of return to public school.

### **Will graduation rates be disaggregated by student subgroups?**

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

- |                              |                              |                   |            |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| • All students               | • Students with disabilities | • Asian           | • Male     |
| • Limited English Proficient | • Black                      | • American Indian | • Female   |
| • Economically disadvantaged | • White                      | • Native Hawaiian | • Homeless |
|                              | • Hispanic                   | • Other           | • Migrant  |

### **Who is a dropout?**

A dropout is an individual who:

- Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled on October 1 of the current school year, or
- Was not enrolled on October 1 of the previous school year although expected to be in membership; and
- Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved educational program; and
- Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
  - Transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program;
  - Temporary school-recognized absence due to suspension or illness;
  - Death.

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**How are dropouts counted in calculating the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate?**

Dropouts are not counted as transfers out and remain in the denominator when calculating the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate.

**Can the dropout rate for a school or division be determined from its graduation rate?**

No. The dropout rate is not the inverse of the graduation rate.

**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 does not count as an on-time graduate in the four-year rate. The success of these students in earning a diploma is reflected in five-year graduation rates that VDOE reports as part of a five-year cohort report.

**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 students who graduate early included in the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate?**

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. For example, a student who entered the ninth-grade for the first time in 2005-06 but earned a diploma in 2008 was counted as an on-time graduate in 2009.

**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.

**What graduation rate will be used as an academic indicator for calculating whether Virginia high schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the goals of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?**

While the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate appears on VDOE report cards for schools, school divisions and the commonwealth, the estimated graduation rate adopted as part of Virginia's NCLB implementation plan will continue to serve as an academic indicator for calculating AYP ratings for the 2009-10 school year.

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