

# Richmond Fed Survey of Community College Outcomes

Community colleges play a major role in workforce and economic development in communities across the Fifth District. Their responsibility for educating and connecting individuals to jobs means that understanding their outcomes is important to how we think about our best path to maximum employment and sustainable economic growth.

Currently, the primary data used to understand postsecondary outcomes in the United States is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) from the U.S. Department of Education. IPEDS provides rich information about post-secondary education. However, IPEDS graduation rate data are not suited to assess community colleges. For example, the traditional IPEDS cohort, used to measure graduation rates, only includes first-time, full-time students; this means that part-time students and those who have previously attended other institutions are left out of the graduation rate measure. This is unfortunate because many of these students achieve outcomes that they themselves consider a success—outcomes like transferring to four-year institutions, earning credentials that allow them to enter the workforce, or eventually earning their degree outside of the allowed timeframe.

In 2022, the Richmond Fed launched the [Richmond Fed Survey of Community College Outcomes](#) to offer a different system for measuring community college success. After an initial pilot study, we surveyed 63 community colleges in states across the Fifth District—Maryland, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia—to better understand community college performance in our region and to offer a fuller, more representative metric for measuring the success of these important institutions.

## A New Metric of Success: The Richmond Fed Success Rate

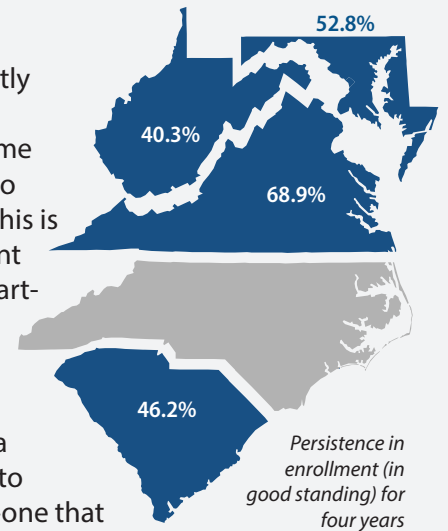
Graduating with an associate degree is not the end goal for all community college students. Many students attend community colleges to earn short-term credentials, certificates, or other educational outcomes, and many others attend for the sole purpose of eventually transferring their credits to a four-year institution. As such, success metrics that limit success to degree attainment fall short of capturing the full scope of successful student outcomes, which can in turn impact the opportunities available to these students.

To improve available metrics, the Richmond Fed has created the Richmond Fed Success Rate, a new measure that more broadly defines student success. Our metric varies from the IPEDS graduation rate in two primary ways:

- The Richmond Fed Success Rate measures outcomes at the four-year mark rather than the IPEDS standard of 150% time to completion (i.e., three years). This longer timeline allows us to capture the success of

students consistently working toward an educational outcome but taking longer to reach their goals. This is especially important since we include part-time students in the cohort.

- The Richmond Fed success rate takes a broader approach to defining success—one that recognizes students' diverse educational goals—and includes four outcomes rather than just one: associate degree attainment, industry-recognized certificate or credential attainment, successful transfers to four-year institutions prior to degree attainment, and persistence in enrollment in good standing for four years.



## Interested in digging deeper?

Visit the Community College Insights blog on [RichmondFed.org](#) for additional data and analysis from the survey.

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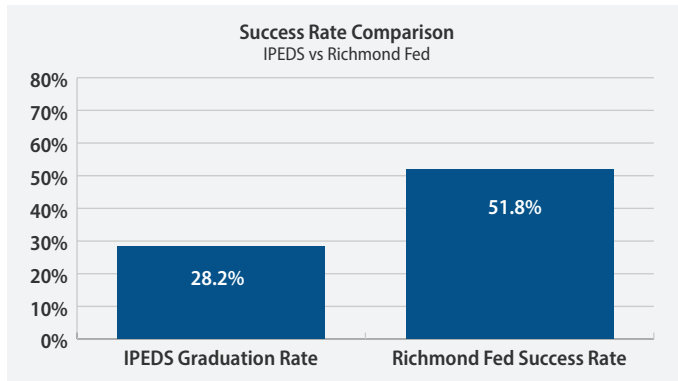
Strengthening the economy  
and our communities™

## Richmond Fed Survey of Community College Outcomes: Highlights from the Extended Pilot

There are a wide array of ways students utilize community colleges to prepare for the workforce, yet not all are counted as “successful.”

- At the schools included in our extended pilot, **14.8%** of students in the cohort transferred before getting a credential. These students are not counted as successful in traditional graduation rate metrics.
- At the schools included in our extended pilot, **8%** of students in the cohort persisted, and remained in good standing, but did not earn a credential within four years of initial enrollment. These individuals may work full-time, be single parents, or have other responsibilities or disabilities that prevent them from taking a full course load.

**Because of this, current success metrics don’t tell the full story of success for community colleges.**

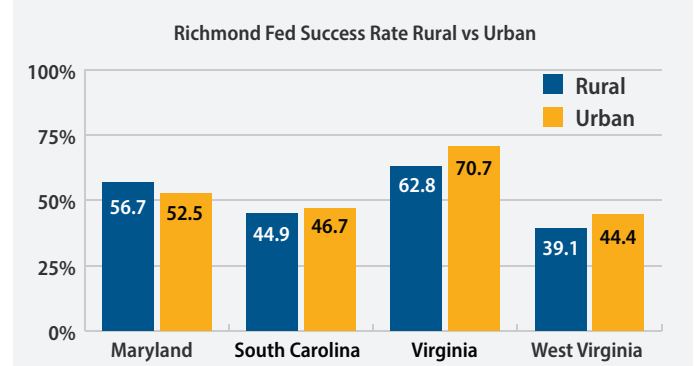


Publicly available graduation rates for extended pilot schools are **28.2%** on average. Our Richmond Fed Success Rate averages **51.8%** for the same schools. This indicates that community colleges across these four states are **83%** more successful than traditional graduation rates indicate. An accurate measure of success is important because these metrics have an impact on the funding, partnerships and opportunities available to community colleges and their students.

**High school students have higher credit attainment rates yet often go unmeasured by traditional community college success measures.**

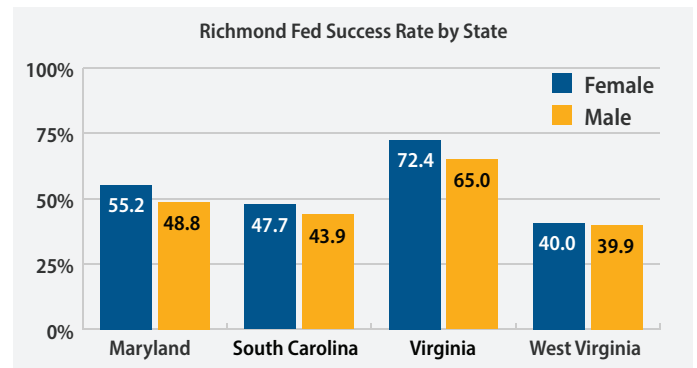
Extended pilot data revealed that high school students make up **18.2%** of credit students served by community colleges and have higher credit attainment rates than non-high school students, yet high school students are frequently left out of current measures of success at community colleges.

**Fifth District rural community colleges are anchor institutions in the communities they serve.**



Nearly one-quarter of our District’s population lives in small towns and rural areas. Rural community colleges have a larger percentage of students who graduate or attain a credential, whereas urban community colleges have a higher transfer rate. In many rural regions, the community college may be one of the few anchor institutions with the local presence and trust to facilitate economic and community development.

## A Demographic View of Community College Success



### Richmond Fed Success Rate by Gender

Females have higher success rates than male students in all four states in the extended pilot. Females averaged a success rate of **53.4%**, while their male counterparts averaged **49.4%**. Female students also make up the majority of enrolled students across credit and dual enrollment programs. Non-credit programs are male dominated in three of the four states, with the exception being Maryland.

### Richmond Fed Success Rate by Race

When looking at race, the most noticeable gap was between Black student and White student success rates. At extended pilot schools, Black student success averaged **43.6%** while White student success averaged **55.1%**.