

Research Brief

Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium
Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education

The High School Antecedents of On-time College Completion

This study used a service known as *StudentTracker*, that provides the opportunity to use higher quality data on college graduation than that provided by the customary surveys of graduates. The intention of this study was to investigate how high schools can improve what they do to better facilitate “adequate preparation for college” (operationally defined in the context of this study as “graduating in four years from a four-year college or in two years from a two-year college.”)

The study was focused on the most recent high school cohort for whom 4-yr college graduation was available: the cohort that graduated from high school in May, 2003. Under the definition of on-time graduation adopted for this study, these students would have graduated by May, 2005 if they went to a 2-year college, or by May, 2007 if they went to a 4-yr college. Two MERC school divisions contributed data for this study. They were asked to include every high school graduate for the year ending May, 2003 in a data set which included gender, race, limited English proficiency status, special education status, school attended, diploma type, final GPA, class size, class rank, highest verbal and mathematics scores on SAT, number of days student was in the division, number of days absent, and whether an AP class/exam was taken. These data were merged with individual student data from *StudentTracker*, including whether a 2-yr or 4-yr college was attended by each student, whether that college was public or private, and the year of graduation from that college.

Logistic regression of each school division’s data was conducted, using a random 70 percent of the cases to develop a logistic regression model, and the remaining 30 percent of the cases in each division as a cross-validation sample. The models were developed for the “regular classroom” students (students not classified as either special education or limited English proficiency), who were from comparably sized high schools within each division (some considerably smaller high schools in the data were special purpose high schools). Also, separate models were developed for students who went to 2-yr and 4-yr colleges.

Highly nuanced findings indicated that gender played a strong role for graduates from one school in particular. Data from both school divisions showed GPA as an indicator of on-time college graduation. Studying both the demographic and academic high school antecedents of on-time college graduation in particular divisions highlights strengths and issues inherent in the local community.

By empowering individual school districts to ask and seek answers to locally meaningful questions, analyses of such data can be part of a perceptive response to national imperatives.

For more information about this study contact the principal investigator, Dr. Martin Reardon at 804-828-8698, mreardon@vcu.edu or visit our webpage: www.vcu.edu/eduweb/merc for a copy of the full report.