

Why Diploma Types Matter

Experts predict that by 2018, at least 65 percent of all jobs will require some type of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). But what determines college success? A recent research project sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education revealed that high school diploma type is an important factor in predicting Virginia graduates' success in college (in both two- and four-year colleges). More specifically, high school graduates who took courses that are required to earn Virginia's Advanced Studies diploma (or an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma), were almost twice as likely to remain in or graduate from college after four years compared to graduates who earned Standard diplomas.

In Virginia, the most commonly awarded High School diplomas are the Standard and Advanced Studies (or International Baccalaureate) diplomas. Additionally, Virginia offers the Modified Standard diploma and the Special diploma to students with disabilities. These diploma types demand vastly different requirements of students during their four years in high school (see Table 1). For example, the Standard diploma requires only three years of Mathematics, Lab Science, and History and Social Sciences, while the Advanced Studies diploma requires four years of the same subjects.

Diploma Type Requirements

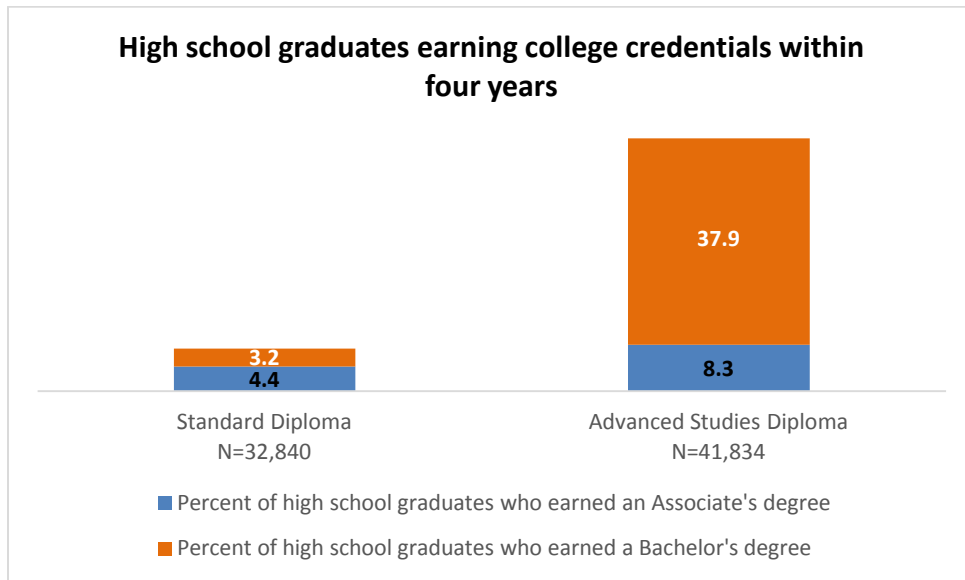
Diploma type	Core Course Requirements	Minimum high school credits required
Advanced Studies diploma	English	4
	Mathematics	4
	Lab Science	4
	History and Social Sciences	4
	Foreign Languages	3
Standard diploma	English	4
	Mathematics	3
	Lab Science	3
	History and Social Sciences	3
	Foreign Languages	0

Using data from the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS), the study, *Virginia's 2008 On-Time Graduation Rate Cohort Four Year College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion*, examined the 2008 Virginia high school graduates and followed their success rates in college. Of the 78,087 high school graduates in the cohort, 54,024 students (or 69 percent of graduates) enrolled in a college or university in the first year after graduation. However, the study found that of these, students with Advanced Studies diplomas were far more likely to enroll, remain, and graduate college within four years. Some of these findings were as follows:

- High school graduates with Advanced Studies diplomas were more likely to enroll than graduates with Standard diplomas (88 percent vs. 50 percent).



- Four years after high school, Advanced Studies diploma-earners were twice as likely to stay in college or earn a degree as Standard diploma-earners (83 percent vs. 46 percent).
- High school graduates who earned Advanced Studies diplomas were more likely to earn Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees than those who earned Standard diplomas. Overall, of the 41,834 Advanced Studies diploma-earners, 46 percent earned a degree after four years, compared to the 7.2 percent of 32,840 Standard diploma-earners.



Finally, an examination of student successes at four-year colleges revealed that the difference between the two groups’ success rates was not as stark, but nonetheless still exists. According to the study, “Ninety-three (93) percent of the college-enrolled Advanced Studies diploma-earners and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of college-enrolled Standard diploma-earners whose last enrollment was a four-year IHE persisted for four years.”

The differences between the two diploma-type earner types are not surprising. As the study pointed out, “In Virginia, the requirements of the Advanced Studies diploma are aligned to the entrance requirements for typical college and other postsecondary training programs. Students who complete a program of study consistent with or exceeding the Advanced Studies diploma requirements will be better prepared for college-level coursework and other types of training programs upon graduation. Students who earn the Advanced Studies diploma are more likely to enroll in college, stay in college, and earn a degree.”

The results of this study can help parents, students, and educators understand the potential impact of their students’ course-taking choices and decisions. Diploma types, which have different course requirements, can affect students’ future chances for success in college and career training programs. By ensuring that more high school students participate and succeed in the high school courses consistent with the Advanced Studies diploma, more graduates’ will leave our schools with a better shot at success in college, career training, and life.



Research Purpose

Since 2007, Virginia's education agencies have worked together to better understand the courses and achievement levels that high school graduates need to be successful in college. This information has helped policy makers assess the potential impact of their actions, and can help educators and parents set learning and achievement goals for students.

Research Methodology

Virginia's CCRI research focused on the high school graduating classes of 2006-2008, with the most in-depth analysis focused on the class of 2008. Researchers used de-identified data from VDOE, the National Student Clearinghouse, and SCHEV to describe the Virginia-specific high school achievement indicators that predict college enrollment and success. Some of the work is ongoing.

Research Insights

The research showed that students who meet the following Virginia-specific indicators have a relatively high chance of enrolling in college, and earning a grade of C or better in first-year credit bearing courses *regardless of race, ethnicity, or income.*

Virginia factors associated with passing entry-level college courses that count towards graduation

Research at the national level has identified scores on college entry tests, such as SAT and ACT,

which predict students' success in their first year of college. Virginia recognizes these measures, but the CCRI research program has identified measures that are available for all students:

- Earning an Advanced Studies Diploma
- Advanced Proficient scores on SOL tests administered prior to 2009
- Participating in high school chemistry and Algebra II

Students who participated in dual-credit courses while in high school increased their chances of a successful first-year in college as compared to their peers with similar prior achievement.

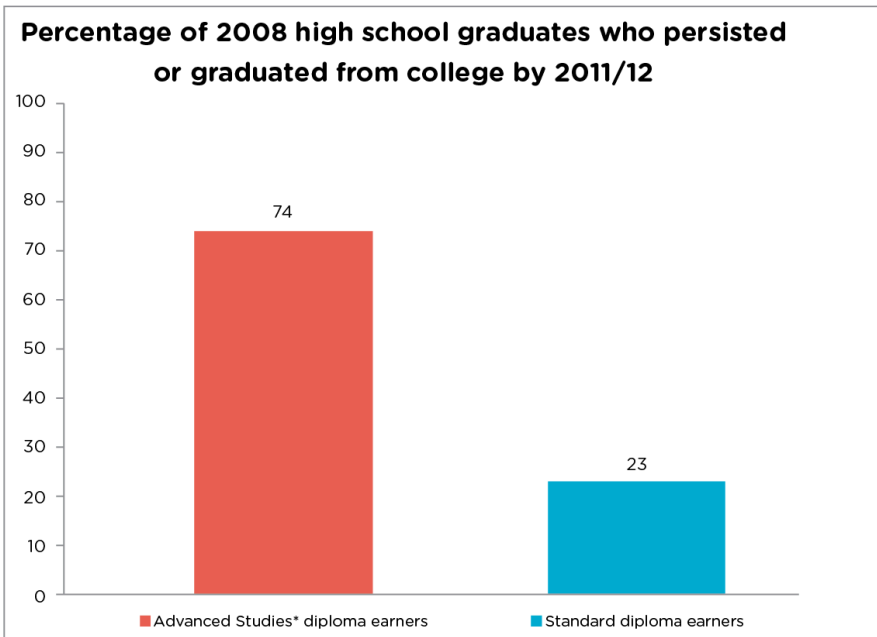
Persistence and college graduation linked to high school achievement

Preliminary results from research following the 2008 cohort through four years of college suggests that at least some of

these indicators predict which students remain enrolled in college and are more likely to earn credentials.

- Most students who earned Advanced Studies diplomas and enrolled in college remained enrolled or had earned a credential within four years
- On average, high school graduates who earned Advanced Studies diplomas had accumulated almost 3 times the number of college credit in four years compared to other high-school degree holders

Researchers are continuing to conduct this work, with a long-term goal of understanding how recent policy changes, such as new learning standards and graduation requirements, impact students' chances of success after high school.



For more information about Virginia's College and Career Readiness Initiative, visit

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/college_career_readiness/index.shtml#resources

To learn more about VLDS, visit www.vlds.virginia.gov

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