



# Community College Completion

Progress toward goal of 50% increase



AMERICAN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES

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## Introduction

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In April 2010, six national community college organizations (American Association of Community colleges, Association of Community College Trustees, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, League for Innovation in the Community College, Phi Theta Kappa, and Center for Community College Student Engagement) jointly signed an historic commitment to boost student completion by 50%. The participating organizations stated a bold goal for the community college field: “to produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality.” (See “Democracy’s Colleges Call to Action” in appendix A).

This commitment to increase completion was further emphasized in the first recommendation of the 21st Century Commission on the Future of community colleges’ final report calling on colleges to: “Increase completion rates of students earning community college credentials (certificates and associate degrees) by 50% by 2020, while preserving access, and enhancing quality” (Reclaiming the American Dream, Community Colleges and the Nation’s Future: A Report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges; 2014). It has been five years since the community college field first committed to this challenge. This report is designed to answer the question – **How well are community colleges doing in meeting the ambitious goals they set for themselves in 2010?**

The original need for the commitment has not abated. The need for increasing levels of educational attainment in our country has not subsided, and to remain a competitive economy, more individuals need to attain postsecondary credentials of value. Education continues to be the entrée to the middle class, and individuals without postsecondary credentials will become increasingly marginalized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. How do we know how well community colleges are doing at meeting this goal?

There are a lot of data on the number of credentials awarded by community colleges. However, it can be difficult to interpret this data to understand the role community colleges are taking in increasing the number of individuals who have a high quality credential. There are two separate sources of information that can help answer this, but neither provides a complete picture of the role community colleges play in addressing the goals. One source of data is institutional reports of credentials conferred as reported annually to the US Department of Education. While these provide a good accounting of the actual number of degrees and certificates conferred, it is problematic because many students earn more than one credential.

Therefore, using these data one cannot differentiate between students who are earning their first credential, or their fourth credential. While a student who earns four credentials will likely see a benefit from each of them (many colleges are creating stackable credentials to help move individuals along a career pathway), by counting each of these awards individually we over-represent the number of individuals in the country who have a credential of value. As second source of data come from levels of educational attainment in the US, as collected through the US Bureau of the Census. These data allow us to determine the number of individuals in the US by varying levels of educational attainment, but these data do not account for a large number of individuals who have certificates that have significant labor market value, nor can the attribute the credential to the type of institution which awarded the degree.

Therefore, this report uses data from the National Student Clearinghouse to provide a clearer picture of how many students are earning their first credential from a community college, as well as those with subsequent credentials from community colleges. But community colleges also provide a critical role in preparing students to succeed in four-year colleges as well, and many students earn their degree at a four-year college without first earning a credential at the community college. This report captures this important community college contribution to the completion agenda as well.

Data typically used to answer the question on increasing the rate of completions is also problematic. Graduation rates collected by the US Department of Education have several significant limitations, such as only including students who start full-time and only following students for a limited number of years. Therefore, these data provide only a limited view of how well colleges are doing at increasing their completion rates. This paper will examine these data, and discuss alternative approaches to measuring these goals.

## Background

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Community colleges provide a wide range of opportunities and experiences for their students. Community colleges – often referred to as democracies colleges—have long prided themselves as being open access institutions, providing opportunity for any student who desires to attend. Funding models were built on the number of students served, and entrance requirements allowed all who had a high school diploma, or the equivalent to enroll for classes.

But focus began to shift from access into the institution to student success, and the importance of creating more equity in student outcomes. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education Report highlighted the need for increasing both access and success for “every student in the nation”. (“A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education”; 2006 pg. 17). In 2009, President Obama called for increasing the number of US citizens with postsecondary education asking “every American to commit to at least one year of more of higher education or training...”(Address to Joint Session of Congress, 2009). National efforts such as Achieving the Dream focused on increasing student success in community colleges.

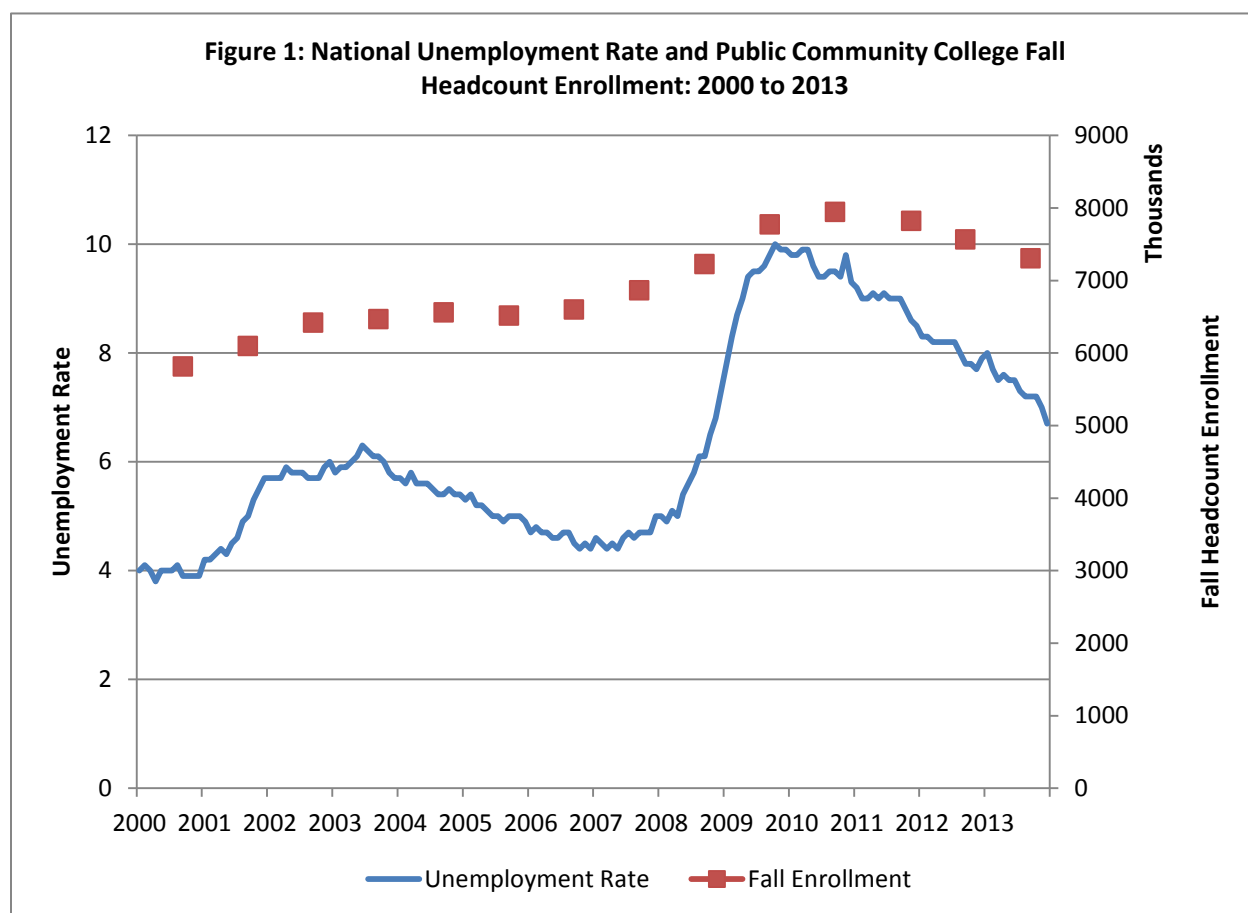
Out of this increased attention on completion six national community college organizations (American Association of Community colleges, Association of Community College Trustees, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, League for Innovation in the Community College, Phi Theta Kappa, The Center for Community College Student Engagement) determined that bold action was required to move the community colleges toward increasing the number of students who successfully complete credentials of value. In April of 2010, at the conclusion of the American Association of Community Colleges’ (AACC) annual convention, the leaders of each of the six national organizations signed a pledge to increase the number of students with credentials of value by 50% by the year 2020. Each of the organizations, as part of the pledge, indicated they would dedicate efforts to help colleges and student toward completing this goal.

In 2014, the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges reaffirmed the importance of colleges committing to the completion agenda. The commission, staffed by community college thought leaders recommended that colleges increase completion rates (not the number of credentials) by 50%. This call to increase completion rates recognizes the importance of serving all students, and the importance of “eradicating attainment gaps associated with income, race, ethnicity, and gender”.

## Enrollment and Completion history

In order to understand the data in this report, it is important to understand the context of the data to be reported. The enrollment patterns at community colleges prior to, and during the time-frame of this report, are important factors to help understand these data.

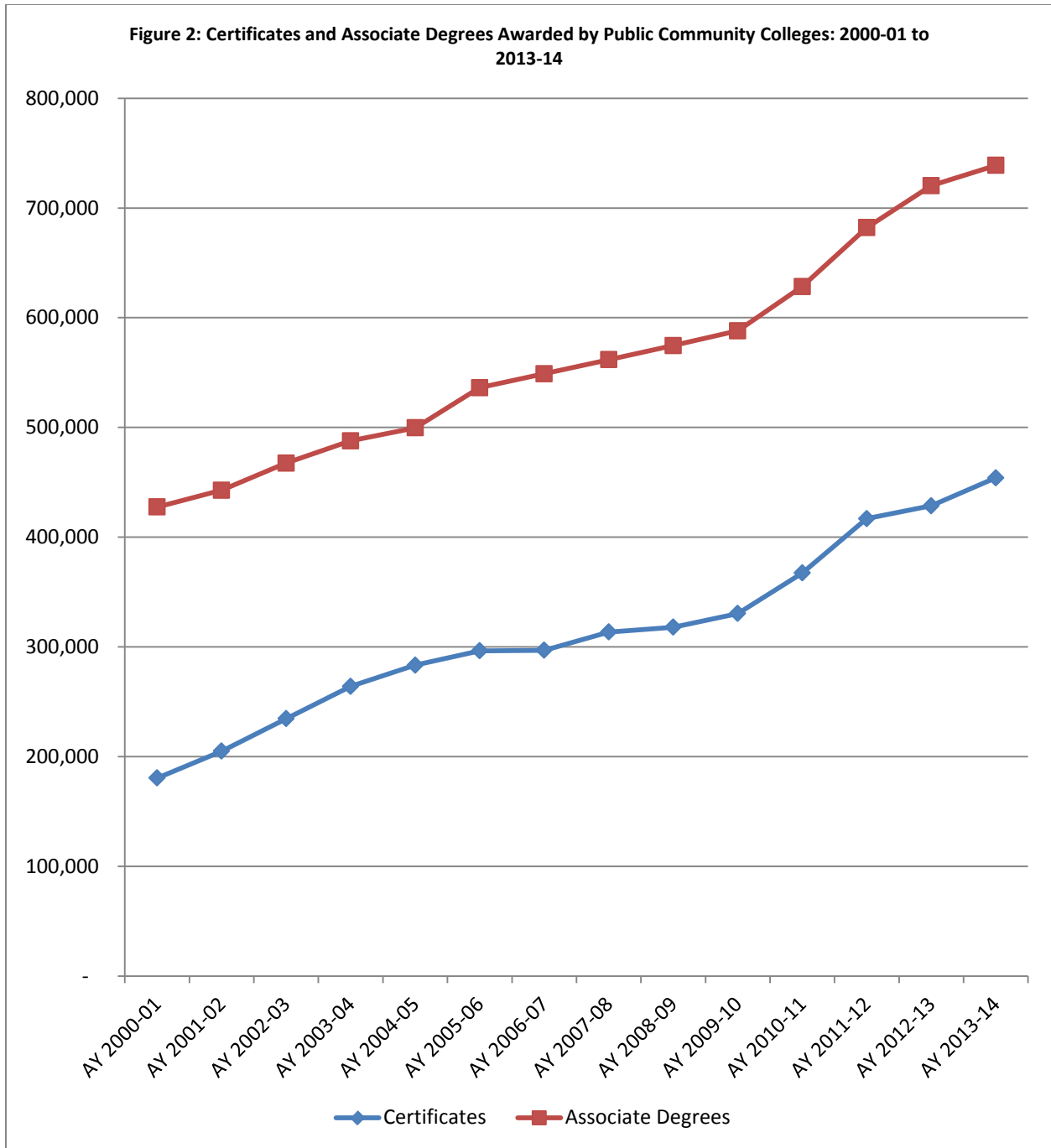
During the early years of this century, community college fall headcount enrollment saw a slow but somewhat steady increase, averaging about 2.2% increase per year from 2000 to 2006 (See figure 1). Then as the recession hit, community college enrollments spiked jumping by nearly 18% (5.6% per year) between 2006 and 2009, with enrollment peaking in the fall of 2010.



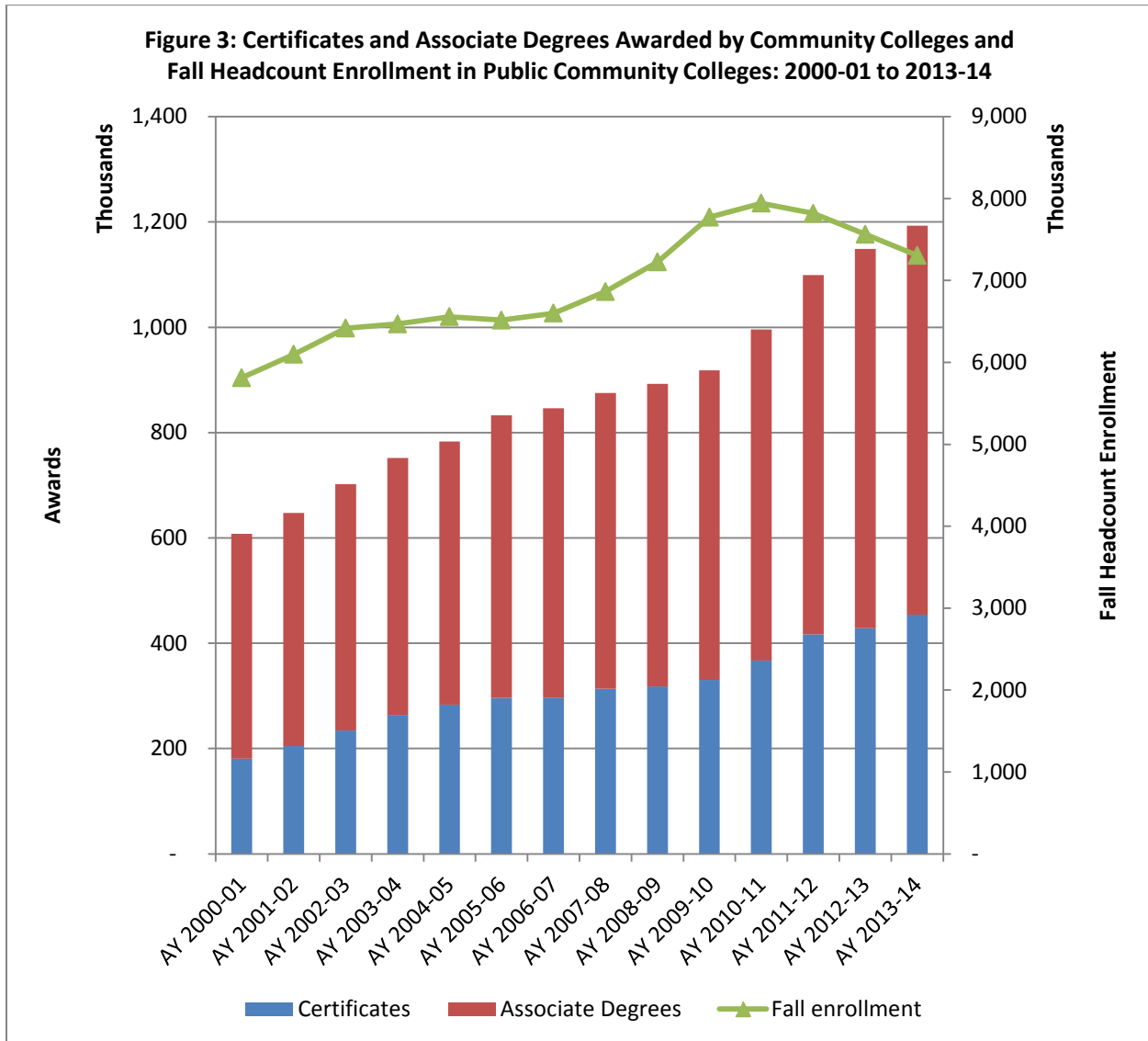
As the economy improved, enrollments in community colleges began to decline. Several factors may have contributed to this decline in enrollment. Many students who came to community colleges at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had attained the training and skills the needed to enter or re-enter the workforce. In addition, the number of students graduating from high schools was decreasing. Between fall of 2010 and 2011, enrollments went down by 1.6%,

and have been steadily decreasing by about 3.5% each year since. These enrollment trends provide an important context for the completion data to be presented in this report.

The number of credentials community colleges conferred during this same period also provides a valuable insight. Community colleges reported steady increases in the total number of degrees and certificates that they awarded. Between 2000-01 academic year and 2006-07 academic year, the number of certificates awarded jumped by 64% (averaging 8.8% increase per year) and associate degree production over the same period increased by 28% (averaging 4.3% increase per year) (See Figure 2). During the rapid growth of enrollment (2006 to 2009) credential production increased at a slower rate (2.8% per year for certificates, and 2.3% for associate degrees). But the next two years (2010-11 and 2011-12) saw double digit increases in certificates awarded and an average increase in associate degrees awarded of 7.7% for academic years 2010-11 to 2012-13.

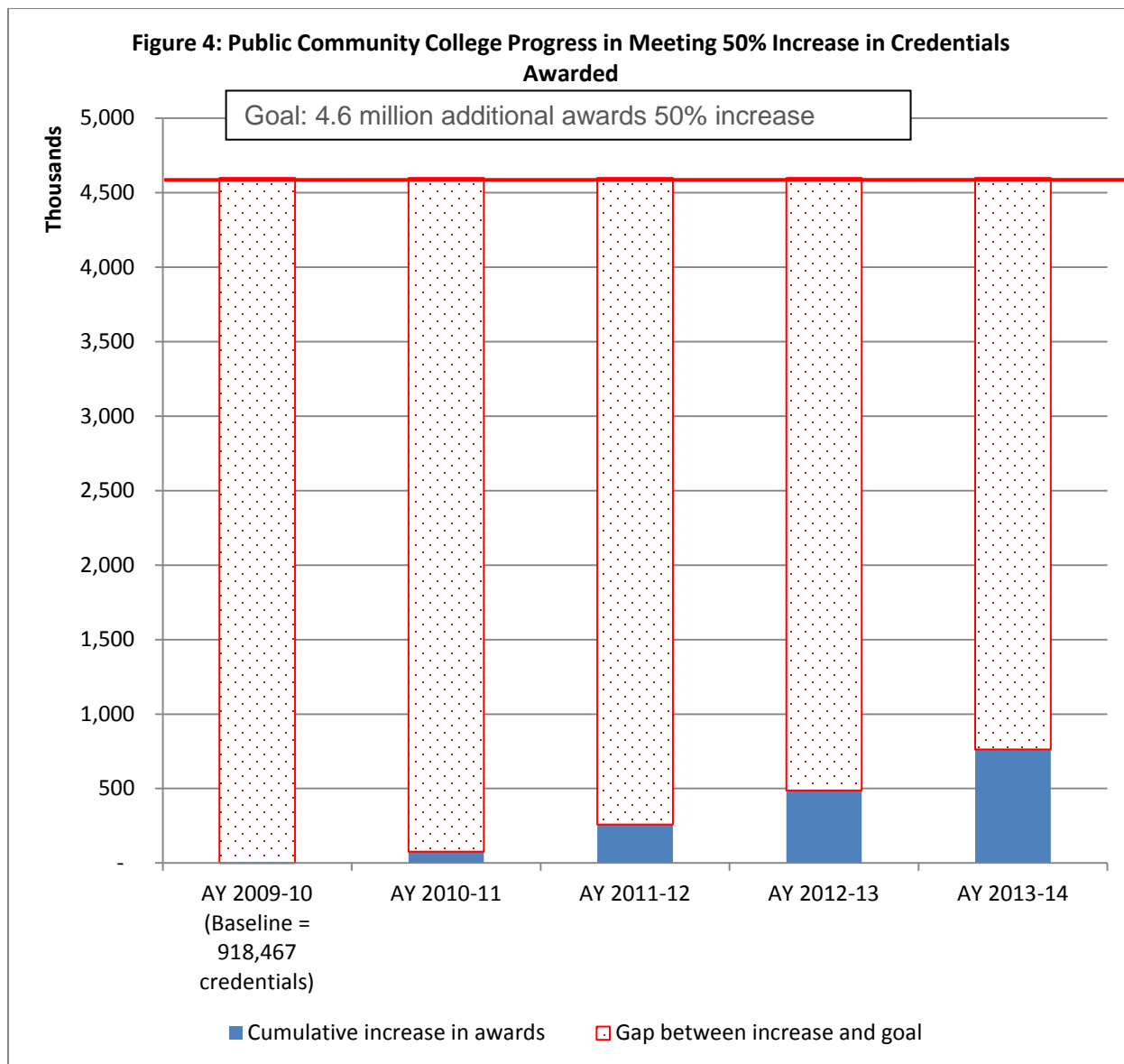


It is particularly illustrative to see the two sets of data plotted together. Figure 3 shows enrollment and credential completion running relatively parallel for the first decade of this century. However, during the four-years of this study, the pattern takes a marked change, with completions continuing to increase while enrollments drop off. This may in part be due to a time lag from initial enrollment to the time a credential is earned. However, these data provide an important backdrop to this report.



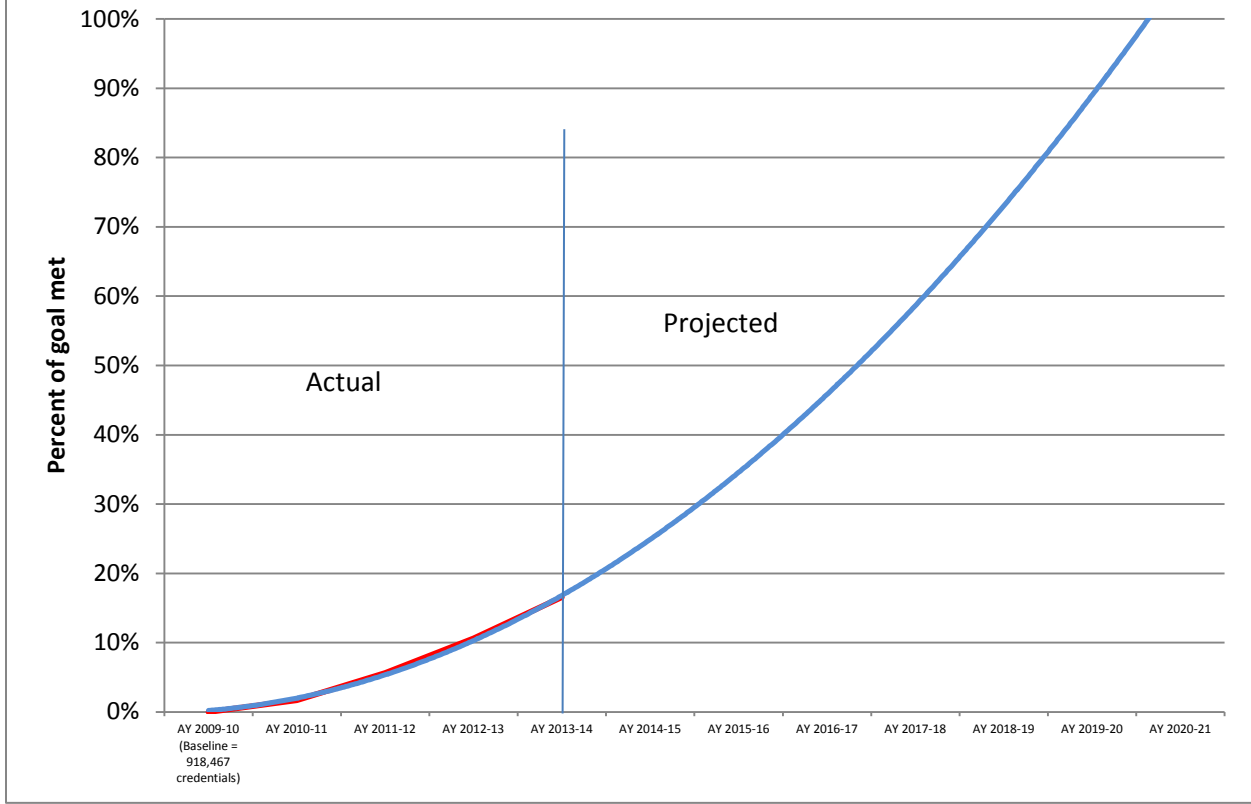
Using the completion data above, we can begin to answer the question: how are we doing in meeting the goal of 50% more completions? In the 2009-10 academic year (the year the pledge was signed) public community colleges conferred slightly less than 920,000 degrees and certificates. Projecting the same number of degrees per year out to 2020 would represent 9,200,000 certificates and degrees. To increase by 50% would require approximately 4,600,000 additional awards for a grand total of 13,800,000 awards over the ten-year period. Figure 4 shows the annual progress community colleges are making in meeting this goal. During the first 4 years tracked, community colleges were only 17% of the way toward meeting the goal of conferring 4.6 million more degrees or certificates by 2020.





However, assuming the trend in credential production seen in the first four years continues, we can project this trend out the full ten years. This projection suggests that community colleges will reach approximately 90% of their projected goal by 2020 (See figure 5) and meet it by 2021. While this is a promising projection, it is important to note that it assumes a constant rate of increase over the ten year period. There may be challenges in maintaining this increasing credential production trend in an era of decreasing enrollments and tightening budgets. Therefore, to meet the goals, colleges will need to increase the rate of success of incoming students, increase the number of incoming students or both. Community college progress on the rate of completions will be addressed in a later section.

**Figure 5: Public Community College Projected Progress in Meeting 50% Increase in Credentials Awarded Based on First Four Years**



## A new look at completion data

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The data above clearly indicate the impact of the recession on community college enrollments, and documents the steady increase in the raw number of certificates and degrees that community colleges conferred over the last decade and a half. However, the data do not tell us how many of those awards were given to students who had no prior postsecondary credential. Students who have their first academic credential represent increases in the number of the people in the US population who have attained a credential past high school.

This study was designed to answer a series of questions, to better place the number of total credentials awarded into a context of how many students are attaining a first, or subsequent award. As the surge in enrollments and credentials awarded during the recession and initial recovery suggest, it is clear community colleges were serving a vital role in training individuals to enter and re-enter the workforce. However, it may be that a substantial number of the credentials in the early part of this decade were given to individuals who had a prior postsecondary credential, and the community college provided an opportunity for re-training to re-enter the job market with a different set of skills.

Therefore, this study asks the following questions:

1. How many individuals (count of students) earned a certificate from a community college as their first ever postsecondary credential?
2. How many individuals (count of students) earned an associate's degree from a community college as their first ever postsecondary credential?
3. How many individuals (count of students) earned an associate's degree from a community college and who had a prior postsecondary credential?
4. How many individuals (count of students) earned a certificate from a community college and who had a prior postsecondary credential?
5. How many individuals (count of students) earned their first ever postsecondary credential from a 4-year college and had substantial community college experience prior to earning their first credential?

The first four measures are designed to specifically determine on an annual basis how many students are earning credentials from community colleges, what type of award, and was it their first ever postsecondary credential. The fifth measure was designed to see how many individuals who earned their first-ever postsecondary credential from a four-year college had a substantial community college experience before transferring and completing at the four-year college. Many students transfer prior to receipt of a degree at the community college, and this report captures those student outcomes as well.

AACC partnered with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to answer these questions. NSC data provide an excellent opportunity to look at these questions from the perspective of individuals, as opposed to institutions – the level of analysis most frequently used to analyze student credential completion. NSC captures student level enrollment data, and degree

completion from participating colleges and universities. Using this student level data it can be determined when students earn a credential and if the student had earned a prior credential. For each year in the study, all students with a credential earned from a public community college<sup>1</sup> were evaluated to determine if the credential was their first postsecondary credential (they had no prior record of a credential completion in the NSC database) and what credential they earned. Finally, for each year of the study, a similar process was used to determine students who attained a first credential from a four-year college, and of those who did, the number who had significant community college experience<sup>2</sup> prior to the attainment of the credential from the four-year college. Methodology details are available at <URL>

## Results

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In 2013-14, approximately 900,000 individual earned their first postsecondary credential at a community college, or with substantial preparation at a community college, based on the community colleges included in this study (See figure 6) Since this study does not have complete coverage of all community colleges, and represents an under-estimate of certificates conferred (See methodology report for more details), a conservative estimate would be that community colleges were responsible, directly or through transfer, for over 1,000,000 students earning their first postsecondary credential in the 2013-14 academic year. Stated differently, between fall 2013 and the end of summer 2014, 1,000,000 more US citizens had a postsecondary credential attributable to community college experiences.

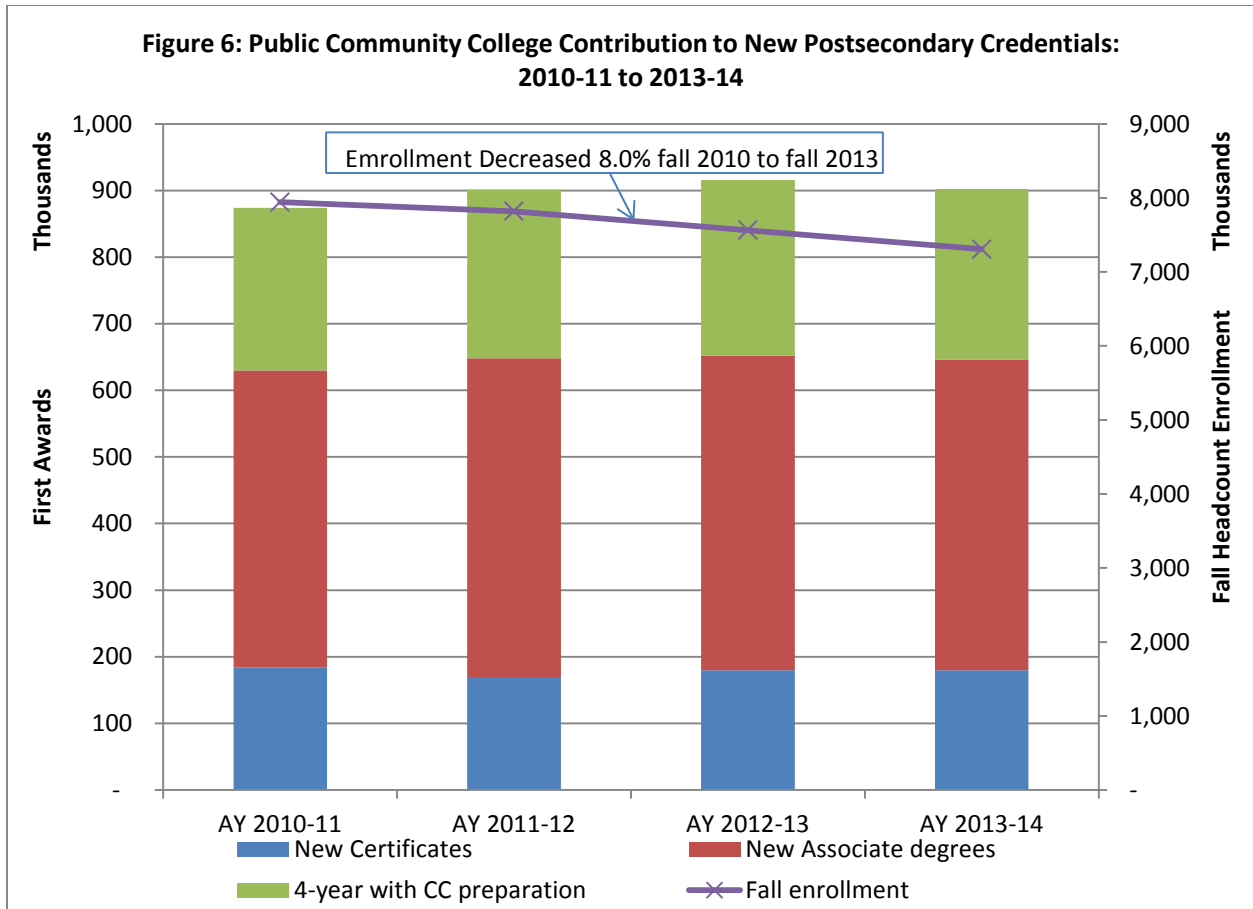
As figure 6 shows, the number of first time credentials increase the first three years, but dipped slightly in 2013-14—the last year data are available. First-time associate degrees make up slightly more than half of all first credentials reported in Figure 6, with four-year credentials making up around 28 percent, and certificates slightly more the 20 percent. Further analysis indicates that the while the number of students who first earned an associated degree or four-year degree dropped slightly the last year, the number of student who first earned a certificate increased slightly.

Figure 6 also plots the enrollment trend over these same four years, and shows an overall enrollment decrease of 8.0% from fall 2010 to fall 2013. During this time-frame the total number of first-time awards increased by 2.5% (increasing 3.5% the first three years, but dropping 0.9% the last year). In other words, enrollments were steadily decreasing while completions were mostly increasing.

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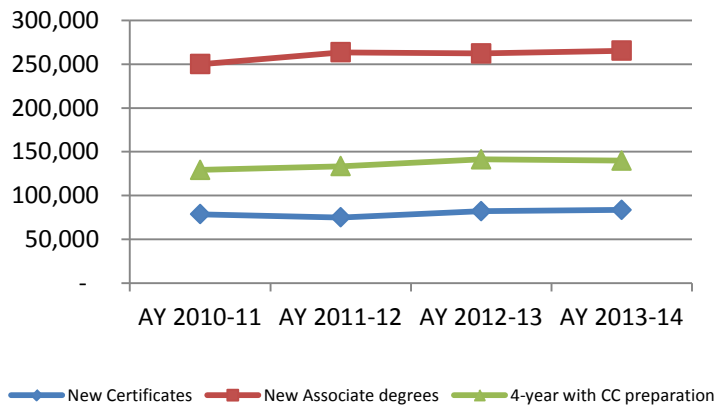
<sup>1</sup> For this analysis, only colleges that participated in the National Student Clearinghouse's Degree Verification were included – this represents about 87% of community college enrollments.

<sup>2</sup> Significant community college experience was defined as 28 or more full-time-equivalent weeks of enrollment at a public community college in the eight prior academic years

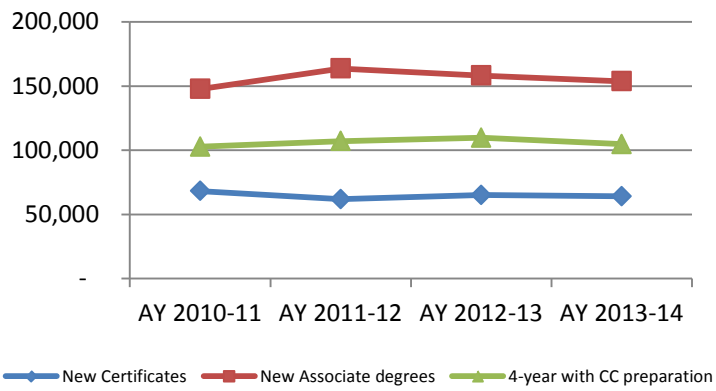


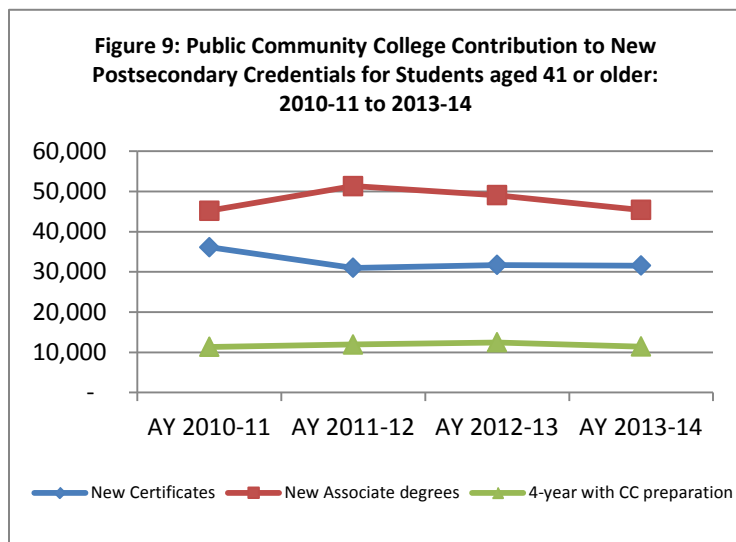
In order to better understand this trend, we broke the population into three separate age bands based on their age at the time of the receipt of their credential: students aged 24 or younger, students aged 25 to 40, and students over 40 years of age. There were striking differences in the pattern for the different age groups over this time period. (See figures 7-9)

**Figure 7: Public Community College Contribution to New Postsecondary Credentials for Students aged 24 or younger: 2010-11 to 2013-14**



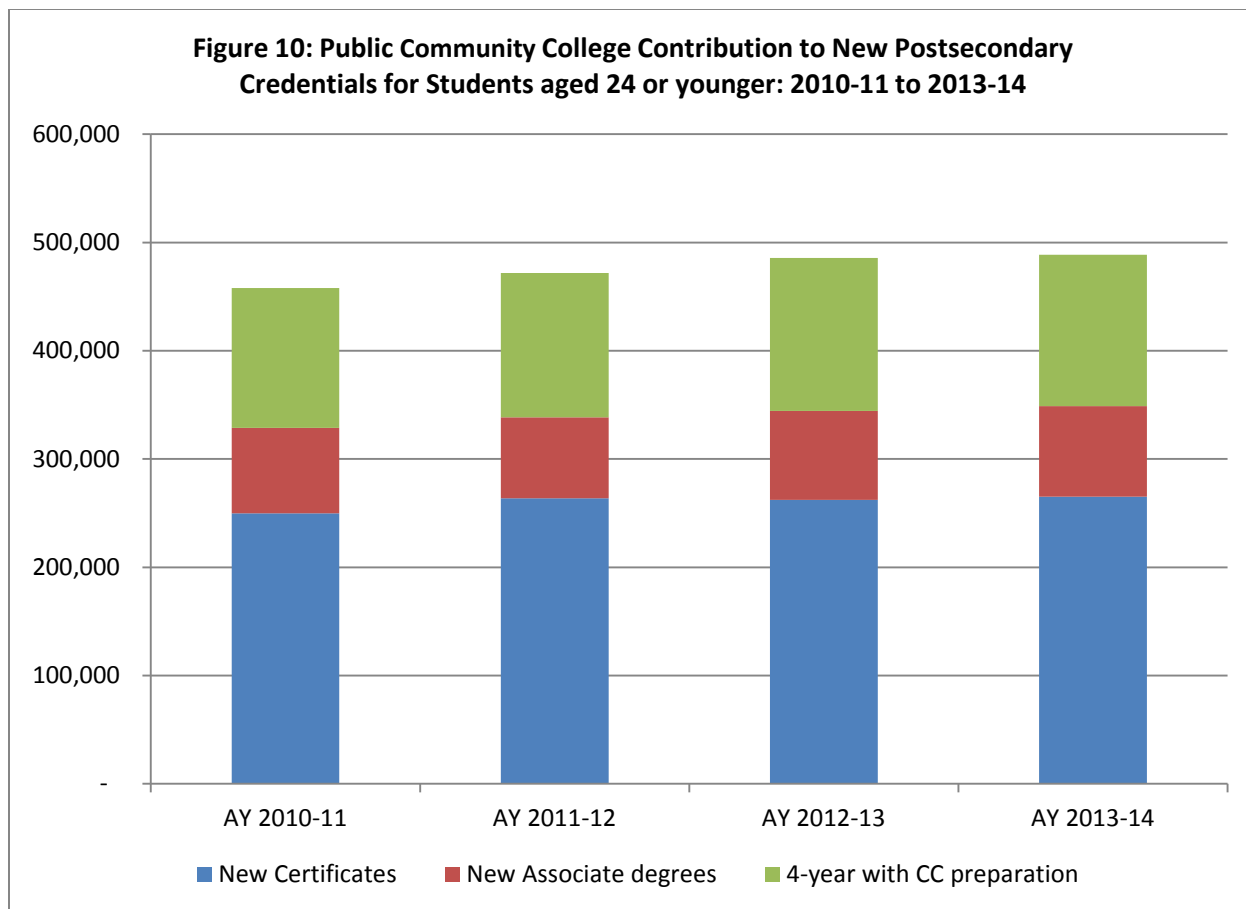
**Figure 8: Public Community College Contribution to New Postsecondary Credentials for Students aged 25 to 40: 2010-11 to 2013-14**





The first thing to note in these is the ratio of the three credential types. In the youngest age group, associate degrees constitute by far the most frequent first credential for this age group, followed by 4-year degrees with a community college contribution, and finally slightly lower was the receipt of certificates as a first postsecondary credential. In contrast, individuals aged 40 or older were least likely to have earned their first postsecondary credential from a four-year college following substantial community college experience, though still more likely that their first credential was an associate degree.

The youngest age group represented the largest share of students who attained their first credential (53% of students in 2010-11). The youngest age group also was the only age group that showed a steady increase over the four-year period of the study (see figure 10). The number of students 24 years of age or younger whose first credential was a certificate or associate degree from a community college increased by 6.1% over the four years, while the number whose first credential was from a four-year institutions with substantial community college experience rose by 8.3%. These trends may be the result of several factors. First, as the economy improved over this time frame, fewer older workers may be returning to higher education to attain their first credential. Another factor is that many community college reform efforts have focused more on the more traditional age students, and this may be reflected in these data.

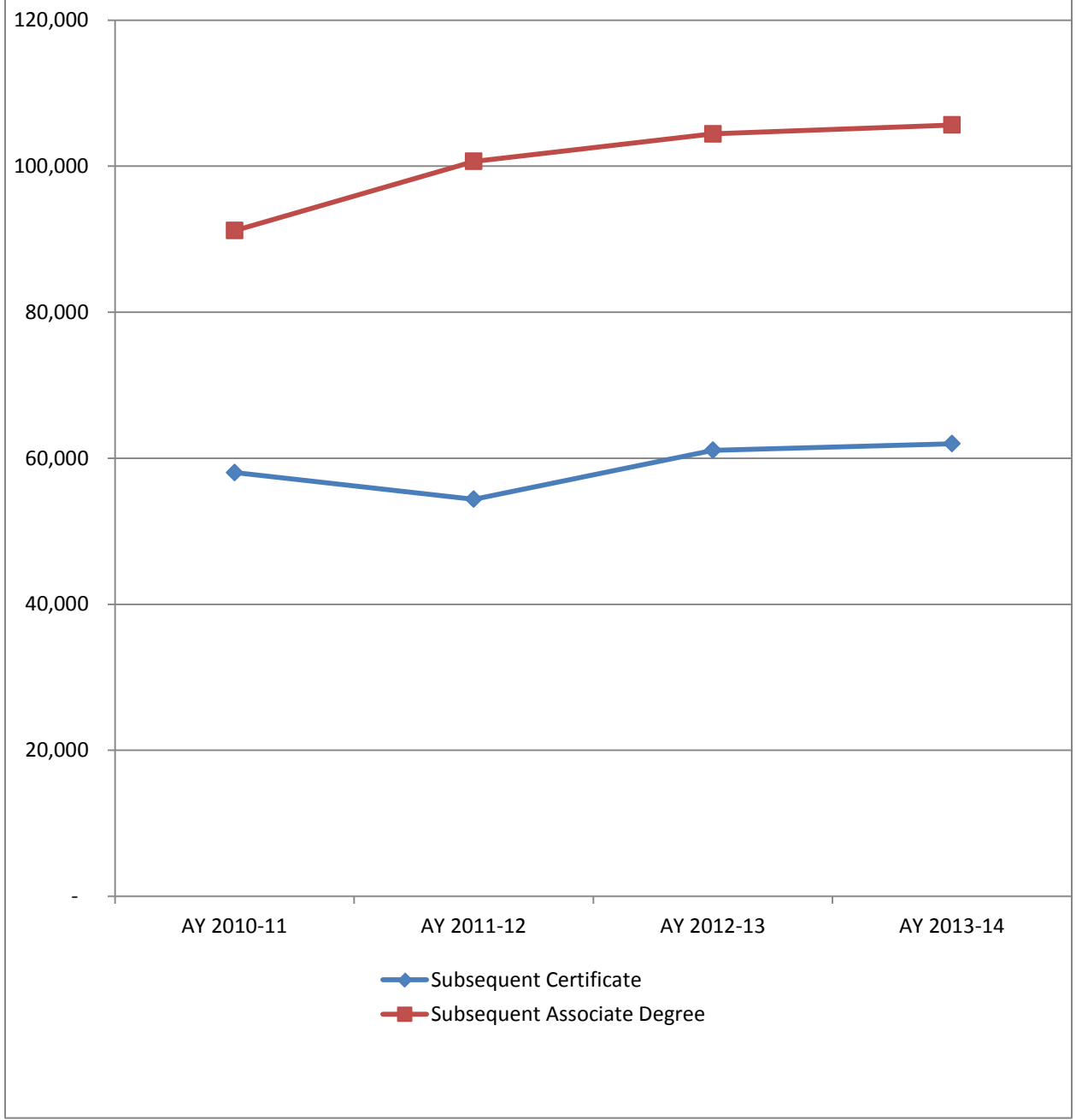


The last set of questions (Questions 4 & 5) addressed the number of students who earned a credential at a public community college who had previously attained a postsecondary credential. These credentials may be sequential in nature (e.g. stackable credentials) or non-sequential (e.g. a student with a bachelor's degree in Art History earning a certificate in an IT field). This study did not differentiate based on what the prior credential was—it could have been anything from a short-term certificate to a doctorate—it only indicates if the credential is not the first. To put this into context, approximately 8% of all students attending community colleges hold a baccalaureate degree.

The findings from this study show that during the time frame studied, there was an increase in both the number of certificates and associate degrees conferred by community colleges to students who had a prior postsecondary credential (See Figure 11). Similar to the first credential, the subsequent credential was more likely to be an associate degree rather than a certificate. However, the number of certificates awarded in a given year is higher than the rate reported in the first certificate and subsequent certificates for a variety of reasons. First, many students earn more than one credential in a given year, but since this is a count of individuals, not awards, the number will be lower. In addition, not all awards reported on IPEDS completions survey were reported to the National Student Clearinghouse degree verification system.



**Figure 11: Number of Students with a Prior Postsecondary Credential Who Earned a Credential at a Public Community College: 2010-11 to 2013-14**



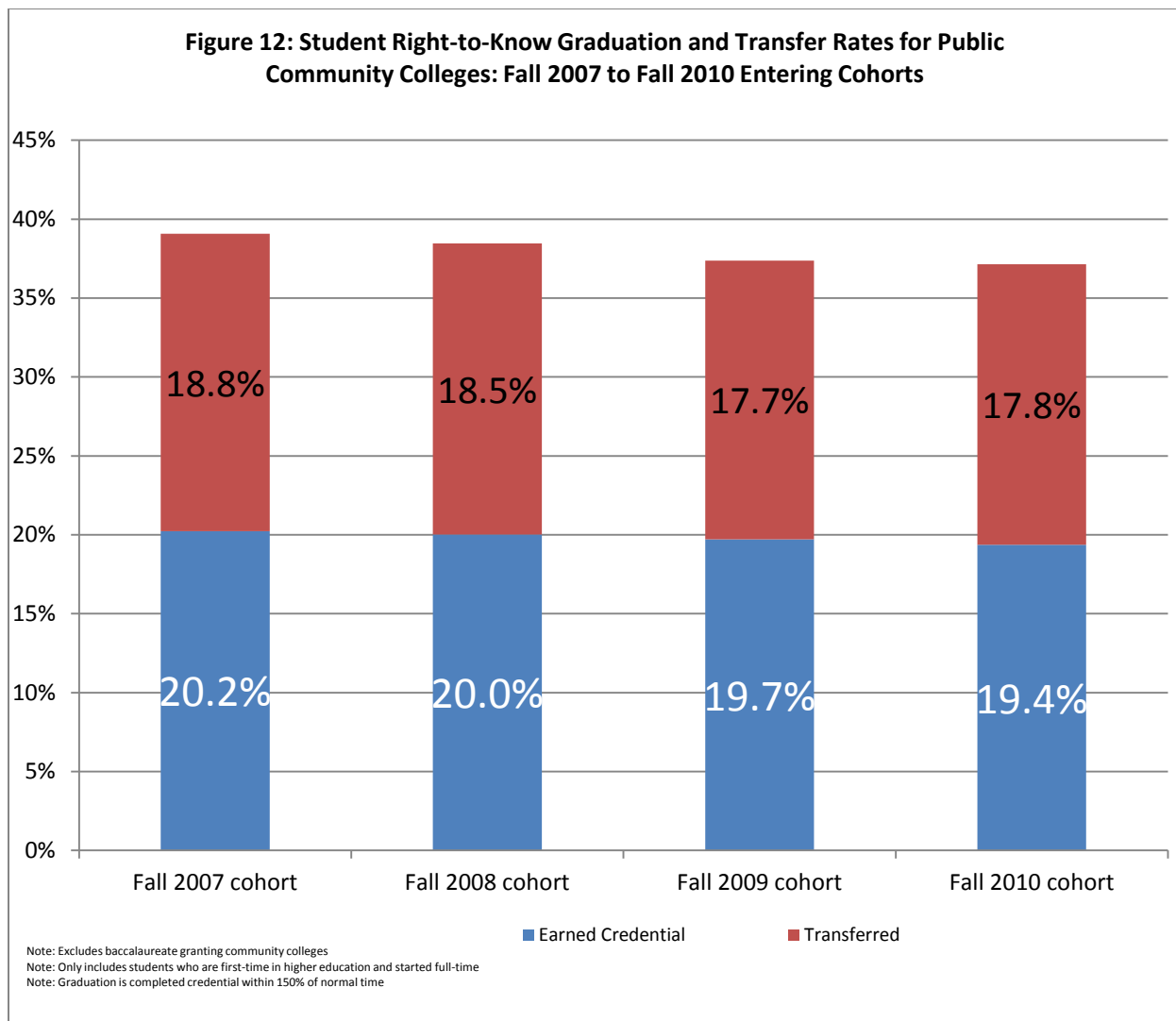
## What about Rates?

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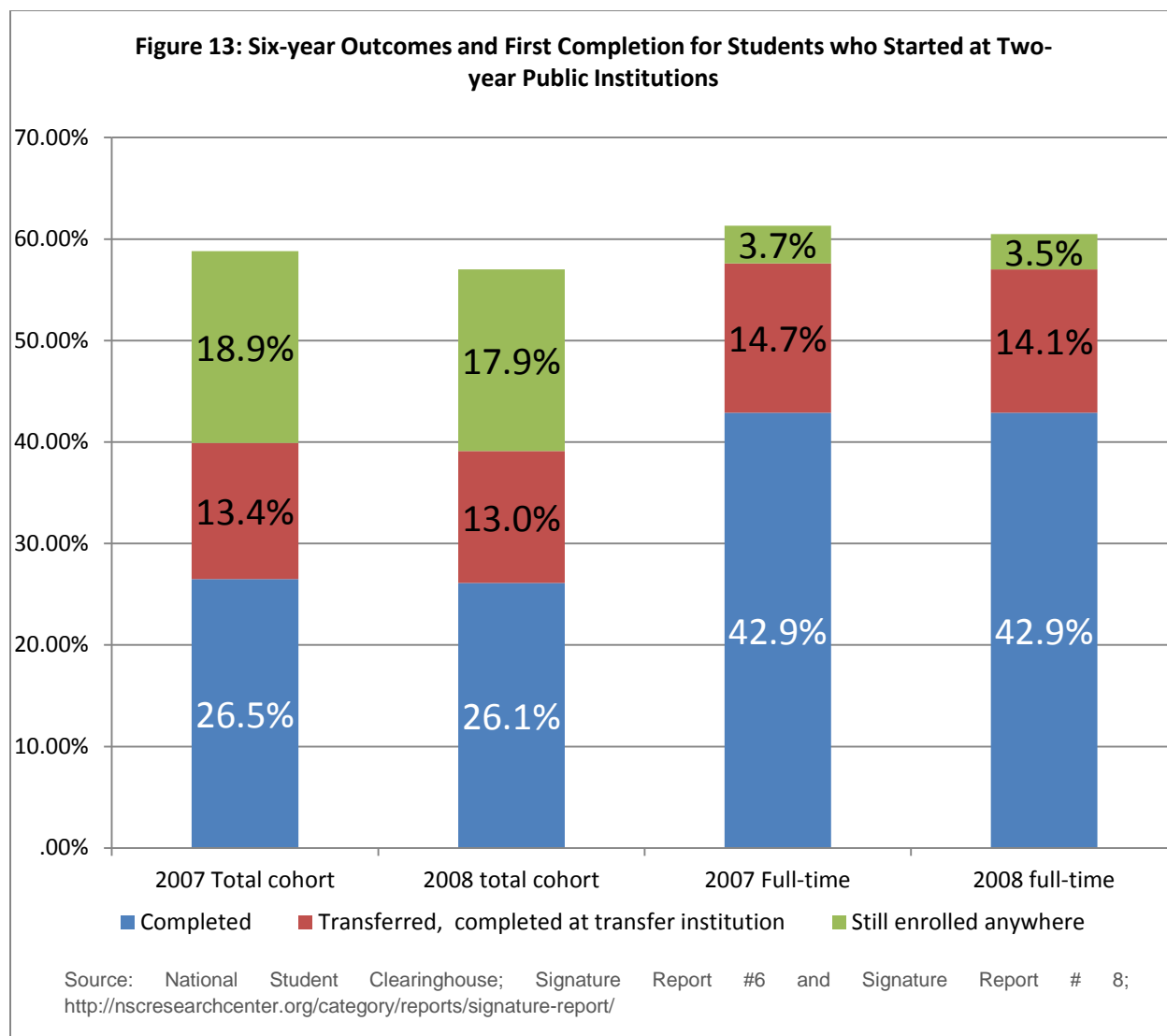
The original pledge to the commitment agenda was to increase the number of individuals with a credential, and the data provided above speak to the progress on that front. However, the Twenty-first Century Commission on the Future of Community colleges report called for a 50% increase in the **rate** of completions, not just the number of completions. This is a more challenging metric to gauge, as the national metrics currently available to measure this are not well suited measure this outcome. The most widely available and used metric is the Student Right-to-Know graduation rate. This metric denotes the number of first-time, full-time students who earned a credential (degree or certificate) within 150% of normal time.

For an associate degree, the normal time is generally two years, so the completion of the degree is measured at the end of three years (150% of two years); the completion time for a certificate of less than two-years would be less than 3 years. These data are collected annually for colleges, along with the number of students who transferred without a credential, or were still enrolled at the end of the three-year tracking period. These data have several key limitations: 1) they only track students who are first-time in higher education and begin their studies full time—a small percentage (about 34%) of community college students; 2) the tracking period is relatively short for students who do not always stay full-time, and who may have significant developmental coursework to complete on the way to a credential; 3) community colleges that offer a baccalaureate degree report differently, and cannot be directly compared; and 4) transfer outcomes are generally not included in reports for these students.

Despite these shortcomings, these data can begin to provide insight into the rate of completions at public community colleges that do not award a baccalaureate degree. Figure 12 shows the graduation and transfer rate for public community colleges. As the chart indicates, both transfer rates, and completion rates for first-time full-time students have decreased over the time-frame studied. It is important to bear in mind that increasing a completion rate will take significant effort on colleges parts, and since the last cohort include in this data began at the beginning of this effort (Fall 2010), institutional change efforts may not have had a significant impact on these cohorts.

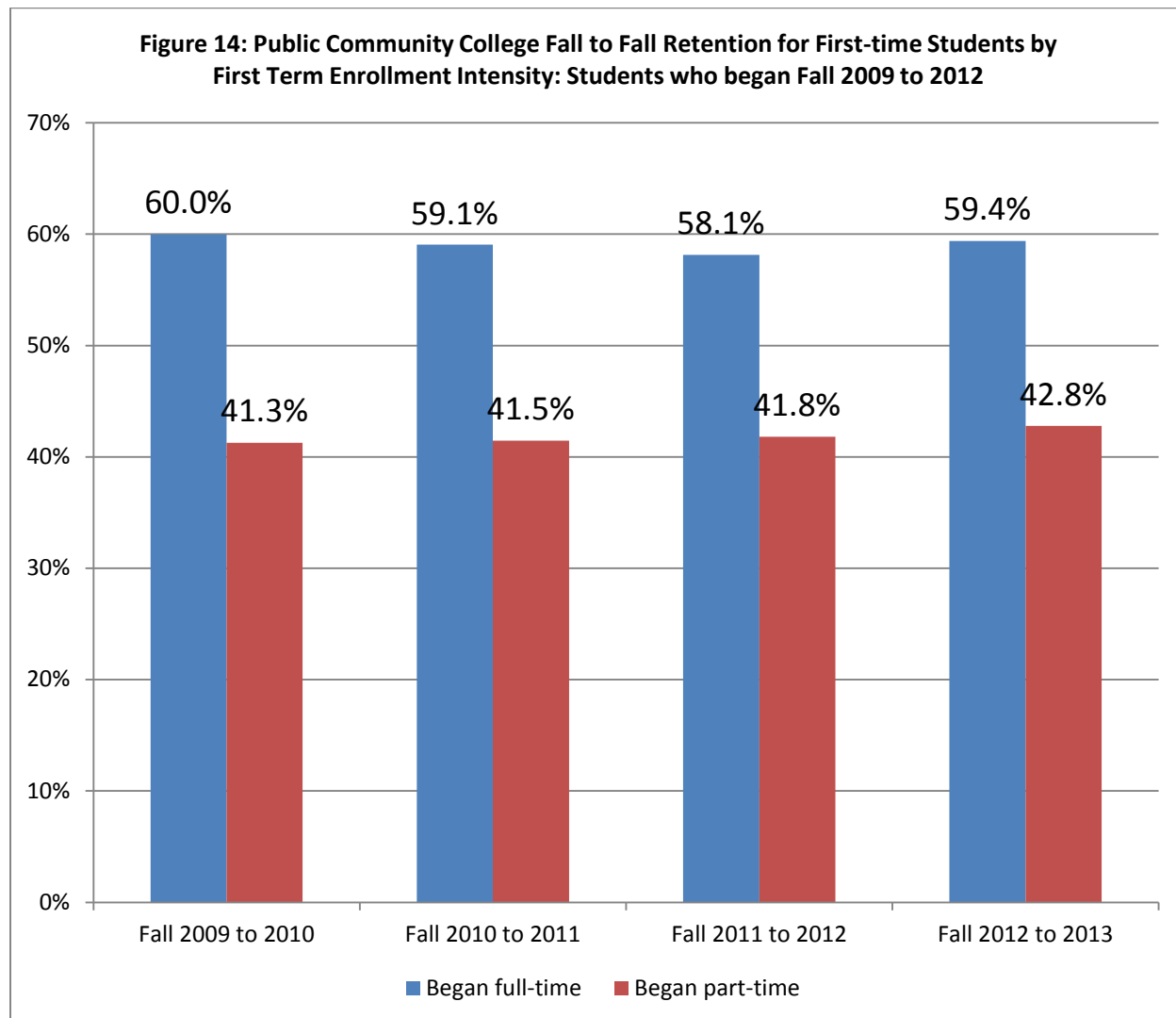


The National Student Clearinghouse has also looked at student completion in several of their reports. Data from their Signature Reports #6 and #8 provide another look at community college completion rates. Figure 13 shows the percentage of students who began at a public community college (non-baccalaureate granting) and earned a credential from that college within six years. The data for the 2007 and 2008 cohort show more completions after six years than shown in the Student Right-to-know data particularly when comparing the full-time students (approximately 43% in the NSC data as opposed to approximately 20%). The telling statistic in this data is that the rate after six years is unchanged for the students who began full-time, and decreased slightly for the total cohort—indicating that the six-year completion rate for part-time students decreased. These data are helpful to understand completions for students who began at community colleges, but are designed more to describe student outcomes than institutional outcomes, and as such provide a less complete picture of institutional performance on student success.



Since the data provided above has at least a three year time lag between the when students began, the data describe students who began before the colleges began to commit to the completion agenda. Changes in the rates as a result of institutional changes may not be apparent in these data. Therefore, other measures might provide an earlier indication of how well colleges are doing to improve success. One such measure, available in the federal data, is fall to fall retention rates. Figure 14 shows rates of all students who began who were first time in higher education one fall and were also enrolled in the following fall at the same public community college. Since the tracking period for these students is shorter and more current, these data can provide insight into progress colleges may be making toward improving their graduation rates. During the tracking period, there has been a slow but steady increase in the rate of students who start first-time part-time in the fall who return the following fall term. First-time full-time retention rate saw an initial dip, but in the last year of data available showed an

increase. These leading indicators of longer term outcomes suggest that colleges are retaining more students, which may lead to increases in completions.



## Alternate measures of completion rates

Finally, as noted above, the Student right-to-know graduation rates provide a truncated time line, and the National Student Clearinghouse Signature data provide limited institutional outcomes of student success. Community college have created the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) that includes broader set of metrics, that are more inclusive and appropriate for measuring student outcomes at community colleges. It measures outcomes for all students who enter a college (full-time and part-time, first-time and returning) and reports outcomes after six years, rather than the 150% of normal time. These data provide a fuller-more complete picture of outcomes for students at community colleges. Since the VFA is only

beginning (only one year of data have been collected), the number of colleges participating is not sufficient to create national estimates nor is there sufficient data to calculate trends. However, the data provide an important insight into the value of using the six year tracking period to look at outcomes for community colleges. Figure 14 is an illustration of this point.

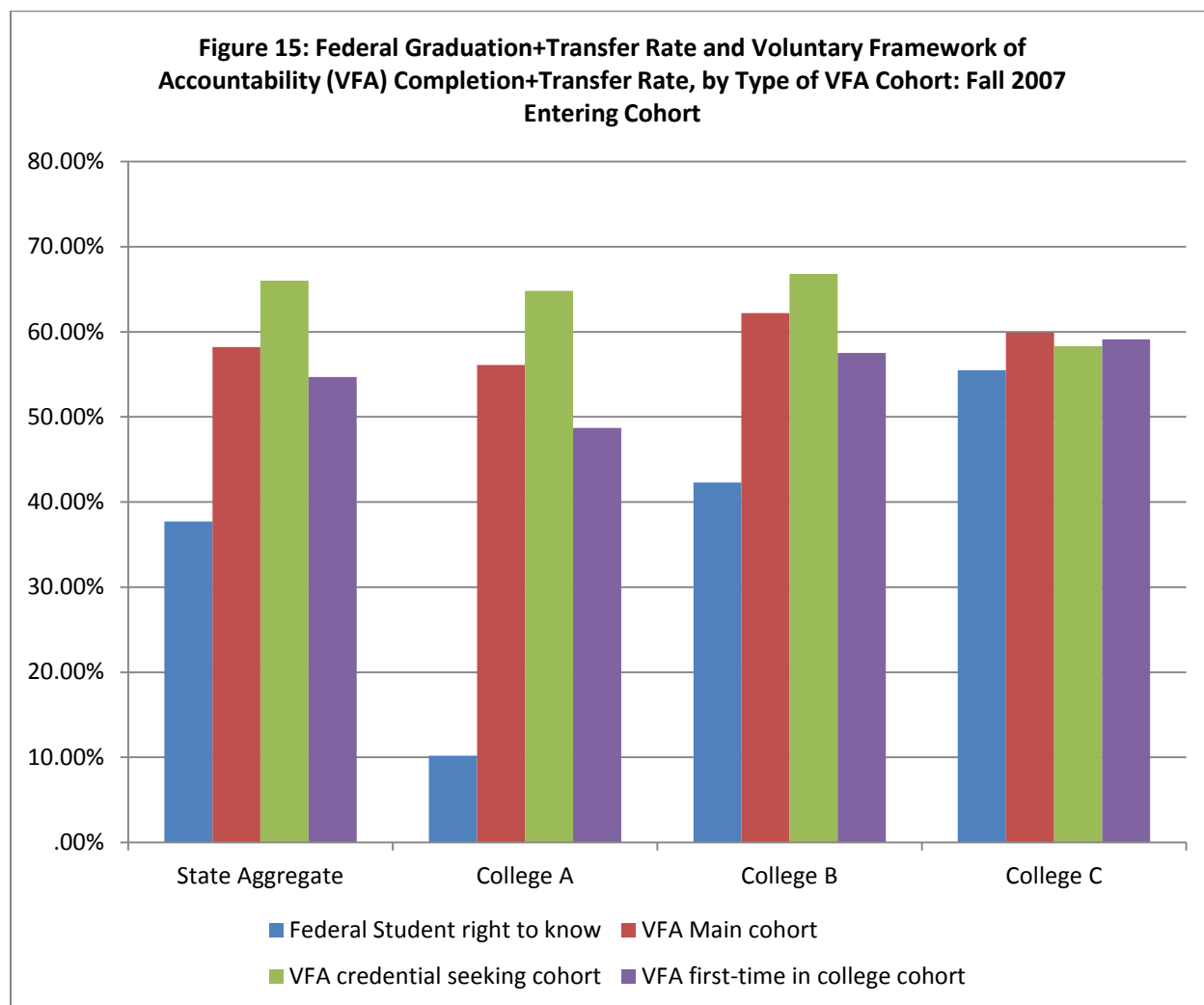


Figure 14 is a comparison of the Federal Student Right-to-Know graduation rate for a state (most colleges in the state had data in the VFA) as well as three separate colleges in the state. The blue bar for all for examples (State-wide and the three colleges) represents the SRK completion rate (graduation plus transfer), and the other three bars represent the VFA outcomes for different cohort types. It is important to note that the SRK data is only for first-time in college students who enrolled full-time their first term—the VFA outcomes are for full-time and part-time students. In all cases, the SRK completion rate for first-time, full-time students is lower that the VFA six-year completion rate (graduation plus transfer) for all students—full-time and part-time.

This was true for all students who started in the cohort, as well as those who were first-time in college or were identified as credential seeking. As more colleges participate in the VFA, and more data become available, we will look to this data to provide a better understanding of the progress community colleges are making in increasing the completion rate by 50%.

## Conclusion

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Community colleges have committed to increase both the number of individuals with credentials, and the rate at which students are successful in attaining those credentials.

The early data suggest community colleges have made great strides in increasing the raw numbers of credentials that they are awarding, and that the trajectory suggests that they may be able to meet the goal of 50% more awards if their rate of increase in production of credentials continues.

In addition, in the 2013-14 academic year, community colleges either conferred a credential, or were instrumental in the conferral of a 4-year college credential for one million individuals who had no prior postsecondary credential. The rate of increase for new awards was somewhat small, but steady for student who were 24 or younger—and area of particular focus for community colleges.

Progress on the completion rate was less encouraging. However, give the time lag between institutional change, and the outcomes being measured, more time is needed to evaluate the success of community colleges on meeting this outcome, and leading indicators of fall-to-fall retention suggest that colleges are moving in the right direction on increasing success rates for students.

## Appendix A

## Democracy's Colleges Call to Action

*We, the leaders of national organizations that represent and serve America's 1,200 community colleges, recognize and celebrate the colleges' central role in ensuring an educated U.S. citizenry and a globally competitive workforce. We affirm the need for a dramatic increase in the number of Americans with postsecondary degrees and certifications to fulfill critical state and national goals. With the "completion agenda" as a national imperative, community colleges have an obligation to meet the challenge while holding firmly to traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality.*

## WE BELIEVE

- We believe the student success and completion agenda is the future of community colleges.
- We believe that completion matters and that every student counts.
- We believe in every student's potential and responsibility to succeed, and that an engaged student is more likely to persist in college.
- We believe the open door must not be a revolving door, and that institutions must take responsibility for student success.
- We believe that community colleges are gateways to the middle class and beyond for millions of Americans.
- We believe that community colleges are an invaluable economic engine driving the nation toward renewed and sustained economic prosperity.
- We believe there are thousands of talented and committed people working "heart and soul" in community colleges who are ready to take on leadership roles.

## WE COMMIT

- We commit to a change in institutional culture, from emphasis on access only to emphasis on access and success.
- We commit to courageous conversations and openness regarding diversity, equity, and evidence reflecting student success and institutional performance.
- We commit, while increasing success rates for all students, to eliminating the attainment gaps that separate student groups on the basis of race, ethnicity and family income.
- We commit to acting on facts to make positive changes in the interest of student success and college completion.
- We commit to promoting faculty and staff development focused on evidence-based educational practice.
- We commit to providing development opportunities, for college CEOs, trustees and future college leaders, to build leadership for student success.

## WE ASK

- We ask every community college president, trustee, administrator, faculty member, counselor, advisor, financial aid officer, staff member, and stakeholder to examine their current practices, to identify ways to help students understand the added value of degrees and certifications, and to help them progress toward their goals.
- We ask every student to help one other student succeed.
- We ask community members to support and work with their local colleges to help more students succeed.
- We ask elected officials to create the policy conditions that enable, support and reward community colleges in their work to strengthen student success.
- We ask every community college and community college stakeholder to join us by signing and sharing this commitment and call to action.

As organizations representing America's community colleges, we mutually commit and pledge to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices, and institutional cultures that will produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality. We call for leaders from every sector and constituency of every college to join us in this work. **Our democracy needs every one of us.**



## Appendix B

Notes and data Sources

### **COLLEGE TYPE DEFINITIONS:**

**Community colleges:** Unless otherwise noted, for purposes of this study, community colleges are defined as regionally accredited public colleges, who primarily offer an associate degree as their highest award. Colleges included may award a baccalaureate degree, but the majority of their degrees are associate degrees.

**Four-year colleges:** For purposed of this study, four-year colleges are all baccalaureate degree granting institutions, except those which meet the community college definition above.

### **US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM DATA:**

**Fall Headcount enrollment:** The number of students enrolled in the fall term. Data are from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Fall Enrollment Surveys, National Center of Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

**Certificates and Degrees awarded:** The number of certificates and degrees awarded (not number of students earning credentials) in a given academic year. Data are from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completions Surveys, National Center of Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

**Fall to Fall retention:** The number of first-time students enrolled in a given fall term who are enrolled one year later in the fall term. Data are from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Fall Enrollment Surveys, National Center of Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

### **Student Right-to-Know Rate:**

**Graduation Rate:** The percent of first-time, full-time students enrolled in a given fall term who earned a credential (degree or certificate) from a community college within 150% of normal time (e.g. three years for an associate degree). Data in these charts do not include baccalaureate granting community colleges—they report using a different survey form. Data are from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Graduation Rate Surveys, National Center of Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

**Transfer Rate:** The percent of first-time, full-time students enrolled in a given fall term who did not earn a credential (degree or certificate) from a community college within 150% of normal time (e.g. three years for an associate degree) but have evidence of transfer to another postsecondary institution within three years. Data in these charts do not include baccalaureate granting community colleges—they report using a different survey form. Data are from the

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Graduation Rate Surveys, National Center of Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

### **NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARING HOUSE COMPLETION DATA<sup>3</sup>:**

**New Certificates:** Number of students in a given academic year whose first ever documented credential is a certificate awarded by a community college. Data are from National Student Clearinghouse database.

**New Associate degrees:** Number of students in a given academic year whose first ever documented credential is an associate degree awarded by a community college. Data are from National Student Clearinghouse database.

**Four-year degree with community college preparation:** Number of students who earned any postsecondary credential from a four year institution, as their first ever postsecondary credential, who had 28 or more full-time-equivalent weeks of enrollment at community colleges in prior academic years.

**Subsequent Associate degree:** Number of students in a given academic year who earned an associate degree from a community college, but had previously earned a degree or certificate. Students who earned both a certificate and associate degree in a given year were included in this category. Data are from National Student Clearinghouse database.

**Subsequent Certificate:** Number of students in a given academic year who earned a certificate from a community college, but had previously earned a degree or certificate. Students who earned both a certificate and associate degree in a given year were included in the Subsequent Associate degree category. Data are from National Student Clearinghouse database.

**Academic Year (National Student Clearinghouse definition):** Academic years are defined as beginning on July 1 of the start year, and concluding on June 30 of the end year.

### **NATIONION STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE SIX-YEAR OUTCOME DATA**

**Six Year Outcomes:** Data reported come from National Student Clearinghouse *Signature Report #6: Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2007 Cohort* and *Signature Report #8: Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2008 Cohort* (<http://nscresearchcenter.org/category/reports/signature-report/>). The three outcomes reported for students who began in public community colleges are:

1. Completed at initial institution within six-years
2. Transferred, and completed at transfer institution within six years
3. Were still enrolled in any institution in the sixth academic year

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C for more details on methodology  
Community College Completion  
AACC-2015

**BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS DATA:**

**Unemployment Rate:** The unemployment rate represents the number of individuals 16 and older who are unemployed as a percent of the labor force, and is seasonally adjusted. Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Department of Labor

**VOLUNTARY FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY DATA:**

**Completion + Transfer Rate:** Number of students, in a given cohort, who earned a credential (degree or certificate) from a community college, or transferred to another postsecondary institution within six years.

**VFA Main Cohort:** All students who were new to a college in a given fall term – they may or may not have had prior postsecondary education attendance.

**VFA Credential seeking Cohort:** All students in the VFA Main Cohort who earned 12 or more semester credits after at the end of two years.

**VFA First-time in College Cohort:** All students in the VFA Main Cohort who had no postsecondary education enrollment after high school prior to enrolling in the VFA College.

## Appendix C

### **Data Used in this Report for the New Look at Completion (pages 10-16).**

The National Student Clearinghouse® (the Clearinghouse) is a unique and trusted source for higher education enrollment and degree verification. Since its creation in 1993, the participation of institutions nationwide in Clearinghouse data-collection programs has steadily increased.

The Clearinghouse has a 21-year track record of providing automated student enrollment and degree verifications. Due to the Clearinghouse's unique student-level record approach to data collection the Clearinghouse data provide opportunities for robust analysis not afforded by the more commonly used institution-level national databases.

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. Moreover, because this database is comprised of student-level data, researchers can use it to link concurrent as well as consecutive enrollments of individual students at multiple institutions – a capability that distinguishes the Clearinghouse database from national databases built with institution-level data.

The National Student Clearinghouse collects enrollment and graduation information from its participating institutions via two data reporting services: Enrollment Reporting and DegreeVerify. Enrollment Reporting data allow the Clearinghouse to determine when a student was enrolled, at what institution, with what enrollment status (full-time, part-time, etc) and provide basic completion information such as a graduation indicator and the date of graduation. DegreeVerify includes enhanced information on completions, including degree title, major, level, and CIP code.

#### Enrollment Reporting Data Coverage

Clearinghouse enrollment data currently include more than 3,600 colleges and 96 percent of U.S. college enrollments, and were used in this report to calculate academic progress for students included in Outcome 5.

Enrollment data coverage rates for the years used in this report were as follows:

- Fall 2014: 95.5%
- Fall 2013: 95.4%
- Fall 2012: 94.6%
- Fall 2011: 93.3%
- Fall 2010: 92.2%
- Fall 2009: 90.1%
- Fall 2008: 90.0%
- Fall 2007: 88.1%
- Fall 2006: 86.8%
- Fall 2005: 85.3%

- Fall 2004: 84.0%
- Fall 2003: 83.7%

### Enrollment Coverage Weighting

To account for incomplete coverage of national postsecondary enrollments, a weighting scheme was applied to the enrollment data used for calculating Outcome 5. For each outcome year, the weighting factor was determined by selecting the year, within the prior 8 academic years, with the highest number of enrollments, and applying a weighting multiplier necessary to adjust the coverage rate for that year to 100%. For example, for 2014, in the preceding 8 years the highest number of enrollments occurred in 2010, a year with a coverage rate of 92.2%. Given this the raw Outcome 5 results were multiplied by a weighting factor of 1.0846 (calculated as  $1/0.922$ ) to arrive at the coverage-adjusted results.

### DegreeVerify Data Coverage

DegreeVerify data includes detailed information about awards granted by participating institutions. Coverage is somewhat lower than for Enrollment Reporting data, but are more consistent because institutions often report historic awards when commencing participation with the Clearinghouse.

- 2013-14: 87.1%
- 2012-14: 87.1%
- 2011-12: 87.4%
- 2010-11: 87.0%

No weighting was performed on the DegreeVerify data used to calculate Outcomes 1-4.

## **Explanation of Outcomes**

This report examines five outcomes, which together form a picture of the contributions of community colleges to nationwide degree and certificate attainment.

### Outcome 1

Count of students who earned a certificate from a community college as their first ever postsecondary credential.

### Outcome 2

Count of students who earned an associate's degree from a community college as their first ever postsecondary credential.

### Outcome 3

Count of students who earned an associate's degree from a community college who had a prior postsecondary credential.

Outcome 4

Count of students who earned a certificate from a community college who had a prior postsecondary credential.

Outcome 5

Count of students who earned any postsecondary credential from a four-year institution, as their first ever postsecondary credential, who had 28 or more full-time-equivalent weeks of enrollment at an AACC-eligible community college in the eight prior academic years.

**Identification of Institutions**

Outcomes 1-4 include only awards from institutions included in the AACC Member Eligible list. Outcome 5 academic progress calculation combines degree records from by non-AACC Member Eligible four-year institutions and enrollment records from AACC-Member Eligible institutions.

**Academic Year Definition**

Academic years are defined as beginning on July 1 of the start year, and concluding on June 30 of the end year.