

# HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE MILESTONES

## A COHORT-BASED ILLUSTRATION OF DC'S TRENDS

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is committed to understanding student progress toward college degrees.<sup>i</sup> Research demonstrates that people with college degrees have better life outcomes related to their social and emotional health and finances than people without degrees.<sup>ii</sup> And in DC's recent job outlook through 2028, only five of the top 50 high demand-high wage careers of tomorrow require less than an associate degree level of education or training.<sup>iii</sup> Preparing young residents for college options begins early in their educational careers. Consequently, this report traces young residents' progress toward college credentials, reviewing college enrollment, persistence, and completion, as well as leading indicators such as high school persistence, graduation and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion. These data offer pre-pandemic baselines that can be used to measure progress for students attending public high schools in DC.<sup>iv</sup>

A cohort analysis<sup>v</sup> is one way to observe a group of students over time. The 2011-12 school year ninth grade cohort had a similar volume of students exit the cohort between ninth grade and high school graduation, when DC's K-12 system had the greatest access and opportunity to support student success, as the volume of students exiting between college enrollment and completion, when higher education partners could make a significant difference in student success. The data provide sufficient evidence<sup>vi</sup> to ask a key question – how can DC schools, LEAs and decisionmakers disrupt high school exit trends and provide the support and resources that students need at each milestone toward earning college degrees?

### PATHWAYS & OUTCOMES

Figure 1 illustrates the varied experiences of DC's 2011-12 school year ninth grade cohort from their first high school enrollment in 2011 until 2022. This cohort was chosen because it is a recent cohort for whom 10 years has passed since ninth grade, allowing OSSE to examine college completion (using a six-year completion timeline, a standard period for college completion).

The blue milestones show 2,239 of the ninth-grade cohort enrolled in a college or university within two years of their 2014-15 school year high school graduation (the four-year graduation time period).<sup>vii</sup> Of the DC public and public charter high school graduates who enrolled in college, 40.2 percent completed a college degree (associate or bachelor's degree) within six years of their first college enrollment (purple pathways).<sup>viii</sup> The pathways in Figure 1 are one aspect to understand, in order to determine how to increase the number of residents with a college degree. Particularly, any potential interventions should bear in mind students' choices between years one and two, when many students exit college.

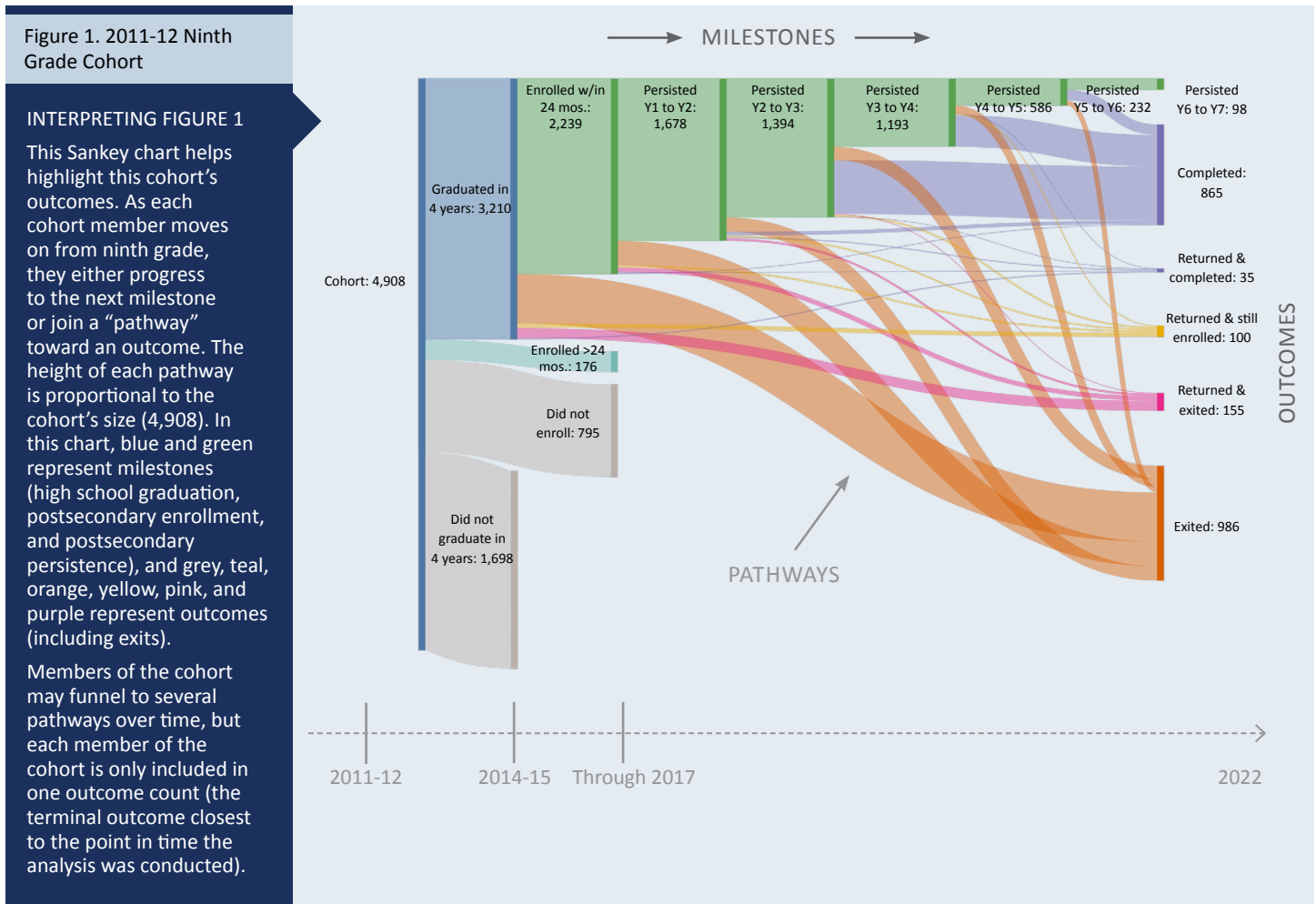
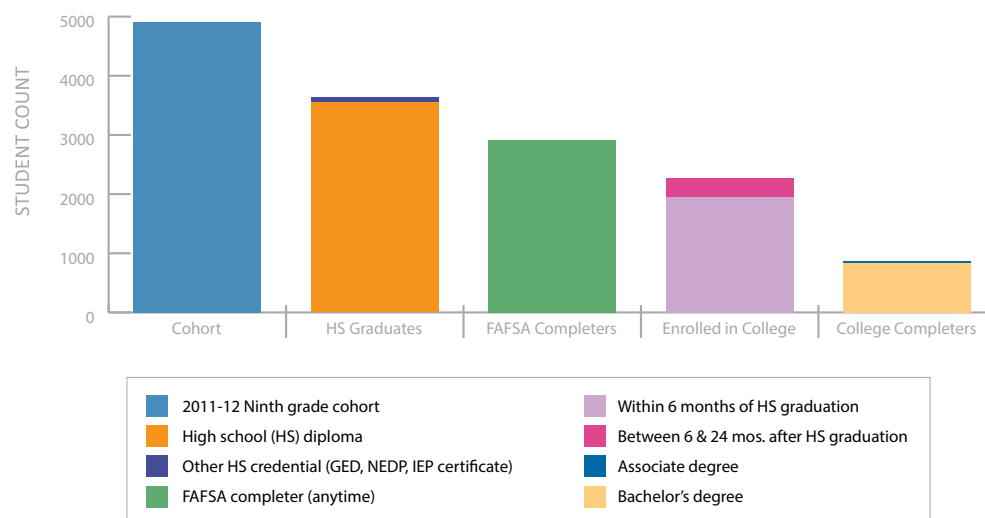


FIGURE 2. 2011-12 First Ninth Grade Year Progress



## ADDITIONAL MILESTONES

While acknowledging what happens in college, this analysis also shows a similar volume of students exit high school before they even enroll in college. Figure 2 adds two “college readiness indicators” for the same cohort - high school graduation<sup>ix</sup> and FAFSA completion (if students complete either milestone, it indicates they are more likely to enroll in college).

Among 4,908 students enrolled in their first ninth-grade year at DC’s public and public charter high schools in the 2011-12 school year, 74.1 percent complete a secondary credential (the majority earn a high school diploma). Among the 4,908, 59.3 percent completed the FAFSA at least once between their senior year and 2022. More than 45 percent of the ninth-grade cohort enrolled in a college/university within two years of graduating high school (most within six months).

It is possible to interpret the percentage of students in the cohort with a college degree (the majority earn a bachelor’s) in two ways. First, 38.2 percent of the 2,264 students who graduated from high school *and enrolled in a college or university* completed an associate or bachelor’s degree by 2022. The second way is equally true, and uses the same universe discussed in the prior paragraph - 17.6 percent of the ninth grade cohort (4,908 students) completed a degree by 2022.

This analysis provides three baseline metrics – (1) the number earning a high school credential (around two-thirds of the cohort); (2) the number enrolling in college (almost half of the cohort); (3) the number completing a college degree (fewer than one-fifth of the cohort earn an associate or bachelor’s degree). While recent cohorts show marginal growth in positive outcomes (high school graduation and college completion), this analysis demonstrates the continuing need to invest in supports that lead to increased rates of positive outcomes. To do this, OSSE, LEAs and schools must deliver a high-quality secondary education and work with partners to better inform students and their families about common barriers to college completion (and solutions) while students are in high school.

### Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> OSSE acknowledges there are other industry-recognized credentials that are meaningful to DC employers, but this document focuses on pathways to associate and bachelor’s degrees.
- <sup>ii</sup> Oreopoulos, P. and U. Petronijevic (2013). “Making College Worth It: A Review of Research on the Returns to Higher Education.” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series. [www.nber.org/papers/w19053](http://www.nber.org/papers/w19053)
- <sup>iii</sup> DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) Office of Labor Market Research and Performance (OLMRP) (2022). [Job Outlook through 2028](#).
- <sup>iv</sup> OSSE provides metrics to DC Council, the Office of the City Administrator (OCA), the US Department of Education, and the community that are related but separate from those presented in this document. OSSE may calculate similar metrics using different universes to meet reporting requirements.
- <sup>v</sup> The cohort this analysis represents includes DC public and public charter high school students who enrolled in their first ninth grade year in the 2011-12 school year. This cohort’s four-year high school graduation was the 2014-15 school year, and anything after that point is considered to be “postsecondary”. This cohort was matched with Federal Student Aid and National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data, as long as the date of postsecondary enrollment occurred between 2015 and 2017. For information regarding OSSE’s adjusted cohort graduate rate (ACGR) data and guidance, please visit: [osse.dc.gov/node/1280](http://osse.dc.gov/node/1280). Note: Additional NSC data releases may result in enrollments updated to completions or exits.
- <sup>vi</sup> The patterns this cohort displays are generally representative of recent cohorts at aggregate and state-levels, so it is appropriate to anticipate similar patterns for future cohorts for planning purposes. However, the methodology and sources for each milestone have limitations and caveats. These include aggregate trends not representing the nuances of all student group experiences, postsecondary enrollments only include National Student Clearinghouse data and do not represent all experiences after high school graduation or any early career outcomes, and the universe (ninth grade or a sub-set of those ninth graders) may vary by outcome and research question.
- <sup>vii</sup> The difference between Figure 1’s “Enrolled within 24 months” and Figure 2’s combined count of college enrollments is related to available data on DCTAG participants as well as timeframe business rules. Figure 1 does not include postsecondary enrollments only indicated in DCTAG invoices, but Figure 2 does.
- <sup>viii</sup> This percentage represents highest degree earned for each graduate, and therefore does not represent all postsecondary credentials that this cohort earned.
- <sup>ix</sup> The high school graduation metric in Figure 2 uses a broader inclusion criteria than the criteria used for than Figure 1, and therefore has a higher number of graduates for the same cohort.