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Revised data show community colleges deserve more credit for student success

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Community colleges have long been criticized for low graduation rates, but the **Department of Education**'s newly revised graduation rate model suggests that two-year institutions deserve more credit for student success, Kevin Carey reports for the *New York Times*.

The previous community college graduation rate only measured the percentage of first-time, full-time students who graduated from the institution they started at within three years, Carey writes.

The old set of rules favored four-year institutions where the average undergraduate is first-time, full-time student and a recent high school grad, he argues. Most community colleges, however, support learners who work or parent or are re-enrollees. Many community college students also enroll part-time, take longer than three years to graduate, or transfer to a four-year institution, he adds.

Under the old model, community colleges had a 20% three-year graduation rate on average across the United States. The low success rates pushed some students towards for-profit institutions that boasted a 63% graduation rate for their two-year programs, Carey writes.

To better reflect the experience of the typical community college student, the Department of Education made three key changes to the graduation rate calculation in October: tracking part-time and returning students, extending the graduation rate to eight years, and measuring the number of transfers.

Now, community colleges boast an average eight-year graduation rate of 27%, and including the percentage of students who transfer bumps the success rate up to a whopping 60%, Carey writes.

**North Shore Community College** (NSCC), for example, had a 19% graduation rate under the old model. But the new success rate calculations boosted NSCC's graduation rate to 35%—and its combined graduation/transfer rate up to 54%, he writes.

The graduation rates for two- and four-year students at for-profit colleges, on the other hand, have dropped two percentage points under the new model, and including transfer students only bumps up their student success rate to 39%, he adds.

While community colleges still have room to improve, the recalibrated graduation rates paint a better picture of what community college student success can look like, Carey writes (Carey, [*New York Times*](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/upshot/revised-data-shows-community-colleges-have-been-underappreciated.html?_r=0), 11/3).