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VSAC's final "check-in" with Vermont's high school Class of 2012 shows more work is needed to increase Vermonters' educational attainment

WINOOSKI (April 30, 2021) – Since the spring of 2012, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) has followed the Vermont high school Class of 2012, collecting data on the students' college enrollment plans and degree completion rates. This week, VSAC released its final study of this group.

The data showed that 46% of students from the high school Class of 2012 had obtained a college degree – either an associate or bachelor's degree – within six years of high school graduation. This level of educational attainment is consistent with US Census data on the educational attainment level of the Vermont adult population; as of 2020, 47% of Vermonters 25 and older held at least an associate's degree.

"While our results aren't necessarily a surprise, they do remind us that we have work to do," said Scott Giles, CEO of VSAC. "After all, our data show that more than half of the Class of 2012 – 54% – had not obtained a two- or four-year degree within six years of high school graduation. We know that the highest-paying and most in-demand jobs require education beyond high school. So, unfortunately, more than half of our young people are still not prepared for the jobs of the future."

"Our state leaders have, rightly, made it a priority to increase those numbers," Giles continued. "Advance Vermont has proposed a goal that by 2025, 70% of Vermonters will attain a credential of value. To achieve this goal, we must increase Vermonters' educational attainment."

Giles suggested that those efforts begin with more concentrated support and outreach efforts to the most underserved demographic groups – which, when it comes to college education, are first-generation students, males, and residents of the state's more rural counties.

This latest report, as well as earlier VSAC studies of this student group, showed that first-generation college students, or those whose parents did not go to college, were less likely to obtain a postsecondary degree than were second-generation students; and males, especially first-generation males, were less likely to obtain a degree than females. And while Chittenden

and Washington counties had the highest overall six-year degree attainment rates – 54% and 51%, respectively – Lamoille and Orange counties had the lowest degree attainment rates – 34% and 36%, respectively.

Giles recommended starting career and college counseling programs earlier, and sustaining them longer, to better support students all the way through their educational journey. By offering more career planning programs in middle school, students might be more motivated to prepare themselves better academically in high school, making them more likely to enroll in college.

Further, Giles said, those who do enroll in college still need our support to make sure they finish with a degree. According to the report, 30% of the students who enrolled in the fall of 2012 had not obtained a degree within six years. The Lumina Foundation estimates that there are 55,000 working-age Vermonters who have some college, but no degree, which means they don't benefit from the higher wages and increased opportunities that usually come with a college degree, but they still often carry the burden of student loan debt.

This final check-in with the Class of 2012 at the six-year mark following high school graduation also offered an opportunity to evaluate some college enrollment strategies that have increased in popularity in recent years, such as taking a gap year, or planning to start at a two-year school and later transfer to a four-year college. VSAC's data suggests that there may be disadvantages in both of these strategies. Among the students who planned a gap year after high school graduation, almost half did not enroll in college within six years of high school graduation. And among the students who planned a transfer, only 20% followed through with those plans.

This series of reports marks the third time VSAC has followed a high school class cohort over several years to study college enrollment and completion. VSAC previously studied the classes of 2008 and 2010, and in this report, concluded that the four- and six-year degree attainment rates have remained relatively stable since 2008.

The full 22-page report can be found at www.vvac.org.

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About VSAC – Changing Lives through Education and Training since 1965

Vermont Student Assistance Corporation is a public, nonprofit agency established by the Vermont Legislature in 1965 to help Vermonters achieve their education and training goals after high school. VSAC serves students and their families in grades 7-12, as well as adults returning to school, by providing education and career planning services, need-based grants, scholarships and education loans. VSAC has awarded more than \$600 million in grants and scholarships for Vermont students, and also administers Vermont's 529 college savings plan. Share your VSAC story by email to myVSACstory@vsac.org or submit a video to [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). Find us at www.vvac.org or check in on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) or [Twitter](https://twitter.com). #changing lives