



# Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond: Survey of Community College Outcomes

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*The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author. They do not represent an official position of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond or the Federal Reserve System.*

# Why the Richmond Fed cares about workforce development and community colleges



**The Federal Reserve has been given a dual mandate:**

**Price  
Stability**

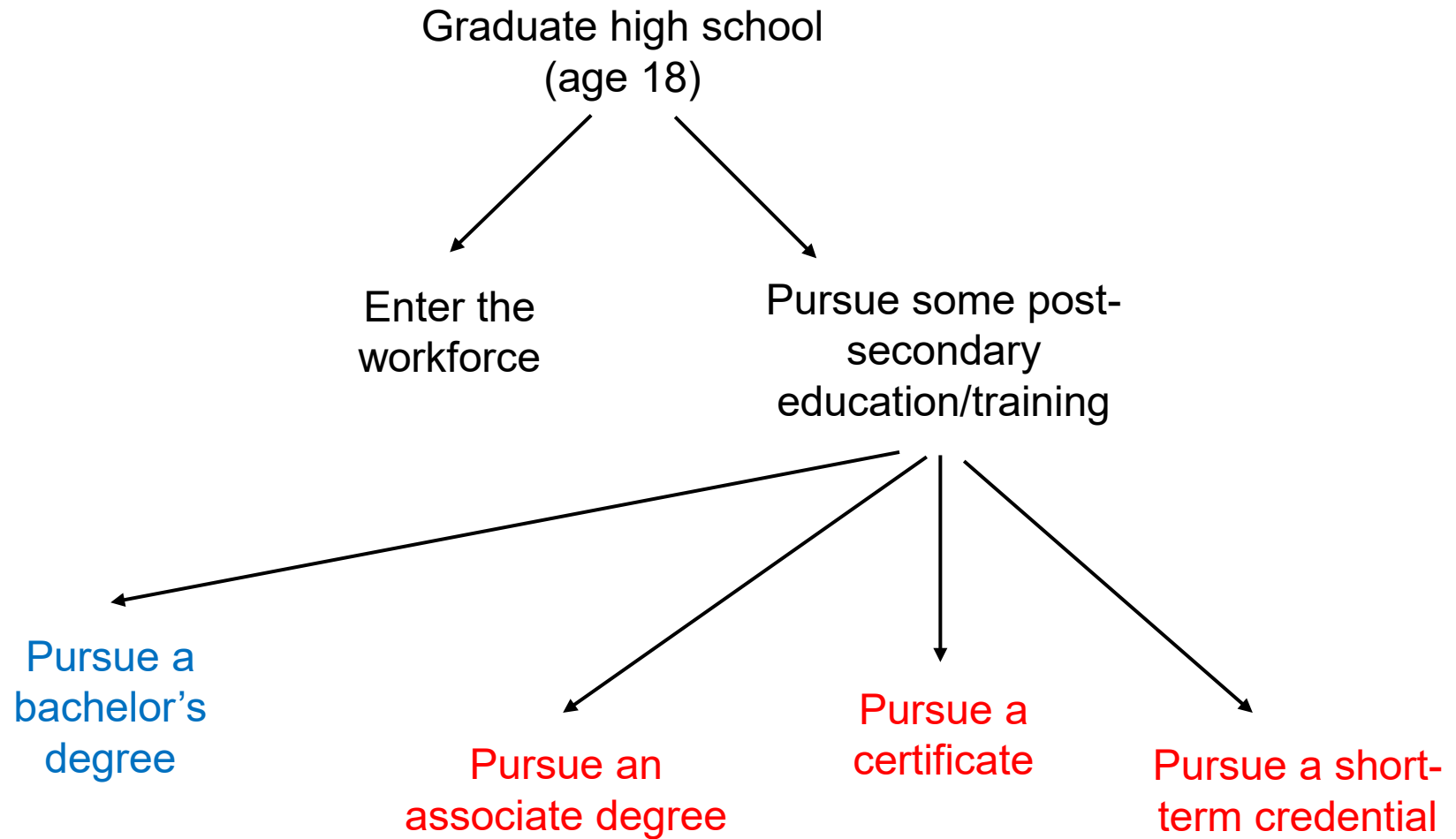


**Maximum  
Employment**



*Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*

# How does the system of higher education work in the U.S.?



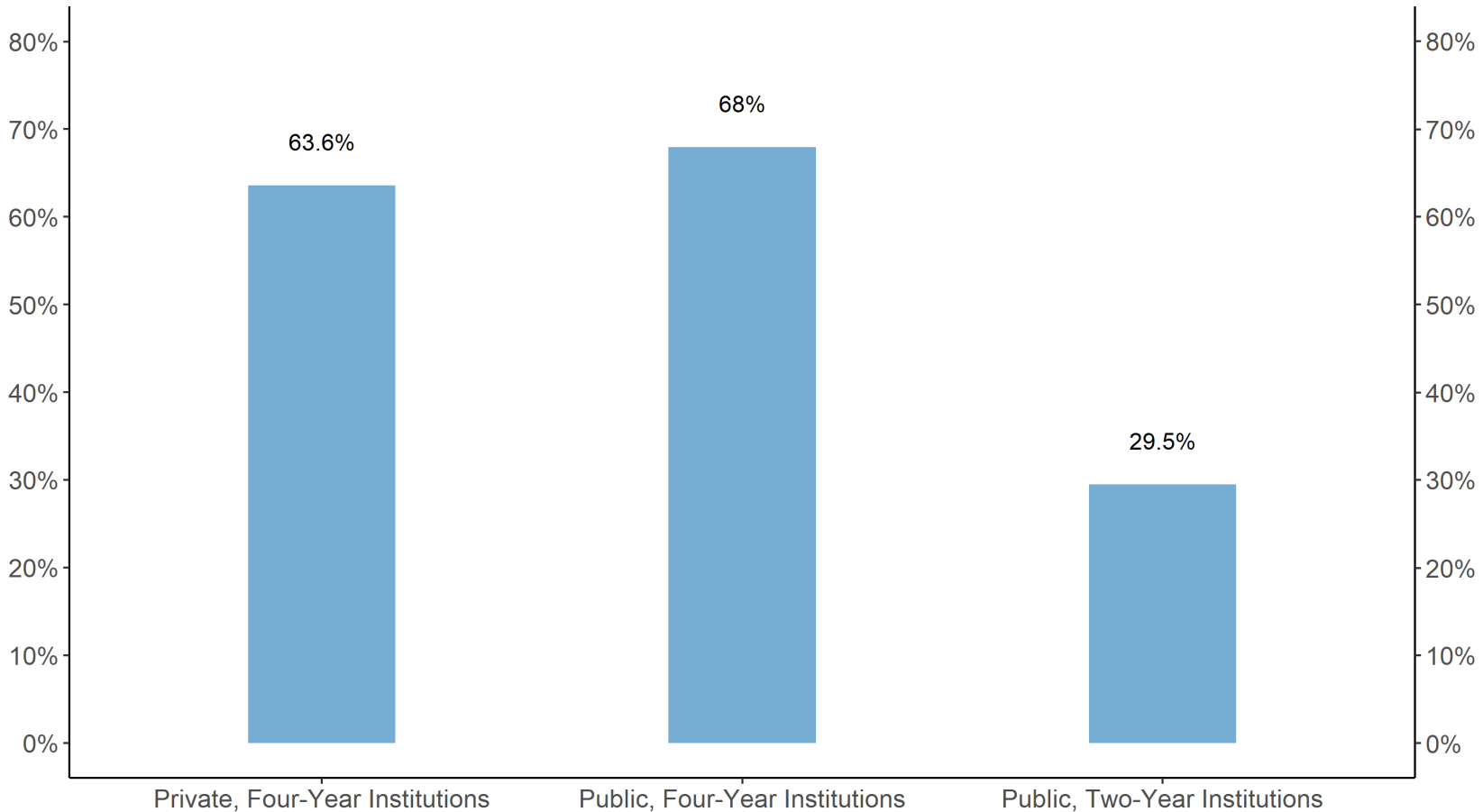
To pursue a **bachelor's degree**, you attend a **four-year college**. To pursue an **associate**, **certificate**, or **short-term credential**, you attend a **community college (2-year college)**.



# How do we think about success?

Fifth Federal Reserve District higher education outcomes by sector show that community college completion (as reported by IPEDS) is less than half that of public four-year colleges.

Graduation Rates at Fifth District Institutions  
Within 150% of Expected Time to Completion



Source: IPEDS  
Note: Private institutions include only those with 300 or more students.



**BUT this measure of success does not account for what community colleges do or who they serve.**

### What do community colleges do?

- Dual enrollment: Supplement high school education
- Associate degree programs
- Transfer programs
- Certificate programs (e.g., early childhood education, criminal justice)
- Non-credit programs (e.g., commercial driver's license, welding, phlebotomy, EMT)

### Who do community colleges serve?

Everyone in the community:

- High school students
- Working adults in the community
- Working students who are slowly working towards a degree
- Students who have left and re-entered school multiple times
- Students who want to transfer to four-year institutions



# What the colleges say

Conversations with District community colleges led to comments like...

*“Don’t use that data.”  
“The cohort utilized in **IPEDS** doesn’t accurately reflect what’s really going on.”*

*“**IPEDS** doesn’t really work for community colleges.”  
“That’s not our real graduation rate.”*

But...

- *If you Google “X Community College graduation rate” today, what comes up is the **150%** of expected completion rate reported by IPEDS.*
- *Students, parents, high school counselors, employers, researchers and legislators are making decisions based on these data.*

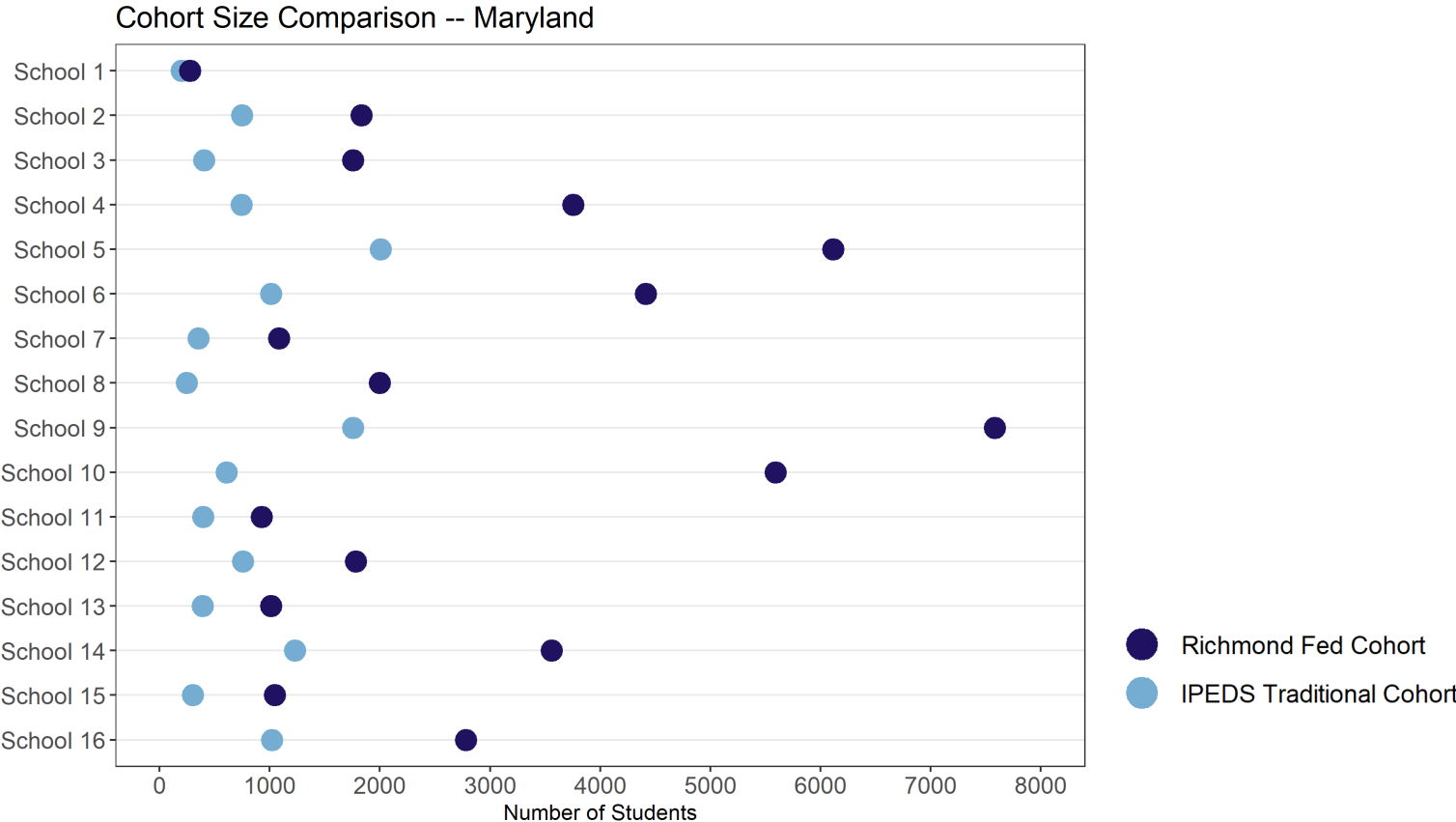




# What needed to change?

## #1: The cohort (denominator)

	IPEDS Graduation Cohort	Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Cohort
Enrollment Status	Full-time	Full-time & Part-time
Enrollment History	First-time	First-time and Non-first-time
Degree	Degree/certificate seeking only	Degree/certificate seeking only
Student Success	Received a degree	Received a degree/credential, transferred to a 4-year institution, or persisted
Time measured	150% time to completion (3-years)	Four years after entry



## What needed to change?

### #2: The definition of success (the numerator)

Traditional Success =  
Graduated or Attained a Credential/Licensure

(Measured in the period 1.5 times of normal time to completion—e.g., for a 2-year program, a student will need to complete in 3 years to be considered a success)

Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Success =  
Graduated or Attained a Credential/Licensure  
+  
Transferred Prior to Degree/Credential Attainment  
+  
Persisted

(Measured 4 years after initial enrollment)





# Our Goals in Creating the Survey of Community College Outcomes

**Community  
College  
Focused**

**Independent**

**Universally  
Available**

**Not  
Burdensome**

**Longevity**

**Good  
Coverage**



# The Survey of Community College Outcomes (SCCO)

The goal:  
expansion to  
any school or  
system across  
the U.S.



## 2023 SCCO:

- ✓ Maryland
- ✓ South Carolina
- ✓ Virginia
- ✓ West Virginia

## 2024 SCCO:

- ✓ Maryland
- ✓ North Carolina
- ✓ South Carolina
- ✓ Virginia
- ✓ West Virginia

## 2025 SCCO:

- ✓ Maryland
- ✓ North Carolina
- ✓ South Carolina
- ✓ Virginia
- ✓ West Virginia
- ✓ ...and more...

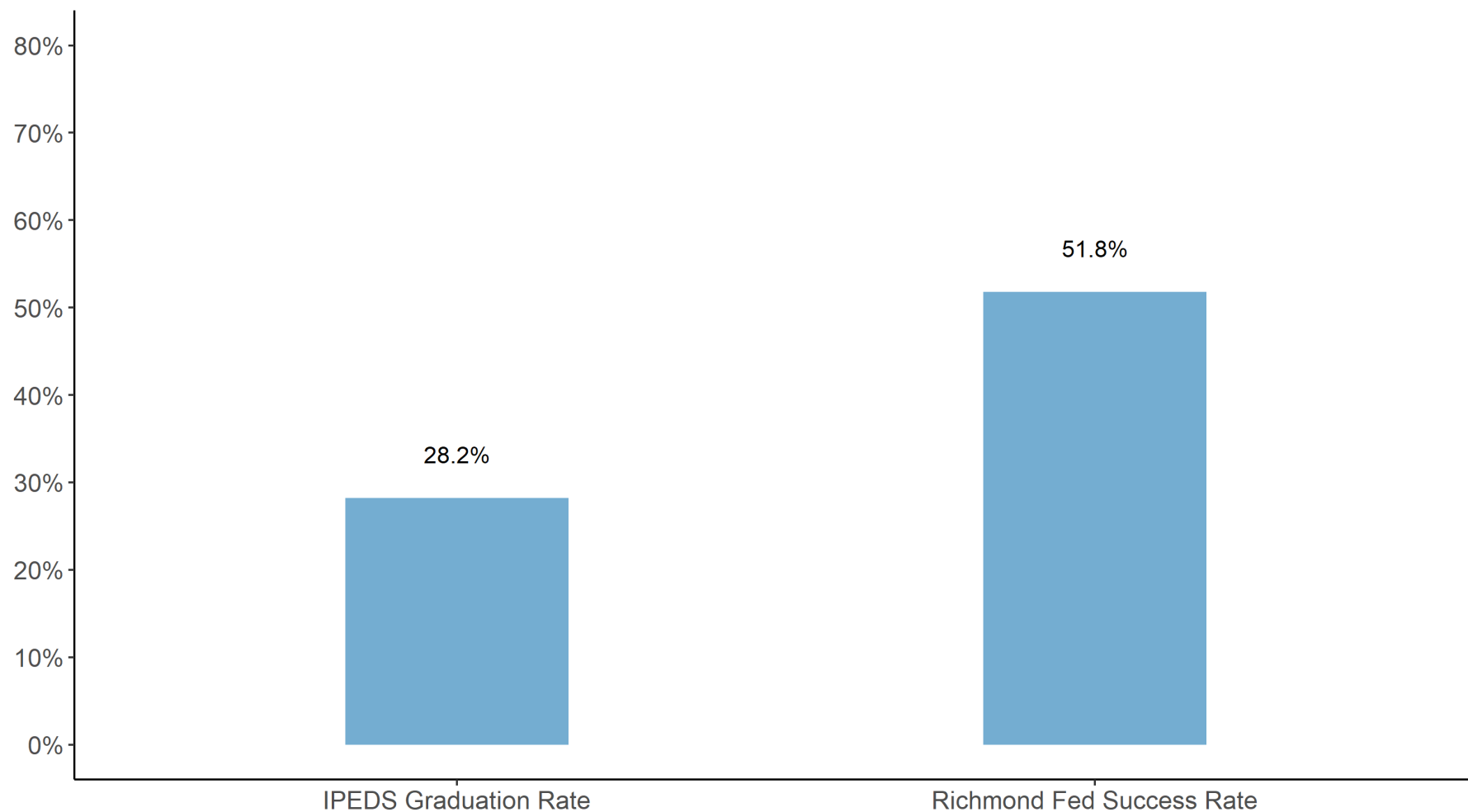
# The Richmond Fed Student Success Rate

n=63



## Success Rate Comparisons for Survey Participants

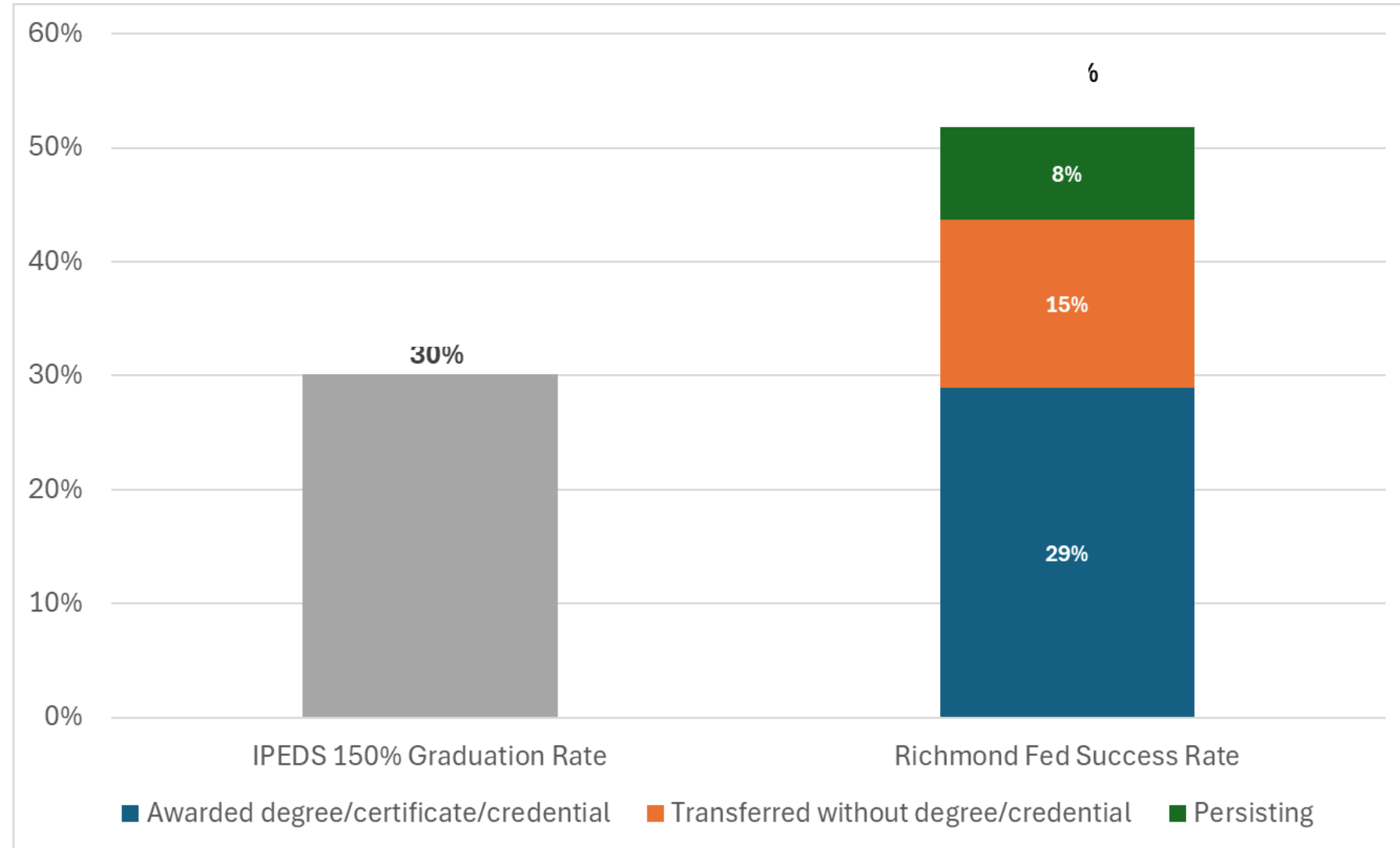
IPEDS v Richmond Fed



Source: IPEDS 2023, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond SCCO 2023.

The Richmond Fed Success Rate should be viewed as a lower bound estimate of success, as we can't identify all third-party credentials earned.

But looking at the breakdown shows key successes left out of the traditional graduation rate.



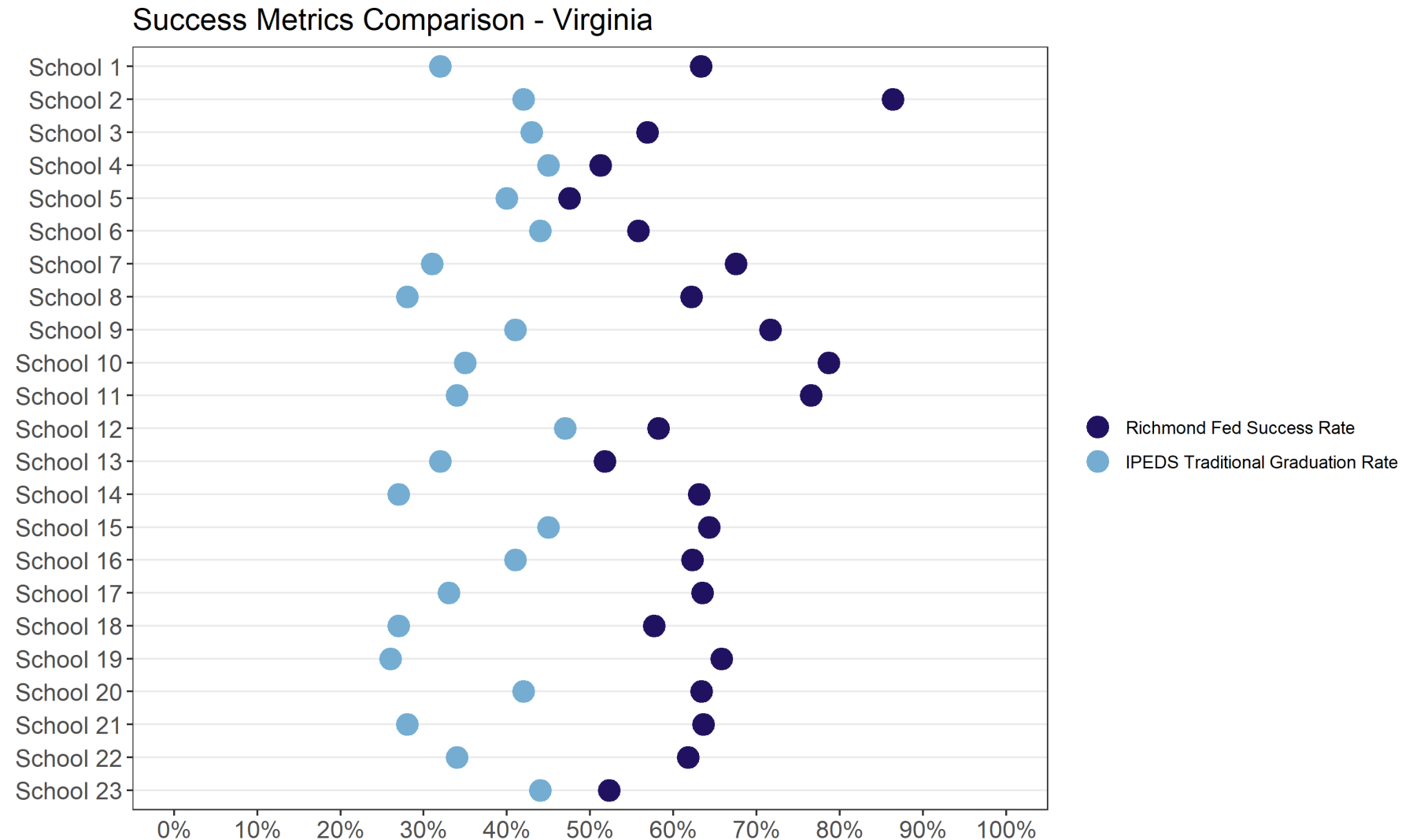
Sources: NCES IPEDS 2022 Provisional data, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond; author's calculations.

Note: The IPEDS graduation rate and Richmond Fed Success Rate cannot be directly compared due to differences in composition of the cohort and the time horizon over which success/graduation is calculated.

# The Richmond Fed Student Success Rate - Virginia

## Student Success

- Received an award (associate degrees, licensures, certificates, or industry credentials), or
- Transferred to a 4-year institution prior to attaining a degree/credential, or
- Persisted (defined as currently in good standing, but taking longer than four years to complete degree/certificate)



Source: IPEDS, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

Note: Private institutions include only those with 300 or more students.



## Range of success rates amongst community colleges

State	IPEDS Graduation Rate	Richmond Fed Success Rate
Maryland	11% - 41%	41% - 62%
South Carolina	12% - 36%	33% - 56%
Virginia	24% - 47%	47% - 86%
West Virginia	18% - 46%	33% - 44%

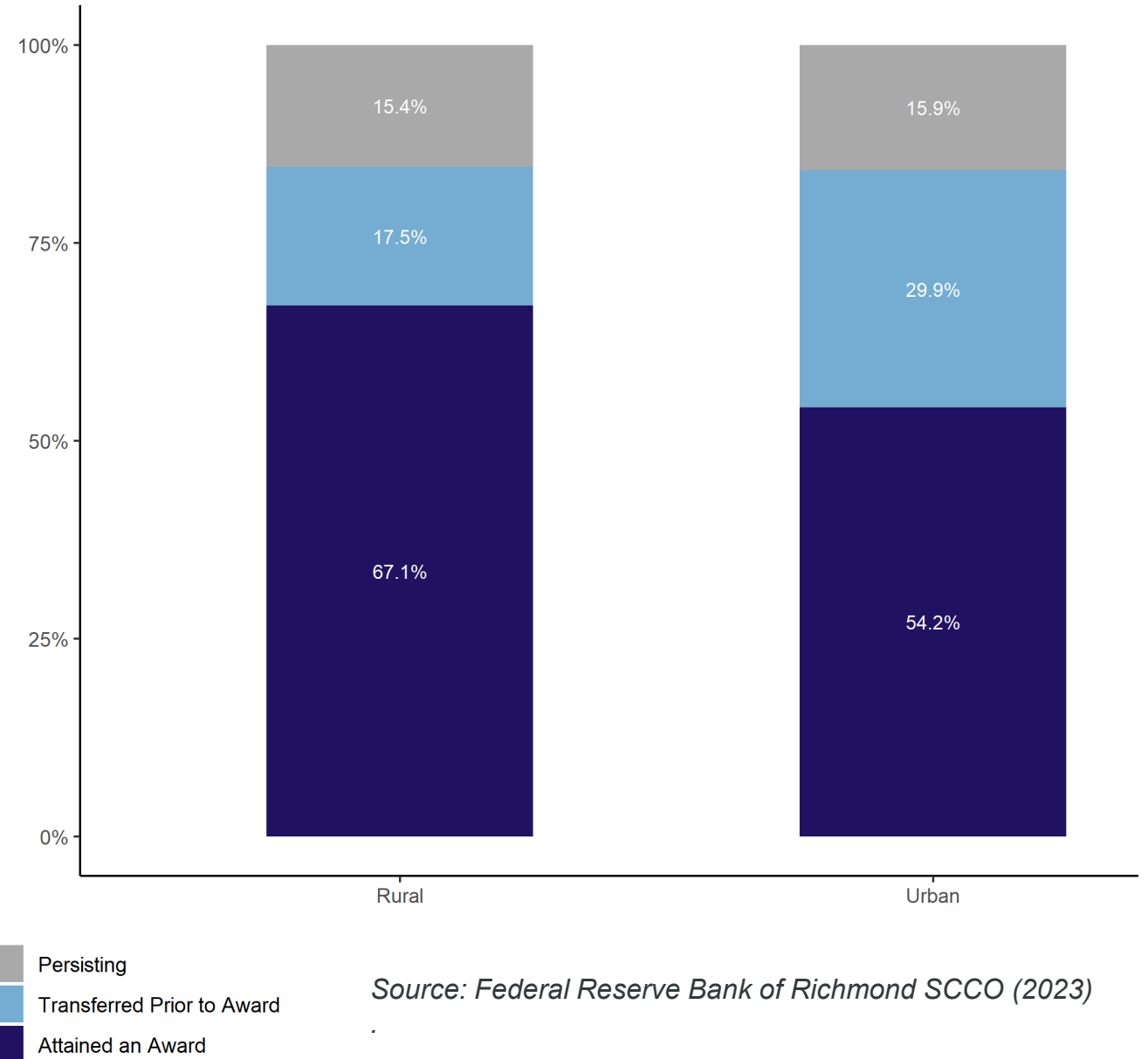
Source: IPEDS, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

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**Student success varies based on the urban/rural status of the institution (using the Richmond Fed definition of urban/rural)**

Richmond Fed Success Rate Breakdown -- Rural v Urban



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond SCCO (2023)



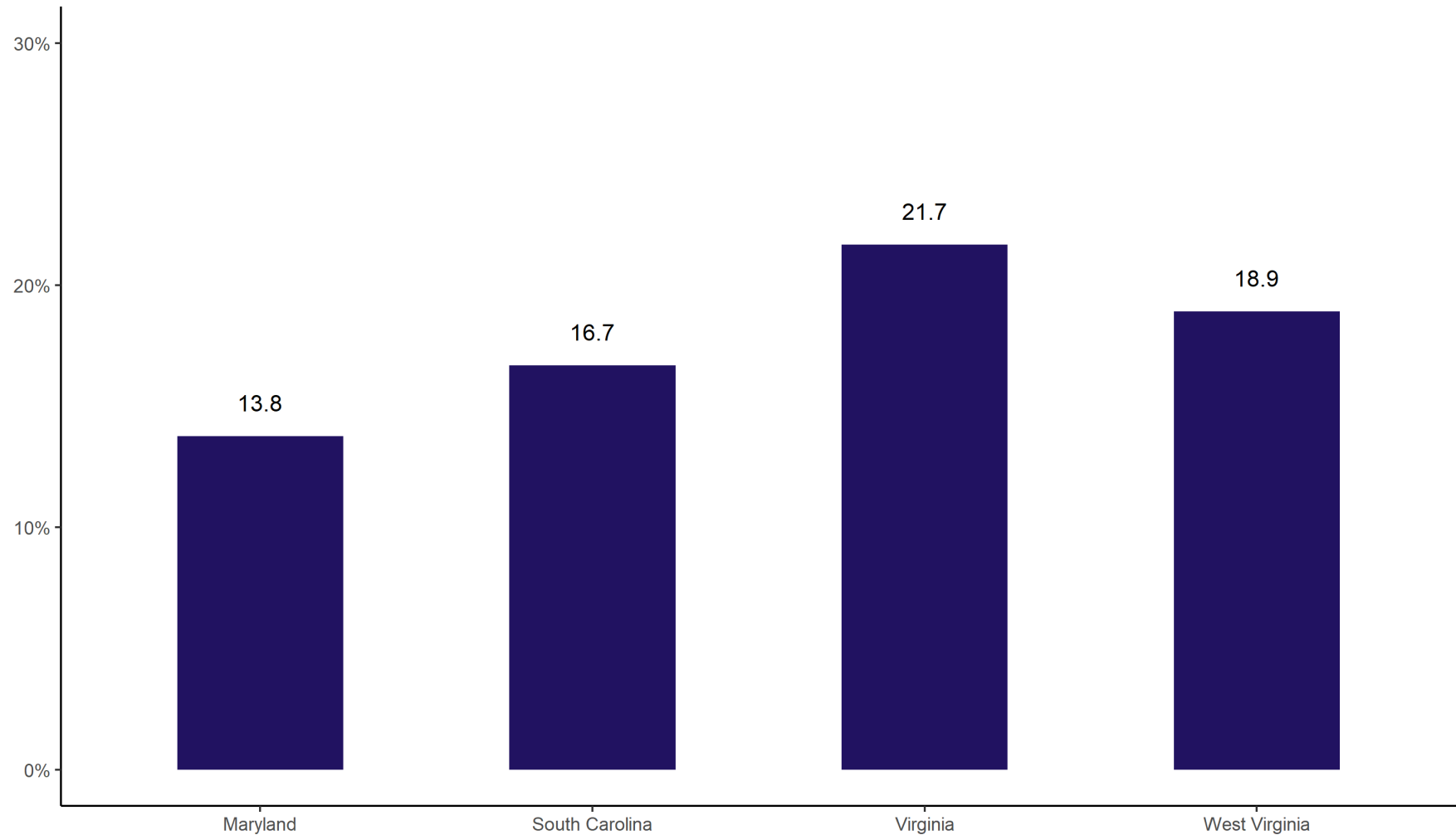


# Dual Enrollment

High school students represent an important – and growing – part of community college enrollment

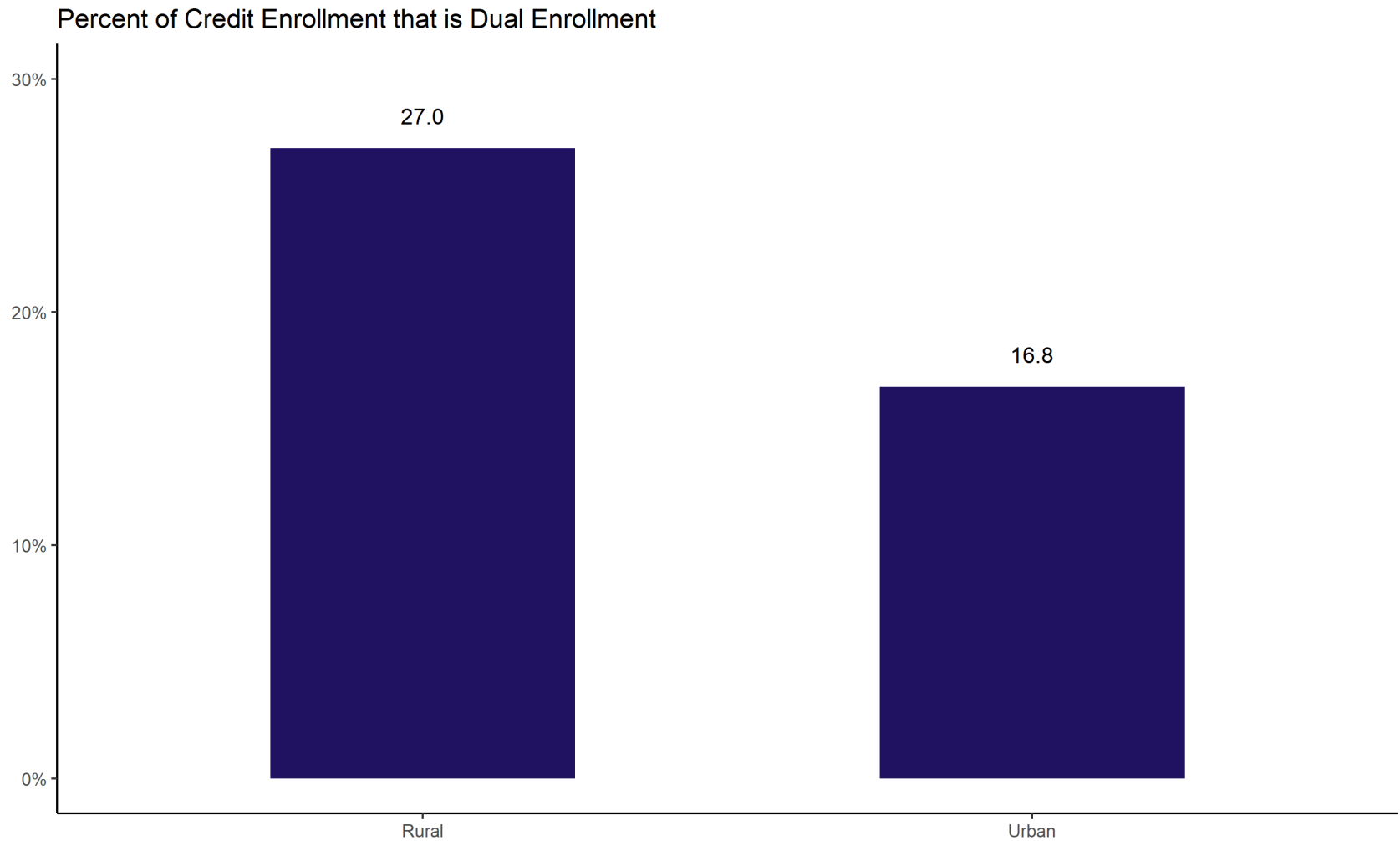


Percent of Credit Enrollment that is Dual Enrollment by State



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond SCCO (2023)

**This is even truer in rural areas. Community colleges are supplementing K-12 education in important ways in these communities. We need more research in this space.**

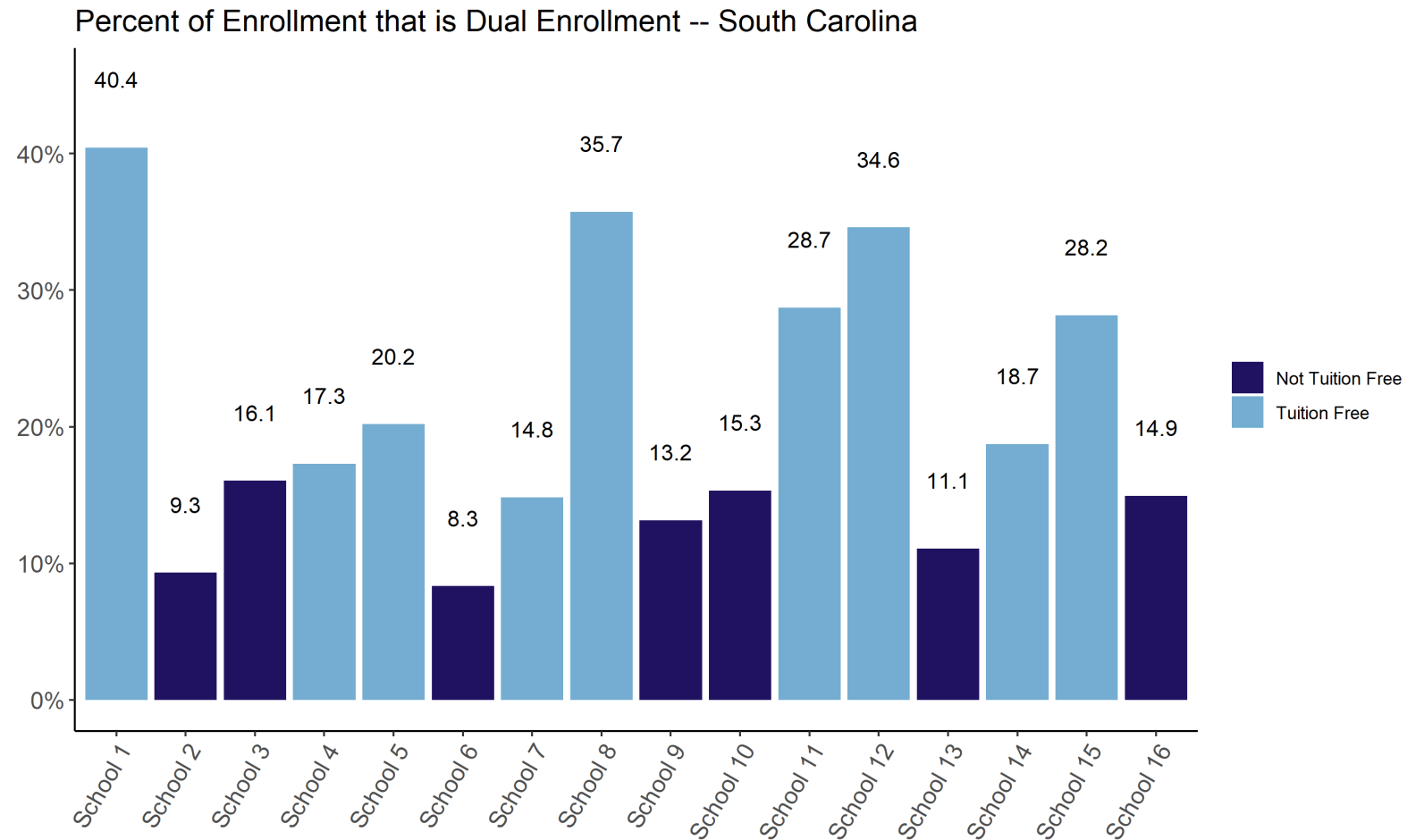


*Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond SCCO (2023)*

**Dual enrollment  
policy varies  
significantly across  
our District.**

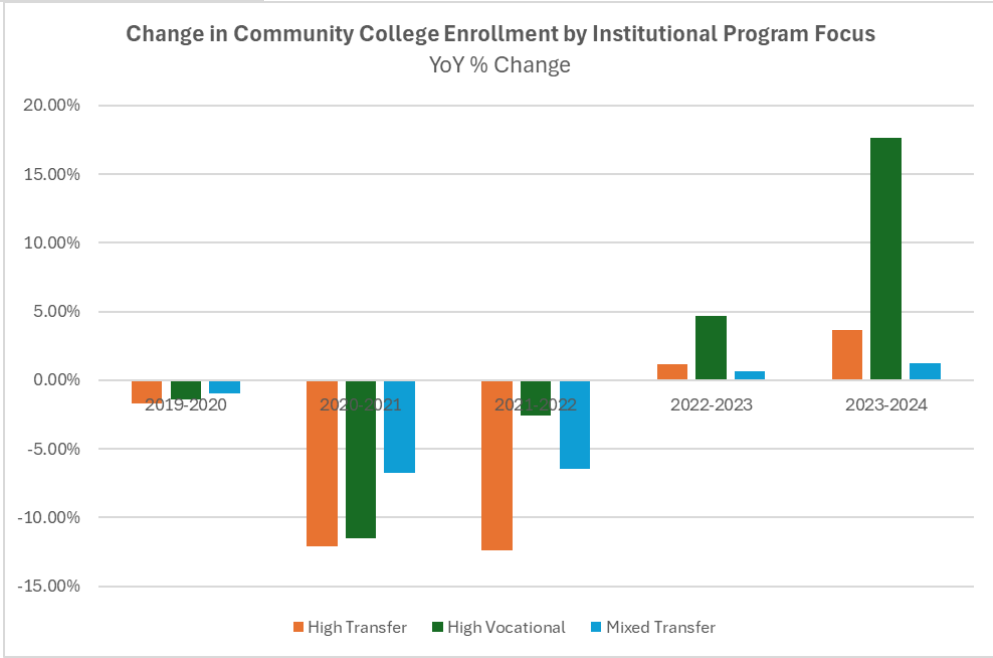
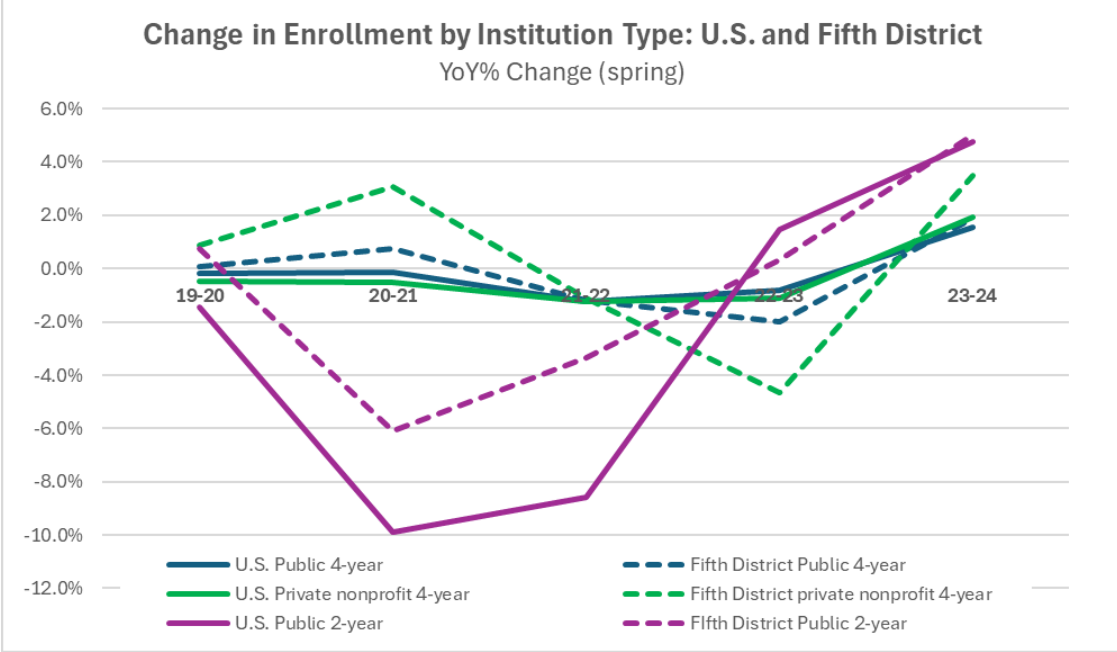
**Policy appears to  
matter in important  
ways when it comes  
to student  
enrollment.**

**Example:  
South Carolina**



*Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond SCCO (2023)*

# Why will this continue to matter?



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Current Term Enrollment Estimates (spring 2024)/authors calculations. Includes graduate and undergraduate

# There is so much more!

SCCO Website:



Subscribe to our Community  
College Insights Blog:



Check out our website and subscribe to our blog!

We are excited to share our 2024 results at a webinar on November 19<sup>th</sup>. Sign up for our blog to receive registration information.



[www.richmondfed.org](http://www.richmondfed.org)