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## Information Brief

# Connecting ACT Scores, High School GPA, First-Year College GPA, and Degree Completion

for students enrolled in a two-year postsecondary institution

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ACT scores and HSGPA are both indirectly (through first-year college GPA) and directly related to the likelihood that a student will complete an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year institution within three years of initially enrolling in a two-year institution.

These results highlight the importance of ensuring that all students are academically prepared for their first year in college.

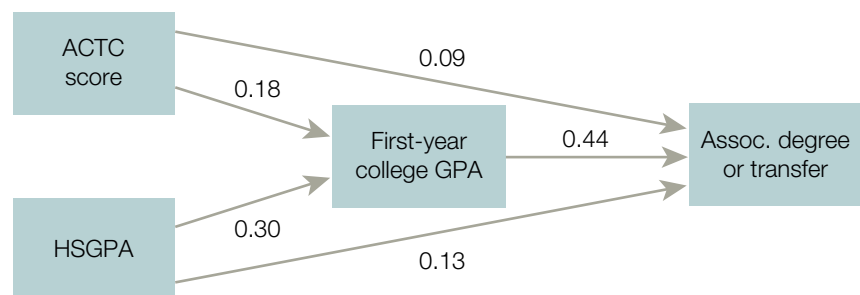
To improve their chances of completing an associate's degree or transferring to a four-year institution within three years of initially enrolling in a two-year institution, students must be strong academically—both during high school and their first year of college.

As illustrated from the straight lines in the figure below, both ACT Composite (ACTC) score and high school grade point average (HSGPA) are directly related to first-year college grade point average (GPA), as well as a student's likelihood of completing an associate's degree or transferring to a four-year institution by year 3.

However, first-year college GPA has a much larger direct effect than either ACTC score or HSGPA on degree completion or transfer by year 3 (0.44 vs. 0.09 to 0.13). Both high school performance measures are, for the most part, indirectly related to students' chances of degree completion or transfer through their positive, unique effects on first-year GPA.

In particular, students with higher ACTC scores and HSGPAs generally earn higher first-year college GPAs than those with lower scores and HSGPAs. And, students with higher first-year college GPAs are more likely to complete an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year institution by year 3.

### Factors Influencing Associate's Degree Completion or Transfer to a Four-Year Institution by Year 3



**Note:** Standardized regression coefficients are provided to allow for direct comparisons among variables. A positive coefficient indicates that a variable has a positive effect on the other; larger coefficients indicate stronger effects.

Based on data from nearly 66,000 ACT-tested students who enrolled in a two-year postsecondary institution as first-time entering students in fall 2000 through 2006. Forty institutions from two in-state systems were represented. Degree completion from the initial institution was tracked. For a more detailed description of the study, see the full ACT Research Report numbered 2012-5 at [http://media.act.org/documents/ACT\\_RR2012-5.pdf](http://media.act.org/documents/ACT_RR2012-5.pdf).

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