The College Completion Agenda

State Policy Guide

Produced in Collaboration with:

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It would not be possible to create a guide such as this without drawing on the unique educational and public policy expertise of NCSL and College Board staff. These authors have collaborated to bring clarity to extraordinarily complex issues in a form that will be useful to policymakers throughout the country, and we are most grateful for their efforts.

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Today we face a crisis across the educational landscape: High school completion rates are dropping. Achievement gaps persist, with significant disparities for students from low-income families and for minority students. Greater numbers of students are enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities, yet the proportion of individuals earning a postsecondary degree or credential continues to decline. The proportion of adults with postsecondary credentials is not keeping pace with that of other industrialized nations, and the United States is facing an alarming education deficit that threatens our global competitiveness and economic future.

There are formidable challenges at every level of the system that confront students who aspire to enroll and succeed in college. In 2007, the College Board formed the Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education to study the educational pipeline as a single continuum and identify solutions to increase the number of students who graduate from college and are prepared to succeed in the 21st century. The commission found that a "torrent of American talent and human potential entering the educational pipeline is reduced to a trickle 16 years later as it moves through the K–16 system." In short, too many students fall through the cracks at each point of the P–16 pipeline. Led by William "Brit" Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, the commission established 10 interdependent recommendations to reach its goal of ensuring that at least 55 percent of Americans hold a postsecondary degree by 2025. To improve our college completion rates, we must think P–16 and improve education from preschool through higher education. State legislators and policymakers can play a large role in advancing each of the recommendations.

The College Board and the National Conference of State Legislatures joined together to produce a practical policy guide for state legislators to pursue each of the commission's recommendations. The guide acts as a road map toward increasing the number of Americans who attain a postsecondary degree and empowering legislators to be an even more positive and active force.

State Policy Guide

The College Board and NCSL have identified coauthors in their respective organizations with policy and practice expertise in each recommendation area to create the individual chapters of this State Policy Guide. The authors actively consulted with specialists from the education community and a legislative advisory group of eight experienced state legislators and staff who have given ongoing guidance to this effort.

The College Board and NCSL authors, in consultation with the advisory group, have worked to ensure that the information in the guide is useful and meaningful to state legislators. Each chapter includes:

• Brief background information on the topic;
• A list of questions that state legislators need to ask about conditions in their own states;
• An overview of current and relevant research;
• Specific strategies for dealing with the problems;
• The cost implications of the policy strategies (including low- , medium- and high-cost options);
• Examples of policies that are currently being implemented in the states; and
• Short- , medium- and long-term action steps state legislators can take.
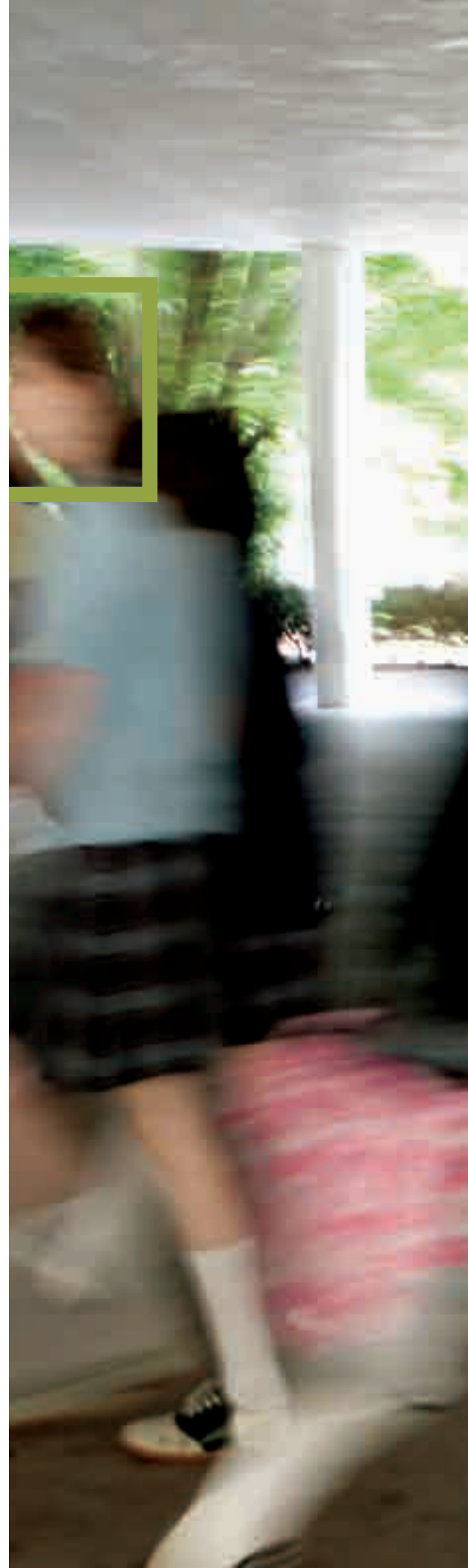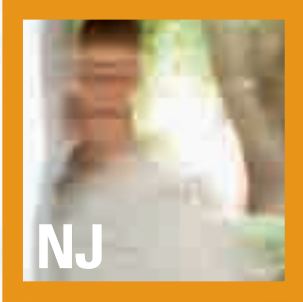
Each of the commission's recommendations is the focus of a chapter in the State Policy Guide. The ten recommendations are:

One
Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two
Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three
Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four
Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five
Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six
Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven
Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight
Keep college affordable

Nine
Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten
Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

One
Early Childhood

Children entering school ready to meet its academic, social and emotional demands are more likely to achieve success in academics and in life. States that want to increase college readiness and success must intervene in the earliest years. States must be strategic and coordinated in their investments in these early years. These include programs to provide:

- Child care;
- Preschool;
- Family supports, including economic and parenting support;
- Child health services; and
- Early identification and intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities

Examples of state policies:

- Enhancing Oversight Through Coordinated Governance (Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio)
- Providing Stable and Flexible Funding Through Block Grants (Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska)
- Promoting Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Washington)
- Implementing Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessments (Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)

Two
Improving Middle School and High School College and Career Counseling

Promoting college aspirations, ensuring that students enroll in the academic classes they need to be ready for college, guiding them through the admission and financial aid processes and helping them build the social skills necessary to succeed is the role of the school counselor — a role especially vital for first-generation college students and for students from low-income families. In order to ensure that students are ready for college, college counseling services should start early — at least by the middle grades.

Examples of state policies:

- Making College and Career Preparation Part of Graduation Requirements (Kentucky)
- Funding Comprehensive Counseling Programs (Washington)

Three
Dropout Prevention

Each year 1.3 million students leave school without graduating — 7,000 per day. The problem is especially acute for minority students: Only about half of African American, Latino and Native American students earn a high school diploma. With the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma more than 3.25 times higher than the rate for those with a college degree, this has become a national crisis.

Research has shown, however, why many students drop out of school and what might be done to prevent it. For example, identifying at-risk students at an early age, developing individual plans for their education and implementing dropout recovery programs to get students back in school have all proved successful.

Examples of state policies:

• Helping Students to Develop Individual Learning Plans, Providing Quality Student Mentoring and Training Counselors in Effective Dropout Prevention Techniques (California, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina)
• Identifying and Supporting Struggling Students (Colorado, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Washington)
• Reengaging Out-of-School Youth by Implementing Dropout Recovery Programs (California, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas)

Four
Standards and Alignment

Content standards outline the knowledge and skills students should attain at each level of their education across different subjects. These standards serve as the foundations of every other component of raising student achievement. Although each state has the structure in place to articulate the content standards their students should meet, various problems exist across the current state frameworks, including a lack of common assessment measures, different definitions of progress, problems associated with students transferring across state lines and different expectations for teacher training. Such problems ultimately hinder student preparation for college and career. High-quality and rigorous content standards are by no means the silver bullet for raising student achievement, but they are essential for all other strategies to be integrated into a coherent effort toward higher achievement.

Examples of state policies:

- Establishing Standards Workgroups to Set and Evaluate Rigorous Content Standards (Indiana)
- Examining and Comparing Standards Against International Benchmarks (Michigan, Ohio)
- Revising and Improving Standards to Be More Closely Aligned to College and Career Readiness (American Diploma Project states, Colorado, Virginia)
- Establishing Common Standards with States to Set Clear and Rigorous Expectations (Common Core State Standards Initiative)
- Establishing Statewide Program to Align Curriculum, Assessment, Professional Development, Graduation Requirements and Higher Education Placement Tests to Standards (California, Massachusetts, Texas

Five
Educator Quality

About 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first three years; as many as half leave within five years and many of those who do stay are not adequately prepared to teach. High-quality teachers and principals are not distributed equally throughout the system — that is, the best teachers are not typically found in the lowest-performing schools. One-fifth of states' entire general-fund budgets, on average, are devoted to "human capital" — teachers and leaders — employed in K–12 public schools. Effective policies are needed to recruit, train and retain talented educators, especially in the highest-need areas. Recruiting and training effective school principals is equally important: Research shows that there are almost no low-performing schools that have been documented to have turned around without a highly skilled principal.

Examples of state policies:

- Recruiting Students to Return to Their Home Areas as Teachers (Illinois, South Carolina)
- Revamping Teacher Compensation (Minnesota)
- Using Student Achievement as Part of Teacher Evaluation (Michigan, Rhode Island, Tennessee)
- Building Longitudinal Student Data Systems (Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Tennessee)
- Conducting a Statewide Survey of Teacher Working Conditions (North Carolina)
- Creating Leadership Programs (Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina)
- Adopting Policies to Attract Talented School Leaders (Arkansas, Florida)

Six
College Admission Process

Although choosing which students attend a given college has traditionally been the decision of that college, changing demographics — including the rise of returning and other nontraditional students and "swirling" enrollment patterns with students changing colleges one or more times — and other factors combine to have a great effect on states' goals for college participation and achievement for all students. The complexity of the admission process is a barrier for many students, especially for first-generation and historically underrepresented students.

Examples of state policies:

- Systemwide Application, Information and Management (New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas)
- Ensuring Admission for Low-Income Students (North Carolina, Virginia)
- Guaranteed Admission for Merit (Georgia, Indiana)
- Guaranteed Admission Through Transfer and Articulation (Florida, Ohio)

Seven & Eight
Financial Aid and College Affordability

State legislators and their constituents are very concerned about the rising price of college and the ability of state, federal and family resources to keep pace. Increasingly, lower-income students risk being priced out of college. This is occurring at a time when fewer and fewer jobs in our economy are available to individuals with no college education. A statewide commitment to keeping college affordable not only helps more students obtain a postsecondary degree but also supports state economic development.

Examples of state policies:

- Promise Scholarships/Early Commitment Financial Aid (California, Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon)
- Loan Forgiveness (Many states)
- Aid to Adult Students (Kentucky, Michigan)
- Incentives (Virginia)
- State Savings Programs (Many states)
- Investment in Community Colleges (Many states)

Nine
College Completion

Currently, only 56 percent of students at four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree within six years, and only 28 percent of those at two-year colleges earn an associate degree within three years. Graduation rates for minority students are below 50 percent. Many factors combine to lower the graduation rate, such as the need to work full time, having dependent children, inadequate academic preparation, lack of social preparation and college costs.

Examples of state policies:

• Legislating Reporting Requirements that Include Student Success (Massachusetts)
• Establishing Transfer Policies Between Two- and Four-Year Colleges
   (Florida, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota)
• Financial Incentives for Transfer and Graduation (New Jersey)
• Legislative Task Forces on Student Success
   (Arkansas, Illinois, South Carolina)
• Student Support Programs (California, New York)
• Performance-Based Funding (Florida, Indiana, Oklahoma, Ohio)

Ten
Adult Education

There is a pressing need to focus more attention and resources on adult learners. Close to two-thirds of the projected workforce of 2020 are already out of elementary and secondary education and following current trends; by 2025, this nation will fall an expected one million short of the college graduates needed in the workforce.

Adult learners come from many different walks of life and approach educational opportunities at various times. Unlike many traditional students, adults typically have more outside responsibilities competing with their time and ability to advance educationally.

In addition, there is no single group of adult learners; they vary widely in age, have differing levels of academic readiness, and come from different social and economic circumstances. States need to make investments in systems designed to understand the needs of adult learners and support these students while they earn their degrees.

Examples of state policies:

- Make Reaching All Types of Adult Learners an Education Public Policy Priority (Kentucky, Oklahoma)
- Offer Credit for Prior Learning (Ohio)
- Design Clear Articulation and Transfer Policies (Connecticut, Florida)
- Promote Awareness Campaigns (Kentucky, Louisiana)
- Develop Career Pathways for Current or Emerging High-Demand Industries (Arkansas, Oregon, Virginia)
- Address Affordability and Accessibility (Kentucky, Michigan, Washington)

CollegeBoard
Advocacy & Policy Center

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of U.S. states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues, and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:
• To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
• To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
• To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The conference operates from offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

For further information, visit www.ncsl.org.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board is composed of more than 5,700 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college readiness, college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid and enrollment. Among its widely recognized programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®), SpringBoard® and ACCUPLACER®. The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, we work to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. We make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

This report can be downloaded at completionagenda.collegeboard.org.
Hard copies may be ordered by contacting cbadvocacy@collegeboard.org.

advocacy.collegeboard.org

Recommendation **One**

Early Childhood

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The College Completion Agenda
State Policy Guide

One

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Background

Children who enter kindergarten ready to meet its academic, social and emotional demands are more likely to achieve later success in school and life. Conversely, children who enter school behind and unprepared to meet these demands tend to remain behind and grow up at risk for harmful behavior in adulthood (e.g., dropping-out of school, criminal behavior, teen parenthood and unemployment).

There is evidence that more than half the achievement gap found in later school years is already present when children enter kindergarten and this disproportionately affects children living in poverty. When starting kindergarten, the cognitive scores of children from families with high socioeconomic status (SES) average 60 percent higher than those of poor children.[1] Children from low-income, disadvantaged environments have smaller vocabularies and are behind higher income peers in reading and math skills. There is little doubt that many children will be challenged to succeed in school and beyond, based on their lack of readiness when they walk into the kindergarten classroom. School readiness is malleable, however. Numerous programs have documented success in increasing school readiness at kindergarten and sustaining progress in later years. States can increase college readiness and success by intervening in the earliest years. No single early childhood approach is the best answer. State investments in these early years must be strategic and coordinated.

What Legislators Need to Know

In order to evaluate the condition of young children in their states and their readiness for school, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- Which children in the state are most at-risk for problems with school readiness, and where are they located?

- Where are early childhood programs located, and which children do they reach?

- What state agencies have responsibility for early childhood services, and how do they coordinate services?

- To what extent does the state provide or support the experiences and interventions known to increase the chance for academic success? Are there gaps?

- Where is the funding for early childhood services and how much is provided for different ages? For different types of programs?

- Which programs for children up to 5-years-old have the elements that will make them most effective, and which programs need improvement?

- How does the state evaluate program efficacy and child progress before school entry?

Research

Early child development significantly affects later student achievement.

We now know that both genes and experience shape brain development. Genes determine when brain circuits mature, which is why most children learn to walk at fairly predictable times. But a baby's experiences greatly influence how cognition, emotion and skills such as speech develop, which, in turn, further shape brain circuits. These interactions among genetic predispositions and early experiences not only affect the foundations of learning and behavior, but also of physical and mental health.

Recent research has shown that a child's early experiences can actually become embedded in the body and affect early learning and later academic achievement (in addition to adult problems such as stress regulation and heart disease). Developmental disparities between poor children and their peers can be seen in children by the time they are age 1, and even as early as 9 months. And, while poverty alone can increase the risk of poor development, a set of cumulative risks is even more threatening. A recent study of children in the child welfare system indicates that those with six or more risk factors (e.g., minority status, teen-aged caregiver) have a 92 percent chance of having a developmental delay; this increases to 99 percent for children with seven risk factors. While the family remains central to a child's development, mounting evidence about the factors that enhance or diminish long-term cognitive development and overall wellness gives policymakers more reason than ever to intervene early and comprehensively for those most at risk.

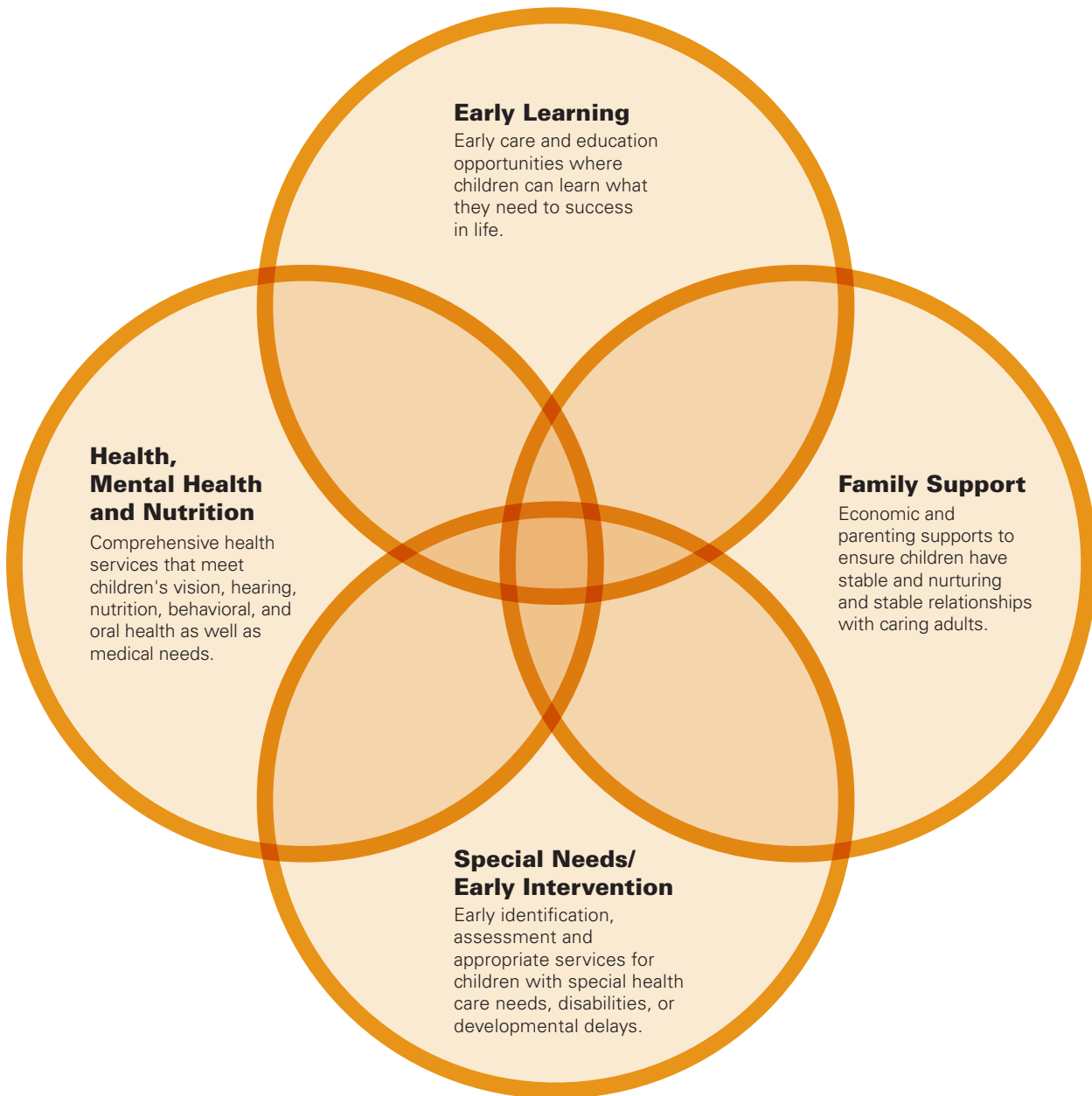## Effective early childhood programs and services make a difference.

Some of the strongest evidence that early intervention can have an impact on school readiness comes from longitudinal research on prekindergarten or early care and education programs such as the landmark Perry Preschool and Abecedarian projects. Newer state-funded programs are showing strong results: A study of five state-funded preschool programs found significant improvements in language, literacy and math.

But prekindergarten alone will not ensure that the children who are most developmentally at risk will be ready for school and higher education. Instead, a system that supports children from birth to age 5 must be strategically tailored around different populations of children and parents. For example, effective child care is essential: Research has shown that children in better care settings have scored higher on fifth-grade vocabulary tests than those who received lower quality care. A recent five-city study of Educare Centers, which provide full-service child care and education, revealed that the at-risk children, in these centers had school readiness scores nearly equal to national averages (96.7 percent compared to 100 percent). Children with more exposure to Educare — those who joined between birth and age 2 — had scores 9 points higher than the national average.

Other programs also make an impact. Home visits that support new parents, early intervention for children with developmental delays, and mental health concerns and initiatives to prevent environmental threats such as exposure to toxins and poor nutrition show success in targeting vulnerable children. Most states are administering a variety of state and federally funded programs for some of their youngest citizens — some with proven results and some with only anecdotal support. Some programs serve many (e.g., prekindergarten for all children at 200 percent of poverty level), while others are more appropriate to certain populations of children (e.g., children born with low birth weight).

Figure 1. State Early Childhood Development System

Source: Early Childhood Systems Workgroup

Early Learning
Early care and education opportunities where children can learn what they need to success in life.

Health, Mental Health and Nutrition
Comprehensive health services that meet children's vision, hearing, nutrition, behavioral, and oral health as well as medical needs.

Family Support
Economic and parenting supports to ensure children have stable and nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults.

Special Needs/ Early Intervention
Early identification, assessment and appropriate services for children with special health care needs, disabilities, or developmental delays.

Among the many options for children through age 5, the most effective programs provide:

- Qualified and appropriately compensated personnel;
- Responsive, warm and developmentally appropriate interactions between adults and children;
- High adult–child ratios and small group sizes;
- Safe and language-rich environments; and
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum.

More children will be ready for success when they walk through the kindergarten door if we understand the effect of programs on children and families and coordinate programs to maximize results.

Effective early childhood strategies are multifaceted.

Because many individual, family and community factors may delay a child's development and readiness for school, it is necessary to consider a comprehensive approach to early childhood services that includes different strategies. The national Early Childhood Systems Working Group developed the following framework (Figure 1) to help guide state efforts (other states have developed similar frameworks).[2] The framework addresses early needs of children in learning, health and mental health, special needs, and family support. Services to support these areas include:

- Child care;
- Preschool;
- Economic and parenting support;
- Health and dental care and vision services; and
- Early identification and intervention of infants and toddlers with disabilities.

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State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Coordinate governance for greater alignment from birth to age 5.

States are beginning to coordinate agencies and oversight across services (prekindergarten, child care) and along the birth to age 5 range. A single coordinating agency can enhance the quality of services and the results for children, and maximize investments by ensuring that services are coordinated and aligned.

Ohio established the Family and Children First Cabinet Council to help families seeking government services by streamlining and coordinating resources. In 2006, HB 289 added responsibilities to the council, including selecting indicators in order to measure progress toward improving children's well-being, developing an interagency system to monitor progress and developing a plan for state-level interagency efforts. In 2007, Ohio also established the Help Me Grow Advisory Council, an interagency coordinating council that advises the Ohio Department of Health about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C. (Part C provides early intervention services for children with developmental disabilities or delays.)

Connecticut Senate Bill 941 (2009) established the Office of Early Childhood Planning, Outreach and Coordination within the Department of Education. It is responsible for planning, developing and coordinating the delivery of services to children up to age 9. This includes an early childhood data system and development of an early childhood accountability plan in conjunction with the state's Early Childhood Education Cabinet. The cabinet includes legislators; representatives from the departments of Education, Social Services, Public Health and Mental Health; and representatives from other agencies that provide early childhood services. The cabinet is charged with coordinating services among state agencies as well as among public–private partnerships.

A 2003 **Illinois** Act (Senate Bill 565) established the Illinois Early Learning Council to coordinate, improve and expand upon existing early childhood programs and services. The purpose of the council is to implement early childhood efforts and initiatives; develop a multiyear plan to address gaps in capacity and quality; reduce policy, regulatory and funding barriers; and collaboratively plan and coordinate across programs, divisions and agencies at the state level. Legislation in 2008 (HB 4456, Act 95-781) created the Commission on Children and Youth to develop a five-year plan for services for children from birth through age 24.

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Low Cost

Coordinate workforce training and professional advancement ladders.

Training for early childhood providers should, along with two-year or four-year degrees, include a clear way to increase further qualifications and professional advancement.

Connecticut (2004, SB 517) coordinates the training of child care and early childhood educators by including public health, social services and higher education in all planning decisions. Staff receive training, career counseling and scholarship assistance. In addition, agreements that coordinate classes and requirements between two-year and four-year degree programs and common program accreditation help a student achieve higher levels of education across various types of early child care and education programs.

Montana's Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium, established without legislation to enable consistency in higher education course work and training across the state, includes higher education articulation agreements between four-year institutions and tribal and community colleges. In addition, local outreach sites administer a Child Development Associate credential, for which the course work credits may also be applied to a college certificate or to an associate or a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

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Medium Cost

Measure early childhood program quality.

Defining essential and optimal standards for all early childhood programs can help them improve. One approach many states have taken is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). These systems provide standards such as high staff-to-child ratios and minimum qualifications for providers, which help less effective programs improve.

Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS (Standards, Training and Professional Development, Assistance, Resources and Supports) began in 2004, after a successful 2002 pilot. More than 5,000 providers receive ongoing technical assistance through the voluntary system, which includes five levels of quality evaluated by curriculum, teacher qualifications and parent engagement. Higher quality programs receive more compensation. One-quarter of participating programs received the highest quality rating in the 2007–2008 fiscal year.

Washington Learns, the state's initiative to review the education system with the goal of creating a world-class seamless system, recommended establishing a Quality Rating and Improvement System in 2007. Senate Bill 5828 (C 394 L 07) established a voluntary QRIS for child care and early education programs. Administered by the Department of Early Learning in collaboration with a public–private partnership, the department began a six-county pilot of the system, Seeds to Success, in July 2009. Communities will evaluate which elements of the system already exist to some degree in the county (e.g., provider training) and explore how various elements of the QRIS impact child development.

In operation for more than a decade, **North Carolina**'s five-star rating system, the Star-Rated License, is considered one of the most established systems for child care and early learning providers. All licensed programs in the state enter the system with a Star 1 designation; higher rated programs are rewarded through higher reimbursement rates for services. Star ratings are determined by program standards (e.g., child–staff ratio and measures of child–adult interactions) and staff education standards. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood project (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) encourages staff to get further education by providing scholarships for course work that leads to degrees or credentialing in early childhood education. T.E.A.C.H. is a national model established in 21 states.

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Medium Cost

Track readiness.

Data systems can be expanded so they provide information to evaluate child risk levels, program access and duplication of efforts, and to determine whether interventions are working for children. If early childhood data systems include unique child and provider identifiers, they can link to K–12 student and teacher information. The data systems can help evaluate children's readiness for K–12 education in different areas (e.g., social-emotional, literacy). Tracking readiness throughout early childhood is the best way to understand how various programs support the highest level of child development.

Maryland uses a revised version of the Work Sampling System (WSS) observational assessment for all kindergarten children that complements the state's early learning standards, Maryland's Model for School Readiness (MMSR). The results are published annually in a statewide readiness report, which includes information by county/school district and for subgroups of children, as well as for four types of early childhood experiences (e.g., family child care, Head Start). Data also are used to guide curriculum and planning and to communicate children's strengths and weaknesses to their parents.

In **New Jersey**'s state-funded prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, children receive an assessment tied to the curriculum three times a year. This state-developed tool assesses oral language and literacy skills and children's skill development. Student progress is evaluated through a combination of teacher ratings and anecdotes about a child's skills, a literacy activity and child work samples. Teachers conducting the assessments are given significant training and use the results to guide their classroom instruction. In addition, annual state evaluation visits to at least one-third of the state's prekindergarten programs validate the programs' self-assessment of state quality standards.

Pennsylvania is embarking on an ambitious effort to assess all children from birth to age 5 who receive state-funded early care and education services annually. The state will use Pearson's Work Sampling System for 3- to 5-year-old children and the Ounce Scale Child Development Tool for younger children. This assessment is one part of the state's Keystone STARS quality improvement initiative.

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High Cost

Retool funding.

States are developing a stable funding source for birth to age 5 services with appropriate funding for children through age 3. Block grants allow communities the most flexibility to support specific gaps in needs and services.

In 2008, **Kansas** (HB 2946, Chap. 184) instituted an $11 million early childhood block grant program administered by the Children's Cabinet. The money will be used to support evidence-based programs for at-risk children in underserved areas, with a minimum of one-third of the funds specifically for infants and toddlers.

Nebraska, in 2006, established an Early Childhood Education Endowment (Bill 1256) to fund services for at-risk children from birth to age 3. Earnings from a $60 million public–private endowment are used for the programs. A 2006 constitutional amendment allocated the public funds from state perpetual funds dedicated to schools. A board of trustees administers the program with competitive grants awarded to school districts in partnership with community programs and agencies.

A long-time leader in this approach, the **Illinois** legislature in 1997 enacted the Early Childhood Education Block Grant (Public Act 89-397. 105 ILCS 5/1C-2) to support prevention programs, prekindergarten, parent training and other services for children from birth through age 5. Using state general fund revenue, the block grant combined money for numerous early childhood programs into one funding stream. The competitive grants distribute funds to a variety of entities, including school districts. In addition, 11 percent of the funds are specified for at-risk children age 3 and younger.

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High Cost

Target early prevention services.

States may want to target effective programs to those children who are most in need as well as increase efforts such as prenatal care, home visiting programs, and early identification and intervention services for children with developmental concerns that can later prevent more costly issues. For families most at risk, states can develop a wide array of necessary services, including health, mental health, home visiting programs, and good quality care and education. Not all families need all services, so a systemic state approach to understanding and addressing family needs can maximize limited resources.

Iowa's Community Empowerment, now known as Early Childhood Iowa, was established in 1998 (SF 2406) to provide a variety of community services and supports to young children, particularly in the critical ages from birth to 3. The legislation created Community Empowerment Area Boards to administer funds from the state departments of Education, Human Services and Public Health. Through a community assessment of needs, services and gaps in care for children from birth to age 5, local boards target funds to meet the following goals:

- Increasing school readiness skills;
- Improving the health of young children;
- Decreasing child abuse and neglect;
- Developing more adult–child mentor relationships;
- Getting parents more involved; and
- Increasing access to quality child care.

This initiative tracks program measures (e.g., number of quality child care programs) and child measures (e.g., immunization rates) every year.

Take Action

1   **Ensure legislators are included at the table of state
and federally supported coordination efforts, including:**
- State P–20 education councils, legislative children's
caucuses and children's cabinets.
- Federally required state early childhood advisory councils
(ECACs), now being formed in states that will advise
state policymakers on creating comprehensive systems for
children from birth to age 5.
- Ongoing efforts resulting from State Early Childhood
Comprehensive Systems grants, funded by the Maternal
and Child Health Bureau.

Short-Term

2   **Bring together legislators focused on K–12 and early
childhood to evaluate coordination in the earliest
school years, from early childhood through third grade,
and assess child transitions through high school.**

Short-Term

3   **Develop a framework that communicates the state
vision for a comprehensive approach to early childhood.
Include specific and measurable child, family and
service-level actions and results; and use these to rank
policy and other actions. Articulate any necessary changes
in the state's current services so together they can work
toward achieving that vision.**

Short-Term

4   **Set goals for children (e.g., percentage of children ready
for school) and complete a plan for tracking and publically
reporting annual progress.**

Short-Term

5   **Conduct a state scan of programs and services. Look for reach of programs, differences in eligibility and use of services, and duplication of services or goals. Analyze regulatory friction between programs and funding streams that prevents seamless coordination.**

Mid-Term

6   **Evaluate and prioritize resources for:**
- Percentage of children ready for kindergarten, by income level or other demographic factors (e.g., English Language Learners).
- Percentage of children eligible for services and percentage actually enrolled in programs such as Head Start or home visiting programs.
- Location of highest quality child care programs and an evaluation of their accessibility for children in very poor neighborhoods.
- Distribution of early childhood programs and family supports in communities that most need the services.

Mid-Term

7   **Assess the use of birth to 5 services by surveying a random sample of families with multiple risks. Evaluate their knowledge of, eligibility for, and use of these services.**

Mid-Term

8   **Remove barriers by simplifying applications for multiple services, establish an early childhood hotline for information, and develop strategic outreach and communication to at-risk communities, including encouraging providers to help families submit applications.**

Mid-Term

9   **Scan state data systems. How many systems are tracking providers, programs and children? What is tracked and what data are actually analyzed? What are the technical differences between these systems?**

Mid-Term

Take Action

10	Complete memoranda of understanding with all public and private services for child data and other operations-sharing information.	Mid-Term
11	Evaluate, track and publicize data for major at-risk indicators for children age 5 and younger. Use this data to make informed decisions about policy, practice and funding.	Mid-Term
12	Ensure that all early childhood data systems can work together and with the state's K–12 data system.	Long-Term
13	Regularly review goals and evaluate how policy is supporting children's progress.	Long-Term

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• To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
• To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
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Recommendation **Two**

Improving Middle & High School College & Career Counseling

Brenda Bautsch, NCSL
Patricia Martin, The College Board

The College Completion Agenda
State Policy Guide

CollegeBoard
Advocacy & Policy Center

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

America is striving to once again be the world leader in the percentage of college-educated citizens. Planning ahead for college is crucial to getting there and succeeding. School counselors in particular can play an essential role in helping students plan for college.

School counselors can have a significant influence on children's aspirations, school course choices and future career options — elements essential to achieving a meaningful career and good quality of life.[1] School counselors support young people as they explore career and college options and can be advocates for educational equity. They can encourage higher education for all students, not just those students traditionally deemed academically talented. As a result, counselors are critical for improving the number of minority, low-income and first-generation students going to college. These students are often the most in need of advice and support.[2]

Because counselors are so vital, schools should maintain an adequate staff of professionally trained counselors. In addition, counseling should be available early, by at least the middle-school level, so that students can begin to explore their future career options, understand the paths to reaching those careers, and take the necessary courses and tests. Without this early information, students who are interested in careers that require a college degree may arrive at high school without the academic knowledge and skills needed to take rigorous, college-preparatory course work. A statewide focus on school counselors helps guarantee that every student has the chance to consider and plan for his or her career and college goals early.

What Legislators Need to Know

To evaluate the state's school counseling performance, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the counselor-to-student ratio in the state? How does it vary among districts and schools?

- Is there a difference in student academic aspirations and results when there are better counseling programs at the schools?

- How are school counselors being used? Is their time spent on college and career counseling, or are they being used in other roles (i.e., testing, hall and cafeteria duty, substitute teaching)?

- What are the training and licensing requirements to become a school counselor?

- What are the standards for counseling in middle school and in high school?

- Do school counselor training programs include course work on college and career counseling?

- How are counselors evaluated? Are there measurable goals (e.g., to increase participation in AP® classes, or to increase the number of students who apply for college) for which counselors are held accountable?

Research

Counseling is a profession.

Qualified school counselors should be designated, trained professionals charged with the responsibility for:[3]

• Championing educational equity and academic success for all students;
• Nurturing students' aspirations and developing academic plans to enable students to fulfill their hopes and dreams;
• Creating safety nets that ensure students reach their goals; and
• Distributing information and guidance to empower students and their parents or guardians to understand the widest range of educational postsecondary options available after high school.

Professional school counselors need to have the knowledge and skills to work in collaboration with the school and community to meet these responsibilities.

School counselors foster a college-going culture.

The Consortium of Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago concluded that improving college enrollment and success requires two efforts: (1) fostering a college-going culture; and (2) providing students with adequate support and guidance. CCSR found that school counselors are in a unique position to accomplish both efforts.[4] Schools, however, do not always use counselors in a manner that allows them to spend time on college and career guidance.

Counseling in schools today takes on many identities and is mostly driven by the principal and community. Research tells us that in communities where people believe their children will be prepared to go to college after high school, school counselors spend more than half their time on college tasks. In poor communities where there are large numbers of minority youth, school counselors spend significant time on personal and social issues, including mental health services. In these schools, little time is spent on college activities, academic planning and transitions from high school to college.[5]

In addition, schools often assign several duties to counselors, which decreases the time they have available to foster a college-going culture. An inordinate amount of school counselors' time is spent on activities such as test administration, record keeping, hall and cafeteria duty, substitute teaching, making attendance calls, and changing class schedules. The amount of time spent on these activities varies from school to school and district to district. School counselors at private schools, for example, spend an average of 58 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling, while

those in public schools spend an average of only 25 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling.[6]

School counselor training often falls short.

Research indicates that the majority of school counselor graduate training programs do not include course work in college readiness counseling. Very few programs train school counselors in how to actively prepare middle and high school students, parents, and families for college.[7]

Student-to-counselor ratios are high.

Student-to-counselor ratios average 315:1 in public high schools and 241:1 in private high schools,[8] with states having a range of more than 1,100 students per school counselor to 165 per school counselor.[9] Professional norms for counselor staffing recommend one counselor for every 250 students.[10] At low-income rural and urban schools, counselors are assigned an average of 1,056 students.[11]

Counselors have a wide influence.

Research shows the effectiveness of counselors.

• School counselors are very effective in helping middle school children in career development.[12]
• A 2000 poll of students found that a majority turned to their counselors for college-preparation advice and found college counseling sessions helpful.[13]
• School counselors influence students' future plans for going to college by having high expectations for the students. A survey of 10th- and 12th-graders found that students perceived that their counselor expected them to attend college regardless of their ethnicity. As a result, the students' expectations for themselves increased.[14]
• A study of Florida K–12 students in 2001–2002 looked at the effect of increased and improved counseling services on student achievement and behavior.[15] Counselors focused on improving school success skills, such as listening, goal setting and self-motivation. The counselors provided structured group counseling and classroom guidance. Seventy percent of the students involved in the study improved their academic achievement and behaviors that lead to success in school.

KY

State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Incorporate courses on college and career counseling into master's degree programs for school counselors.

Urge practicing school counselors who did not complete this kind of course work in their master's training to take a college and career counseling certification course.

Consider authoring a resolution that promotes counselors as key members of school staff.

In the resolution, legislators also can encourage collaboration among high school counselors, postsecondary institutions and the state department of higher education.

Provide encouragement and incentives for schools to create college-going cultures.

Schools will need to implement or bolster activities that help all students explore and plan for college and careers, take college-preparation courses, apply to colleges, and learn how to apply for financial aid. Schools should also widely distribute results attributed to effective school counseling, professional development, and successful college and career advising programs.

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Medium Cost

Incorporate a college and career counseling program into high school graduation requirements.

In 2002, **Kentucky**'s General Assembly created the Individual Learning Plan and made it a requirement for high school graduation. The learning plan is an electronic-based comprehensive college and career counseling program aimed at helping students connect their high school classes and activities with their post-high-school goals. The plan, administered by school staff, begins in sixth grade and runs through 12th grade. The plan uses each student's academic interests, skills and hobbies to suggest possible careers. The program then creates a four-year high school plan based on the student's college and career goals. It is reviewed regularly by school counselors or teachers throughout high school to track progress and any shifts in aspirations. The program promotes the idea that early planning gives students the opportunity to fully prepare for college and careers.[16]

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Medium Cost

New Mexico lawmakers passed a similar measure, SB 561, in 2007. To graduate, all students must complete a Next Step Plan at the end of grades eight through 11 that sets a course schedule and academic and career goals. The purpose of the plan is to help students think about and plan for their future. Since it is done yearly, the plan is meant to be flexible and adjusted each year to meet students' changing goals and needs. The Next Step Plan is filled out with the help of parents, teachers and school counselors. As part of the process, every student must be informed about course options, including honors, advanced placement, dual credit, distance learning and remedial courses. Every student also must be informed about alternative post-high-school options.

Fund comprehensive counseling programs.

In **Washington**, Navigation 101 is a middle and high school counseling program funded by the Legislature. Select schools administer the program, which matches each student to an adviser — a teacher, counselor, the principal or social worker. Advisers work closely with students from grade six through grade 12 on college and career planning. Having an assigned adviser ensures that each student has at least one adult at the school who knows him or her and cares about the student's future. The advisers follow a curriculum that was developed using academic and counseling standards. It covers topics such as setting personal and academic goals, improving class grades, planning for college, exploring careers, joining extracurricular activities and managing money. Early data show that students who participate in the program are more likely to take Advanced Placement® courses, graduate from high school and enroll in college.

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High Cost

Provide professional development funding for school counselors to help them learn the best ways to close the achievement gaps for college preparation and enrollment for all students. Professional training can help school counseling programs promote collaboration among teachers, principals and school counselors on issues of teaching and learning.

Provide state funding to hire culturally competent school counselors in struggling schools with high numbers of low-income and minority students and in schools where academic improvement is needed.

Consider adopting policies governing student-to-counselor ratios that move toward professional norms for staffing middle and high school counseling offices.

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High Cost

Provide funding to enable schools to increase the number of counselors.

In **Colorado**, House Bill 1370 (2008) created the School Counselor Corps Grant that provides $5 million in grants to increase the number of counselors in middle and high schools. Grants are also meant to increase the quality of counseling and the quantity of services provided. The goal of the grant program is to increase the percentage of Colorado students who are ready to enroll in and graduate from college. In the first year grants were available, schools saw lower student-to-counselor ratios, more professional development for counselors and increased services for students (e.g., college and career preparation and financial aid and scholarship workshops). In addition, through the grant program, schools have increased the amount of college-related data they collect.

Establish measurable goals and monitor the results of increasing counseling staff with state funding.

Merely increasing the number of counselors does not ensure they will be used for college and career counseling. Establishing standards and measurable metrics can hold districts and schools accountable for how counselors are used and can hold counselors accountable for results in student achievement.

If a school goal is to increase the college-going rate, counseling goals and metrics could be established around the steps it takes to get students ready for college. For example, measurable goals could be set to:

- Increase the number of eighth-grade students who take Algebra I by 15 percent over the number who took it the previous year.
- Increase the number of 10th-grade students who take the PSAT/NMSQT® by 20 percent.
- Get 95 percent of the senior class to complete the FAFSA (financial aid form) by Feb. 1.
- Increase the number of high school seniors who are academically eligible to enroll in the state's four-year postsecondary institutions.

Take Action

1	Determine counselor-to-student ratios in the state and how they vary by district. Districts with high numbers of low-income, minority and first-generation students may need more counselor resources.	**Short-Term**
2	Evaluate standards for college and career counseling in middle and high schools. How do they compare to other states? How could they be improved? What involvement would the legislature have?	**Short-Term**
3	Convene a group of stakeholders — higher education leaders, nonprofits, local school board members, etc. — and devise a strategy to improve college and career counseling.	**Mid-Term**
4	Explore federal and nonprofit grants that are available to states to improve college and career counseling.	**Mid-Term**
5	Evaluate middle school counseling programs and determine where resources need to be increased to ensure all middle school students have access to college- and career-preparation services.	**Long-Term**

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Recommendation **Three**

Dropout Prevention & Recovery

Sunny Deyé and Lamar Bailey, NCSL
Stephen J. Handel, The College Board

The College Completion Agenda
State
Policy Guide

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

The social and economic costs of students not completing high school are staggering. More than 7,000 students leave school daily, according to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. Annually, that adds up to about 1.3 million students who do not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled. Unfortunately, for students from underserved groups, dropping out is very common. Although the national graduation rate was 69.2 percent for the class of 2006, only about half of African American, Latino and Native American students earned diplomas with their peers.

Students who drop out of school feel the effects the rest of their lives — as does the nation. Dropouts not only earn significantly less over the course of their working lives, but they also cost the nation billions of dollars in uninsured health care, lost tax revenue and crime-related costs. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, dropouts from the class of 2009 alone will cost the nation nearly $335 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes. In 2005, the average annual income was $17,299 for a high school dropout and $26,933 for a high school graduate. In addition, while the unemployment rate for individuals of all education levels has significantly increased since December 2007, high school dropouts face the most difficulty finding a job. In 2009, the Alliance for Excellent Education noted that, "According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts in July 2009 was 15.4 percent, compared to 9.4 percent for high school graduates, 7.9 percent for individuals with some college credits or an associate degree, and 4.7 percent for individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher."

These troubling statistics point to a widespread and systemic problem that requires the intervention of state leaders to promote proven practices to reduce dropout rates. This chapter identifies promising practices that states can use to increase high school graduation rates.

What Legislators Need to Know

Addressing a dropout problem requires having basic data about the extent of the problem and who are most severely affected. Legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the state graduation rate?

- What is the graduation rate for every school district in the state?

- How is the graduation rate calculated?

- What is the graduation rate for various populations (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity)?

- When are students dropping out (e.g., middle school, freshman, sophomore, junior or senior year)?

- What is the effect of high school dropouts on the state's economy?

Research

Research indicates that students who drop out of high school do so because of long-term dissatisfaction with education, sometimes beginning as early as middle school. As a result, legislators have increased efforts to improve the education experience for students from the middle grades through high school and beyond.

Although several policies are aimed at identifying and supporting struggling students — and bringing students who have already dropped out back into the system — another set of policies also aims at improving high school performance overall. Research indicates that high schools can better serve today's students by establishing different ways to graduate. Elements of such alternative routes include the ability to enroll in college-level classes while in high school — often in the form of dual enrollment — and career and technical education that lead to industry certification. Preliminary research indicates that students who start dual enrollment programs are less likely to drop out of high school even if they are considered to be at risk and are more likely to continue their college education at a postsecondary institution and graduate with a degree. Research also indicates that students who participate in high-quality career and technical education programs are less likely to drop out of high school, are more likely to improve their test scores, do better in the workforce and are more apt to pursue postsecondary education.

The most critical policy options revolve around identifying and supporting struggling students, and bringing students who have already dropped out back into the system.

Students need personal attention.

Personalized learning opportunities provide students with an opportunity to plan and prepare for life after high school and to understand how their schoolwork is related to postsecondary and career goals. Personalized learning means designing a blend of courses and experiences that match the needs and interests of each student. It includes mentoring along with an emphasis on career and academic planning.

Most students do not plan well for their futures, so one of the most important elements for middle and high school students is having guidance to take the right courses. According to a 2005 ACT report, *College Readiness Begins in Middle School,* one reason students are not planning properly is that they may not have adequate guidance from their schools. The report recommends that school districts set up a formal program, starting in middle school, to help students develop a college readiness plan.

Identification and support for struggling students is critical.

Years before dropouts actually leave high school, most send warning signals — some as early as sixth grade — that they are having trouble in school. Chronic early absenteeism in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance in first grade math and reading. Absenteeism and student academic struggles in the middle grades also can be found in data that school districts keep on their students.

Schools and districts have another opportunity to identify struggling students in the first year of high school. Research from a large-scale study of Chicago Public Schools found that two indicators — grades and school absences — are especially effective in predicting graduation. For example, almost all students with a "B" average or better at the end of their freshman year graduate, compared to only a quarter of those with a "D" average. Moreover, nearly 90 percent of freshmen who miss less than a week of school per semester graduate, regardless of their eighth-grade test scores. On the other hand, just one week of absence is associated with a much greater likelihood of failure — no matter whether students arrive at high school with top test scores or below average ones.

Dropout recovery programs help out-of-school youth reengage.

As adults, dropouts recognize the importance of a high school diploma. In a 2006 national poll of 16- to 25-year-old dropouts, 81 percent of the poll participants reported that graduating from high school is important to success in life; 74 percent reported that if they were able to relive the experience, they would stay in school; 76 percent said they would definitely or probably reenroll in a high school for people their age, if they could; and 47 percent said that not having a diploma makes it hard to find a good job. Research suggests that the most successful dropout recovery programs are flexible, link to postsecondary education and employment, and provide strong student support.

State Policy Approaches

State lawmakers have been developing policies to reduce the dropout rate and increase student completion rates. Recent legislation on specific interventions and the potential cost is provided below:

Create statewide plans for dropout prevention.

Steps include:
- Gathering local and state data to demonstrate the extent of the problem;
- Analyzing the data to understand when and why students are dropping out, including evaluating transcripts and looking at key transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school; and
- Conducting policy audits, including those relating to attendance, discipline, grading, retention, promotion, the awarding of GEDs and the use of alternative schools, to ensure that current policy is in line with statewide dropout prevention efforts.

Colorado, in 2009, created the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement in the state Department of Education to collaborate with local education providers. The goals are to reduce the student dropout rate and increase the student graduation and completion rates. The office must develop a report of best practices for reducing the dropout rate and increasing student engagement. It will identify school districts with high dropout rates and provide assistance to them.

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Low Cost

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Medium Cost

Help students develop individual learning plans, provide good student mentoring and train counselors on effective dropout prevention techniques.

States are increasingly focusing on dropout prevention in elementary and middle school. Techniques include requiring students to develop long-term education plans and investing in school counselors, adult advocates and mentors.

In 2006, **Georgia** appropriated funds for a graduation coach in each public high school to identify at-risk students and help them keep on track academically before they consider dropping out. In 2007, the legislature expanded the program to include middle schools.

South Carolina in 2005 began requiring career awareness counseling for students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades, during which they identify career interests and abilities. Eighth-grade students select a preferred cluster of study and develop an individual graduation plan in preparation for high school.

In 2007, **New Mexico** provided that, at the end of grades eight through eleven, each student must prepare an interim next-step plan for the course work remaining through high school graduation. Each year's plan must explain any differences from previous interim next-step plans and be signed by the student and the student's parent and the school counselor.

California established the Early Commitment to College Program in 2008. In grades six through nine, it requires schools to provide pupils the opportunity to sign a pledge declaring a commitment to finish high school and prepare for and enroll in, college. The bill also requires participating districts to provide college information and preparation events for pupils.

Identify and support struggling students.

State efforts involve early identification and support for struggling students to help them remain in school and graduate. Options include extending learning opportunities before or after the regular school day, on Saturday, and beyond the regular school year, and ensuring that dual enrollment and career/technical education opportunities are available to help students connect classroom learning with real-world experiences.

Since 2007, **Rhode Island** has required the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to work with school districts that have the lowest high school graduation rates. The goals are to incorporate progressive support and intervention with specific dropout prevention strategies and targeted resources. The department will develop or identify specific methods of targeted intervention for school districts with a dropout rate higher than 15 percent.

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Medium Cost

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High Cost

Louisiana, in 2000, described the circumstances under which certain students may withdraw from school. The state requires an exit interview along with information regarding available training and employment opportunities. It also requires comprehensive coaching for middle school students who are below grade level in reading and math.

In 2008, **Washington** created extended learning opportunities to help students earn a high school diploma. It also provided extended learning and instructional support for English language learners, low-income students, students with learning disabilities and students in grades eleven and twelve who are not on track to graduate. Extended learning opportunities are before or after the regular school day, on Saturday or beyond the regular school year.

Reengage out-of-school youth with dropout recovery programs.

These policies offer a safety net by providing dropouts with another chance to graduate. Options include allowing flexibility in the numbers of hours a day or the number of days a week a student attends classes; raising the maximum age at which a student is eligible for state funding to complete a high school diploma; and adding five- and six-year graduation rates to the four-year graduation rates included in school accountability and funding formulas.

Texas created the Optional Flexible School Day Program in 2006, providing an optional school day for students in grades nine through twelve who are dropouts or at risk of dropping out. The law allows school districts flexibility in the numbers of hours a day or the number of days a week a student attends classes. Also, in 2007, **Texas** authorized school districts to admit anyone between ages 21 and 26 who wants to complete the requirements for a high school diploma. The student's attendance qualifies the school for state funding.

In 2008, **California** added five-year and six-year graduation rates to the four-year graduation rates that are included within the academic performance index of schools and specifies how to calculate the new graduation rates.

Illinois established the Illinois Hope and Opportunity Pathways Through Education Program in 2009. The program will develop a comprehensive system to re-enroll more high school dropouts in programs that will enable them to earn a high school diploma. Programs can include year-round classes, summer school, evening courses and community college courses.

Take Action

1

Conduct a policy audit.
Examine policies relating to attendance, discipline, grading, retention, promotion, the awarding of GEDs and alternative schools to ensure that current policies are in line with statewide dropout prevention efforts.

Short-Term

2

Establish a statewide task force to build political will and develop a set of strategies to address dropouts.
The task force can: (1) highlight the issue (i.e., its costs to the state, school districts and families); (2) identify behaviors and markers of students who are likely to drop out; (3) suggest effective ways to intervene; and (4) develop dropout prevention resources for schools, teachers and parents.

Mid-Term

3

Analyze current data-collection procedures to identify accurate predictors of possible dropouts. Provide this information to policymakers, educators, parents and school counselors.
Determine if the state collects "early warning" data that could help school districts identify students at high risk for dropping out, including those with absences and lower grades.

Mid-Term

4

Work with youth agencies to share their data.
Consider how state policy and funding can encourage accountability among different agencies that serve youth for keeping students on the path toward graduation.

Long-Term

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Recommendation **Four**

Standards & Alignment

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CollegeBoard
Advocacy & Policy Center

The College Completion Agenda
State Policy Guide

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

The United States is being left behind as other nations forge ahead in academic performance. These countries have developed a manageable system of curriculum and assessments that are aligned to rigorous academic standards. Falling behind will have palpable effects on the global competitiveness of the U.S. workforce. One challenge is that our nation's K–12 learning and performance standards are not always aligned to college and career readiness expectations. To be globally competitive, students have to master standards that are benchmarked against those in high-performing nations in all stages of K–12 education, as well as aligned with college and career expectations. For the United States to be economically competitive, the workforce must be globally competitive, and students must be educated to world-class standards.

Content standards are integral components of college and career readiness systems. State standards determine what knowledge and skills students should demonstrate throughout their K–12 education. Although each state has the structure in place to articulate which standards their students should meet, various problems exist across the current state frameworks: a lack of common measures, different definitions of progress, problems associated with students transferring across state lines, different expectations of teacher training, etc. Such problems ultimately hinder students' preparation for college and careers that meet the demands of global competition. Achievement on international assessments indicates disparities between students in other highly competitive nations and U.S. students. An examination of the most recent international comparisons in reading, mathematics and science by the Institute of Education

Sciences[1] demonstrates that U.S. students are below average or showed no gains on several assessments. When there were score increases, they were overshadowed by the gains of other nations.

National comparisons of state standards show improvement, but also show that states have widely varying standards of what they expect their students to be learning.[2] Differences among state standards are widespread in terms of content, rigor, organization and progression. In terms of organization, standards differ in their fundamental overarching structure: Are they based on content, courses or grade levels? Standards across states also have very different approaches in terms of length, language, and the number of discrete concepts and statements included. Some states include only broad conceptual statements, whereas other states are explicit and include details and specificity. For example, some states have up to 100 content standards for just one grade level. Others may have 10 statements for the entire K–12 system. Although No Child Left Behind required all states to set standards, differences are apparent in the level of details, organization and goals. States also differ in how much they support academic standards with curriculum frameworks, assessments and professional development programs centered on the standards. For the United States to be globally competitive, students must be well prepared for college or career after high school. Benchmarks equal to those of high-achieving nations ensure that students are being educated to these levels. The varying frameworks and the dynamic nature of state standards pose challenges to aligning these standards to expectations of college and career readiness and world-class benchmarks.

What Legislators Need to Know

Legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the state's college completion and job attainment rates for high school graduates? What are the college readiness assessment metrics, including benchmarks set by assessments such as the SAT®, ACT, AP®, IB and NAEP to measure college readiness and/or college-level achievement?

- Of those high school graduates who go on to college, what percentage requires remediation before they can begin entry-level course work?

- Are the knowledge and skills valued and required by postsecondary instructors and employers reflected in the state standards?

- How familiar are postsecondary instructors with the state standards? How familiar are high school instructors with college and career readiness expectations and requirements?

- Is a system or forum in place for high school and college teachers to communicate about what is taught in K–12 and what is expected in college to ensure that they are aligned?

- How many high school students are participating in rigorous college-preparatory programs such as Advanced Placement® courses, International Baccalaureate programs and dual-enrollment classes? Are students obtaining college credit for these programs?

- Are high school graduates required to demonstrate college- and career-level skills and knowledge when they graduate?

- Are the content standards, curriculum and assessments at each level in a sequence that prepares students for college or careers when they graduate from high school?

- Does the state assessment and overall accountability system reflect college- and career-ready content standards?

- How do the state's scores on NAEP, state assessments and placement tests such as the SAT or the ACT compare with other states' scores? Has the state compared achievements on international assessments? If so, how do students fare?

- Are there large discrepancies in performance on state assessments among different grades? This can suggest a discrepancy in preparation, gaps in the standards progression between grades, or other disconnects in the K–12 system.

- How does the state's set of standards compare to those of other states?

- How does the state evaluate and set content standards? Are the people who have the necessary expertise and those who are affected by the standards involved in the process?

- Are rigorous standards being taught, tested and demonstrated equally among districts and schools?

Research

What are quality content standards?

There is a growing body of knowledge about what good content standards look like. The American Diploma Project — a network of state leaders focusing on college and career readiness — found two main flaws in high school graduation frameworks: the level of specificity and focus of fundamental middle school skills were not being reached, nor were more complex critical thinking skills being acquired in high school. More is not always better in content standards. College faculty expect more depth in core skills and knowledge than wide but shallow exposure to an entire gamut of standards. International assessments such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) also focus on more depth and less breadth in their testing.

A 2007 Rand Corporation[3] study found that teachers expressed the difficulty of teaching a high volume of material with unclear standards. The goal of high-quality content standards is to avoid teaching the same content inefficiently over several years without students gaining real mastery of the topic.

With these findings in mind, the College Board developed the College Board Standards for College Success™, which outline the knowledge and skills that students need to be prepared Advanced Placement or equivalent college courses. These standards set out a grade-by-grade progression from middle school through high school to prepare all students for college-level work. They also recommend including fewer content topics, but requiring a deeper level of knowledge — similar to the expectations of international assessments.

High school completion does not always mean college and career ready.

Actual course content should match needed real-world knowledge and skills. Concrete differences exist, however, between what colleges and employers expect and what high schools provide. College readiness is not the same as high school competence. College courses tend to move at a quicker pace, focus on different aspects of materials and have different goals. For example, a typical college course requires reading eight to 10 books in the same amount of time that a high school course would require only one or two. Workplaces also have specific requirements such as problem solving, adaptability, complex communication, math and reading skills.[4] Unfortunately, the United States is not measuring up to other high-achieving nations in teaching students valuable skills such as problem solving.[5] Test results show a lack of preparation in high school for the demands of the modern workplace.

Standards are a starting point for reform.

Aligning content standards to curriculum is a necessary first step in ensuring student achievement. Simply having high-quality standards does not necessarily yield higher performance on measurements such as the NAEP. According to Russ Whitehurst, in the most recent edition of "Quality Counts 2010" from Education Week, curriculum is more effective than standards in increasing actual achievement. Rigorous content standards are necessary, however, to guide the development of better curricula. Currently, curriculum is heavily driven by textbooks.[6] Strong content standards, however, should drive curriculum. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in "The State of State Standards 2006" claims that "standards-based reform is still the most promising driver of educational improvement." So, although standards alone will not necessarily lead to higher student achievement, they can be a starting point for other efforts.

Assessments should be aligned to standards.

Assessing the progress of students in obtaining the knowledge for college and careers is also key to raising student achievement. Good assessment should reflect standards for parents, students and teachers. Assessments such as curriculum-based exit exams aligned to rigorous content standards are what set some high-achieving countries apart from others. Currently, the chance that one state's comprehensive test aligns with its own content standards is no more likely than its being aligned with another state's.[7] This disconnect between what the content standards indicate students should learn and what the tests measure is detrimental to the effectiveness of the entire accountability system.

Other efforts complement standards to yield results.

Other elements complement quality content standards to ensure student achievement. One is ensuring that teachers are prepared and supported in teaching the standards. Experts point out that standards do not always explicitly state what students must know by a certain grade level, which makes it impossible for teachers to know what they have to teach and when, in a student's academic career. In addition to developing clearer and more precise standards, creating model lessons along with the standards can help support the teacher. End-of-course testing and curriculum audits also are possibilities to ensure that students are actually learning what they are supposed to in the classrooms.

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State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Organize workgroups to study standards.

State leaders, including legislators, can form a workgroup specifically focused on content standards. Members could be state business leaders, K–12 educators, higher education representatives, content experts, legislators, legislative staff, union leaders and parents. The group could evaluate state standards and assessments. Members and experts can suggest changes to the state standards.

Indiana's state content standards and Core 40 graduation standards are hailed by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation as some of the most rigorous standards in the country. Other states often look to Indiana as a model when reviewing their own standards. When the Indiana legislature formalized the Education Roundtable in 1999 to develop world-class academic standards and align their state test to those standards, it was one of the first steps to developing today's quality state standards.

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Medium Cost

Benchmark state standards to international standards.

State lawmakers can set up a system to compare their students' achievements to international assessments. To address the international competitiveness of the job market, international benchmarks also can be incorporated into the state accountability system. Schools can be rewarded and held responsible not only for bringing students to adequate yearly progress, but also for bringing them to performance levels that are competitive with those of high-achieving nations.

Michigan's review and revision of standards were based on the level of quality set by Achieve Inc. — an organization focused on raising state academic standards — that included rigor, clarity, specificity, focus and progression. Standards of other states and nations were taken into account in the revision process.

Ohio was the first state to study how its education system, including its standards, compared to international benchmarks. Its strategic plan includes benchmarking content standards as an action step and international assessments scores as a measuring metric.

Massachusetts and **Minnesota** both participated in the 2007 TIMSS and Minnesota's standards are internationally benchmarked.

Voluntary Common Core Standards

Common standards could make state-by-state and international comparisons easier. The goal of preparing all students for postsecondary success and globally competitive careers assumes that there are some common standards all states can share. This is part of the premise behind the Common Core State Standards Initiative launched by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. This state-level effort promotes a common set of English language arts and mathematics standards that are validated not only by research and evidence, but also are internationally benchmarked. These standards would incorporate what is emphasized in international assessments like TIMSS and PISA, which focus on depth rather than breadth of knowledge, unlike many existing state standards. Forty-eight states signed onto the initiative to review the K–12 standards that were released in March 2010.

MA

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High Cost

Align assessments, curriculum and professional development to standards.

Once good, specific content standards are in place, curriculum, textbooks, teacher support and assessments can follow. Assessments are particularly important because they measure how well all other components meet the standards. The tests must be aligned with standards at each K–12 level to measure continuous progress and identify learning problems. Flexible assessment systems can include different types of tests — formative, summative and periodic benchmarked assessments — that are aligned to college readiness standards.

California's voluntary Early Assessment Program (EAP) originally was designed to evaluate how ready 11th-graders were to enter California State University. The legislature recently passed a measure allowing community colleges to use the assessment. The goal is to have clear communication about what is expected for college-level work and what will help what will help reduce remediation.

Texas recently passed legislation to elevate the state to the forefront of college and career readiness. Its accountability overhaul specifically requires schools to have college-ready standards for accreditation. It also sets up cutoff scores for college readiness in the English III and Algebra II end-of-course exams that place students into credit-bearing college courses after they graduate.

Massachusetts' Education Reform Act of 1993 established academic standards, along with curriculum frameworks, assessments, accountability measures and teacher certification requirements, that are all aligned. It has some of the best standards in the country. The school accountability measures called for students to pass exit exams tied to content standards in order to graduate. The schools, in turn, receive reports on how each student performs on specific test items, along with links to the relevant curriculum frameworks.

K–12 educators must first be well versed in what it means to prepare their students for college and careers when they leave the classrooms. A discrepancy between what teachers in K–12 believe is important to teach and what really is important in the real world are huge roadblocks in student preparation. If they are held accountable for teaching these standards, educators should have professional development opportunities that focus on defining rigorous content standards and the best way to teach them to students. Specifically, tying teacher training and certification to building, teaching and assessing rigorous standards is essential in developing teacher expertise in new standards. States can provide funding support for curriculum and professional development that targets the college- and career-ready standards.

California's comprehensive content standards are both course- and grade-specific, and they include instructional materials to help teachers.

Take Action

1 Gather the necessary information to begin the conversation about the quality of state standards. This information can include NAEP scores, international comparisons, state assessment data and reports comparing 50-state frameworks conducted by research organizations.

Short-Term

2 Seek evidence of best practices from high-performing countries and states.

Short-Term

3 Convene higher education representatives, high school leaders and subject experts to develop standards for high school exit and college entrance.

Mid-Term

4 Set up ways to periodically compare student achievement in the state to that in other states and countries.

Mid-Term

5 Establish a P–20 council or other efforts to align educational goals from preschool to graduate level if one does not already exist. Be active in the current P–20 council.

Mid-Term

6 Fund and support vertical alignment efforts that ensure learning coherence from one grade to the next at the state and district level.

Long-Term

Notes

1. Institute of Education Sciences, *Special Analysis 2009 International Assessments* (Washington, DC: IES, 2009).

2. Institute of Education Sciences, *The Nation's Report Card — National Assessment of Educational Progress 2009* (Washington, DC: IES, 2010).

3. RAND Corporation, *How Educators in Three States Are Responding to Standards-Based Accountability Under No Child Left Behind* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007).

4. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of State Boards of Education, and Council of Chief State School Officers, *Accelerating the Agenda: Actions to Improve America's High Schools* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2008).

5. National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve Inc., *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2008).

6. Stephen Sawchuck, "Teaching, Curricular Challenges Looming," *Education Week: Quality Counts 2010* (Washington, DC: Editorial Projects in Education, 2010), 17.

7. Andrew J. Porter, quoted in Erik W. Robelen, "Making Standards A Classroom Reality," *Education Week: Quality Counts 2010* (Washington, DC: Editorial Projects in Education, 2010), 21.

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Recommendation **Five**

Educator Quality

Michelle Exstrom and Sara Shelton, NCSL
Helen Santiago, The College Board

**The
College
Completion
Agenda**
State
Policy Guide

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

At a time when the United States is falling behind other countries in student achievement and a skilled labor force is essential for economic competitiveness, state legislators are searching for promising new policy ideas to address teacher and principal quality. State lawmakers know that teaching and leadership are the top two school-related factors influencing student achievement. Although legislators have worked for years to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in schools, many challenges still exist.

Research indicates that as many as 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first three years, and as many as half leave within five years.[1] Many argue that those who stay are not adequately prepared. To exacerbate the situation, a 2009 report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future suggests nearly a third of our educators — teachers and principals — will retire over the next four years.[2] Research also shows that high-quality teachers and principals are not equitably distributed throughout the country's schools, leaving high-need schools without our best and brightest to challenge our most difficult-to-reach students.

To face these mounting challenges, state lawmakers may want to consider adopting a comprehensive educator workforce strategy to ensure that all students achieve success and that the United States remains globally competitive.

What Legislators Need to Know

State policymakers need to understand the specific challenges of their state to find the best policies to support effective teachers and principals. Legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the specific teaching and leadership challenges facing the state?

- How does the state define competencies and characteristics of effective teachers and principals?

- Is the state preparing enough teachers in every subject and grade area in every region? Is the state preparing enough principals, including those who are specifically trained to turn around low-performing schools?

- Are the best and brightest teachers and principals equitably distributed across schools, districts and regions so the neediest students have access to them?

- Are the schools retaining effective teachers and principals? Can the state remove ineffective teachers?

- What are the state's current policies on recruitment, selection, preparation, mentoring, induction, licensure, professional development, evaluation, compensation, incentives, retention and working conditions? What policies need to be changed, added or removed?

- Does the state have a comprehensive data system that can help researchers answer these questions by tying together teacher and principal data with preparation program data and student data?

Research

During the past 20 years, researchers have studied the impact of effective teaching.[3] The difference between effective teaching, versus ineffective teaching, on student learning, is significant.[4] As a result, state policymakers are interested in looking at current research on the effects of good teaching and which policies seem to be specific the most effective.

Research is emerging on the effectiveness of some popular policies to recruit and retain more effective teachers in the classroom. States have created alternative routes to teaching; success varies due largely to varying quality.[5] Many states and local districts also have tried to lure teachers into hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subjects with higher pay and other incentives. Research from Goldhaber and Podgursky shows that the traditional system is broken and outdated, and that more innovative market-based approaches are needed.[6] State surveys by the New Teacher Center and recent research on teacher working conditions also are telling us more about why teachers decide to leave, which policies might create better working conditions and the impact the school principal has on teachers.[7]

Effective school principals influence teaching and learning.

A growing body of evidence supports the notion that effective leadership is key to improving teaching and learning. Landmark research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation in 2004 indicates that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning, especially in high-need schools.[8] The report also found that there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without a strong principal. Consequently, during the past decade, the national conversation has shifted from whether leadership really matters or is worth the investment, to how best to recruit, prepare and support effective principals where they are needed most. Improving leadership has been the major focus of The Wallace Foundation's efforts in education since 2000. The foundation has invested more than $300 million and worked directly with dozens of states, districts and researchers to develop and test ways to improve leadership and share lessons broadly.

State Policy Approaches

Low Cost

Establish statewide standards for teachers and principals.

State policymakers can set rigorous standards for teachers and principals that reflect the knowledge and skills necessary in today's complex school environment and align those standards to preparation, licensure, ongoing professional development and evaluation. Standards can serve as the foundation for building a comprehensive educator development system. Nearly all states have created statewide standards for teachers and principals, and a number have updated their standards in the last several years.

In 2007, for example, **Iowa** established the Administrator Quality Program to develop statewide leadership standards for school administrators, and training programs, professional development and evaluation criteria based on the standards.

Consider career ladders.

State policymakers can create career ladders for teachers, including teacher-leader positions. This gives teachers an incentive to work toward becoming a mentor, curriculum leader, master teacher or toward achieving another teacher-leader position that may include additional compensation.

Georgia, **Illinois** and **Louisiana** offer voluntary teacher-leader endorsements as part of their teacher certification system.

Strengthen preparation programs.

State legislators might consider strengthening preparation programs by adopting rigorous standards; setting and approving preparation program accreditation; evaluating the quality of current preparation programs (both traditional and alternative routes); providing incentives for improvement and repercussions for poor performance; providing ongoing training and support; and creating alternative preparation programs.

States with data systems that connect teachers and principals to student data can use that information to evaluate the effectiveness of preparation programs.

Louisiana is using teacher and student data to evaluate the effectiveness of preparation programs.

Figure 1. Education Career Continuum

| Internship |
| Preparation |
| Recruitment |

Licensure

| Professional Development |
| Mentoring & Induction |

Re-Licensure

| Evaluation & Ongoing Learning |

Aspiring Educator   **Novice**   **Mid & Senior Career**
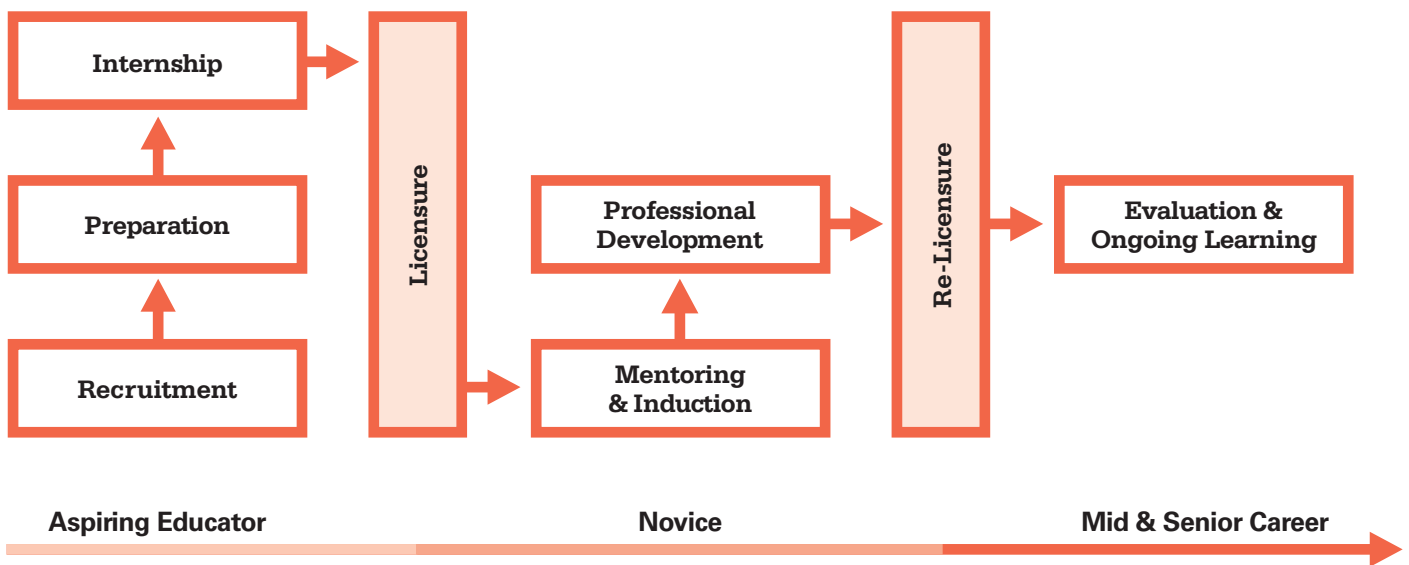
Source: National Association of State Boards of Education, 2009.

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Low Cost

In 2010, **Colorado** enacted legislation to gather data to track the effectiveness of educator training programs.

New Mexico, **Illinois** and **Kentucky** created task forces to recommend steps toward making improvements in school leadership preparation.

Alabama, **Georgia**, **Kentucky**, **Louisiana** and **Iowa** sunset all leadership preparation programs, forcing them to adopt new guidelines in order to reapply for accreditation.

Create university and school district partnerships.

States can help to interest middle and high school students in becoming teachers by connecting teacher preparation programs and nearby school districts.

Illinois and **South Carolina** are trying to increase the number of students who are interested in pursuing a career in education through grow-your-own and teacher cadet programs that provide insight into the nature of the profession and encourage students to attend local university schools of education. In addition, states can help foster university-district partnerships to better prepare school leaders to face real-world problems.

Rethink licensure and certification.

The state's authority to license and certify educators can be important to ensuring that all schools have effective teachers and principals. States can strengthen requirements, consider tiered systems, and create high-quality alternative programs that attract mid-career professionals outside the field of education and prepare them for high-need areas.

All states have some alternative routes for teacher licensure, and **New Mexico** has one of the best-known tiered-licensure systems for teachers, where advanced licensure requires additional professional development, mentoring and evidence of teaching competencies. At least one-quarter of the states have tiered-licensure systems for principals, and more than a quarter have alternative pathways to certify principals.

Grant new autonomy and authority.

States can allow districts to develop policies that give principals significant autonomy and authority, including the ability to remove low-performing teachers and use personnel and other resources to best promote student achievement.

Colorado, **Maine**, **Connecticut**, **Iowa**, **Oklahoma** and **West Virginia** have established processes for creating innovation or empowerment zones to give approved schools greater control over curriculum, personnel, scheduling, budget and delivery of services, in exchange for greater accountability.

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Medium Cost

Target recruitment and retention.

State lawmakers might consider developing recruiting and selection processes that invite more well-qualified teachers and principals with diverse backgrounds to fill vacancies, particularly in high-need schools. For example, states can encourage math and science graduates and professionals to enter the teaching profession with differential compensation, loan forgiveness, bonuses and housing assistance. States can also encourage partnerships between schools of science and math and the school of education at a university to prepare teachers in high-need areas.

Although most states offer some incentives to lure teachers into hard-to-staff subjects or schools, where studied, research indicates that not all of these policies have been effective. State legislators might consider investigating the effectiveness of existing policies and making changes where needed.

The UTEACH program at the University of **Texas** at Austin has a successful model that is being replicated across the country. Several states also have different ways to attract and retain exemplary school leaders.

The **Arkansas** Master School Principal Program, established by the General Assembly in 2003, offers bonuses of up to $25,000 annually for five years to master principals who serve in high-need schools around the state.

Improve working conditions.

States can learn more about working conditions and gain insight into specific needs by surveying both teachers and principals. The quality of teachers' working conditions can be part of principals' evaluations.

In 2002, **North Carolina** policymakers became the first to survey all licensed public school educators about their working conditions to help in recruiting and retaining teachers. In 2008, the state repeated the survey for the fourth time. Educators have consistently pointed to certain factors they need to be successful: supportive school leaders; engaged community and parents; a safe environment; sufficient facilities; enough time to plan and collaborate; high-quality professional development; an atmosphere of trust and respect; effective school improvement teams; and appropriate assignments and workload.

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Medium Cost

Restructure pensions.

Pension plans consume a significant portion of education budgets, yet are often cited as an important benefit to lure and keep educators in the profession. New research shows a growing concern that pension policies may unintentionally challenge, rather than improve, teacher retention largely because of how pensions are structured to accumulate or lose wealth.[9] State legislatures can consider making pension plans more portable to candidates from out of state or across districts. They can also adjust how the pension accumulates wealth to avoid large spikes typical for educators in their 50s and losses as they approach 60.

Revamp evaluations.

State officials may want to revamp teacher and principal evaluations to ensure that they accurately measure their effectiveness. Robust data systems help connect teachers and principals to student data for use in evaluations. States are currently working to revise teacher and principal evaluations to include evidence of student achievement growth.

With the incentive for additional federal funding from the Race to the Top competition, **Delaware**, **Illinois**, **Maryland** and **Michigan** now require data on student growth be a significant factor in the evaluation.

Arizona, **Colorado**, **Louisiana**, **New York**, **Oklahoma**, **Rhode Island**, and **Tennessee** require a specific percentage of the evaluation to be based on student academic growth.

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High Cost

Build data systems to link teachers and principals to student improvement.

Legislators might consider using unique educator identifiers in state education databases to tie teacher and principal data to student data and to preparation programs for evaluation. Fewer than half the states have built statewide longitudinal databases that tie teachers to student data, which allows the states to determine the effect of a particular teacher and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.

Early pioneers include **Florida**, **Louisiana** and **Tennessee.** The data are used to make teacher assignments, tailor instruction, and design meaningful professional development and support.

Colorado, **Illinois** and **New Mexico** include both principals and teachers in their educator identifier, providing the opportunity to study the effectiveness of principal preparation programs, inform professional development and evaluate principals.

Improve mentoring and induction.

States can support teachers and principals with communities of learning, mentoring and induction programs, and meaningful professional development. Mentoring and induction can be an integral component of preparation programs to improve school and student performance and, in some states, can be linked to licensure requirements. Most states have mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, especially for those coming from alternative routes, but their quality and effectiveness vary. About half the states have created mentoring and induction programs to support new principals and administrators during their first few years on the job.[10]

Provide high-quality professional development.

States can ensure that educators receive continuous, job-embedded, high-quality, standards-based professional development, especially in low-performing schools, and they can provide the necessary funding. In some states, professional development is required for licensure or license renewal for administrators, and nearly all states require ongoing professional development for teacher licensing. Roughly half the states have minimum professional development requirements for administrator license renewal.

Grow your own programs.

States have developed unique ways to prepare educators to serve in hard-to-staff schools.

Illinois' Grow Your Own program and **South Carolina**'s Teacher Cadet Program both are successful models. Illinois' program identifies, trains and employs local residents in low-income communities with struggling schools to become

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High Cost

teachers in those communities. Each program under this initiative is organized and run by a consortium of institutions, including at least a teacher preparation university or college, a community-based organization, and a school district. South Carolina's program is part of the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA), a statewide center to meet the state's need for high-quality teachers for every child. No other state has a similarly organized program to build and support its teacher workforce.

Arkansas, **Colorado**, **New Mexico** and **Washington** have created statewide leadership academies to prepare and support effective school leaders.

Revamp compensation.

State lawmakers might restructure teacher and principal compensation to be more competitive and perhaps include one-time or base salary increases for performance and service in high-need areas.

Minnesota is among a few states that have revamped their compensation system during the past decade, with some success. Started in 2005, Q Comp includes performance-based pay, alternative teacher salary structures, high-quality professional development, teacher evaluations and additional career opportunities for teachers. Participating schools are eligible to receive an additional $260 per student from the state. During the 2008-09 school year, the 72 out of 500 school districts and charter schools that participated in Q Comp, were concentrated mainly in large, urban districts.

Alaska, **Ohio**, **South Carolina** and **South Dakota** have secured funding through the federal Teacher Incentive Fund to begin incentive pay for improved student achievement and increased support for both teachers and principals. A new competition for this federal funding will begin July 2010, with grant awards given in September 2010.

In 2007, the **Florida** Legislature created the Merit Award Program, a voluntary performance pay program for teachers and school-based administrators. The merit-pay salary supplements vary by district and range from 5 percent to 10 percent of the school district's average teacher's salary. Teacher and principal evaluations are based on student performance (60 percent) and district-based criteria (40 percent), including the ability to deliver high-quality instruction, maintain collaborative relationships, recruit and retain effective teachers, and manage resources.

In 2008, **Illinois** created a salary incentive program that awards $5,000 annually to certified principals in hard-to-staff schools.

Take Action

1	Perform an audit of current teacher and principal policies and encourage districts to do the same.		**Short-Term**
2	Ask top researchers within the state to give a thorough evaluation of the "state of the state" on teaching and leadership challenges. Also bring in national experts to discuss the latest research, best practices and action in other states.		**Short-Term**
3	Create a statewide effort, blue-ribbon panel or task force to address the quality of teaching and leadership that includes both state and local policymakers and stakeholders.		**Mid-Term**
4	Thoroughly investigate why teachers and principals are staying and leaving, perhaps through a working conditions study.		**Mid-Term**
5	Work with state and local policymakers and stakeholders to make appropriate policy changes, including removing policy barriers.		**Mid-Term**
6	Adopt a comprehensive educator workforce strategy. This includes considering teacher and leadership policy within a larger human capital context.		**Long-Term**

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CollegeBoard
Advocacy & Policy Center

Recommendation **Six**

College Admission

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The College Completion Agenda
State Policy Guide

One
Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two
Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three
Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four
Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five
Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six
Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven
Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight
Keep college affordable

Nine
Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten
Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

The college admission decision-making process — who gets in and who doesn't — is regarded as the prerogative of the institution. It has not been an arena where state or federal authorities have stepped in to monitor or regulate. The exceptions are long-standing policies at public universities that attempt to improve access — for example, California students being guaranteed a place at a community college, a California state university or one of the UC system schools based on tiered eligibility requirements. The Texas Top 10 Percent policy is a more recent example of a legislature determining who should be offered admission to the state's public institutions.

State legislators face several policy issues that influence the admission process and can have significant implications for students' ability to go to college and complete a degree in a timely manner. Student participation patterns are very different than they were a decade ago because more students "swirl" among several institutions and take longer to complete their degrees. Many students are older than the "traditional" student and attend part time. In addition, states are preparing for dramatic demographic changes as illustrated plainly in the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education publication, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity 1992–2022*. Legislators are concerned about a new generation of college students, particularly first-generation and minority students who have traditionally been the least successful at getting to and graduating from higher education institutions. Institution-by-institution admiss ion policies may not support overall state goals to increase access and success for all students.

A significant barrier to a college education is the perception held by many that the actual admission process — securing information about educational opportunities, choosing among options, filing applications, and understanding the selection process and its results — is overly complex and not easy to understand. Within the higher education community, however, there is considerable disagreement about the complexity of the process. There is general acknowledgment that even the most seemingly straightforward, easy-to-navigate process for college administrators is complex for some students and parents.

Competition among institutions for the "best and the brightest" often makes admission unpredictable and disappointing. In addition, decreases in state funding for public institutions create a dual admission process, one for in-state students and one for out-of-state students. This complicates access to state-supported institutions, particularly among in-state, middle-income students who feel squeezed out when space is reserved for low-income students or those who pay full out-of-state tuition. Students who are not admitted to the state institution, and who in previous years or generations almost certainly would have been, are disappointed and complain that the process is complicated and that the institution is not serving its constituents fairly.

Claims of complexity and unfairness cut across all types of colleges and universities. Some flagship state universities have straightforward application processes (a single electronic or paper page), while others rival the most complicated processes found at private colleges.

Over the years, efforts to make the process easier have resulted in the "common application" form. This allows college hopefuls to fill out only one form for hundreds of schools. Individual schools, however, may require additional material from applicants.

What Legislators Need to Know

In order to understand their current admission policies to evaluate potential reforms, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the population growth trends in the state? What are the enrollment demands on state institutions for the next 10 to 20 years?

- What is the typical application process in state institutions? Is there a centralized process?

- Does the state higher education department sponsor a website to help students and families find information and compare institutions?

- What information is available to the public, to students and their families to explain the process? Who provides and updates this information?

- What is the level of state funding provided to state institutions, and is it changing?

- How many of the four-year colleges allow students to submit applications online?

- How many of the four-year colleges use the Common Application, Universal College Application, SuperAPP or the Common Black College Application?

- What percentage of the state's applicants to public institutions use a common application if one is available, and how has this changed over time?

- How many of the state's high school graduates immediately enroll in college?

- What percentage of students transfer from two- to four-year degree programs?

- What is the tuition structure in state institutions for in-state and out-of-state students?

- What are the state's transfer policies between community colleges and universities? Are there common course numbering or other agreements comparing the courses at different universities?

Research

The admission process is complex.

Significant anecdotal evidence exists for the claim that the college admission (and financial aid) process has become overly complicated. However, little credible research has been conducted on the subject to date. The College Board is currently conducting a quantitative research study with precisely this focus. The results will be available in late summer 2010. One collection of essays on the contemporary college admission process suggests that admission has become extremely competitive among the top institutions, and institutions are particularly driven by national and regional rankings in making their selections.[1] Rankings are often based on the test scores of the incoming freshmen and how many applications they receive, not on how well they reach out to underserved populations. A survey of members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling sought to determine how the current economic crisis has affected admission, college budgets and financial aid. Colleges and universities are increasing the number of students who are admitted under early-decision plans and who are more likely to pay full tuition, leaving less space for regular admits and creating larger waiting lists.[2]

Several factors are important in admission decisions.

A report by the National Association for College Admission Counseling polls college admission officers each year to determine what factors are the most important in admission decisions and to determine trends in admission office functions, staff, budgets and operations. The category of "operations," coupled with "important factors," offers insights into institutional policies and practices that drive the admission cycle each year and is often the source of complaints about complexity and lack of transparency.[3]

There is little agreement about secondary school preparation for college admission.

A report by the College Board's Task Force on Admissions in the 21st Century explores 10 significant indicators of the educational health of the country, including admission and financial aid standards and practices.[4] The report asks, "How hard is it for a student to gain admission to a four-year college or university in the United States?" Part of the answer, the report offers, is the surprising notion that there is little agreement by colleges on what they want applicants to have studied in high school. This makes understanding college requirements for admission difficult and illustrates the continued need to align state school standards with a recognized body of courses that, most agree, prepares students for college success. Until we achieve this goal, the admission process will be complex.

Low-income students face additional obstacles.

Another College Board report focuses on the challenges facing low-income students. Some of the problems include the nature of counseling services available to students and the effect of "talent search" programs on encouraging and overcoming the "information deficits" among low-income students. Further complicating the process is the fact that parents may be unfamiliar with college applications, the role community colleges play in providing services to underserved populations, and the lack of research exploring what sorts of financial aid information are most helpful to students and parents.[5] A volume of collected essays on the problems of access to higher education for low-income students suggests that the lack of clarity and transparency in the admission process is a particular barrier to low-income students.[6]

State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Provide and encourage information/outreach.

A powerful but low-cost way to improve acceptance in college among traditionally underserved students is to support outreach programs. Many of these programs already exist, and many postsecondary institutions manage outreach programs in local elementary and secondary schools. The Southern Regional Education Board's Go Alliance is an interstate cooperative that works to increase college awareness and attendance by marketing the benefits of a college education. Go Alliance sends clear messages to students about the importance of graduating from high school, how to get ready for college, and how to overcome common financial and personal barriers. Member states jointly develop and share college marketing materials (such as radio and television spots, research, posters and brochures) as well as ideas about programs that directly reach students.[7]

Improve the complexity/transparency of the admission process.

Complexity is often the result of many factors. In most states there are fewer spots for incoming students at the state flagship universities. Financial aid practices that reduce need-based assistance and increase merit money to compete for the "best and the brightest" cause anxiety on the part of middle-income families. The shift to find more students able to pay full tuition to generate operating revenue leads to accusations that admissions are made not on the merit of a student's record but on the ability to pay — or worse still — admitting lesser qualified students who can pay and denying admission to more able but more needy students. Finally, the increasing number of prospective first-generation and low-income students who lack the resources or experience to understand the process adds to the complexity of the problem.

North Carolina and **Pennsylvania** utilize innovative centralized application processing whereby all applications go to a central place. Students indicate which participating institutions in the system they wish to be considered for and those institutions receive the records. The institutions evaluate the records and then notify the students of the decision.

In **New York**, the SUNY and CUNY systems also use centralized application processing.

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Medium Cost

Adjust admission criteria.

Admission criteria are adjusted to accommodate changes in institutional priorities, increased selectivity, or the desire to improve the institution's rankings, status and prestige. These changes work counter to the desire to serve an increasingly diverse student population. Students who would previously have been admitted are denied, and admission for formerly underserved students becomes even more remote at top institutions.

In **North Carolina**, the Carolina Covenant helps qualified low-income students attend the University of North Carolina and graduate debt-free if they work on campus 10 to 12 hours a week in federal work-study jobs. The University of North Carolina was the first public university in America to launch such an initiative.

In **Virginia**, the AccessUVA program (adopted in the fall of 2004) is designed to increase the number of underrepresented, low-income undergraduate students enrolled at the university.

The **Texas** 10 Percent Plan was created in 1997 in response to a federal appeals court decision known as the *Hopwood* ruling that barred public colleges in Texas from considering race or ethnicity in admission.[8] The plan ensures admission to the University of Texas for the top 10 percent of students in every state high school. As in most states, Texas has many high schools with predominantly black or Latino populations, so this plan ensures that these students can get into a university. The plan has significantly changed the University of Texas's admission authority, and may contribute to a student body that is ultimately less successful in the system.

Retool tuition policy.

Differential tuition can also determine which students are admitted to public institutions — for example, favoring out-of-state students (who pay more) over in-state residents. Similarly, financial aid policies (need based versus merit based; state-sponsored tuition reduction schemes) need to be evaluated in the context of the changing population and the institutional mission.

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Medium Cost

Improve articulation and transfer.

Today, nearly 50 percent of all higher education students in the country today are enrolled in community colleges. But these students face barriers when switching colleges if it is difficult to transfer credits from a community college to a university. Articulation agreements make classes at community colleges and state universities equivalent. This makes it easier for community college students to transfer. Transfer policy is an important tool for supporting student access and success.

Florida has one of the strongest transfer records in the nation. By state law, every community college graduate is considered to have met all general education requirements and is guaranteed admission as a junior to a state university. **North Carolina** has a similar program.

Ohio´s Articulation and Transfer Policy[9] is one of the most comprehensive statewide policies. Adopted by the Board of Regents in 1990 and continually improved by the legislature to ensure flexibility for students, the policy includes a universal course equivalency system and guaranteed admission to state universities by students who complete an associate degree at a technical or community college.

Ensure there is sufficient space in higher education for growing populations.

Legislators may want to consider whether there are enough spaces to meet future demand. With demographic changes cited by WICHE and other changes that occur in the demographics of the nation's college-bound populations, institutions should consider whether they are well positioned to accommodate their current institutional mission with respect to access. Are they flexible enough to change that mission if changing demographics make the current mission unrealistic or unattainable? How do you provide more opportunities for the students now entering the education system in the state and in the nation?

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High Cost

Rethink finance policy.

Legislators can give incentives to institutions to enroll and serve particular students. But budget cuts to higher education can affect how entering classes are selected, which admission standards will be in place, and to which students these standards will apply, as institutions respond to the need to generate adequate operating income.

Link financial aid and admission policies.

Several states have merit-based financial aid programs that also ensure admission to an in-state institution for students who do well in high school. Need-based financial aid helps students afford college but does not guarantee admission. Institutional aid is often used for the most desirable rather than the neediest students. Shrinking need-based financial aid and dramatically increased merit-based awards, especially among public institutions, are creating considerable public (and federal) scrutiny. It is renewing public concern over how resources are moving away from students who are truly needy to more affluent students who are considered meritorious.

The **Georgia** Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) Scholarship was designed to prevent "brain drain" from the state by offering financial assistance to students who meet a 3.0 GPA in core college-preparatory classes or a 3.2 GPA for regular diploma types. Developed in 1993, the merit-based program is financed by the Georgia lottery and rewards academic achievement with a scholarship that covers tuition, fees and books at a state public college or university or up to $3,500 per year for students who attend private colleges or universities in Georgia.

The **Indiana** 21st Century Scholars Program guarantees low- and moderate-income students access to higher education. A student who graduates from high school with a rigorous curriculum, an Indiana High School Diploma and at least a 2.0 GPA, and has stayed out of the criminal justice system is guaranteed four years of financial assistance at a participating state college or university.

Take Action

1	Collect a database of successful policy-driven innovations in admission that have influenced the process.	Short-Term
2	Conduct market survey research with parents and students on their frustrations with the complexity of the admission process.	Short-Term
3	Conduct similar surveys of secondary school and college admission staff.	Short-Term
4	Talk to the admission staff at colleges and universities to better understand their jobs, their challenges and how different state policies affect (both positively and negatively) their process.	Short-Term
5	Learn all you can about state transfer policies and study how policy changes might affect admission.	Mid-Term
6	Inventory state policies that affect admission decisions, such as guaranteed admission programs. Evaluate the effect these policies have on improving access for targeted populations and the consequences for universities.	Mid-Term
7	Conduct a thorough study of state college enrollment trends and the capacity of institutions to accommodate anticipated growth.	Long-Term

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CollegeBoard
Advocacy & Policy Center

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of U.S. states, commonwealths and territories.

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Recommendations **Seven & Eight**

College Affordability & Student Financial Aid

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The College Completion Agenda

State Policy Guide

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

State legislators and their constituents are concerned about the rising cost of attending college and the ability of state, federal and family resources to keep pace. Rising costs are of particular concern to students from lower- and moderate- income families and may dampen their college aspirations. This is occurring at a time when fewer well-paying jobs are available to people with no college education. A statewide commitment to keeping college affordable not only helps more students obtain a postsecondary degree but also supports state economic development.

Most state legislators focus on rising tuition as the primary indicator of college "affordability." But tuition is only part of the picture. Affordability depends on several factors, including living expenses, family income and the availability of financial aid. All these elements together create the total cost of attending college. Although living expenses are incurred whether or not individuals are in school, these expenses (on or off campus) constitute the largest portion of total college costs for many students. Another central issue is the loss of income students may experience when they strive for an appropriate balance between devoting their time to studying, working and managing other family obligations.

Traditionally, the federal government has been the main source of financial aid for low-income students. The Higher Education Act of 1965 created the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant Program, now called the Federal Pell Grant Program, to increase college enrollment by providing low-income undergraduate students with need-based grants. Eligibility for a Pell Grant is based primarily on family income. Funding for the Pell Grant program has increased over the years, but not rapidly enough to keep pace with rising college costs coupled with the growth in the number of eligible recipients. Recently, the individual maximum Pell Grant was increased from $4,850 to $5,350 per academic year, after a period of stagnation between 2002 and 2007.

During the past 10 years, states have put more money into merit-based financial aid. Beginning with the Georgia Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) scholarship program in 1993, merit-based financial aid programs emerged as a popular policy option. Financed by the Georgia Lottery, the HOPE scholarship rewards academic achievement (i.e., maintenance of a 3.0 GPA) with a scholarship that covers tuition, fees and books at in-state public colleges or universities. Following the popularity of the HOPE program, Florida, Tennessee, New Mexico and Louisiana also created large merit aid programs.

Merit aid has been growing proportionately faster than need-based aid. There is considerable evidence that, while the simplicity and assurance of some of the state merit-based programs have a positive effect on college enrollment, aid to low- and moderate-income students has much more impact on students enrolling and graduating than aid distributed to more affluent students.

As college costs increase, so does the reliance on student loans. Without sufficient grant support, students are turning more and more to loans. Students borrowed about $88 billion from federal sources and an additional $12 billion from private sources to help finance their education in 2008-09, according to the College Board.[1] Two out of three college students graduate with debt — the average borrower who graduates from a public four-year college owes about $18,000 in student loans.[2] This figure is closer to $22,000 for a student graduating from a private not-for-profit university. Although many students can repay these loans relatively quickly if they find a good job after graduation, this debt burden creates real hardship for others.

What Legislators Need to Know

To evaluate the state's affordability landscape, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- In the overall state budget, what has happened to the share that goes to higher education? If state appropriations have decreased, do you see different trends in tuition and financial aid?

- What are the current tuitions at state institutions, what are the trends and how do these translate into families' ability to pay?

- What were the trends in tuition, financial aid and appropriations policies during the last decade?

- What percentage of college costs does the state cover versus the student? How has this changed over the last decade?

- What drives tuition increases in the state?

- Who sets the tuition policy in the state? Who oversees the financial aid policy?

- What are the current state need-based aid programs and how many students are (and are not) taking advantage of them?

- What current need- and merit-based programs exist? Who administers these programs?

- Is state policy aligned with federal policy so that students are taking full advantage of federal money (Pell Grants and tax credits)?

- What are the state projections for the number of high school graduates? How many of the graduates immediately go to college and earn a degree? What are the students who do not immediately enter college doing? Do they ever reenter the educational system?

- How long does it take a student to graduate from college?

- What do you know about growth among the 18- to 24-year-old population? Will the state higher education system have the capacity to serve them?

- What is the proportion of in-state versus out-of-state students in the system? Does the state import college students from other states?

- What is the enrollment of adults in the postsecondary system?

- How much of the population growth is due to immigration from other states? Where are these immigrants coming from?

- Is the population of the state getting older or younger?

Research

Overall, states are not doing well at maintaining college affordability.

The annual survey of state higher education policy, "Measuring Up,"[3] flunks almost every state on affordability, arguing that states aren't effectively using available policies to ensure that college tuition remains affordable for the neediest students. Some reasons for this have already been discussed: State appropriations to higher education have not kept pace with increasing enrollments; tuition has increased and grant aid has not kept up.

Decreasing state appropriations contribute to higher tuition.

There is a close relationship between decreases in state appropriations for higher education and increases in tuition.[4] The cost of educating students rose a modest 3 percent between 1998 and 2005 at public research institutions, for example, but the student share of that cost rose 12 percentage points — from 35 percent ($4,602) to 47 percent ($6,328).[5] This increase coincides with the average decrease in the state share through appropriations. Tough state economies and cuts for higher education are responsible in large part for tuition increases. Students are paying more for higher education while states are contributing less.

Investments in affordability return to the state.

The College Board's publication *Education Pays*, illuminates the fact that investing in student success in college is worthwhile for states. We know that education level is associated with higher income and higher tax revenues for the state, greater community service and charitable donations, improved health, and less dependence on the human services and criminal justice systems. Increased levels of educational attainment also significantly improve the prospects of the next generation.

Today's financial aid system is out of sync with today's college students.

State financial aid systems are targeted toward what used to be (but no longer is) the "traditional" student: an 18- to 24-year-old, right out of high school who enrolls in college and finishes within four years. Today's college students, however, often take longer to finish, transfer between institutions and are over age 24. Simplifying the federal financial aid system and coordinating academic classes between two- and four-year institutions will help today's students pay for and complete a credential or a degree.

Merit-based financial aid doesn't necessarily serve the most financially needy students.

During the past decade, states have invested significantly more financial aid in merit-based programs. Research studies indicate that merit programs have helped keep the best and brightest high school students in state. But merit programs disproportionately reward students who most likely can afford and will go to college anyway. Merit aid may erode critical funding for need-based programs.

Many students who are eligible for financial aid don't seek it or obtain it.

According to the American Council on Education, many low- to moderate-income high school graduates are eligible but do not apply for Pell Grants. These students may be unaware of their eligibility or may be intimidated by the federal application process. Outreach programs and simplification can help these students receive the financial aid for which they are eligible.

Money is crucial for success, but money alone is not sufficient.

Students cite the inability to afford college as the most common reason for not attending. Research has found that much of this perception is inaccurate. Students presume they cannot afford college but don't know much about the different kinds of institutions or financial aid. In addition, we know that financial aid alone is not enough to guarantee students' success. Even with sufficient financial assistance, they may not complete their degrees if they are not well prepared for college in the first place and if they do not receive ongoing personal and social support throughout their college experience.

WA

State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Align appropriations, tuition and financial aid policy.

The major elements of higher education financing policy — appropriations, tuition and financial aid — need to be considered together in order to address college affordability. All three are intimately linked; decisions about one directly affect the other two. Typically, however, decisions regarding these policies are made independently. As a result, decisions in the legislature regarding appropriations or financial aid can lead to unintended changes in tuition, or worse — higher education finance policies that work against each other.

Improve student information and outreach.

Many students, especially those who are first-generation college students, are unaware of their potential eligibility for financial aid. States and communities are actively engaged in efforts to reach students with this information. This includes informing students about the FAFSA, helping them complete it and identifying websites that offer financial aid information. College Goal Sunday is a national effort that draws on resources in the community to focus student and family attention on college and the sources of financial aid.

Seek out matching grant programs with local foundations.

The Gates Foundation supports the **Washington** State Achievers program in 16 high schools. Scholarship recipients may receive up to $5,000 per year for college.

In **Colorado**, the Denver Scholarship Foundation provides counseling to high school students to help them enroll in and receive funding for college. The foundation supports counselors who make sure students complete the FAFSA and receive all federal and state grants for which they may be eligible.

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Medium Cost

Help institutions control costs.

Many state officials are working with colleges and universities to support and encourage (but not necessarily mandate) cost control measures. These include supporting joint contracts for certain services, expanding the use of technology, improving administrative efficiency and increasing faculty teaching loads.

Expand work-study programs.

Work-study programs subsidize employment for students on campus and can be a great value for states and institutions by saving on labor costs.

Focus on policies that help students earn their degrees in four years.

Every additional year students spend in a higher education system increases the cost for both the state and the student. So lawmakers are experimenting with policy reforms and incentives that help students complete their degrees in four years. Such policies include requiring rigorous high school preparation, allowing dual and concurrent enrollment options, and providing tuition or other monetary incentives for completing college in four years. Of particular importance is ensuring that there are enough resources to allow students to enroll in all the courses they need to graduate in a timely manner.

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High Cost

Increase and/or target financial aid and other resources.[6]

For most states, it is unlikely there will be significant new money to increase need-based student aid, so legislators have been considering better ways to target financial aid, and to link aid and ensure that it improves students' success in college. States have begun to invest in a new generation of financial aid programs that let students and families know well in advance about resources to attend college and that encourage students to take a rigorous high school curriculum and graduate. Early commitment financial aid programs guarantee college tuition to qualified low-income students in middle school. They are appealing because they help those most in need, reach out early and offer incentives for students to graduate. Students earn the money for college by taking tough courses, staying out of trouble and maintaining a good grade point average.

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High Cost

Offer cash incentives to students.

Virginia has established Two-Year College Transfer grants that provide an additional $1,000 annual incentive for students who have received an associate degree and will enroll in a four-year institution the following year in a shortage field (e.g., science, technology, engineering, mathematics or nursing).

Encourage and reward students for being well prepared for college.

The **Indiana** Twenty-First Century Scholars Program provides academic and college-preparation assistance through high school to low-income middle school students who sign a pledge to complete high school and avoid illegal activities. If a student graduates from high school with a "Core 40" (rigorous curriculum) diploma and at least a 2.0 grade point average, and has stayed out of trouble, he or she is guaranteed four years of financial aid covering all tuition and fees at an in-state public college or university or an equivalent amount at an in-state private institution. The program receives substantial state support — $25.4 million in FY 2007. Forty-nine percent of scholars come from single-parent families, and 32 percent are members of racial and ethnic minorities whose families have a median income of $29,000.[7]

Oklahoma's Promise Scholarship targets low-income students in middle school as well. They agree to take a rigorous high school curriculum, maintain a 2.5 grade point average, maintain good behavior and complete the federal financial aid form (FAFSA). The state provides $54 million in funding.

Minnesota and **Oregon** have developed a "Shared Responsibility Model" of financial assistance that outlines the various responsibilities of the students and their family, the public and philanthropic partners, and the universities — to make college more affordable. This approach combines several components of financial aid policy, requiring students to pay some of the costs, and ensuring that states and students receive available federal and institutional aid. It assumes that all students have a responsibility for investing in postsecondary education, but that low- and moderate-income families need help to reduce the disproportionate burden of the price of a college education.

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High Cost

Provide student loan forgiveness for high-need fields.

Most states have loan forgiveness programs to encourage students to stay in the state and work in their field after graduation, typically in high-need fields such as math and science, teaching, and medical practice in rural communities. For students interested in these fields, this can be a valuable way to make college affordable and give them work experience, and also benefit the state. Some of the programs are at risk, however, because of current economic pressures.

Provide financial aid for adults.

Michigan and **Kentucky** recognize that helping adults complete a college degree is an investment with significant returns. In every state there are thousands of adults age 25 through 54 with some college credit but no degree. Kentucky identifies those people and sends them information about options for returning to college to finish a degree. Michigan provides up to $5,000 for adults to attend two years at a community college.

Provide guaranteed tuition and state savings programs.

Almost all states currently have 529 college savings accounts that help students and families save for college. A 529 plan allows tax-free withdrawals for qualified education expenses. There are two types of plans: prepaid tuition and savings. Prepaid tuition plans (sometimes called guaranteed savings plans) are currently available in 13 states and allow for the prepurchase of tuition based on today's rates. They then are paid out at the future cost when the student is in college.[8]

Increase and target investments in community colleges.

Community colleges play a vital role in the higher education system. They provide opportunities for many traditionally underserved students to obtain certificates and degrees; they help students transfer to four-year institutions; and they serve adult students. They are a good investment for states and for certain students because the average cost of one year at a community college is $2,544, compared to $7,020 for a four-year public institution.[9] Because many students who begin their higher education at a community college do not earn a four-year degree, state policy could focus on improving remedial education and transfer agreements.

Take Action

1 **Set the agenda. Bring legislators together with other higher education policymakers to talk about affordability. Too often, the legislature's agenda for higher education is reactive rather than proactive and deals with individual issues rather than the big picture. Legislators can take the initiative to identify a targeted set of priorities for the year ahead.**

Short-Term

2 **Help bring media and legislative attention to the relationship between affordability, access and success. Sponsor a series of workshops or bring in speakers to talk with state policymakers about these issues.**

Short-Term

3 **Support federal student aid simplification. Be sure that state grant programs and the application processes for these funds do not counteract federal simplification efforts.**

Short-Term

4 **Find reliable ways to measure the impact affordabilityhas on student access, choice and success. Rather than monitor only tuition or "sticker price," pay attention to "net price" — that is, tuition minus financial aid grants. Closely examine family "ability to pay" — the percentage of family income required to cover the net price of college for students at different income levels.**

Mid-Term

5 **Launch a statewide discussion: What responsibility does the state have to students for higher education in today's economy? What portion ought to be covered by the state, the student and the institution? (What's the fair share?)**

Mid-Term

Take Action

6   Target financial aid or incentives on low-income — the most price sensitive — students. Enrollment and success of higher-income students are not significantly affected by moderate increases in price. This will begin with a close examination of current financial aid policies and good data about how the state is using (and not using) various forms of state and federal aid.

Mid-Term

7   Ask your higher education institutions how productive they are. What are they doing to lower costs? Together, consider how state policy can provide incentives for institutions to contain costs while making it possible for more students to complete their degrees.

Mid-Term

8   Sponsor a discussion or series of discussions on merit-based versus need-based aid. Help your colleagues become more aware of the different types of students served and the different public policy goals achieved by both forms of aid. Closely examine the investment the state makes in both types of programs and the number of students who use them.

Mid-Term

9   Examine instability in state funding. Rising tuition and postsecondary unaffordability are the result of various factors. Unstable state funding plays a significant role in the ongoing increase in tuition and creates unexpected and unplanned increases for students and families. Reaching some level of funding stability and creating incentives for higher education funding are two ways legislators can help reduce the rate of tuition increases. This will require a shift in focus from revenues and inputs to costs and quality, which can make operations more efficient and contain — or even reduce — spending.

Mid-Term

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2. Patricia Steele and Sandy Baum, *How Much Are College Students Borrowing?* (Washington, DC: The College Board, 2009).

3. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2008* (San Jose, Calif.: NCPPHE, 2008).

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5. Julie Davis Bell, *Getting What You Pay For: The Nuts and Bolts of the Higher Education Legislative Appropriations Process* (Boulder, CO: WICHE, 2008).

6. As high-cost strategies, the types of programs listed as examples may flourish in strong economic times but are vulnerable to cost-cutting measures when state financial resources decline.

7. Wendy Erisman and Melissa Del Rios, *Creating Change One Step at a Time: Efforts to Improve College Access and Success in Indiana* (Washington, DC: IHEP, 2008).

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CollegeBoard
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College Completion

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The College Completion Agenda
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Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

The United States must educate more of its citizens for an increasingly competitive and complex workplace. Significantly increasing the number of students who earn postsecondary degrees and credentials is not only the cornerstone of several recent national reports issued by the College Board (*Coming to Our Senses*; *Winning the Skills Race*), it is also a central objective of the Obama administration. This increased focus on college completion (not simply college access) is reflected in, for example, the president's goal for the United States to be the world leader in the percentage of citizens who are college graduates by 2020.

College graduates gain significant advantages in today's economy. They are more likely to have better career opportunities, earn higher salaries, and live healthier and longer lives. It is estimated that people with bachelor's degrees earn 61 percent more during their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.[1] Higher earnings translate into higher tax revenues for states and the federal government.

Unfortunately, just a little over half — 56 percent — of students who enroll in four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree within six years. Only 28 percent of associate degree-seeking students earn their degrees within three years.[2] The statistics for students of color are not any better — just 41 percent of black and 47 percent of Hispanic college students attain their bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 59 percent of white students (Figure 1).[3]

Several factors increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of college. Full-time employment, dependent children, weak academic preparation, off-campus residency and college affordability can hurt student retention and graduation rates. Low-income, minority and first-generation students tend to face one or more of these factors. Low-income students, for example, are more likely to work full time during college. This places them at a disadvantage; research shows that working more than 20 hours per week is detrimental to student academic performance.[4]

Poor academic preparation is another reason students do not complete a college degree. Each year, one million students fail college placement tests, and more than one-third of all students enroll in remedial education. At community colleges, 43 percent of students enroll in at least one remedial course to learn what they should have learned in secondary school.[5]

Successful state policies and programs recognize and address the many factors that cause students to drop out of college. Thoughtful policy analysis can track the leading drop-out factors for particular institutions, and for the state as a whole, and can target solutions to those problem areas.

Figure 1. Six-Year Graduation Rates for Four-Year Institutions, by Race
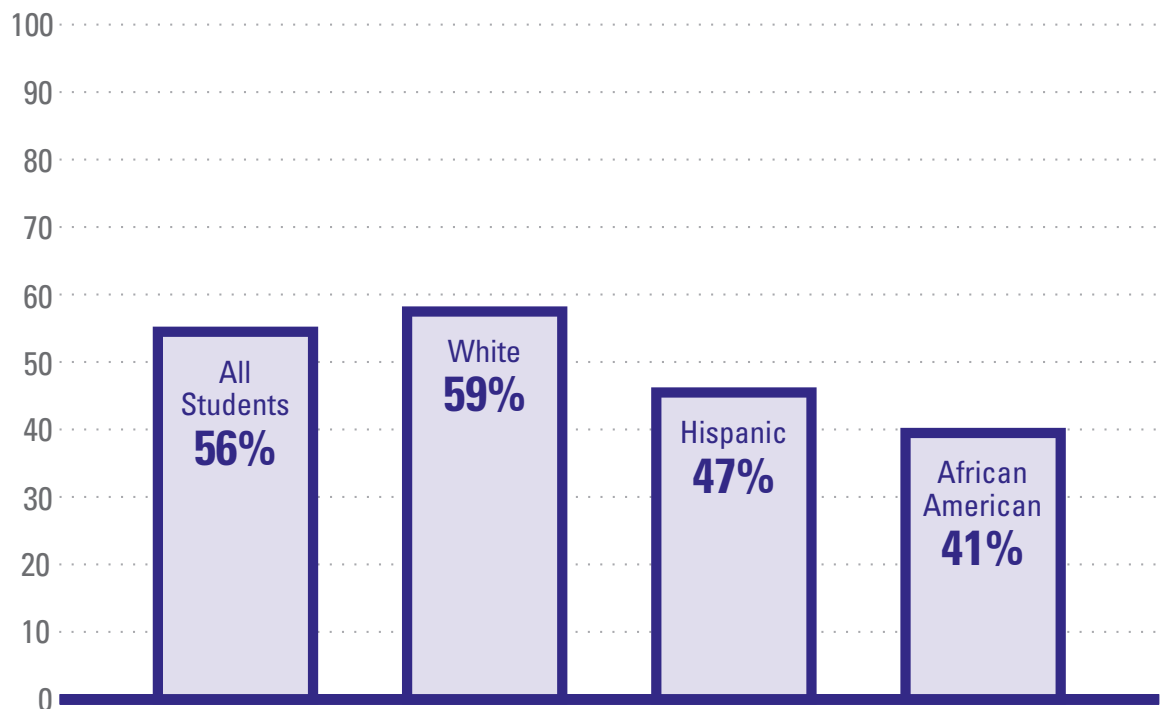
Sources: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2009;
National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008

What Legislators Need to Know

To evaluate the state's college completion performance, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the percentage of adults in the state who have earned an associate degree? A bachelor's degree?

- What are the retention rates at state institutions? Is there a common definition of retention? Often there is not, which makes comparing and analyzing retention rates among institutions difficult.

- What are the college completion rates in the state? How are the completion rates calculated?

- What is the percentage of first-time students who require at least one remedial course? Of those, how many successfully complete the remedial course? What is the success rate in entry-level, first-year college courses for students coming out of remediation? How many of these students complete a degree?

- What are the college retention and completion rates for various categories of students (e.g., by race, gender, ethnicity, age)?

- How long is it taking students to complete their degrees?

- When are students dropping out (e.g., first year, second year)?

- Why are students dropping out? For example, are more students dropping out because of finances or because of remediation? Are students dropping out because of institutional behavior, such as not enough courses or services in the evenings and on weekends? Are students dropping out because they do not feel that their college is a cultural fit? Do all the institutions in the state administer exit surveys to track the reasons students drop out?

- What are the transfer rates between two- and four-year institutions in the state? Currently, transfer data are not collected very well. Can data processes and systems be improved to measure transfer rates accurately?

- What are the transfer rates for students who transfer out of state? Does the state keep track of these students? Are there border institutions where it would be helpful to assess transfer numbers for students coming in and going out of the state?

- What are the transfer and articulation policies in the state? Do they make the transfer process easier for students? Can the policies be improved to better facilitate student transfer?

- What programs and practices are institutions using to increase retention and graduation rates? Are institutions using programs that evidence shows have a high impact on retention and graduation (e.g., research with faculty, service learning and internships)? Are institutions measuring the comparative effectiveness of retention programs and investing in those that are the most effective?

Research

College completion improves if students are academically and socially engaged.

As discussed above, college completion rates are around 56 percent for bachelor's degrees[6] and 28 percent for associate degrees. Most students drop out during their first year of college. The reasons for dropping out vary, but students who are low-income, minority or first-generation are the most likely to drop out.[7] Today's students who do complete their degrees are taking longer to do so than in previous generations.

In the research community, the consensus is that students who are academically and socially engaged during college are more likely to graduate. A student is academically engaged when he or she interacts with faculty and finds learning meaningful. Social engagement refers to participation in campus activities and multiple connections with other students.[8]

High-impact practices can help students.

Research conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that certain institutional policies and practices can have a significant effect on retention and graduation rates. The research identifies "high-impact practices," including service learning, faculty-guided research and internships. These practices increase both social and academic engagement. Students who participate in these activities not only have higher rates of persistence and graduation, but also gain more personally, intellectually and culturally from their education. These positive results apply to all students, but appear to be even more evident in minorities and low-income students. Compared to non-Hispanic students, Hispanic students who participated in "high-impact" activities had better grade point averages, and African American students who participated in "high-impact" activities had higher chances of staying in college than white students.[9]

Redesigning first-year courses can improve student success and cut costs.

Research indicates that students who return for their second year of college have a higher chance of graduating. Sixty percent of low-income and first-generation students who do not complete their college education drop out after their first year.[10] To increase the retention of first-year students, the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) conducted research on redesigning introductory courses to improve student success.

About 25 introductory courses serve one-half of the students at community colleges and one-third of the students at four-year colleges. These 25 courses have high drop-out, failure and withdrawal rates, and the rates can vary dramatically across institutions and institution type. At four-year institutions the

drop-out, failure and withdrawal rates average from 22 percent to 45 percent, while at community colleges the rates average 40 percent to 50 percent, but can be much higher. Since this small number of courses affects such a large proportion of college students, restructuring them to improve student success can have a significant effect on retention and graduation rates.[11]

The National Center for Academic Transformation led a project that redesigned one introductory course at 30 postsecondary institutions. After evaluating the newly designed courses, the center found that 25 of the 30 colleges showed significant improvement in student performance in class, and all 30 cut costs by an average of 37 percent. According to the project report, "Collectively, the 30 redesigned courses affect more than 50,000 students nationwide and produce a savings of $3.1 million in operating expenses each year."[12] Half of the institutions were studied closely to evaluate the effect on low-income and minority students; of those, 90 percent improved student learning.

Articulation policies ease transfer.

Transfer rates between two- and four-year institutions often are not accurately or consistently measured, especially for students who transfer out of state. It is hard to evaluate how states are doing in this matter. Many states have adopted articulation policies to make the transfer process easier. Transfer and articulation policies that ease the process do so by creating a coherent, systemwide procedure for transferring, by establishing a common course numbering system throughout the state's higher education system and by identifying a general education core that is accepted by all institutions. These policies are important and necessary, but there is little research available on how articulation policies affect transfer and graduation rates. The studies that have been conducted indicate that articulation policies in and of themselves are not enough to increase transfer or graduation rates. Other efforts, such as fostering a "transfer-going culture," are needed to improve completion rates.[13]

Institutions can foster transfer-going and receiving cultures.

The movement to create a "college-going culture" within high schools has increased college enrollment rates. This movement focused on increasing academic rigor and college preparation and fostering a belief that all students can achieve a college education. Researchers have taken that model and applied it to colleges. Fostering a "transfer-going culture" can encourage community college students to pursue a bachelor's degree. Four-year institutions need to promote a positive "transfer-receiving culture" that accepts and supports incoming transfer students. As in the high school model, transfer-going and transfer-receiving cultures provide students with the necessary information and resources, offer academic rigor, ensure that all students are supported, and make transfer and completion institutional priorities. This research has been led by the College Board's Stephen Handel, who states that "the transfer policies and practices of community colleges and four-year institutions that link the success of their institutions to student transfer and completion of the baccalaureate degree are more likely to see increases in overall transfer rates."[14]

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State Policy Approaches

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Low Cost

Require regular reporting.

Reporting requirements are one way states can signal to institutions that student retention and success are priorities, and that institutions will be held accountable for results. State laws can require that institutions annually report to the governor and the legislature on enrollment, retention and graduation rates so the state can track and monitor progress.

In **Massachusetts**, public two-year and four-year colleges are required by law to report annually to the governor and the legislature on a variety of higher education performance measures, including student success.

Improve the transfer process between two- and four-year institutions.

Progress from community college enrollment to bachelor's degree attainment is an increasing concern. Many students who make the effort to apply, gain financial aid and attend a two-year college still do not graduate from a four-year college. The reasons for this include the longer hours that students are working, their family demands and the students' inability to pay for their education. Still, one significant barrier to the smooth movement of students through the educational pipeline is the difficulty of transferring from a community college to a four-year college or university. This has the effect of slowing the movement of students, particularly minority students, toward a baccalaureate degree. Policymakers can strengthen the pathway between community colleges and four-year colleges by developing effective state transfer and articulation policy and by providing financial incentives for transfer.

In **Florida** and **North Carolina**, "2 plus 2" articulation agreements guarantee admission with junior standing at state universities to community college graduates who earn an Associate of Arts degree. Florida's statewide articulation agreement, for example, guarantees that the 60 credits students earn as a part of their Associate of Arts degree will transfer to a state university. Students are guaranteed to have met all general education requirements as part of their degree and are admitted as juniors. Most of the independent colleges and universities in Florida recognize the transfer policy. Additionally, Florida has a common course numbering system in place to ease the transfer of students among state institutions. Courses with similar content are given the same number throughout the state college and university system. When students transfer, a course must be credited if the school they transfer to offers that course. North Carolina also has a detailed articulation agreement that includes a 2 plus 2 transfer policy and a common course numbering system.[15]

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Low Cost

"Competency-based" articulation agreements in **South Dakota** and **New York** require community college students to demonstrate that they are academically prepared for upper-level course work. The benefit of this policy is that it monitors academic progress and ensures that students are acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge across all institutions in the state. In South Dakota, community college students must take a proficiency exam before transferring to a four-year institution. Students take the same exam that all students applying for admission to the four-year system take. Students who pass the exam can register for upper-level course work. The City University of New York (CUNY) system also implements a similar program, requiring transfer applicants with fewer than 45 credits to take proficiency exams.[16]

New Jersey's Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (STARS) program covers tuition and fees at state community colleges for students who take rigorous course work in high school and who graduate in the top 15 percent of their class. Students must enroll full time at the community college and graduate on time. Students who maintain a 3.25 grade point average at the community college and wish to transfer to a New Jersey public four-year college or university are eligible for the program's STARS II scholarship, which awards $6,000 to $7,000 per year for tuition. Students must maintain a 3.25 GPA at the four-year institution and earn their bachelor's degree on time to receive the full scholarship.[17] New Jersey created the STARS program to help students afford the large increases in college tuition. The program seeks to increase the number of high school students who earn an associate degree by covering the costs of tuition and fees at community colleges. The program also provides financial incentives for community college students to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree.

Take leadership on student success.

College and university presidents have the power to make student success a priority and to foster a college-completion culture on campus. They can create strategic plans focused on data usage and can assign responsibility throughout the institution for implementing the plan. Strong leaders can coordinate efforts by administrators, faculty and staff to increase student success.

State legislators do not have to relegate all leadership on completion to college presidents, however. Legislators can take leadership to improve college completion by letting institutions know that student retention and success are state priorities and that the institutions will be held accountable for results. A state agenda on college success can send that signal. This agenda identifies priorities, sets goals, and recommends policies and practices to improve college completion. Several legislatures have created task forces that bring together policymakers and higher education stakeholders to articulate state agendas.

In 2007, the **Arkansas** General Assembly passed Act 570, creating the Legislative Task Force on Higher Education Remediation, Retention and Graduation Rates. The task force consisted of the governor, legislative leaders,

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Low Cost

college administrators, faculty and state education board members. It was charged with researching and analyzing Arkansas trends and data on student success, and compiling best practices for decreasing remedial education and increasing student retention and graduation. In 2008, the task force released a report of its findings with a set of recommendations.[18]

The **Illinois** General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution 69 in 2007, which created a Public Agenda Task Force and directed it to study higher education challenges and opportunities. As in Arkansas, the task force consisted of policymakers, state education leaders, and administrators and faculty from postsecondary institutions. It held six formal meetings and conducted regional forums and special briefings. The final report, the *The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success*, lays out the state plan and serves as a guide for policymakers and higher education institutions as they consider policies, priorities and funding. It defines four main goals for Illinois: to increase access to postsecondary education; to make affordability a priority; to increase the number of degree holders in the state; and to use education, research and innovation to meet economic needs.[19]

In **South Carolina**'s FY 2007-08 Appropriations Act, the Higher Education Study Committee was authorized to create a plan to improve the state's higher education system and increase the number of college graduates. To accomplish that task, the study committee developed a project plan involving participants from the education, business and government sectors. The result, a comprehensive report titled *Leveraging Higher Education for a Stronger South Carolina*, includes detailed analysis and recommendations.[20]

The **Tennessee** General Assembly took a different approach in creating a state plan for higher education. The "Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010" (Senate Bill 8 2010 Extraordinary Session) was signed into law on Jan. 27, 2010. The act contains different provisions, one of which requires the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to develop a statewide master plan for public higher education. The master plan will consider input from higher education stakeholders and will address how to improve economic and workforce development, how to increase degree production, and how to promote institutional collaboration and efficiency through mission differentiation. The commission must present recommendations for implementing the master plan to the General Assembly. As part of developing the master plan, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission is required to create an outcomes-based funding formula that rewards institutions for meeting goals set forth by the master plan, such as increased student retention and degree production. The Complete College Tennessee Act also includes other low-cost reforms such as developing a fully transferable 60-credit curriculum, establishing a statewide articulation agreement, requiring remedial education to be taught only at community colleges and establishing a statewide community college system.

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Medium Cost

Ensure state or federal funding for student support services.

Student support services are crucial for improving college completion rates, particularly for low-income, minority and first-generation students. If students receive the information and support they need when they need it, they have a greater chance of attaining a degree. Support services can provide students with help through academic advising, career counseling, mentoring, tutoring and financial aid guidance. Funding student services and programs that demonstrate effectiveness is a way states can support student success.

States can use their own funds or can leverage available federal funds, such as those offered by the TRIO Student Support Services program. The federal TRIO Student Support Services program helps low-income, first-generation and disabled students attain a college degree. Of the students participating in TRIO, two-thirds must be both low-income and first-generation. Institutions of higher education can apply to the Student Support Services program for competitive grants to fund student support projects on campus.

Research indicates that Student Support Services programs have had a positive effect on student retention and persistence. Overall, the 950 programs nationwide serve more than 200,000 students. According to the U.S. Department of Education's analysis of the program, those students are more likely to persist through college and attain a degree than other low-income and first-generation students.[21]

The state-funded Educational Opportunity Programs in **California** and **New York** help low-income, academically disadvantaged youth succeed in college through financial aid and comprehensive student support. Implementation varies by college; some require participants to enroll in summer bridge programs or orientations, while others require a specific course load. Overall, institutions provide Educational Opportunity Program students with individual attention and extensive academic and personal counseling. Nyack College in New York testifies that it has seen noticeable positive effects from the program. Many of the students in its program have become leaders on campus, have made the dean's list and have graduated with honors.

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High Cost

Consider performance-based funding.

Promoting college completion can be done through state higher education funding formulas. For nearly all states, funding for higher education is largely based on student enrollment. This funding formula provides incentives for institutions to enroll students, but provides no compulsion for institutions to graduate students. Several states have modified their higher education funding formula to provide some incentive funding based on performance indicators such as course completion, the number of degrees awarded, or the number of low-income and minority graduates.

Florida has used performance-based funding since 1997 to reward colleges for the number of graduates, particularly the number of graduates with degrees from programs that are in high need. Funding is also allocated to colleges based on efficiency — the time it takes students to earn a degree — and on the transfer rate of students from two- to four-year colleges.

Oklahoma has been rewarding colleges for high retention and graduation rates with funding since 2002. Florida and Oklahoma provide performance-based funding as a small percentage of the overall budget for higher education. Colleges and universities still receive the bulk of their funding based on enrollment. In Oklahoma, for example, performance-based funding averages only $2.2 million a year.

Indiana first implemented incentive funding in 2003, rewarding research universities that receive federal grants. In 2007, Indiana expanded performance funding to provide incentives for institutions to increase degree completion and improve on-time graduation rates and transfer rates. These incentives were provided on top of the base funding that institutions receive, which is tied to enrollment. In 2009, Indiana approved a new formula that begins a shift in the way base funding is allocated. Starting in 2010, 10 percent of the base funding will be allocated according to credit hours completed, and 90 percent according to credit hours enrolled. By 2014, all base funds will be tied to credit hours completed. In addition, the 2009 legislation created new performance measures to reward degree completion by low-income students and to provide funding for noncredit workforce training courses.

Ohio's legislature approved a new funding formula in 2009 that allocates money to colleges and universities based on course and degree completions, with extra funding being provided for at-risk students and students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The funding formula will be implemented over time, and eventually all state colleges and universities will receive funds based on course completion, instead of course enrollment.[22]

Take Action

1	Evaluate transfer, retention and completion rates for the state. How do they compare to other states?	**Short-Term**
2	Know what the transfer and articulation policies are and evaluate whether they can be improved.	**Short-Term**
3	Start a discussion around financial policies that encourage institutions to focus on student success, such as performance-based funding or funding targeted to student support services.	**Short-Term**
4	Form a legislative task force and bring stakeholders together to discuss student success policy options.	**Mid-Term**
5	Reform transfer and articulation policies, if needed.	**Mid-Term**
6	Fully leverage federal funding such as the TRIO programs, which award grants to institutions for student support.	**Mid-Term**
7	Foster a culture within the state that is focused on college completion. The movement to create a "college-going culture" within high schools has increased college enrollment rates. States can focus on creating a "college-completion culture" to encourage students to finish their degrees. This includes fostering a "transfer-going and receiving culture" to support community college students on a path to a bachelor's degree.	**Long-Term**

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Recommendation **Ten**

Adult Education

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Produced in Collaboration with:

NATIONAL CONFERENCE
of STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

Background

A pressing need exists to focus more attention and resources on adult learners. Close to two-thirds of the projected workforce in 2020 have already left elementary and secondary education. Following current trends, by 2025, the United States will fall an expected one million short of the college graduates needed in the workforce.[1] According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States is one of the few countries where younger adults are less educated than older adults. The United States ranks 10th in the percentage of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 with a two- or four-year degree. The Obama administration has set a goal for the nation to regain the top position for percentage of college graduates by 2020. Yet, states cannot attain the educational levels of the best-performing countries unless they focus on the current needs of the adult population who has some or no postsecondary experience.

Part of the problem is that the large, highly educated baby boomer generation will be retiring soon, yet there is an expected drop in the number of American students graduating from college. Producing more college graduates is critical to the economy, and completing college is essential for individual success. The social benefits of an educated citizenry are enormous. These include reducing states' fiscal spending on social welfare programs, lowering incarceration rates, increasing civic engagement and having an educated workforce to fill critical jobs. Currently, only one-third of students in the K–12 system go on to earn a college degree. This is not enough to ensure a workforce capable of competing in the global economy. It is imperative that adults already in or entering the workforce develop the skills and education necessary for the United States to remain internationally competitive.

State policymakers are concerned more than ever about educating adult citizens effectively with limited funds. They also realize that current college graduates make up a small percentage of adults and will not supply the demand for skilled and educated workers. Providing affordable and accessible postsecondary options for adult learners is essential.

In an educational context, adult learners are those age 25 or older who demonstrate needs or behaviors unlike the traditional college student.

Adult learners may have:
• delayed enrollment in postsecondary education;
• attended college part time;
• financial independence from their parents;
• worked full time while enrolled;
• children;
• children but no spouse; or
• not completed high school or obtained a GED.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the nation's 6.8 million adult learners represent about 70 percent of students enrolled in higher education.

The number of adults currently in the postsecondary system who have some college credit but not a degree, who require more or updated education or training, or who have no postsecondary experience at all, varies among states. A significant number of adults have not earned a high school diploma, which often becomes the focus of the public spotlight, to the exclusion of adults currently interested in completing a postsecondary degree. Finding out how many of these adults exist in a state is important to developing policies that help them advance through higher education programs. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provides state policymakers with data that enable them to understand how their states are doing in developing and educating citizens. In *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data*, CAEL teamed with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to provide states with the information needed to assess how well they were serving these adults and to identify where they needed to direct future work.

What Legislators Need to Know

To help guide state policymakers who are interested in meeting the needs of adult learners, legislators may want to seek answers to the following questions:

- What is the condition of the state's economy?

- What are the state's education and workforce demographics?

- Where are the projected shortages for meeting workforce needs?

- What are the highest levels of postsecondary education among the state's adult population? What are the percentages of adults with a postsecondary credential or college degree(s), a high school diploma or a general education diploma (GED)?

- What percentage of the adult population age 25 and older is employed full time?

- What percentage of the college-educated adult population is nearing retirement age?

- What is the inventory of the state's policies and programs for educating adults? Do these programs meet the needs of both individuals and the state? Can programs be merged or eliminated?

- Who is accountable for state oversight of higher education and workforce training?

- What is the degree of coordination and cooperation among various education providers?

- How is adult education funded? Are disparities in funding between the various providers hindering progress?

- Has the state conducted an analysis to compare the cost of supporting and promoting higher education for adults to the economic costs of supporting greater numbers of adults with no postsecondary credentials? Are financial aid and assistance programs available?

- To what extent are educational foundations and nonprofit organizations included in state-focused economic and workforce development strategies? Are businesses that will directly benefit from an improved workforce working in partnership with postsecondary institutions, and are these institutions providing incentives and on-site training to appeal to adult learners' schedules and interests in applied learning?

- Are funding sources for adult education available?

completionagenda.collegeboard.org

Research

There is no quintessential "adult learner."

Adult learners represent many different walks of life and approach educational opportunities at different points in their lifetimes. Unlike many traditional students in both postsecondary and lower education, more outside responsibilities typically compete for adults' time and ability to advance educationally. Adult responsibilities often include taking care of children or others, working full time, or dealing with difficult life situations such as unemployment or divorce. Research finds that adult learners require flexible programs that can be tailored to their life circumstances. The more flexible the education experience, the more likely that adults will be able to participate.[2]

Adult levels of education vary tremendously.

Adult learners have varied levels of educational experience; they may have earned a postsecondary degree or certification, but require new training to meet evolving workforce needs. Others may have dropped out of college and need only incentives or financial aid to complete a degree or certificate. Others may need remedial education to be ready for college. Some adults may need literacy or English language training before they are ready for more advanced education. Research indicates that knowing the educational needs of adults and accounting for their level of knowledge are necessary when designing policies to make the most of strategic investments.

Adult education providers vary tremendously.

Among the many adult education providers, their structure and responsibilities vary across states. Entities that provide workforce development programs reach a large number of adult learners who want to develop or upgrade their skills. *Adult Education in America,* an ETS report, identifies five types of providers: local education agencies, community-based organizations, community colleges, correctional institutions and "other," which includes libraries, human service departments and coalition providers. In addition to these providers, four-year and for-profit postsecondary institutions are increasingly reaching out to adults.

Education costs deter adults.

Research consistently demonstrates that educational costs, whether perceived or real, are a strong deterrent for adults who want to further their education. Adults often are discouraged when they calculate tuition, fees and other expenses. Financial aid policies are targeted at traditional full-time students, and most four-year public colleges and universities do not offer financial support that could serve part-time adult learners. Addressing affordability of education for adults is often the number one recommendation for increasing the number of adults going to college. By reexamining state financial aid programs, resources may be made available for part-time adult students.

Accessibility is an issue.

Getting into and paying tuition for a four-year institution can be challenging for adults. In most states, affordable college opportunities for adult learners are restricted to community and technical colleges, which may indicate that there is a need to study the barriers to transferring to four-year institutions. Needs assessments conducted through current and prospective employers can identify workforce qualifications and the state's projected economic needs. The results can underscore the importance of higher education programs that meet these needs. Some effective, low-cost options for increasing access to postsecondary education can make it easier for adults to navigate the system. These options include clear articulation policies, recognition of prior learning to earn college credit, and the creation of incentives to higher education institutions to develop policies and programs to better serve adult learners.

Awareness of educational and career opportunities is essential.

Many potential adult learners are not aware of the different educational opportunities available to them and do not take advantage of programs that can help improve their skills. They may not be aware of possible career opportunities and the higher earnings associated with advanced education. Some adults are not aware of the support systems that exist to help them prepare and persist in getting a degree. Strategies that include employer support, off-campus learning centers, prior learning assessment and financial aid options improve adult perceptions of higher education. Public awareness and outreach campaigns in several states have shown impressive results at raising adults' awareness of programs and the importance of continuing their education.[3]

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State Policy Approaches

Low Cost

Identify the needs of adult learners.

Adult learners have not consistently been a major focus of state education, but current economic and global realities require a new focus if the U.S. is to remain economically competitive. Millions of Americans are out of work or underemployed, many without a postsecondary credential or degree. This high level of unemployment causes a drop in state revenues from decreased tax receipts and strained budgets because of the increased need for social services. Adults who do not have college degrees need to improve their skills to be attractive to employers, which will increase their bargaining power in the marketplace. State policies that shape adult postsecondary education and workforce training should be analyzed and, where appropriate, strengthened to increase enrollment trends.

Establish low-cost initiatives with partnership funding and program support.

States and higher education systems have been awarded funding to collect data and analyze state policies that shape adult preparation for postsecondary enrollment from organizations such as CAEL, the Lumina Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Achieving the Dream, the American Council on Education (ACE), Jobs for the Future and the College Board. Among the areas for study are state higher education funding formulas, costs, tuition and financial aid, effective outreach, workforce training, and credit and transfer policies. Through partnerships, states can research current adult education policy and services, explore school-to-work transitions and analyze graduation rates. Supporting workforce development partnerships and state-supported internship and apprenticeship programs may provide low-cost options to ensure that local economies have a skilled labor pool that meets existing and future workforce needs. As states look seriously at their adult education strengths and weaknesses, a number of state policy and program strategies may serve as models to encourage action.

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Low Cost

Encourage recognition of prior learning assessment (PLA) for college credit.

Prior learning assessment allows colleges to measure what students have learned out of the classroom. Colleges can award credit and advanced standing to students who demonstrate mastery of a particular subject. These tests reward motivated students from various backgrounds. A recent study conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the Lumina Foundation, *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success*, found that students who earned credit through PLA had better academic results in terms of persistence and the time it took to earn their degree compared to students with no PLA credit. Providing the opportunity for adults to demonstrate college-level subject knowledge and skills acquired from independent and experiential learning is essential for reaching many adult students. Applying prior or experiential learning is a low-cost effective way to help adults reach their educational goals and increase the number of state residents with a postsecondary degree. Credits can be earned using relatively inexpensive assessments for a variety of independent learning, including employer training programs, military training, national examinations and job certifications.

The **Pennsylvania** Prior Learning Assessment Consortium is a group of postsecondary institutions in the commonwealth that have agreed to abide by, fully implement and oversee the Prior Learning Assessment General Guidelines. These were developed by the Department of Education in cooperation with more than 30 higher education institutions, nonprofit groups, and the Department of Labor and Industry. The goal is to proactively advance PLA accessibility, validity and transferability by providing guidance, standards and resources to implement PLA in consistent ways across the commonwealth.

A College Access Challenge Grant enables the University System of **Georgia** (USG) and its partners to target the two-thirds of adult Georgians who do not hold a college degree (www.usg.edu).

The **Colorado** Community College system provides a Student Guide to Prior Learning Assessment (www.cccs.edu/Docs/EdServices/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Handbook.pdf).

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Medium Cost

Design clear articulation and transfer policies.

Credits that do not transfer easily from community colleges or workforce development programs to four-year colleges and universities are a barrier to completing a bachelor's degree. Many states have been developing and using clear and easy-to-interpret articulation systems. They are accomplishing this through prior learning assessment, common course numbering, and policies that provide students with confidence that earned course credits will count toward a four-year degree. These policies cost the state money up front to develop but little to maintain long term. Advancing students from classes they do not need can achieve long-term savings in higher education.

Florida's Statewide Articulation Agreement, established in 1971, is the most comprehensive articulation agreement in the nation. It defines the associate degree as the transfer degree; guarantees that all general education classes will transfer, establishes a consistent statewide course numbering system and common college transcript; creates a transfer guarantee for credit-by-exam; and contains a student bill of rights.

With Lumina funding, **Maryland** will launch an unprecedented statewide effort to redesign entry-level, large lecture or "bottleneck" courses in public and private colleges and universities. The goal is to serve more students at less expense, improve the quality of the learning experience and free resources to add additional courses.

North Dakota's University System Articulation and Transfer policies include: (1) the general education requirements transfer agreement; (2) common course numbering; (3) statewide articulation agreements; and (4) national credit-by-examination policy, as well as strong support for student veterans who have military training and experience.

Promote awareness campaigns.

States can increase the number of adults in postsecondary and workforce development programs with awareness campaigns focused on available higher education opportunities and the economic and social benefits. A growing number of for-profit and corporate universities are willing to offer flexible options that include evening, weekend and online courses, and employer partnership programs with tuition assistance and flexible work hours. States that want to expand higher education opportunities may find some promising, innovative ideas from these institutions. Reaching out to adult populations where the need is highest, identified through demographic analysis, can improve state economic development plans. Potential students can be reached in various ways: public ad campaigns on TV and radio, Internet portals, billboards and community groups.[4]

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Medium Cost

One example is **Kentucky**'s GoHigher campaign which provides an online resource for adult learners with information about paying for college, career opportunities, virtual education and adult education centers.

Louisiana's Continuum for All Louisiana Learners, is a statewide partnership between the Louisiana Board of Regents, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Consortium for Education, Research and Technology of North Louisiana. Its goal is to make it easier for adults to enroll at a Louisiana public college or university and earn a degree or other college credential.

With Lumina funding, **Tennessee** will work with its colleges and universities to establish model programs for re-enrolling and graduating adult students who left college without degrees but earned several credits. It will also revise its funding model and incentive program for public institutions.

Develop career pathways for current or emerging high-demand industries.

Career pathways are defined steps to move efficiently through the educational system and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to enter specific fields and industries. Developing career pathways requires coordination among the K–12, postsecondary and workforce development systems to remove potential roadblocks or wrong turns on the way to gainful employment. Career pathways have been shown to particularly help low-skilled and low-wage adults and out-of-school youth advance to higher levels of education and employment. Career pathways should target state needs and provide incentives for institutions to refine or shorten degree and certificate programs to meet specific industry and individual needs.

Oregon's Pathways to Advancement is focused on growing Oregon's economy by ensuring that its citizens have the skills to compete for family wage jobs. Career Pathways is a key initiative of Oregon's education, workforce development and economic development agenda.

National Career Pathways Network is a membership organization for educators and employers who are involved in advancing career pathways, tech prep and related education reform initiatives. Members include **Arkansas**, **Florida** and **Virginia**.

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High Cost

Reduce duplication in adult education.

A level of duplication in delivering adult education and workforce development services is inevitable because of the many adult education providers in most states. States can study the productivity of the agencies involved and establish objectives and a monitoring plan to identify duplication. Identifying these redundancies is, however, a lot easier than removing or combining activities to create efficiencies. For example, similar workforce development activities may be funded through both federal and state money. Each of the programs likely has its internal culture and client base, so ending one or combining the two may cause disruptions. In this time of extremely stretched state budgets, reducing duplicative activity is important to ensure that state funds are used most effectively. Legislatures can encourage educational institutions and state agencies to combine services or determine how best to competitively place certain activities to gain efficiencies. This can be accomplished by providing an overall state vision for serving adult learners, providing financial incentives to encourage interaction and gradually withdrawing state appropriations for duplicative programs as services become more streamlined.

WorkSource **Oregon** is a statewide network of public and private partners that works with businesses and workers to stimulate job growth by connecting them with the adult training opportunities needed to succeed.[5]

Hawaii's Career and Technical Education Coordinating Advisory Council (CTECAC) is the primary mechanism for coordination and consultation at the policy level. The council's membership includes representatives from the Hawaii Board of Education, the State Board for Career and Technical Education, and the Workforce Development Council, as well as the president of the University of Hawaii and the state superintendent of education. CTECAC meets quarterly to discuss matters relating to the Perkins' legislation and state career and technical activities.

The United Way of **Rhode Island**'s Building Adult and Neighborhood Independence Steering Committee conducted a listening process with policymakers, funders, employers, advocates and nonprofit organizations to identify common ground and potential strategies to align resources and actions around a set of shared core values for a high-performing workforce development system in Rhode Island.

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High Cost

Address affordability and accessibility.

Making college affordable and easy to attend are the most beneficial and important steps states can take to reach adults. These areas are consistently shown to be the most significant roadblocks to improving adult learning.

Policies that target part-time learners and low-income people reach the greatest number of adults. Many adults can attend college only part time because of their schedules, and many low-income people can directly benefit from higher levels of education, but usually cannot afford to pay for it themselves.

States can take several approaches to address affordability and accessibility. First, need-based financial aid programs for part-time learners are crucial. Although not a low-cost solution for many states, adult-focused financial aid can expand the number of adults who earn a degree or certificate. These programs can take various forms — scholarships, grants, specific expenses or tax credits. Opportunities also may exist for working with employers in the state to develop tuition assistance for their employees. States can offer tax credits as an incentive for employer action.

The federal government also provides grants, such as the Pell Grant, to adult learners in undergraduate studies who demonstrate economic need. For the 2009-10 academic year, the maximum Pell Grant increased to $5,350. Prorated Pell Grants also are available for part-time students. To be eligible for Pell Grants, students must complete and submit the FAFSA. Current efforts focus on simplifying the online application since its complexities often discourage applicants.

States can provide incentives for institutions committed to helping adult learners complete their degrees. Many states base institutional funding levels on the number of full-time students enrolled in credit-bearing courses, but do not require accountability for students who do not complete a program. This funding system also provides less money to institutions for serving adults who may be enrolled part time or in workforce development courses that do not count toward a degree. Adjusting formulas will help encourage institutions to make adults a priority. States also can offer institutions financial bonuses for enrolling and graduating more adult learners. These might include changing policies or programs to better serve adults or providing bonus funds for increased numbers of adult students successfully completing postsecondary programs.

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High Cost

Access also can be improved through the use of technology. Many adults may not be able to make it to a campus reliably or consistently because of family or employment schedules or lack of transportation. Institutions — especially private, career-oriented ones — are increasingly turning to online courses to reach those adults who cannot regularly commute to classes.

Technology is also being used in some states, such as **Tennessee**, to improve and accelerate developmental education classes.

Michigan's No Worker Left Behind is Gov. Jennifer Granholm's vision for accelerating the transition of thousands of workers to good-paying jobs. It provides adults up to two years of free tuition at any community college, university or other approved training provider to gain the skills and credentials for new careers in high-demand occupations or emerging industries, or to start a business. The program expands on job training and education services currently available to job seekers through Michigan Works! Service Centers.

Washington's Opportunity Grant helps low-income adults train for high-wage, high-demand careers. These careers provide a beginning wage of $13 per hour.

Texas is revising its funding formula to reward course and degree completion.

Ohio is consolidating "back-office" operations across campuses in an effort to save millions that can be directed to graduating more students and holding down tuition.

Indiana is focusing on a four-year plan for educating and engaging legislators, trustees and local chambers of commerce to sustain the nation's most extensive performance-funding model.

Montana is starting a virtual community college that packages degree programs and workforce training. Montana also will revise its funding formula to reward institutions for student progress and for raising the overall percentage of state residents who are college graduates or have postsecondary credentials.

Arizona intends to create a new student-level funding model that rewards student progress and degree completion.

Take Action

1 Determine the various agencies that conduct adult education and workforce training in the state. How well do they interact?

Short-Term

2 Determine the availability of financial aid/grants/ scholarships for adult learners.

Short-Term

3 Examine state and federal funding streams for adult education. Are they helping to achieve state education and workforce goals?

Short-Term

4 Begin a discussion in the legislature and with relevant state agencies to determine how to reform adult education coordination and financial incentives and benefits.

Short-Term

5 Work in the legislature and with stakeholders to develop a coordinated plan for adult education.

Mid-Term

6 Develop policies to provide financial incentives to adults to engage in education and workforce training, recognizing prior learning assessment.

Mid-Term

7 Make adjustments to adult education appropriations and determine if a dedicated state funding stream is desired and feasible.

Mid-Term

8 Remove duplication in adult education. Work to remove policy and financial barriers that prevent adults from earning degrees and certificates. Develop a state culture where adult education and prior learning assessment are standard elements of the educational system.

Long-Term

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