



**2023 Effective Practices for
Student Success, Retention,
and Completion Report**
Four-year public institutions



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Introduction

Driving Student Success Through Student-Driven Measures

Which student retention practices do public colleges and universities use the most? Which are the most effective? Where are the best opportunities to improve student retention and completion?

RNL polled campus retention leaders to answer these questions. This report collects data from 64 institutions on a wide variety of retention practices.

More opportunities to inform retention strategies with data

Campus retention goals are only as effective as the strategies that support them. Those strategies also need data to inform them and guide decision making. Our poll shows that public colleges and universities are missing an opportunity to collect data that can strengthen retention policies.

93% of respondents set measurable goals for college completion rates.

58% use an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs.

70% leverage statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion.

More opportunities to have an up-to-date retention plan

Achieving your desired retention goals starts with a comprehensive student success plan. While most institutions have a retention plan and retention committees, the majority do not have plans that cover the first four terms.

50% of institutions **have a written retention plan.**

75% **update their plan annually.**

72% of institutions **have a retention/student success committee.**

22% of those committees are **empowered to make decisions** that impact student success.

72% of public institutions **have a position charged with leading retention efforts.**

More opportunities to explore strengthening student success

Our poll results can provide helpful context for conversations about student success at your institution, such as:

- What does student success look like at your institution?
- What gaps exist in your current efforts?
- Do you have a committee in place to execute the plan, and are its members empowered to make decisions and effect change?

Consider using this report to perform an informal audit of your current practices, noting practices that you have in place, and highlighting those that you can consider in your retention efforts.



Talk with our student success experts

Ask for a complimentary consultation with us. Our student success experts work with hundreds of institutions each year on retention strategies and planning, student assessment, early-alert programs, and retention data collection and analysis.

Request at [RNL.com/RetentionSuccess](https://www.rnl.com/RetentionSuccess)

Most Widely Used Strategies and Tactics for Student Success, Retention, and Completion

STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	92%
Advising by professional staff (one-on-one)	89%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	87%
Global experiences/studies abroad	86%

Most Widely Used Programs and Strategies Targeted to Specific Populations to Increase Student Success, Retention, and Completion

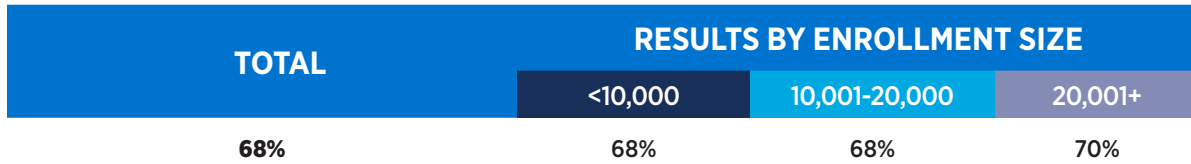
STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	92%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	80%
Programs for student-athletes	74%
Programs for first-generation students	71%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	70%

Management Practices for Optimizing Student Success, Retention, and Completion

STRATEGY/TACTIC	USING
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term to term or year to year	93%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	91%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	90%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	90%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	89%

Technology

Using retention management software to track retention



TOP FUNCTIONALITIES OF THE PLATFORM



Predictive modeling



Appointment scheduling



Assessment of student needs

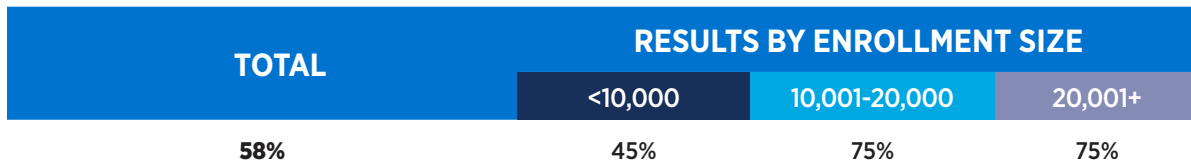


Communications with students

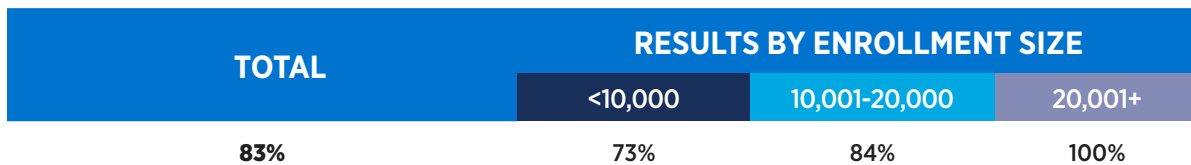


Advising

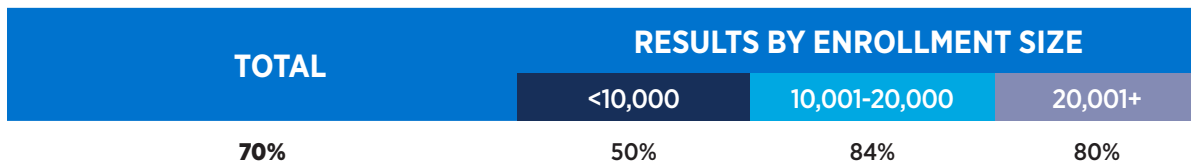
Using incoming student assessment to identify students' needs



Using student satisfaction assessment to make changes to address attrition



Using statistical modeling to assess the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion



New Strategies

STRATEGY	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
HyFlex Courses	34%	36%	20%	71%
Virtual group advising	37%	36%	33%	43%
Virtual career services programs	63%	55%	53%	86%
Virtual faculty advising	26%	27%	33%	0%
Asynchronous tutoring	40%	64%	33%	29%
Virtual student life programs and activities	49%	27%	60%	71%

What Guides Retention Planning Efforts?

Institution has a written plan that guides efforts aimed at student success, retention, and completion

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
50%	38%	60%	54%

Retention plan is updated annually

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
75%	78%	67%	86%

When was the plan last updated if not annually?

UPDATED	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Within the last year	38%	50%	20%	100%
1-2 years ago	50%	50%	60%	0%
3 years or more	13%	0%	20%	0%

Which statement best describes the institution's written plan?

PLAN DESCRIPTION	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
The plan includes retention goals for at least the first four terms and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	38%	33%	47%	29%
The plan has retention goals for the first through the fourth year as well as graduation/completion rate goals and strategies focused primarily on first-year students.	25%	33%	13%	29%
The plan has retention goals for the first through the fourth year, graduation/completion goals, and specific student success strategies aligned with the entire undergraduate experience.	25%	11%	27%	43%
Other	13%	33%	47%	29%

Student Success, Retention, and Completion Committee

Institutions with a committee

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
72%	71%	72%	69%

Which area is the committee chair from?

AREA/DEPARTMENT	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Student affairs staff	7%	0%	11%	11%
Academic affairs staff	22%	29%	22%	11%
Student affairs leadership position	15%	18%	17%	0%
Academic leadership position	15%	6%	11%	44%
This committee has more than one chair from different areas	24%	35%	17%	11%
This committee has more than one chair from the same area	2%	6%	0%	0%
This committee does not have a chair	4%	0%	11%	0%
Other	11%	0%	11%	11%

Role of committee

Respondents who had a committee were asked to choose the best response from the three options below to describe the role of their committee for student success, retention, and completion.

ROLE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
The committee is empowered to make decisions that affect multiple areas of campus.	22%	12%	11%	56%
The committee gathers and shares information that affects multiple areas of campus.	20%	18%	17%	22%
The committee is charged to make recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus.	59%	71%	72%	22%

Chief Retention Officer

Institutions that have a chief retention officer

These respondents indicated their institutions have an individual position charged with leading and coordinating activities for getting results in student success, retention, and completion.

TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
72%	67%	76%	77%

Which office does the chief retention officer report to?

OFFICE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
President	11%	19%	0%	10%
Academic affairs	48%	44%	37%	80%
Student affairs	13%	19%	16%	0%
Enrollment management	20%	13%	32%	10%
Other	9%	6%	16%	0%

What guides your retention planning efforts?

PLAN TYPE	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Institutional strategic plan	28%	42%	20%	23%
Strategic enrollment plan	8%	0%	12%	8%
Both of the above	61%	50%	68%	69%
Neither	3%	8%	0%	0%

Influence of Performance-Based Funding?

Respondents were asked to indicate if their institutions' attention to student success, retention, and/or completion has been influenced by performance-based funding.

ANSWER	TOTAL	RESULTS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE		
		<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Yes, performance-based funding has influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	45%	38%	43%	62%
No, performance-based funding has not influenced us to pay more attention to these areas.	55%	63%	57%	38%

How can you optimize your student success strategies?

Ask for a complimentary retention consultation with an RNL student success expert. We can discuss how you can:

- Optimize your retention planning.
- Predict which students are more likely to be at risk.
- Intervene earlier and connect students to the most appropriate campus resources.
- Realize significant gains in tuition revenue from the students you save.

Request now at RNL.com/RetentionStrategy

Appendices

Programs and strategies targeted to specific populations to increase student success, retention, and completion

Effectiveness by program type (sorted by usage)

PROGRAM	USED	EFFECTIVE		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	92%	77%	100%	100%
Honors programs for academically advanced students	80%	87%	97%	97%
Programs for student-athletes	74%	67%	94%	94%
Programs for first-generation students	71%	82%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	70%	75%	97%	97%
Programs for students with disabilities	68%	94%	94%	94%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	68%	93%	93%	93%
Programs designed specifically for international students	66%	56%	96%	96%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American	60%	54%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	58%	93%	88%	88%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	49%	94%	89%	89%
Programs designed specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community	48%	67%	100%	100%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	48%	85%	94%	94%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	42%	92%	88%	88%
Programs designed specifically for Latinx	38%	56%	87%	87%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	23%	80%	78%	78%
Programs for part-time students	15%	50%	60%	60%

Usage by enrollment size (practices sorted alphabetically)

PROGRAM	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Honors programs for academically advanced students	77%	75%	92%
Programs designed specifically for adult/nontraditional students	22%	46%	62%
Programs designed specifically for Black/African American	36%	72%	77%
Programs designed specifically for first-year students (e.g., orientation for first-year students, a first-year experience program)	91%	92%	100%
Programs designed specifically for international students	50%	71%	85%
Programs designed specifically for Latinx	26%	48%	38%
Programs designed specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community	27%	60%	62%
Programs designed specifically for online learners	41%	46%	69%
Programs designed specifically for second-year students	13%	21%	46%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk academically	61%	68%	85%
Programs designed specifically for students who are at risk for reasons other than academics	36%	48%	77%
Programs designed specifically for transfer students	41%	60%	77%
Programs designed specifically for veterans	55%	64%	100%
Programs for first-generation students	61%	75%	85%
Programs for part-time students	5%	21%	15%
Programs for student-athletes	68%	71%	92%
Programs for students with disabilities	61%	68%	85%

General strategies and tactics for student success, retention, and completion

Effectiveness by program type (sorted by usage)

STRATEGIES	USED	EFFECTIVE		
		ONLINE	TRADITIONAL/ ON CAMPUS	HYBRID
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	87%	96%	81%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	92%	85%	100%	96%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	89%	100%	100%	100%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	87%	94%	92%	95%
Global experiences/studies abroad	86%	35%	90%	53%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	85%	100%	97%	100%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	84%	84%	100%	94%
Student success coaching (internal)	83%	88%	95%	95%
Student life program supporting student success	81%	52%	92%	60%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	81%	61%	94%	76%
Providing opportunities for engagement for residence hall students	80%	29%	97%	64%
Peer mentoring	79%	65%	94%	87%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	78%	85%	75%	67%
Explicit diversity, equity and inclusion strategies	78%	74%	88%	68%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	75%	82%	97%	88%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	75%	43%	94%	69%
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	73%	84%	94%	86%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	72%	100%	100%	100%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	71%	90%	100%	94%
Supplemental Instruction	71%	76%	97%	87%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	71%	68%	88%	73%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	70%	50%	97%	76%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	70%	76%	94%	82%
Learning communities	68%	31%	97%	54%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	68%	83%	96%	92%

General strategies and tactics cont'd

Required developmental education courses	63%	67%	89%	69%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	62%	74%	67%	75%
Summer bridge program	62%	63%	100%	77%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	60%	88%	100%	100%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	58%	61%	88%	75%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	55%	80%	100%	92%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	51%	87%	90%	92%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing, before they leave	50%	59%	63%	50%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	29%	90%	100%	80%
Digital badging	19%	60%	40%	33%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	11%	100%	60%	60%
Digital diaries	2%	0%	100%	0%

Usage by enrollment size (practices sorted alphabetically)

PRACTICE	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Academic support (e.g., learning center, math lab, tutoring)	100%	100%	100%
Advising by professional staff, one-on-one	82%	88%	100%
Advising specifically for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track	64%	67%	92%
Communication plan for recruit-back purposes for students who have left	55%	67%	69%
Congratulating, alerting, and nudging system (early alert system)	86%	88%	92%
Co-requisite courses designed to accelerate the developmental completion pathway	57%	63%	62%
Digital badging	14%	22%	25%
Digital diaries	0%	4%	0%
Explicit diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies	61%	88%	85%
Faculty advising, one-on-one	82%	75%	62%
Financial aid and scholarships aimed at retention for specific populations	57%	79%	62%
Financial literacy programs to assist students and parents with managing their personal finances	35%	71%	69%
Giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g., internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)	73%	92%	92%
Global experiences/studies abroad	83%	84%	100%
Individualized academic recovery plan for students on probation or suspension	70%	64%	85%

Usage by enrollment size cont'd

PRACTICE	<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
Intentional post-enrollment communications at key intervals to impact student retention	70%	72%	77%
Interviews or surveys with students who are withdrawing before they leave	52%	50%	46%
Learning communities	43%	76%	92%
Mandatory first-year experience or extended orientation course	78%	64%	62%
Orientation program targeted to adult students	13%	32%	46%
Orientation program targeted to transfer students	65%	72%	83%
Peer mentoring	78%	76%	92%
Providing career services during students' second year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	55%	48%	73%
Providing career services during students' first year to help students see the connection between coursework and careers	64%	68%	92%
Providing each student with an academic plan/roadmap of courses	86%	84%	85%
Providing guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation	41%	52%	67%
Providing opportunities for engagement for residence hall students	77%	79%	100%
Providing support services specifically designed to address mental health	82%	96%	100%
Required developmental education courses	57%	75%	54%
Student life program supporting student success	78%	80%	85%
Student success coaching (internal)	78%	80%	92%
Student success coaching (outsourced)	9%	8%	23%
Summer bridge program	48%	72%	69%
Supplemental Instruction	57%	68%	100%
Training residence hall staff to recognize at-risk students	64%	75%	100%
Use of social media to engage students post enrollment	71%	79%	85%
Using on-campus student employment as a strategy to engage/retain students	77%	84%	92%

Management practices for optimizing student success, retention, and completion

(sorted by effectiveness)

PRACTICE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	90%	92%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	88%	90%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	84%	88%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	88%	88%
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term to term or year to year	93%	85%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	67%	84%
Tracking rates of academic probation	81%	83%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	68%	83%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	76%	82%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	90%	81%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	82%	81%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	79%	81%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	76%	80%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	91%	79%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	58%	77%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	88%	76%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	83%	75%
Title III or Title V funding	68%	75%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	79%	74%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	83%	73%
Assessing what's important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	89%	72%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	72%	71%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	65%	68%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	77%	68%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	72%	68%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	67%	66%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	67%	66%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	70%	65%

Management practices for optimizing cont'd

PRACTICE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Required training program for adjunct faculty	56%	63%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	79%	61%
Development of faculty skills in advising	74%	60%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	66%	57%

Usage and effectiveness by enrollment size (sorted alphabetically by practice)

PRACTICE	<10,000		10,001-20,000		20,001+	
	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Assessing what is important to your currently enrolled students to help ensure their satisfaction and success	77%	53%	95%	89%	100%	70%
Benchmarking performance against peer institutions (e.g., retention and completion rates)	65%	67%	86%	56%	92%	73%
Building agreement among faculty, staff, and administration regarding retention and college completion concerns	74%	65%	65%	46%	100%	92%
Development of faculty skills in advising	65%	53%	80%	63%	75%	67%
Development of faculty skills in instruction	83%	63%	85%	71%	100%	100%
Development of faculty skills in student engagement	61%	57%	60%	58%	92%	82%
Faculty mentor program to strengthen the skills of new, continuing, or adjunct faculty	57%	54%	60%	75%	83%	80%
Identifying courses that are more difficult or less difficult to complete	87%	75%	90%	95%	83%	100%
Identifying courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates	86%	68%	95%	89%	90%	78%
Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching of undergraduates and undergraduate learning	74%	88%	85%	71%	92%	82%
Monitoring student usage of academic support services	87%	85%	81%	100%	100%	83%
Required training program for adjunct faculty	43%	60%	60%	58%	67%	63%
Research into what attracted and convinced students to enroll in order to keep promises and understand expectations	55%	58%	68%	54%	80%	63%
Reviewing course sequences within academic programs to address attrition	59%	77%	79%	60%	80%	63%
Setting measurable goals for college completion rates	83%	89%	95%	90%	92%	100%
Setting measurable goals for credit hours or courses completed	61%	79%	86%	89%	83%	70%

Usage and effectiveness by enrollment size cont'd

PRACTICE	<10,000		10,001-20,000		20,001+	
	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE	USED	EFFECTIVE
Setting measurable goals to improve the retention rate from term-to-term or year-to-year	87%	70%	100%	90%	92%	100%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an incoming student persisting to degree completion	50%	64%	84%	69%	80%	50%
Title III or Title V funding	73%	75%	68%	77%	60%	67%
Tracking credit hours attempted versus completed for each term	78%	72%	86%	78%	83%	70%
Tracking persistence and progression patterns, term by term, for all students who matriculate	78%	78%	86%	89%	92%	100%
Tracking rates of academic probation	74%	76%	86%	83%	83%	90%
Tracking retention rates for specific academic programs	83%	68%	100%	81%	83%	100%
Training in professional service skills for front-line staff, new employees, or student employees to make the campus atmosphere student-centered	68%	67%	89%	88%	80%	88%
Using a Learning Management System (LMS) to monitor academic progress and identify at-risk students	57%	85%	70%	71%	75%	100%
Using an incoming student assessment to identify students' needs	45%	80%	63%	75%	80%	75%
Using established communication procedures to regularly communicate persistence, retention, and completion rate data throughout the campus	73%	69%	79%	80%	90%	78%
Using retention data to shape recruitment strategies	70%	81%	76%	75%	83%	80%
Using retention software to help track and manage student retention	68%	73%	68%	92%	70%	86%
Using student engagement data to make changes to the ways faculty and staff interact with students to address attrition	57%	69%	60%	67%	100%	67%
Using student life evaluations to make changes to student life programs and services to address attrition	64%	71%	74%	64%	90%	78%
Using student satisfaction assessment data to make changes to address attrition	73%	69%	84%	81%	100%	70%

About this study

Source of data and methodology

Data in this report reflect responses from **64** four-year public institutions that collectively enroll approximately **718,149** undergraduate students (according to data reported to IPEDS). Respondents participated in the RNL national electronic poll of “Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion” between **January 17 and March 4, 2023**. The poll was emailed to student affairs, academic affairs, and retention officers at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness **options that were given to respondents: “very effective,” “somewhat effective,” and “minimally effective,”** rather than including the fourth response, “practice not used.”

Institution distribution by size (total undergraduate enrollment taken from IPEDS)

<10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001+
39%	40%	21%



About RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. More than 1,500 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations rely on RNL for advanced analytics, personalized engagement, and industry-leading insights to achieve their missions. The firm is distinguished by its powerful portfolio of solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right college or university, graduate on time, secure their first job, and give back to support the next generation. RNL conferences, research reports, papers, and articles help clients stay on top of current trends.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

RNL offers a full suite of solutions to increase student outcomes, including:

- Early-alert assessment instruments
 - Student satisfaction and priorities assessments
 - Student retention planning
 - Yield and engagement to prevent stop-outs
 - Predictive analytics for student retention
-



Visit RuffaloNL.com/StudentSuccess

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Call **800.876.1117**

How to cite this report

RNL (2023). *2023 Effective Practices for Student Success, Retention, and Completion Report: Four-Year Public Institutions*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

Retrieved from RuffaloNL.com/RetentionPractices.

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