



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# COLLEGE COMPLETION TOOL KIT





# **College Completion Tool Kit**

United States Department of Education  
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**U.S. Department of Education**

Arne Duncan

*Secretary of Education*

March 2011

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This publication is available at the Department's website at <http://www.ed.gov/college-completion/governing-win>

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## Governing to Win

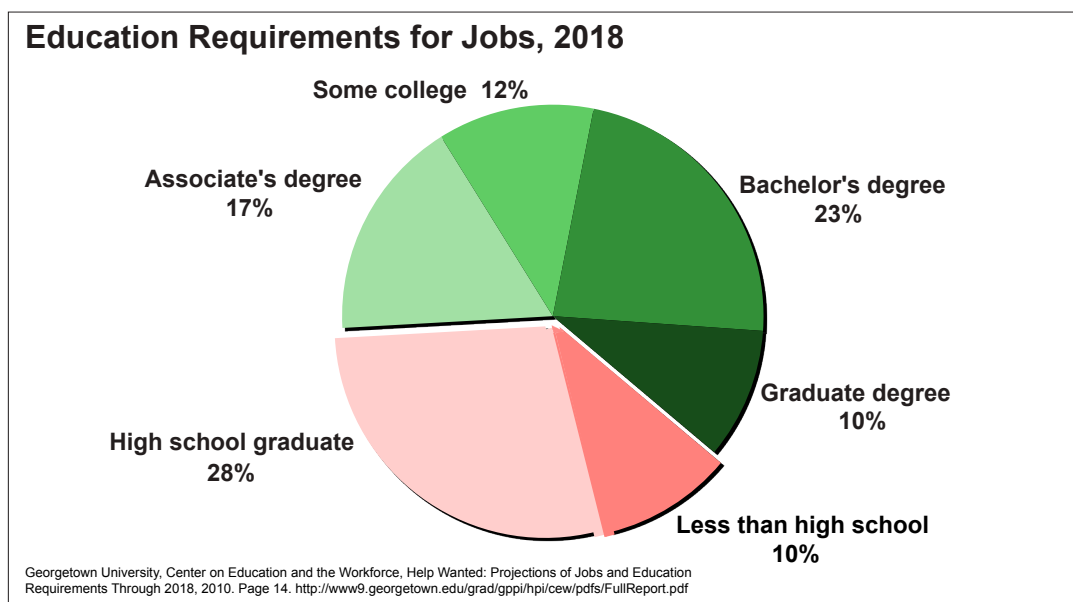
### Leading the College Completion Agenda

#### Promising State and Local Practices and U.S. Department of Education Resources That Can Support Them

The days of being able to rely on high school graduates to provide economic stability and vitality are over. More than half of all new jobs in the next decade will require a postsecondary certificate or degree. Accordingly, boosting the number of college graduates should be a central goal in every state's workforce and economic development plan. Raising college completion *rates* should be a central part of the strategy for reaching that goal.

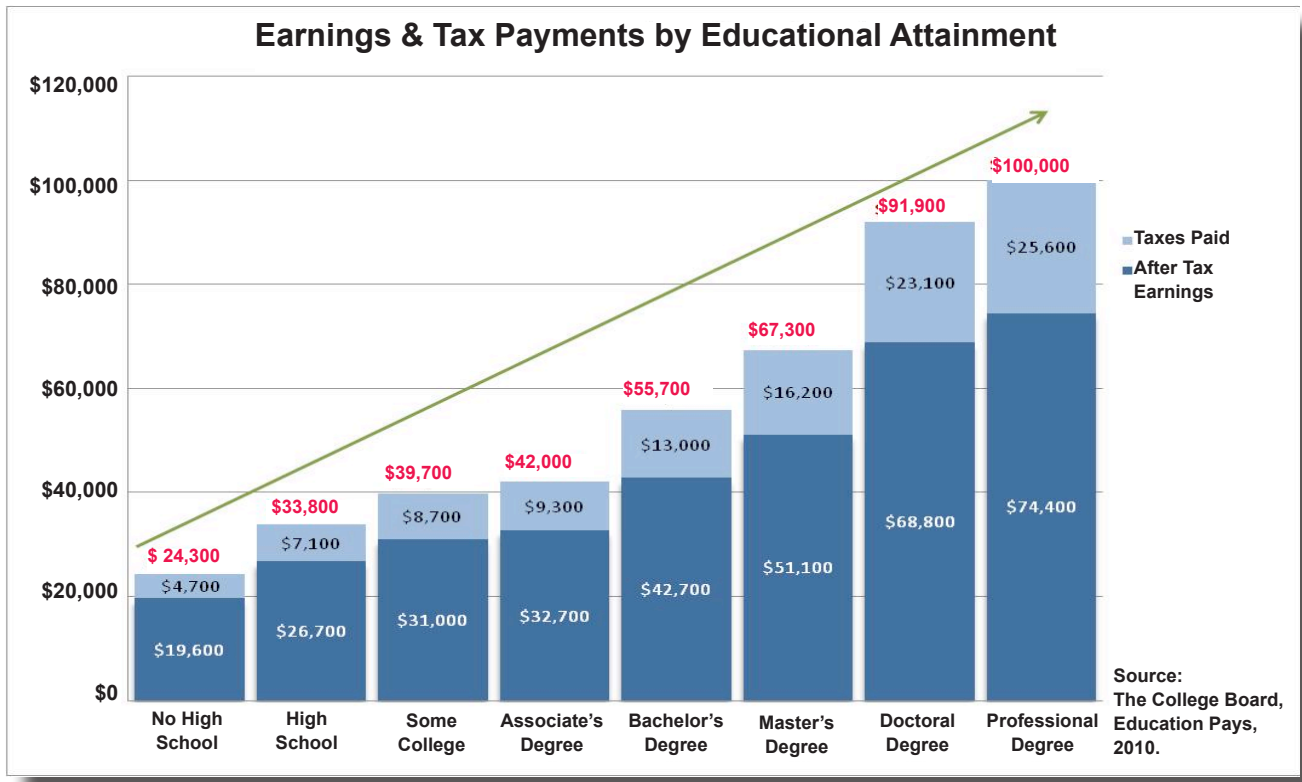
In the coming decade, individuals with professional certificates and postsecondary education degrees at the associate, bachelor's, and graduate levels are projected to continue to experience higher levels of employment and wage growth than those without.

Benefits will accrue not only to individuals but also to businesses in the form of higher earnings and to state, federal, and local governments in the form of increased tax revenue. Each four-year college graduate generates, on average, \$5,900 more per year in state, federal, and local tax revenue than each high school graduate. Over a lifetime, each generates, on average, \$177,000 more in tax revenue



The best jobs and fastest growing firms, whether in biosciences, technology, manufacturing, trade, or entertainment, will gravitate to communities, regions, and states with a highly qualified workforce.

than those with only a high school degree. For a state like Mississippi, increasing its bachelor's degree attainment level by 10 percent would mean over \$200 million dollars in additional tax revenue each year. In short, there is an economic imperative for states to increase the number of high school and college graduates over the next 10 years.



Recognizing job growth and earnings trends, nearly three-quarters of today's young adults pursue some form of postsecondary education. But fewer than half of those who begin postsecondary training earn a certificate or degree within six years of initial enrollment. Causes include poor academic and skill preparation in middle and high school, inadequate financial support, inattention to the college dropout problem on too many campuses, and structural deficiencies with various transition points in our education system.

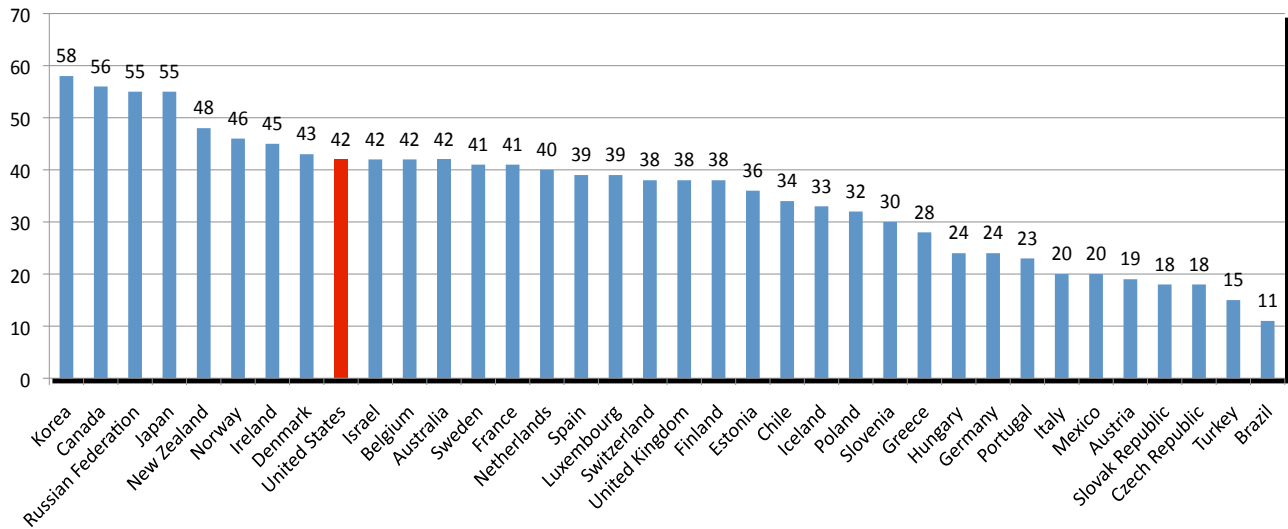
The good news is that many institutions of higher education are increasing college completion rates without increasing their budgets. Higher levels of

certificate and degree attainment can be achieved by directing current resources toward promising practices to increase postsecondary education persistence and completion. There are various governmental and nongovernmental resources from which governors, campus leaders, and state officials can draw. This tool kit highlights key strategies for governors and others to consider, models to learn from, and financial and nonfinancial resources that might be helpful.

A number of states are leading efforts to help the nation as a whole regain its world leadership in college completion and attainment. The federal government can provide a supporting role to accelerate and expand on that state-led work.



### Percentage of Adults Age 25-34 with Tertiary Education



OECD Education at a Glance 2010  
 Table A1.3a - Population with Tertiary Education 2008  
 (Associate Degree or Higher in U.S., per 2008 Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau)

Should a governor choose to champion college completion, he or she, along with state education and economic leaders, will determine strategies, action plans, and new policies needed to increase college completion. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his leadership team stand ready to support “State College Completion Summits” led by governors who commit to a completion agenda supportive of our national goal to increase

by 50 percent the number of Americans with a postsecondary certificate, credential, or degree by 2020. The U.S. Department of Education will provide technical assistance, target available resources to assist states in their college completion efforts, and report by January 1, 2012, where states stand in terms of college completion goals, numeric objectives, plans, and early achievements.

## Strategies for Governors to Consider

- 1: Set Goals; Develop an Action Plan
- 2: Embrace Performance-Based Funding
- 3: Align High School Standards with College Entrance and Placement Standards
- 4: Make it Easier for Students to Transfer
- 5: Use Data to Drive Decision Making
- 6: Accelerate Learning and Reduce Costs
- 7: Target Adults, especially those with “Some College, but No Degree”

There are a number of low-cost structural and state policy improvements that can markedly increase college completion levels. While these strategies do not require large financial investments, they do require new ways of doing business and leadership that inspires new levels of collaboration among various stakeholders.

### Strategy 1: Set College Completion Goals; Develop an Action Plan

**Why?** Setting high profile, quantifiable, and annual postsecondary education completion goals for your state and each institution of higher education in your state focuses state policymakers and institution leaders on increasing attainment levels. Large education funders, including foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor are now making college completion efforts a priority in their grant making. A prerequisite for awards often is goal setting for states and institutions of higher education within states, as appropriate.

**How?** Twenty-four states have partnered with Complete College America, an independent nonprofit organization, which helps states establish short- and long-term college completion goals and accompanying performance indicators. Some states, such as West Virginia, have worked with the National Governors Association (NGA) and Complete College America to establish goals not just for their state, but also for each institution of higher education within their state. At their best, these goals: (i) are year-by-year; (ii) are disaggregated for subgroups, including racial and ethnic minorities, nontraditional adult learners, and low-income students (as evidenced by the receipt of a Federal Pell Grant); and (iii) emphasize closing the “attainment gap” among target populations.

Governors should consider utilizing or forming P-20 councils that involve early education, K-12 education, higher education, adult education, workforce training, and business leaders to develop *state* completion goals *and* associated *state* action plans. Several states, including Rhode Island and Washington State, are viewed as having model P-20 councils. State action plans to meet short- and long-term college completion goals can be created by any number of state entities, including solely the governor’s office, but broadly constructed P-16 or P-20 councils can serve as a vehicle to ensure that state action plans are comprehensive and make full use of multiple resource streams.

In general, governors also can exert greater influence than they traditionally have over *individual* college goal-setting and related individual institution of higher education action plans through explicit use of their role in appointing or recommending for appointment both system and institution of higher education leaders. In the past, appointed institution of higher education leaders and their executive officers have prioritized enrollment and resources over student completion. In making appointments and reappointments, however, governors can demand a commitment to statewide and individual institution college completion goals, insist that individual institution action plans be created, and condition reappointment on progress in meeting system goals. Governors could go even further and simultaneously demand that institution leaders conduct an evaluation of the rigor of their courses and programs as they relate to labor market outcomes to ensure quality is maintained as degree output increases. Completion growth should not come at the expense of quality.



Later this year, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of the Under Secretary will post online: current postsecondary attainment numbers and rates for each state, sample college completion targets, and leading state college completion plans. The NGA Center for Best Practices offers specific progress and outcome metrics for states and institutions, which include tracking the number of degrees and certificates awarded statewide and by institution of higher education, graduation rates, successful transfer rates, and time and

credits needed toward a degree. Most of these data are currently available through the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).



U.S. Department of Education staff can suggest ways to make strategic use of state-level set-aside funds associated with Title I and Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). States can use those funds to create discretionary initiatives that link workforce training and education. Wisconsin, for example, uses its adult education discretionary funds to carry out a Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) program that grants literacy-deficient adult students, including recent legal immigrants who have advanced training in their native languages, with college-level credit for combined academic, English, and occupational skills training. Michigan's "No Worker Left Behind" program uses WIA and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) funds to offer scholarships to adults seeking degrees in high-demand fields.

For a relatively small investment, governors or local foundations also can aid individual colleges in carrying out institution-specific action plans. States and others, for example, can provide aid for grant-writing assistance to under-resourced institutions of higher education, including most community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, to assist them in applying for federal and non-federal competitive grant awards directed at promoting college completion.



Regardless, governors should consider encouraging all colleges within their states to compete for some \$300 million in higher education funds made available through the U.S. Department of Education's Student Support Services program. Student Support Services is one of the federal government's largest TRIO programs designed to advance college access and success. Over 900 new awards are provided every five years to institutions of higher education that supply low-income postsecondary students with assistance in applying for financial aid, choosing courses, and obtaining academic tutoring among other access and completion promotion services.

**Strategy 2: Embrace Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education Based on Progress Toward Completion and Other Quality Goals**

**Why?** Currently, most state higher education funding formulas reward institutions based on student enrollment, not college completion. Institutions of higher education thus are implicitly rewarded for turnover, as large freshman and remedial level courses tend to cost less per pupil to deliver than smaller, more advanced-level courses required for completion. Different financial incentives, however, in state funding formulas are likely to prompt actions by individual institutions to increase college completion. Appropriately implemented, outcome-based formulas take into consideration the needs of institutions providing support so that those serving the

most vulnerable populations have adequate resources to meet student needs.

**How?** Washington State, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, Texas, and other states have revised their higher education funding formulas to consider, in addition to enrollment, performance measures, such as institutional achievement judged against:

- *General outcome indicators*, including levels of and improvement in the numbers and percentages of certificates and degrees conferred.<sup>1</sup>
- *Subgroup outcome indicators*, including levels of and improvement in the numbers and percentages of certificates and degrees conferred to Pell Grant recipients, adult students, minority students, and students who enter with low skills, as well as levels of and progress in closing attainment gaps between these groups and their peers.
- *High-need subject outcome indicators*, including levels of and improvement in the numbers and percentages of certificates and degrees conferred in priority fields, such as mathematics, science, engineering, and nursing.
- *Progress indicators*, including an institution's number and percentage of students who: transfer successfully, transition successfully from developmental (i.e. remedial) to college-level course enrollment, and complete their certificate or degree programs on time.

<sup>1</sup> The United States Department of Education has suggested additional outcome measures for which higher education programs could be held accountable, including student earnings relative to educational debt. See <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/proprule/2010-3/072610a.pdf>.

Financial incentives linked to these types of performance measures, embedded in state higher education funding formulas, should drive institutions of higher education to: (i) develop and implement aggressive outreach strategies to reengage adult students who have received some college training short of certificate or degree attainment but dropped out (such as efforts in Nevada, Texas, and West Virginia); (ii) restructure remedial education to meet individual student needs successfully (such as efforts involving Tennessee’s Tech Centers and Washington State’s Community & Technical College System); and (iii) restructure postsecondary education delivery to ensure that students complete their degrees in a timely manner (such as efforts in Hawaii, Minnesota, Montana, and Ohio).

When appropriately implemented, performance-based formulas consider the needs of institutions and provide heightened support to those serving the most disadvantaged populations. This approach of providing funding where it is needed most, coupled with heightened institutional responsibility for student progress and eventual completion, promises to create a fairer, more efficient, and more productive system of state higher education financing that supports student success.

## Tennessee: A Comprehensive Approach to Increasing College Completion

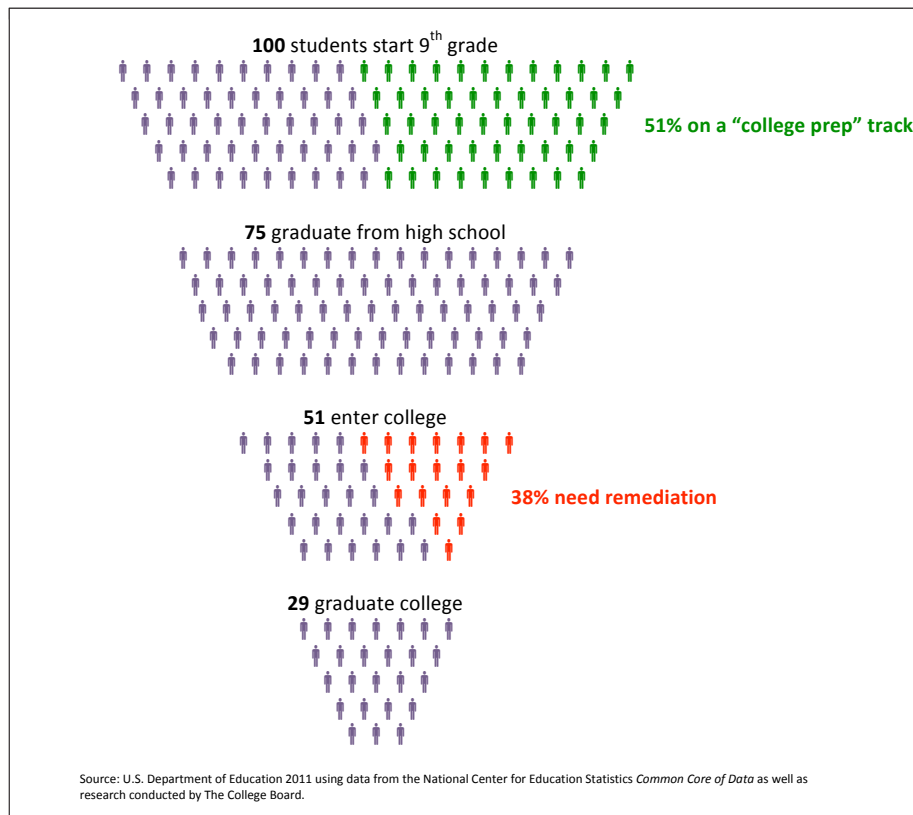
In January 2010, Tennessee’s state legislature enacted a comprehensive set of higher education reforms designed to increase the number of citizens with a postsecondary credential. The Complete College Tennessee Act passed nearly unanimously. Altering the state higher education funding formula to emphasize outcomes is a key component of the new law.

*“At a time when state resources are tighter than ever, we’ve got to prioritize how we spend those finite dollars and retool our funding formula to make it based on success and outcomes, including higher degree completion rates. . . . It’s the responsible thing to do for the budget and, more importantly, that change, as much as any other, will drive decisions at the campus level and help really focus us on the core mission of college completion.”*

– Former Governor Phil Bredesen

In addition to shifting the formula away from being based on enrollments to reward completion, the new Tennessee law requires:

- Development of a multi-sector statewide master plan to increase educational attainment;
- Creation of a common core associate degree curriculum;
- Guaranteed junior status for any state community college student who transfers with an associate degree to a public state four-year institution;
- Establishment of common course numbering within the community college system;
- Greater transparency in course-by-course transfer policy;
- Establishment of dual-admission and dual-enrollment policies at all public two- and four-year institutions of higher education;
- Creation of a statewide community college system, rather than 13 separately-managed schools; and
- Acceleration of associate degree and certificate attainment through creation of highly structured programs designed to speed progress and increase completion.



### Strategy 3: Align High School Graduation, Workforce Training, and Adult Education Expectations to Public College Admission and Placement Requirements

**Why?** Unfortunately, a high school diploma or its equivalent does not always indicate that a student is college and career ready. Over 40 percent of all degree-seeking, postsecondary education students are enrolled in community colleges. Approximately 60 percent of those students are referred to at least one remedial or developmental education course—and less than a quarter of those ultimately receive a degree or certificate.<sup>2</sup> Developmental or remedial education at the postsecondary level increases the amount of time needed to earn a credential or degree, raises

college costs for individual students, and dramatically increases the likelihood of dropping out prior to completion. Students should not have to pay to learn in college what they should have learned in high school. According to two major U.S. Department of Education studies, the number one indicator of college completion is high school academic rigor; it is more influential than race, family income, or parent education.<sup>3</sup>

**How?** Governors can direct and encourage secondary education, workforce training, adult education, and postsecondary education systems to work together to ensure that high school course offerings, high school exit requirements, and college entrance requirements are well aligned. They can:

<sup>2</sup> See Wirt, J. et al. (2004). *The Condition of Education 2004*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004077>

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. Adelman, C. (2004). *Answers in the Toolbox*. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., page 3.

- *Adopt college- and career-ready standards to ensure high and consistent expectations and outcomes for K-12 and adult education students.* Over 40 states have adopted the Common Core Standards, a state-led effort of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to identify what K-12 students should know and be able to do. The standards provide a clear and consistent framework designed to help ensure that students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers. They also can be incorporated in adult education settings to ensure that nontraditional students are similarly equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and careers.
- *Make “college prep” the default track in high school.* As states move toward adopting and implementing college- and career-ready standards, aligning curricula so that students are prepared to master heightened standards will be critical. States can direct and encourage school districts to provide all high school students with access to a “college prep” curriculum to ensure that they are exposed to learning opportunities necessary to master heightened standards. This typically involves providing all students with four years of course work in English and at least three years in mathematics, science, and social studies. A default college prep track, however, should not prevent

schools from experimenting with new ways of delivering high quality academic content, including use of competency-based programs or internship programs developed in partnership with industry. When students can demonstrate mastery, they should be able to advance. Regardless of the approach used to deliver content, schools should provide all students with courses that prepare them to succeed in college.

- *Use early assessment of college readiness to reduce the need for remedial education at the postsecondary level.* States can encourage secondary schools and adult education programs to upgrade curricular rigor to higher education expectations by incorporating college placement exam questions into state high school tests and requiring public colleges to use consistent “cut scores” on those tests for placement in freshman-level courses. California, for example, added a series of college-readiness questions to the state’s 11th-grade exam. After students take the test, they are told whether they are on track for credit-bearing classes at colleges in the California State University system, so that both the student and high school can make necessary adjustments in the subsequent course of study. Without that system, many high school graduates and GED holders enter college only to take placement tests and discover they are not ready for college-level work.

- *Create opportunities for high school and adult education students to earn college credit.* Dual enrollment programs, which offer simultaneous secondary and postsecondary credit for courses, were initially used only for high-achieving students. But emerging evidence suggests that some form of college experience in high school increases college going, college readiness, and college success among lower-achieving populations as well. States can increase the likelihood that secondary school students will take advantage of these opportunities by: (i) extending to 21 the age at which free public elementary and secondary school education will be available to all students; and (ii) incentivizing K-12 and higher education partnerships that ensure college credit earned in high school transfers to all state institutions of higher education.<sup>4</sup>



The U.S. Department of Education recently funded two consortia of 44 states and the District of Columbia to develop K-12 assessments that are linked to college- and career-ready standards. Together, the winning consortia represent 85 percent of the students in the nation. States continue to have the opportunity to join one or both consortia.<sup>5</sup>



The GEAR UP program supplies funds to states to increase college enrollment by providing academic preparation, advising, and scholarships to K-12 students. In 2011, the Department expects to make 18 GEAR UP state grants totaling \$90 million with a priority in awards for states that agree to implement college- and career-ready

standards. The program can be a valuable source of flexible resources to help students finish high school academically prepared for college.



The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act provides over \$1.2 billion in formula grants to states to support secondary and postsecondary education programs that build academic as well as career and technical skills of young people and adults. States can use Perkins funds to ensure that the content of career and technical education courses is rigorous and aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Career and technical education students, for example, should not just learn how to collect a patient's vital signs; they should also learn the anatomy and physiology associated with blood pressure, temperature, pulse and respiratory rates and the relationship of the results to diagnosing and treating diseases and disorders.



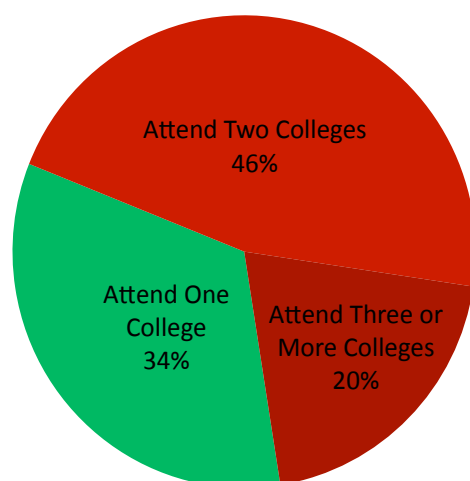
Similarly, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) provides over \$630 million in formula funding to states to help adults develop basic literacy skills. States can use AEFLA funding to ensure that the content of adult education courses is aligned with postsecondary education requirements. College- and career-ready standards should guide basic skills and literacy curricula, particularly for adult immigrants with advanced training in their native country and language. Adult education programs should make use of college placement exams, dual enrollment strategies, and adult education bridge courses where basic skills and college credit can be earned.

<sup>4</sup> Similar partnerships can be embraced with respect to adult education programs. For example, Washington State's I-BEST model and other integrated education and training programs enable adults to refine their basic skills while also securing credit for technical courses offered at the postsecondary level.

<sup>5</sup> For a list of participating states in each consortium (some states participate in both), go to: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/index.html>



## Most Students Transfer



Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005157.pdf>

**Note:** States and school districts that seek to raise standards for high school graduation need to make sure they provide the necessary support services and preparation to enable students to succeed. Appropriate professional development and teacher preparation starting at the elementary school level is critical to ensure students are prepared to be successful at each successive stage in the academic pipeline, particularly when they reach high school. In implementing a default college prep track policy, for example, it is essential to provide support for students who need extra academic help to reach achievement levels necessary to complete a college prep course of study successfully. As lessons and research from the College Prep for All program in Chicago indicate, efforts to raise the level of the curriculum need to be implemented along with improved instruction and strategies that engage and motivate students and verify the accomplishment of identified learning objectives.

### Strategy 4: Make it Easier for Students to Transfer Among Colleges

**Why?** Two in three postsecondary education students attend two or more institutions of higher education before obtaining a baccalaureate degree—one in five attends three or more institutions.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, student and credit transition between institutions is frequently complicated and difficult to navigate. Students spend valuable time and money on courses only to find out credits do not fully transfer, resulting in their having to retake course work. The lack of a coherent, navigable, and transparent transfer process both increases the cost and time needed to earn a degree and diminishes the likelihood of completion.

**How?** States can create an overarching set of policies to promote smooth transition among institutions of higher education, including:

<sup>6</sup> See Peter, K. and Cataldi, E.F. (2005). *The Road Less Traveled? Students Who Enroll in Multiple Institutions*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005157.pdf>

- Developing articulation agreements that ensure a set of up to 60 credits in courses transfer statewide across all community colleges *and* four-year public institutions of higher education. Ideally, common requirements for select majors accompany statewide articulation agreements;
- Developing common lower-division, postsecondary general education curricula accepted by all public two- and four-year institutions, including common course numbering;
- Ensuring that transfer policies are easy to understand. Course schedules and websites, for example, should indicate which courses transfer: (i) for credit within a major, or (ii) for “elective” credit; and
- Rewarding both sending and receiving institutions of higher education for students who transfer successfully as measured by credential or degree attainment, as per a performance-based funding strategy.

According to the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, 16 states have agreements governing transfer of credit among all public and private institutions statewide. Agreements generally involve a set of transferable general education courses. Twenty-two states have similar arrangements involving only public institutions of higher education.



Establishing articulation agreements to facilitate successful transfer is not particularly expensive, and federal aid is available to assist in implementation.<sup>7</sup> The federal College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program, for example, provides formula aid to every state that can be used for a wide variety of activities to help at-risk students enroll in and complete postsecondary education, including developing statewide articulation agreements. Delaware has used CACG funding to create a “transfer of credit” matrix—an online tool cataloging high school to college transition and between-college transfer information. Similarly, North Carolina is using CACG funds to disseminate, through an online tool, information about course transferability between community colleges and four-year universities. CACG funding more than doubled this year to \$150 million nationally. In small states, it increased fivefold. The minimum grant per state is now \$1.5 million, more than enough to create a uniform and clear transfer policy among public institutions of higher education in almost any state.

### **Strategy 5: Use Data to Drive Decision Making**

**Why?** Given the fiscal realities facing states, it is critical to understand the relationship between spending and results as students move through the education system and into the workforce. Too often, however,

<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Department of Education recently awarded discretionary grants, through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education program, to six states to develop career and technical education programs of study that allow students to gain college credit in high school and transfer those credits to and among postsecondary institutions on their way to a degree. These projects are to include secondary and postsecondary education entities, state workforce agencies, and employers. The creation of statewide or multistate articulation agreements is a central component of supported work.

states have multiple, disconnected education and workforce data systems—resulting in a lack of accountability across sectors. Secondary schools don't know how many of their high school graduates are unprepared for college-level work; community colleges don't know how many of their students transfer and how successful they are at four-year institutions; and few secondary or postsecondary institutions know how well their students fare in the labor market.

**How?** With strong statewide data systems, like those in Florida and Washington State, states and institutions can follow the progress and success of different types of students and workers across the education system and into the labor market, empowering leaders who want to target resources, reward successful actors, and intelligently alter interventions. State data systems can help policymakers identify the attainment level of any number of groups—for example, Hispanic female Pell Grant recipients with English language deficiencies seeking an associate degree in nursing—and the effects of interventions on those populations without compromising individual student privacy.

All states have committed to building statewide longitudinal data systems as a condition of receiving Recovery Act funding. We look forward to states completing this work by September 30, 2011, as promised in their State Fiscal Stabilization Fund applications, so that they can use longitudinal data systems as a resource to drive decision making and get better results. There are 12 state longitudinal data system elements described in the America COMPETES Act:

- ⇒ A unique identifier for every student that does not permit a student to be individually identified (except as permitted by federal and state law);
- ⇒ School enrollment history, demographic characteristics, and a program participation record of every student;
- ⇒ Information on when a student enrolls, transfers, drops out, or graduates from a school;
- ⇒ Student scores on tests required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- ⇒ Information on students who are not tested, by grade and subject;
- ⇒ Student scores on tests measuring whether they are ready for college;
- ⇒ A way to identify teachers and to match teachers to their students;
- ⇒ Information from students' transcripts, specifically courses taken and grades earned;
- ⇒ Data on students' success in college, including whether they enrolled in remedial courses;
- ⇒ Data on whether K-12 students are prepared to succeed in college;
- ⇒ A system of auditing data for quality, validity, and reliability; and
- ⇒ The ability to share data from preschool through postsecondary education data systems.

- Beyond America COMPETES and Recovery Act requirements, there are additional elements that states may want to consider for robust P-20 longitudinal data systems, including: (i) student-level data for all public colleges and universities relating to enrollment, demographics, financial aid, transfer, persistence, remediation, and degree completion; (ii) student-level data for adult education, GED testing centers, and career and technical education programs; and (iii) a data audit system to ensure the ongoing validity and reliability of data submitted.
- States and universities can create Web-based “dashboards” or “tote boards” that make performance data publicly available. These visual tools not only enable universities to monitor their own performance in a consistent and user-friendly manner, but they also allow consumers, public officials, researchers, prospective students and parents, and members of the general public to gauge performance of state systems and individual institutions and suggest policy innovations. The Accountability Dashboard developed by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System offers one example of how dashboards have been used successfully to track performance and encourage continuous progress toward strategic goals.



CACG funds can be used to help colleges implement data-driven plans to improve student access, retention, and success. Oklahoma is using its CACG funding to identify groups of students who have not succeeded in developmental or introductory

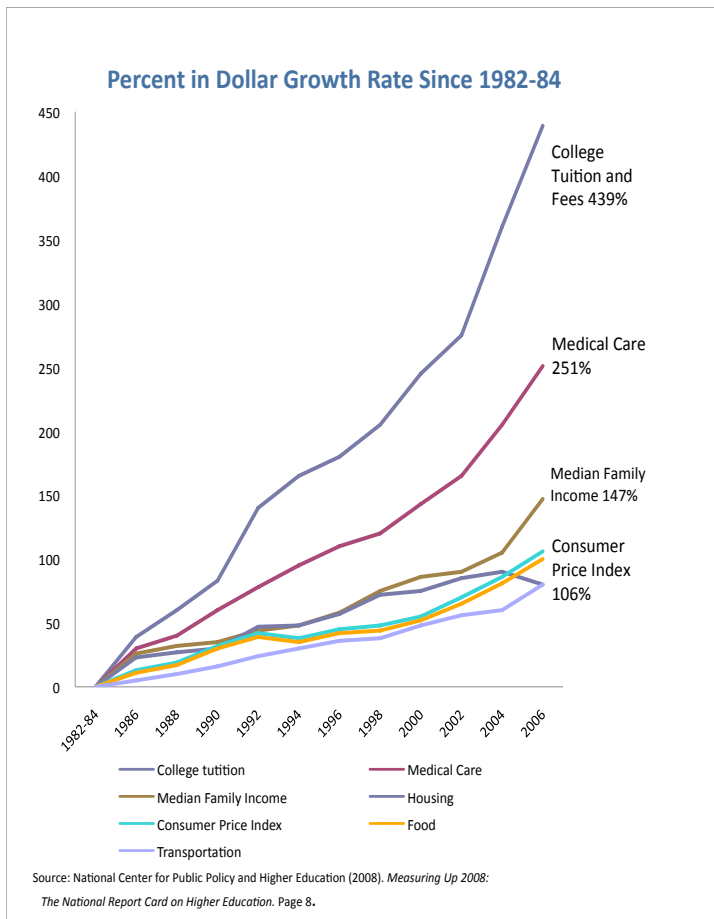
courses and is working with experts to develop strategies to improve success rates for those students.



The National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education can provide technical assistance to states in the process of building or improving their data systems. External groups like the Data Quality Campaign can also provide helpful technical assistance. To date, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor have provided over half a billion dollars to help states develop longitudinal data systems that follow students from elementary school through employment. These systems can and many would submit should be used to track whether postsecondary education students are progressing toward completion on time.

### **Strategy 6: Accelerate Learning, Reduce Costs, and Stabilize Tuition Growth**

**Why?** Over the last 25 years, “sticker price” increases in public college tuition and fees have outpaced the growth in inflation by over 400 percent and the growth in health care costs by over 175 percentage points. Average net price, after financial aid, has outpaced median family income growth. Likewise, the cost of college textbooks has increased at more than four times the rate of inflation for other finished goods. Accordingly, student debt more than doubled in the last decade. Across the nation, state budget shortfalls are leading to reductions in state support for public higher education and a new round of tuition spikes. Students report heightened price is a major contributor to non-completion.



**How?** To stabilize tuition growth, states need to: (i) encourage institutions to embrace productivity measures that cut costs while raising quality, and (ii) stabilize state funding for higher education. Below are a series of options:

- The National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) has demonstrated that hundreds of courses can be redesigned with the aid of technology to lower costs and improve outcomes at the same time.

Carnegie Mellon University's Open Learning Initiative has demonstrated that technology can be used to significantly accelerate learning. In fact, a recent study documented that Carnegie Mellon students completed an undergraduate statistics course in roughly 50 percent of the time consumed by traditional instructional methods.<sup>8</sup>

- A number of institutions of higher education and large state systems have contracted with independent management consultants to identify efficiencies that might be embraced without undermining academic quality (e.g. purchasing energy cooperatively through a system or consortium of institutions; centralizing information technology, human resources, and financial services; entering joint health care purchasing agreements). The University of California system audit identified more than \$500 million in savings. The University of North Carolina system's efficiency audit identified more than 5 percent in operating budget savings. Ohio mandates annual efficiency audits.
- To stabilize tuition, Oregon is considering capitalizing a portion of state higher education funding by replacing over time the state's annual appropriation for its flagship public institution with a public-private endowment. Pending is a proposal for state lawmakers to commit to a stream of flat state appropriations for the University of Oregon over the next

<sup>8</sup> Open education resource methods also can steadily increase the quality of teaching and learning by bringing together teams of instructors and students into virtual collaborations where they can share and more rapidly transfer high-impact instructional practices and be exposed to a greater diversity of high-quality instructional content than would otherwise be practical. See <http://oli.web.cmu.edu/openlearning/files/theinitiative/publications/jime-2008-14.pdf>

## Decreasing Costs and Increasing Student Outcomes: Course Redesign in Maryland

“Course redesign is as close to a magic bullet as we have to improve higher ed productivity,” according to University of Maryland Chancellor Brit Kirwan. Costs go down, and achievement goes up.

In 2007, Kirwan and the National Center for Academic Transformation launched a redesign initiative at the University of Maryland for nine large introductory courses in fields as varied as English and chemistry. While the nature of redesign varied by course, all involved a decrease in passive lecture learning and an increase in technology-enabled active and individualized learning.

Maryland’s results are impressive. Costs for Maryland’s redesigned Chemistry I course, for example, went down by 70 percent — from \$268 to \$80 per student. More important, the redesign produced an increase in the number of students passing with a “C” grade or better from 50 percent in the original course to over 70 percent in the redesigned version. Students in the redesigned course also performed better in and were less likely to withdraw from subsequent chemistry courses. Maryland is now engaged in a statewide redesign of “gatekeeper” courses – including developmental, formerly known as remedial, courses.

Initially faculty was resistant to course redesign driven by cost-reduction goals, says Kirwan. But once they saw improvements in student achievement associated with redesign, they became enthusiastic adopters. In fact, faculty members now are proposing the redesign of additional courses, promising even greater savings and greater achievement gains.

30 years. Funds would be dedicated to financing debt payments for a new general obligation bond of equal length, the proceeds of which would serve as an endowment for the University. Matched dollar-for-dollar in private donations, the resulting public-private endowment is projected to earn an amount more than equal to the current annual state appropriation for the University beginning in 30 years, thus freeing the state at that time from an ongoing expense and stabilizing the University’s public source resources.

- Families tend to overestimate *net* public college costs and underestimate available financial aid. To address the information gap and facilitate financial planning, various public and private institutions of higher education have made multiyear price guarantees to families. Championed by Governor Martin O’Malley, the University of Maryland froze tuition for four years. The University of North Carolina and a group of private institutions have made a “no loan” net price commitment to low-income families. Rice University has indexed tuition growth to inflation. A proposal has been made in New York to cap annual tuition growth at state colleges and universities in exchange for granting institutions semi-autonomy in price setting.



The U.S. Department of Labor, in close coordination with the U.S. Department of Education, recently issued an application for a new \$2 billion grant program to improve job training and education programs for dislocated workers. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program (TAACCCT) supports the creation and continuous improvement of Open Educational Resources (OER) that can be freely used, customized, and improved without the permission of their original producers. Those interested in using TAACCCT funds to create open courseware, courses, and textbooks along with new technology-based assessments should consult the Federal Register and/or the Department of Labor website at <http://www.doleta.gov/grants> to obtain grant guidelines and the application deadline.



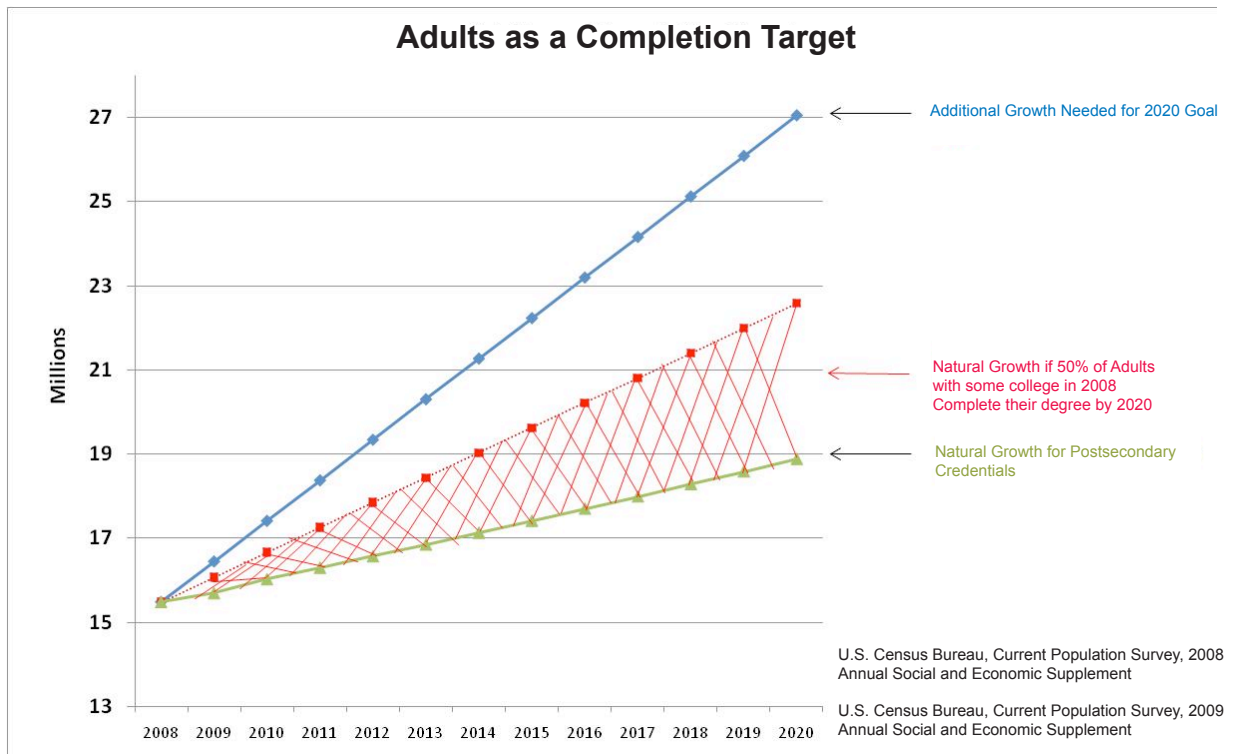
The U.S. Department of Education makes available an early estimate of individual financial aid awards at <http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov>. Students can access a net price estimate and multiyear net price calculator for thousands of institutions of higher education at the Department of Education's College Navigator website: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. In fact, any institution of higher education can download a free template of the Department of Education's net price calculator and tailor it for placement on its home Web page.

### **Strategy 7: Target Adults, Especially Those with “Some College, but No Degree”**

**Why?** Traditional students aged 18-24 are a critical, but insufficient, part of a college completion strategy. Nearly 50 percent of adults aged 25-64 (over 97 million) have a high school degree or equivalent, but no postsecondary degree. There are over 7 million adults aged 25-34 with some college, but no degree, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

One of the fastest, cheapest, and most effective ways to increase the number of citizens in your state with a college certificate or degree is to target adults who have “some college, but no degree.” Many of these individuals already have sufficient credits for an associate degree, and many more are just a few credits shy of earning an associate or bachelor's degree.

**How?** A number of states have made concerted efforts to bring adults who never before attended college into higher education for the first time. Arkansas, Nevada, Texas, South Dakota, and West Virginia all have made concerted efforts to target adults with some college for reengagement back into higher education. States and institutions of higher education can:



- Make use of “prior learning assessments” to grant credit for college-level skills learned outside of the classroom. These assessments can range from national examinations to locally administered, institution-specific portfolio assessments. Over half of all colleges award prior learning credit, but few embrace multiple assessments or conduct portfolio assessments to award it to large numbers of adult students beyond those with military experience. Yet according to a recent study, adult undergraduates who receive “prior learning credit” are more than twice as likely to graduate as their non-prior learning credit peers. Moreover, they complete a bachelor’s degree 2.5 to 10 months faster and an associate degree up to 4.5 months faster than their non-
- prior learning credit peers.
- Develop partnerships between institutions of higher education and employers to ensure adult students receive credit for training provided by industry or labor, where appropriate. For example, institutions of higher education could award academic credit for National Institute for Metalworking Skills Level III certification supplied by employers or apprenticeship work conducted with or for labor organizations and other workforce groups.
- Ensure that assessment and placement policies support highly targeted intervention and short-term developmental program placement. Working adults with no college who



have been out of school for several years may not immediately test into credit-bearing courses. While some students may need intensive remediation, others may just need refreshing. Tennessee requires multiple diagnostic exams to identify and address deficiencies with high levels of precision, allowing more students to enroll in credit-bearing courses immediately with academic support services. Bypassing developmental or remedial education increases the likelihood of course and degree completion. More precisely tailored assessments and placement policies combined with individualized instruction thus can increase student achievement and decrease the student- and state-borne costs associated with semester-long remedial courses.

- Target the 7 million adults who have some college but no degree to increase relatively quickly the number of citizens in your state with a postsecondary education credential. State leaders can urge institutions of higher education to examine student data records to identify those with sufficient credits and nearly sufficient credits for an associate degree, including students who transferred to a four-year institution but never received either an associate or bachelor's degree. Identified adults can be contacted through outreach campaigns and urged to claim a degree or complete outstanding course work.
- Develop a model "completion template" that institutions of higher education can use to create an individual completion plan for returning students.

Items referenced might include: an assigned academic advisor or mentor; a guarantee of emergency financial aid for short-term needs; assurance of on-campus, short-term child care; independent study options; and financial incentives, such as loan forgiveness, for degree completion.

Very flexible CACG funds are being used by a variety of states to increase adult college completion levels. Oklahoma's Reach Higher program, for example, uses CACG funds to provide one-time, need-based grants to those with some college, but no degree. Texas uses its CACG funds to finance a "Success by Degree" program that includes an adult completion website, marketing campaign, and specific baccalaureate programs geared toward returning adult students. CACG grants, which are made to every state, can be used among other things to:

- ⇒ Analyze higher education data of those adults with some college, but no degree;
- ⇒ Conduct outreach campaigns to urge eligible adults to claim a two-year degree for which they have secured sufficient credits or engage adults just shy of a four-year degree;
- ⇒ Support the development and use of prior learning assessments; and
- ⇒ Create policies that ensure the awarding of academic credit for employer training.



The new Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant program will distribute \$500 million this year and each of the next four years in support of four adult worker training priority areas: (i) accelerating academic progress of low-skilled and other workers; (ii) improving retention and achievement to reduce time to completion; (iii) building programs that meet industry needs, including developing career pathways; and (iv) strengthening online and technology-enabled learning. More information on how to access these funds, which just became available in the winter of 2010-11, can be found at <http://www.doleta.gov/grants/>.



Finally, through the Educational Opportunity Centers program run by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education, \$47 million is competitively awarded to institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and other entities to support adults entering or continuing postsecondary education programs. Grant recipients provide services such as academic and financial aid advising, assistance with admissions and aid applications, personal counseling, and financial literacy education. A competition for new awards is being held in 2011.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite dramatic economic changes and substantial investments in higher education over the last 40 years, the percentage of Americans with a postsecondary degree or credential is only modestly higher than it was in 1970. The earnings gap and employment gap, however, between those who have completed postsecondary training and those who have not are substantially wider.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the growing earnings gap and employment gap strongly indicate that the job market's demand for evidence of higher skill attainment continues to rise.

Almost every governor has made job growth a top priority. State-by-state policies will differ, but the most successful will share a common thread: support for a well-educated workforce and heightened levels of college completion. Resources for higher education are an essential element of any state's job creation strategy, though insufficient on their own. It takes a comprehensive approach. We hope you find this guide useful in crafting your own action plan for higher education improvement. Governors and states, like the country as a whole, have a choice: to get smarter or to risk falling behind. The Secretary of Education stands ready to help governors as they take on this challenge.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, including lists of past grantees, go to: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> In November 2010, individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher had a 76.6 percent labor-force participation rate and a 4.4 percent unemployment rate. Those with some college or an associate degree had a 69.9 percent labor-force participation rate and an 8.7 percent unemployment rate. Those with only a high school diploma had a 61.1 percent labor-force participation rate and a 10 percent unemployment rate. And for those with less than a high school diploma, the labor-force participation rate was only 46.6 percent. Their unemployment rate was 15.7 percent.

## Additional Resources

**Access to Success** – a project of the National Association of System Heads and The Education Trust, works with 24 public higher education systems that have pledged to cut the college-going and graduation gaps for low-income and minority students in half by 2015 – [www.edtrust.org/](http://www.edtrust.org/)

**Achieve, Inc.** – created in 1996 by the nation’s governors and corporate leaders, Achieve is an independent, bipartisan, nonprofit education reform organization based in Washington, D.C., that seeks to help states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability – [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)

**Achieving the Dream** – works to make the student success agenda a priority at community colleges and with state and national policymakers and stakeholders – [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org)

**Carolina Counts** – The University of North Carolina’s initiative to streamline operating expenses as per recommendations offered by Bain and Company – <http://carolinacounts.unc.edu/>. See also [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/education/15bain.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/education/15bain.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)

**College Board’s College Completion Agenda and State Policy Guide** – created 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, with 10 interdependent recommendations to reach its goal of ensuring that at least 55 percent of Americans hold a postsecondary degree by 2025 – <http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/reports>

**Complete College America** – a national nonprofit working to increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations; currently, 24 states are pledging to make college completion a top priority as part of CCA’s Alliance of States – [www.completecollege.org](http://www.completecollege.org)

**Council for Adult and Experiential Learning** – a national, nonprofit organization providing tools and strategies to institutions of higher education, state and local governments, and businesses in support of lifelong learning – [www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org). See also *Fueling the Race to Post-Secondary Success: A 48 Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes*, CAEL (March 2010).

**Data Quality Campaign** – a national, collaborative effort that seeks to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the availability and use of high-quality education data to improve student achievement – [www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org)

**Education Commission of the States** – works to help states develop effective policy and practice for public education by providing data, research, analysis, and leadership, and by facilitating collaboration, the exchange of ideas among the states, and long-range strategic thinking – [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)

**Education Trust** – independent think tank and advocacy organization that works to promote heightened academic achievement and attainment for all students, pre-kindergarten through college – [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

**National Center for Higher Education Management** – a private nonprofit that seeks to improve strategic decision making in higher education for states and institutions in the United States and abroad – [www.nchems.org](http://www.nchems.org)

**Lumina Foundation** – a grant-making foundation that works to promote higher education access and success – [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)

**Minnesota Accountability Dashboard** – reports on 10 measures of institutional effectiveness, including cost, access, and completion – <http://www.mnscu.edu/board/accountability/index.html>

**National Center for Academic Transformation** – independent nonprofit that works to support the effective use of information technology to improve student outcomes and reduce the cost of higher education – [www.thencat.org](http://www.thencat.org). See also <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2008/0811.carey.html>

**National Governors Association** – NGA's Center for Best Practices has produced a guide as part of its Complete to Compete initiative on college completion metrics, including specific outcome and progress metrics on completion, as well as an issue brief on the same – [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org)

**University of Oregon's New Partnership Proposal** – website that seeks to help develop and build support for new governance and a public-private endowment building proposal – <http://newpartnership.uoregon.edu/about/>

**United States Department of Education** – the National Center for Education Statistics' IPEDS and College Navigator systems include detailed, institution-by-institution data on college completion and net price – <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>



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