



U.S. Department of Education

Action Plan for Improving Measures of Postsecondary Student Success

Background

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) has developed an action plan for improving measures of postsecondary student success in support of President Obama's college completion agenda and based on the recommendations of the Department's Committee on Measures of Student Success. In its final report to the Secretary, the Committee noted that the "current federal graduation rate measure is incomplete and does not adequately convey the wide range of student outcomes at two-year institutions." In addition, the Committee observed that "data are not collected on other important outcomes achieved by students at two-year institutions."

The Committee has recommended that the Department:

- Broaden the coverage of student graduation data to reflect the diverse student populations at two-year institutions
- Improve the collection of student progression and completion data
- Improve technical guidance to institutions in meeting statutory disclosure requirements
- Encourage institutions to disclose comparable data on employment outcomes and provide incentives for sharing promising practices on measuring student learning

Although its work focused on two-year institutions, the Committee suggested that its recommendations be considered and implemented by four-year institutions as well. The Committee's final report is available at the following link: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/cmss-committee-report-final.pdf>.

The Department's action plan is designed to improve the quality and availability of student success data at the federal level for consumers, institutions, policymakers, and researchers. This plan also includes activities to help institutions, systems, and states increase their capacity for collecting and disseminating data on student success. Various offices within the Department are responsible for implementing the activities within the plan.

Activities

The Department will revise, where feasible under its current authority, existing data collection vehicles to include more comprehensive measures of student success for a broader group of students.

- The Department will calculate an institutional completion rate, as defined by the *Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act* of 1990.
- The Department will take steps to enhance graduation rate and transfer rate reporting in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Department has begun to examine the feasibility of broadening the graduation rate cohort to include part-time, degree/certificate-seeking students, and it will examine the feasibility of adding non-first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students.
- To improve the comparability of data reported by institutions in IPEDS, the Department will examine and implement clarifications to IPEDS definitions of terms such as "degree-seeking" and "substantial preparation for transfer."

- The Department will enhance the National Student Loan Data System to include more consistent data on certificate or degree completion by Title IV aid recipients.
- The Department will examine calculating alternative measures of institutional and student success using data it currently collects.

The Department will provide increased technical assistance to help institutions meet statutory disclosure requirements.

- In October 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released a technical brief to help two-year degree-granting institutions meet the disclosure requirement in the *Higher Education Opportunity Act* of 2008 (HEOA) to calculate and disclose graduation rates while minimizing the risk of revealing the graduation status of individual students. This brief may also be helpful to four-year institutions in meeting the disclosure requirement.
- The Department will develop templates that institutions could adopt voluntarily to help them meet HEOA disclosure requirements.

The Department will provide incentive funding to strengthen states' data infrastructures through its State Longitudinal Data System grant program.

- In September 2011, NCES announced a fifth round of Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grants as part of the *Educational Technical Assistance Act* of 2002 to design, develop, and implement statewide, longitudinal data systems to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use individual student data. For the fiscal year 2012 competition, developing and linking postsecondary and/or workforce data with the State's K–12 data system was included as a priority. The Department anticipates that grant recipients will be announced in spring 2012.

The Department will take steps to help improve state and institutional capacity for collecting, disclosing, and reporting measures of student success such as student learning and employment.

- The Department will make improving state and institutional capacity for collecting, disclosing, and reporting information on student learning and employment outcomes a focus in its postsecondary education initiatives and grant programs.
- The Department will work to develop a process for the public release of data reported by institutions under gainful employment regulations.

The Department will convene representatives of the higher education community in a Student Success Summit to highlight promising practices in the collection and dissemination of data related to student success.

- Institutions, states, and other organizations have developed a number of voluntary models for collecting and disseminating data on student success. The Department will convene a Student Success Summit to help stakeholders share ideas on measuring and disseminating data related to student success—particularly around measures such as student learning and employment.

For more information about the Department's action plan, visit <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/ous/initiatives> or email studentsuccess@ed.gov.