



ATTAINING COLLEGE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Since taking office, the Biden-Harris Administration and the U.S. Department of Education (Department) have been committed to a new vision of college excellence—one that uplifts inclusivity, equity, and excellence, rather than exclusivity and privilege.

The Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence and Equity initiative reflects the Department's commitment to ensuring that students of all backgrounds, ages, disability statuses, and income levels can succeed in any postsecondary pathway. This initiative is focused on supporting institutions and states to implement key evidence-based strategies that address critical loss points along students' postsecondary journeys, including data-driven improvement, holistic advising and wraparound services, credit mobility and transfer support, and career-connected learning pathways.



Key Focus Area: Data-Driven Improvement

Despite recent progress, disparities in college attainment persist in this country. While nearly half of adults ages 25 or older have earned associate degrees or higher, only about one-third of Black and fewer than one-third of Hispanic, Native American, and Pacific Islander adults have done so.¹ These disparities are driven by continued gaps in college access and success since the start of the “completion movement” in 2009.²

In the four-year sector, six-year completion rates have increased by about four to six percentage points for most groups since 2015 (2009 cohort), yet double-digit gaps remain between most students of color and their white peers.³ Three-year completion rates have increased by about four percentage points in the two-year sector since 2012 (2009 cohort), yet have stayed the same for Black students and declined for Hispanic students.⁴

Monitoring and responding to data, especially data revealing opportunity and outcome gaps, is critical to increasing completion rates. Unfortunately, data limitations can make it difficult to measure these gaps because many public data sets do not count all students. Despite notable recent improvements, there are still many students whose experiences are missing, obscured, or invisible in these data sets especially when key indicators are not disaggregated.

To inform efforts to close completion gaps, it is crucial to close these data gaps. Leading states, institutions, and organizations have responded to these challenges in recent years by spearheading data-driven initiatives that not only leverage more comprehensive metrics to identify barriers to completion, but also use these data to implement evidence-based solutions and evaluate their impact on equitably improving student outcomes.



1.

CREATING A CULTURE AND CAPACITY FOR DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT



2.

USING THE METRICS THAT MATTER FOR INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS



3.

ANALYZING DATA TO IDENTIFY AND REMOVE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS



4.

USING DATA TO SELECT AND EVALUATE SUCCESS STRATEGIES

1. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_104.40.asp?current=yes

2. In February 2009, President Obama said that, by 2020, the U.S. should “once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world,”

fueling the emerging “completion movement” at that time.

3. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_326.10.asp?current=yes

4. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_326.20.asp



1. CREATING A CULTURE AND CAPACITY FOR DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

Institutions that have used data to improve often cite their efforts to create and deploy tools and routines that democratize data access and use across campus. By creating a culture that values data and supports data use, institutions can set and work toward improvement goals and make more informed and timely choices about investing in academic programs and support services that address students' needs.

- *Innovation in Higher Education: A Case Study of Georgia State University* by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2019): https://agb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/case_study_innovation_georgia.pdf
- *The Joint Statement on Analytics and Case Studies* by the Association for Institutional Research, EDUCAUSE, and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (2022): <https://changewithanalytics.com/resources/>



2. USING THE METRICS THAT MATTER FOR INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS

Data are critical to the completion movement with many initiatives creating and scaling a common set of metrics to help states and institutions measure and address outcome gaps. These include early momentum metrics such as credit accumulation and more robust completion metrics. More recently, initiatives have focused on post-college outcomes to ensure students earn credentials of value leading to economic mobility.

- *Toward Convergence: A Technical Guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Framework* by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2016): <https://www.ihep.org/publication/toward-convergence-a-technical-guide-for-the-postsecondary-metrics-framework/>
- *Equitable Value: Promoting Economic Mobility and Social Justice through Postsecondary Education* by the Postsecondary Value Commission (2021): <https://postsecondaryvalue.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PVC-Executive-Summary-FINAL.pdf>



3. ANALYZING DATA TO IDENTIFY AND REMOVE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Campus leaders can analyze their data to identify institutional barriers to student success such as whether students are being advised to take enough credits, which courses have the highest D, F, and W rates, and whether students with unmet financial need are dropping out. These types of analyses create ongoing feedback loops that enable continuous inquiry and improvement on campus.

- *Practice Guide: Learning from High-Performing and Fast-Growing Institutions* by the Education Trust (2014): <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/PracticeGuide1.pdf>
- *Using a Measurement System to Strengthen Student Success Reforms* by Complete College America (2023): <https://completecollege.org/resource/usingameasurementsystem/>



4. USING DATA TO SELECT AND EVALUATE SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Data can not only be used to identify barriers to completion, but also to select and implement evidence-based solutions and evaluate their impact. The Department's What Works Clearinghouse provides a wealth of information about the level of evidence supporting use of specific interventions from Practice Guides to Intervention Reports to Reviews of Individual Studies, including the use of data and technology to guide students to success.

- *Using Technology to Support Postsecondary Student Learning* by the Institute for Education Sciences (2019): <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc-using-tech-postsecondary.pdf>
- *Putting Evidence to Work for Student Support* by MDRC (2023): <https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/tools-postsecondary-schools-toolkit>