



A Guide to Major U.S. College Completion Initiatives

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Context

Over the past three years, a wide variety and unusually large number of organizations have adopted a “college completion agenda.” Spurred by President Barack Obama and funded by major foundations, they are undertaking diverse activities aimed at a common goal: to significantly increase the number of adults in the United States who have earned a postsecondary credential. Along with many governors, private businesses and higher education systems and institutions, they are part of a growing national movement focused on increasing student success and educational attainment.

For decades, studies have indicated that the majority of jobs of the future will demand high-level knowledge and skills requiring some postsecondary education. For individuals, obtaining a postsecondary credential is needed to achieve middle-class status; nationally, this credential is needed to boost economic competitiveness. The current interest in college completion is rooted in growing concerns that the United States is steadily losing ground in global competitiveness. While other nations have been making progress, particularly in the attainment of sub-baccalaureate degrees and certificates, the United

States has not. We have achieved measurable success in improving access to postsecondary education, but we have not achieved a comparable growth in degree attainment.

The data most often cited come from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and describe educational attainment among OECD member nations. What has caught people’s attention is the rapid increase in “tertiary” (postsecondary) educational attainment among the young adult populations of European and Asian nations while the United States has been relatively stagnant. The latest OECD data indicate that 41 percent of older workers (aged 55-64) and younger workers (aged 25-34) in the U.S. have attained tertiary education—indicating that there have been no increases over time.¹ Meanwhile, other nations have made significant progress. For example, only 13 percent of Korean adults aged 55-64 have attained tertiary education, while 63 percent of 25-34-year-olds have done so. In G-20 nations as a whole, 22 percent of older workers have attained tertiary education, but that number increases to 36 percent for the younger group. Even Canada—with educational attainment

¹Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011). *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*. Indicator A, Chart A1.1.

comparable to the United States among older workers (41 percent)—has 56 percent of its younger workers with tertiary attainment. Put another way, because of its older workers, America still ranks in the top five most-educated G-20 countries; however, it ranks 15th among those ages 25-34, representing a significant decline.² To make matters worse, recent projections from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) support the notion that the United States is not on track to make dramatic gains over the next decade in degrees conferred.³

Concerns about these trends have been moving this country from its traditional focus on increasing educational access to new interest in educational attainment. This is expressed not only in terms of institutional graduation rates, but also in terms of meeting state and national educational attainment goals. As such, the terminology has shifted from “access” goals to “college completion” goals.

This paper is intended as a guide to the myriad college completion initiatives that have arisen in recent years. First and foremost, it will help answer the “*Who? What? When? Where? and Why?*” questions about this diverse array of projects. A second purpose is to provide some brief general observations about college completion activities. This paper focuses only on major national/regional college completion initiatives. It does not address the efforts of specific states, systems and institutions, nor does it cover initiatives focused primarily on access or college preparation that happen to contribute to completion.

Observations

The Obama administration has served as a catalyst to focus national attention on college completion, and it has explored new territory for the federal government in setting college completion goals.

In a joint session of Congress on February 24, 2009, President Obama set forth a goal that “by 2020,

²Sparks, S. (2011, September 13). U.S. Postsecondary Edge Shrinking Among G-20 Countries. *Education Week*.

³National Center for Education Statistics (2011, September). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020*.

America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.” Stating that three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations now require more than a high school diploma, the newly inaugurated president outlined this goal as part of his agenda to revive the nation’s economy and “to build a new foundation for lasting prosperity.” This speech has helped to define a national problem and to stimulate activity around the nation, as evidenced by the frequency with which the 2020 goal has been cited by a wide range of individuals and organizations.

Early on in his administration, the president proposed the American Graduation Initiative, a \$12 billion program that focused on community colleges, calling on them to increase their number of graduates by 50 percent. However, through political compromise related to passing the health care reform bill, only \$2 billion for career training was actually approved by Congress.

In March 2011, the administration released the *College Completion Tool Kit*, presenting seven “low-cost” action strategies for governors to consider. This document recognizes states as leaders in improving college completion, and indicates that the federal government “can provide a supporting role to accelerate and expand on that state-led work.” In unveiling the tool kit, Vice President Biden called on each governor to host a state college completion summit, and announced a \$20 million grant program under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)’s Comprehensive Program to increase college success and improve productivity. To help governors develop their college completion plans, the administration released a table of “state targets”—the total number of college graduates that each state would need to achieve to be on target to meet the 2020 national goal.

The administration has proposed two additional programs in its FY 2012 budget. The \$123 million “First in the World” incentive program would support programs that accelerate learning, boost completion rates and hold down tuition. The \$50 million College Completion Incentive Grant program would fund states and institutions for undertaking systemic reforms that produce more college graduates.

Major foundations have provided both the voice and the funding to drive a national college completion agenda.

In November 2008, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced an ambitious national educational goal: to double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree or certificate by age 26 by the year 2025. The initial focus was on community colleges, a sector that has received the continued interest of the foundation. Their strategy includes the following:

- Improving the performance of the postsecondary education system;
- Supporting young adult success; and
- Encouraging U.S. leaders to commit to helping students complete their degrees.

Also in 2008, the Lumina Foundation for Education began talking about a single, overarching “big goal”—to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025. Lumina has defined three critical outcomes:

- *Preparation:* Students are prepared academically, financially and socially for success in education beyond high school.
- *Success:* Higher education completion rates are improved significantly.
- *Productivity:* Higher education productivity is increased to expand capacity and serve more students.

Lumina’s three approaches include effective practice, public policy, and public will-building.

These foundations have committed to working as partners to achieve their mutual goals, and many other foundations have joined in this effort.

Many organizations have responded to the call for increasing college completions, and they are carrying out a wide array of activities.

Included in this policy brief is a table containing descriptions of over a dozen major national college

completion initiatives. As the table illustrates, some initiatives are broad-based, covering the wide spectrum of higher education. Others have a more narrow focus, concentrating on sub-groups such as community colleges or adult populations. Some focus specifically on narrowing the completion gap between traditional college populations and underrepresented groups.

Though their goals, objectives and strategies vary, completion initiatives generally concentrate on one or more of the following:

- Raising awareness of issues and mobilizing public support.
- Improving public policy.
- Improving institutional outcomes through programmatic activity and creating a culture of student success.
- Improving higher education productivity.
- Developing more refined completion measures.⁴
- Analyzing current policies and practices, and identifying effective policies and best practices.

If the nation is to reach its college completion goals, it will take long-range, coordinated effort. Some cautions and potential pitfalls can be pointed out.

- *Initiative fatigue should be avoided.* Given limited time, money and energy, there is decreasing value in spreading institutional or state efforts too thin, in terms of developing and/or signing on to new projects.
- *Coordination is essential.* This is the key to minimizing duplication of effort and to maximizing efficiency and effectiveness. For example, consensus around new metrics is preferable to developing numerous separate sets of measures.

⁴Because many of the new completions will come from students who are currently excluded from the Graduation Rate Survey (GRS), new metrics are being developed to track the progress of part-time students, transfer students and students returning to college with previous credits. Additional measures are being developed to: better track sub-groups, such as low-income students; measure educational attainment in the context of state demographics; and monitor intermediate steps along the way to completion.

- *Access goals must not be abandoned.* Educational attainment goals cannot be achieved without continued commitment to educational opportunities for all.
- *Commitment to quality must be maintained.* Despite funding challenges, there is little value in producing many more postsecondary credentials if those credentials provide poor preparation for the workplace. Quality must be maintained, if not strengthened.
- *There must be planning for the future.* It is easy to focus on the initiative rather than the long-term goal. Plans are needed for what will happen when current funding sources are depleted.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that significant challenges lie ahead if the nation is to meet the president's goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. Whether that goal can be met remains to be seen, but significant progress can and must be made if the nation is to remain competitive in the global economy. This paper has described many key initiatives currently tackling the goal of generating more college degree completions, including important efforts to engage state policymakers and institutions in bringing about needed change. The real work will continue as governors and state legislators strive to put into place finance systems, accountability systems and other state policies in support of college completion goals, and as institutions work to make student success an integral part of everything they do.

Summary of Major U.S. College Completion Initiatives

Access to Success (A2S)

Sponsoring Organizations: National Association of System Heads (NASH) and The Education Trust.

Funding Partners: Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Origins: In fall 2007, with support from The Education Trust, a group of NASH members came together to form A2S “to increase the number of college graduates in their states and ensure that those graduates are more broadly representative of their states’ high school graduates.” They agreed to publicly report baseline and progress data and to share collective resources and expertise. They asked The Education Trust to report regularly to the public on their progress, necessitating more comprehensive databases and new metrics for examining student progress and degree completion.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To cut the college-going and graduation gaps for low-income and minority students in half by 2015. (Each participating system sets its own improvement targets based on the economic and workforce needs of the particular state.)

To create better access and success metrics that measure the following:

- Does a higher education system’s entering class reflect the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic profiles of its state’s high school graduates?
- How do the success rates of low-income and underrepresented minority students compare with those of other students within the system?
- Do the system’s graduates reflect the diversity of the state’s high school graduates?

Accomplishments to Date:

- Twenty public higher education systems in 18 states (Calif., Conn., Fla., Hawaii, Ky., La., Md., Minn., Mo., Miss., Mont., N.C., N.Y., Pa., R.I., S.D., Tenn., Wis.) currently participate in A2S. This represents more than 300 institutions serving over three million students.
- The Education Trust has developed new metrics that include transfer and part-time students, measure performance and progress in the context of the state’s population, and focus on both access and success.
- Produced *Charting a Necessary Path: The Baseline Report of Public Higher Education Systems in the Access to Success Initiative* (December 2009). Much of the information in the individual baseline reports, including the graduation rates of low-income and nontraditional students, was not previously available to the public.
- In August 2010, the Education Trust launched *The U.S. Education Delivery Institute*, a partner organization that helps A2S systems mobilize their college completion efforts.
- The Education Trust has led training efforts at the system and campus level on the leading indicators framework. Leading indicators are a set of proven factors such as credit accumulation that provide early signals of how well students are progressing toward degree completion.
- The Education Trust has developed a series of publications related to A2S work, highlighting institutions that are making gains in minority graduation rates and closing achievement gaps.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

The initiative runs through 2015. The A2S work described above is building capacity in these systems to ensure sustainability.

Website: <http://www.edtrust.org/issues/higher-education/access-to-success>

ACE Commission on Education Attainment

Sponsoring Organizations: American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), Association of American Universities (AAU), Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU).

Origins: In 2011, all six of the Washington DC-based presidential higher education associations began work on a joint effort to address the goal to substantially increase the number of individuals in the country with a postsecondary degree. The intent is for college and university presidents to provide clear and decisive leadership toward this goal. By bringing together a diverse group of higher education leaders, this effort is designed to recognize the wide range of institutions in the postsecondary universe and avoid applying single solutions to all types of schools.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To assess the need for improved college retention and attainment and to chart a course for improvement.

Broad themes of the commission's work:

- Assess the environmental factors reshaping American society and higher education, and the implications of these factors.
- Identify and advocate actions that must be taken by colleges and universities to increase student access and success in postsecondary education.
- Define and clarify actions that must be taken by external stakeholders (state and federal governments, the private sector and K-12 education) to support and complement efforts by the higher education community to expand student participation and success.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Prepared a prospectus to guide the work of the commission.
- Have invited a commission of institutional presidents and chancellors drawn from and broadly representative of the members of each of the six presidential associations; have scheduled the first meeting for October 2011.

Future Plans:

- The panel will convene throughout 2012 with the hope of producing a final document by the end of the year.

Achieving the Dream

Funding Partners: Lumina Foundation for Education (Founding Investor) and over 20 funders.

Origins: Achieving the Dream was conceived as a national initiative in 2004 by the Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations: American Association of Community Colleges; Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas-Austin; Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University; Jobs for the Future; MDC; MDRC; and Public Agenda. It began with 27 colleges in five states, numbers that have since steadily grown. In 2010, with the support of Lumina and the founding partners, Achieving the Dream, Inc. was established as an independent national non-profit organization.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To help more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree.

The objective is to help more students:

- Successfully complete the courses they take;
- Advance from remedial to credit-bearing courses;
- Enroll in and successfully complete gatekeeper courses;
- Enroll from one semester to the next; and
- Earn degrees and/or certificates.

The approach is to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success through:

- Improving results at institutions;
- Influencing public policy;
- Generating knowledge; and
- Engaging the public.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Has grown to a network of 160 institutions that have implemented diverse evidence-based programs and policy changes resulting in advancements in student success.
- Coordinated 16 state policy teams (Ark., Conn., Fla., Hawaii, Ind., Mass., Mich., N.C., N.M., Ohio, Okla., Pa., S.C., Texas, Va., Wash.) working in 30 states and the District of Columbia, leading to a variety of outcomes, such as making community college student completion a state priority and developing statewide measures for tracking student success.
- Produced numerous publications, including policy briefs, practical guides for community colleges and a 50-state policy audit.
- Developed data tools as well as a national longitudinal database that tracks full- and part-time students to allow study of various student success outcomes that can be analyzed by race, ethnicity and other student characteristics.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- Will continue to add new colleges.

Website: <http://www.achievingthedream.org/default.html>

Adult College Completion Network

Sponsoring Organization: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

Funding Partner: Lumina Foundation for Education.

Origins: In September 2010, Lumina Foundation awarded WICHE a grant to develop a collaborative learning network to support Lumina's Adult Degree Completion strategy. Made up of regional organizations, state agencies, city programs, non-profit organizations and others, the network is designed to serve as a mechanism for networking, communication and dissemination of information about successful adult college completion strategies.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To unite organizations and agencies working to increase college completion by adults with prior credits but no degree in a collaborative learning network.

Approaches include development of:

- An interactive website;
- Meetings/conferences;
- Webinars;
- Policy briefs and reports on lessons learned; and
- A repository of higher education policies related to adult learners.

Accomplishments to Date:

- First convening took place in March 2011.
- Launched www.adultcollegecompletion.org website.
- Developed "Project Warehouse," a searchable compilation of projects aiming to boost college completion among adults.
- Developed an email discussion listserv to connect policymakers, practitioners and others working to promote and improve adult college completion.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

This is a four-year grant. Participation is open to those working to develop and implement policies and programs that help adult students with some college credit return to school to complete their degree or certificate.

Website: <http://www.adultcollegecompletion.org>

Boosting College Completion for a New Economy

Sponsoring Organization: Education Commission of the States (ECS).

Funding Partner: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To work with legislative and higher education leaders to improve their state economies by increasing the number of residents with a postsecondary credential.

Will engage state legislators by:

- Engaging higher education leaders in their state to explore how the legislature can support strategies to increase postsecondary completion;
- Analyzing current state policies to determine their impact on college completion and workforce development goals; and
- Convening legislative chairs to develop model legislation that they can introduce in their state.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Developed a library of online resources related to college completion and workforce development.
- Produced a comprehensive 50-state database of legislative enactments related to degree attainment and workforce development.
- Produced *Legislative Commissions and Task Forces: Developing Strategies to Meet Completion & Workforce Challenges* (April 2011), the first in a series of policy briefs that examines strategies legislatures are developing to improve college completion and workforce development.

Future Plans:

This is a two-year initiative.

Website: <http://www.boostingcollegecompletion.org/>

College Completion Agenda

Sponsoring organization: College Board.

Collaborating Partners: National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), *Excelencia* in Education and National Council of La Raza.

Origins: In 2008, the College Board convened the Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education to study the educational pipeline as a single continuum and to identify solutions to increase the number of students who graduate from college, especially low-income and underrepresented minority students. The 2008 report *Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future* defined an overarching goal and offered 10 recommendations for achieving that goal. The commission noted that these recommendations must be measured on a regular basis to help bring about greater understanding of the educational landscape in the nation and how it changes over time.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To increase the proportion of 25-to-34-year-olds who hold an associate degree or higher to 55 percent by the year 2025 in order to make America the leader in educational attainment in the world.

10 recommendations:

- *Early Childhood.* Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families.
- *College and Career Counseling.* Improve middle and high school college counseling.
- *Dropout Prevention and Recovery.* Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs.
- *Standards and Alignment.* Align the K-12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations.
- *Educator Quality.* Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention.
- *College Admission.* Clarify and simplify the admission process.
- *Student Financial Aid.* Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent.
- *College Affordability.* Keep college affordable.
- *College Completion.* Dramatically increase college completion rates.
- *Adult Education.* Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Produced *The College Completion Agenda: 2010 Progress Report* (2010), a report on the nation's status with respect to the commission's goal and 10 recommendations.
- Together with the National Conference of State Legislatures, produced *The College Completion Agenda: State Policy Guide* (2010), a practical policy guide to help state legislators pursue each of the commission's recommendations.
- In January 2011, with NCSL, launched the *College Completion Agenda State Capitals Campaign*, a yearlong, multi-state campaign to mobilize the nation around the common goal (Calif., Colo., Fla., Idaho, Ind., Mass., Md., N.C., N.M., N.Y., R.I., Tenn., Texas, Va., W.Va.).
- In September 2011, launched *The College Completion Agenda: Latino Edition*.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center will continue to mobilize policymakers, educators and community and business leaders across the nation to reach the 55 percent by 2025 goal.

Website: <http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/>

College Completion Challenge

Sponsoring Organizations: American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Association of Community College Trustees, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

Origins: Brought together by the Gates Foundation, six national associations that focus on community colleges signed a joint statement at the AACC annual meeting in April 2010. Titled “Democracy’s Colleges: Call to Action,” the statement recognizes the central role of community colleges in fulfilling critical state and national goals and affirms the need to dramatically increase student completions.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To promote the development and implementation of policies, practices and institutional cultures that will produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality.

Asking for community colleges across the country to sign their own completion commitments, modeled on the “Call to Action.”

Accomplishments to Date:

- AACC fall meeting (November 2010) focused on the college completion challenge.
- Produced a summary report from the meeting, *The Completion Agenda: A Call to Action* (April 2011), which included suggestions for advancing the completion agenda, accountability for outcomes, ideas for a completion toolkit, and obstacles and how to overcome them.
- Developed a sample college completion commitment statement and a news release template as resources for community colleges.
- 65 colleges have “accepted the challenge,” as has the Maryland Association of Community Colleges.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- Will continue to encourage colleges to join the completion challenge.

Website: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/completionchallenge/Pages/default.aspx>

College Completion Initiative

Sponsoring Organization: Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

Origins: SREB began its College Completion Initiative in 2008 by identifying and studying 15 regional universities that enroll large numbers of low-income students and show relatively strong rates of degree completion. SREB later began assembling recommendations for states. During his 2009-10 chairmanship of SREB, former West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin III highlighted college completion as SREB's priority. (He later took that priority to the National Governors Association.) SREB has worked closely with Complete College America.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To increase significantly the numbers of students who complete postsecondary career certificates and associate's and bachelor's degrees, so that 60 percent of each state's adults ages 25 to 64 will have one of these credentials by 2025.

10 recommendations for improving college completion fall under four general strategies:

- Set statewide priority and direction for increasing the numbers of degrees and certificates;
- Increase access to postsecondary education;
- Increase numbers of degrees and completion rates through institutional actions; and
- Increase productivity and cost-efficiency in degree completion.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Produced *Promoting a Culture of Student Success: How Colleges and Universities Are Improving Degree Completion* (April 2010), summarizing 15 institutions' successful approaches to improving graduation rates.
- Produced *No Time to Waste: Policy Recommendations for Increasing College Completion* (September 2010), providing a roadmap for states for increasing degree completion, with 50 detailed suggestions.

Website: http://www.sreb.org/page/1456/degree_completion.html

Complete College America

Funding Partners: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Lumina Foundation for Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Ford Foundation.

Collaborating Partners: Nearly 20 national and regional higher education organizations for policy and research expertise.

Origins: Established in 2009 as a national non-profit. Began work in 2010 with 17 states that joined the Complete College America Alliance of States, a membership group of states committed to making increasing college completion a top priority.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

- To focus solely on dramatically increasing the nation's college completion rate through state policy change.
- To build consensus for change among state leaders, higher education and the national education policy community.

To join the Complete College America Alliance of States, a state—in partnership with its colleges and universities—pledges to:

1. Set annual state and campus-level degree and credential completion goals through 2020.
2. Develop state and campus-level action plans and move key policy levers.
3. Collect and report common measures of progress.

Focus areas for states:

- Shifting to performance funding;
- Reducing time-to-degree and accelerating success;
- Transforming remediation;
- Restructuring delivery for today's students; and
- Deploying transformative technology.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Number of states in the Alliance of States has grown to 29 in the three years since the organization's founding (Ark., Colo., Conn., Fla., Ga., Hawaii, Idaho, Ill., Ind., Ky., La., Mass., Md., Maine, Minn., Mo., N.M., Nev., Ohio, Okla., Ore., Pa., R.I., S.D., Tenn., Texas, Utah, Vt., W.Va.).
- Inaugural Convening was held in June 2010.
- In 2011, announced the Completion Innovation Challenge grant program. The initiative, supported by the Gates Foundation, challenged all 50 governors to implement innovative, high-impact reforms essential to significantly boosting student success and close attainment gaps. Thirty-three states applied, and 10 \$1 million implementation grants were awarded to states that produced the best plans to develop and deploy innovative, statewide strategies (Ark., Calif., Colo., Ga, Ind., Ky., Md, Tenn., Texas, W.Va.).
- Produced *Time is the Enemy* (September 2011), presenting completion data on all postsecondary students from 33 states that voluntarily participated in the study, using the Complete College America/National Governors Association Common Completion Metrics.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- There is no termination date for this initiative. Complete College America looks forward to more states committing to completion goals and joining the Alliance of States.

Website: <http://www.completecollege.org/>

Complete to Compete

Sponsoring Organization: National Governors Association (NGA).

Funding Partners: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education and USA Funds.

Origins: Former Governor Joe Manchin III selected college completion as his Chair's Initiative for 2010-11, during his chairmanship of the NGA. After his election to the U.S. Senate in November 2010, Governor Christine Gregoire (Wash.) was elected as new chair of the NGA and continued the effort as her Chair's Initiative for 2010-11.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies:

- Raise national awareness about the need to increase college completion and productivity, and the consequences of inaction.
- Create a set of common higher education completion and productivity measures that governors can use to monitor state progress and compare performance to other states and between institutions.
- Develop a series of best practices and a list of policy actions governors can take to achieve increased college completion.
- Provide grants to states to design policies and programs that increase college completion and improve higher education productivity and serve as models for other states around the country.
- Hold a learning institute for governors' senior advisors in education, workforce and economic development focusing on successful state strategies to graduate more students and meet workforce demands.

Outcomes:

- Published *Common College Completion Metrics* (June 2010). This report recommended four outcome metrics and six progress metrics that states should collect and report publicly at the campus, system and state levels.
- Published *Common College Completion Metrics Technical Guide* (October 2010).
- Published *Improving Postsecondary Attainment among Adults* (February 2011).
- Published *From Information to Action: Revamping Higher Education Accountability Systems* (July 2011). This report recommended the increasing use of performance and outcome metrics, as opposed to inputs, and then using these metrics to help answer key policy questions.
- Developed a Higher Education Data Dashboard for each state.
- Compiled a series of briefing papers on topics related to the higher education completion and productivity agenda.
- Initiated a policy academy on strengthening postsecondary education accountability systems. Grant applications were received, and grants have been awarded to six states (Colo., Conn., Ky., Mo., Nev., Utah).

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- The initiative formally ended in July 2011 with the announcement of the 2011-12 Chair's Initiative. Several initiative-related activities, including technical assistance to governors' offices and the policy academy, continue.

Website: <http://www.subnet.nga.org/ci/1011/>

Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion (EAF)

Sponsoring Organization: *Excelencia* in Education.

Collaborating Organizations: 60 organizations, including ACT, Inc., American Council on Education, College Board, Complete College America, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Jobs for the Future and National Conference of State Legislatures.

Funding Partners: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education and Kresge Foundation.

Origins: At a national policy forum in April 2010, *Excelencia* in Education launched Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion, a "human capital campaign" focused on increasing Latino college completion. Fifty organizations from diverse sectors participated as inaugural signatories in September 2010, committing to work for the common cause.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To inform, engage and sustain efforts to promote the role of Latinos in making the U.S. the world leader in college degree completion.

Going forward, *Excelencia* in Education will:

- Use its voice and convening power to emphasize the benefits to America of helping Latino students access and complete college.
- Fill an existing void by informing, organizing and tracking progress towards Latino college degree completion.
- Engage national state, community and institutional stakeholders in meaningful discussion to develop concrete efforts to accelerate Latino college degree attainment.
- Promote effective practices and policies that accelerate Latino college degree attainment.

Accomplishments to Date:

- The number of participating organizations increased from 50 to 60.
- Produced *Ensuring America's Future: Benchmarking Latino College Completion to Meet National Goals: 2010-2020* (September 2010).
- Produced *Ensuring America's Future: Federal Policy and Latino College Completion* (September 2010).
- Produced *Roadmap for Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion* (March 2011), a tool for stimulating dialogue across the nation about action needed to increase Latino degree attainment. The report addresses policy at four levels: community, college/institution, state and federal.
- In October 2011, *Excelencia* in Education is hosting the 2nd Policy Forum on Latino College Completion.

Time Frame and Future Plans:

In fall 2011, *Excelencia* in Education will release factsheets on Latino college completion for the 50 states. *Excelencia* in Education intends to continue its efforts for Ensuring America's Future through 2020.

Website: <http://www.edexcelencia.org/initiatives/ensuring-america%27s-future>

National Coalition for College Completion (NCCC)

Sponsoring Organization: Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP).

Collaborating Partners: More than 20 organizations, including Boys and Girls Club of America, Business Roundtable, Center for American Progress, Center for Law and Social Policy and National Urban League.

Funding Partners: Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Origins: In June 2011, a broad coalition of organizations representing business, civil rights, social services, students and youth advocacy launched NCCC. NCCC differs from other college completion initiatives in that it represents stakeholders outside of education who support federal and state programs, policies and funding to increase college completion.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies: To mobilize a diverse, non-partisan voice in support of college completion that speaks for the collective interests of the American public by demanding a policy agenda that encourages higher education institutions to provide better support to underrepresented students.

Driving principles:

- Affordability
- Career readiness
- Equity
- Transformation
- Quality

Accomplishments to Date:

- Developed the website FinishHigherEd.org, a resource center for policymakers, media, education leaders and others;
- Created a Mobilization Toolkit; and
- Began a library of promising practices.

Website: <http://www.ihep.org/programs/nccc.cfm>

Project Win-Win

Sponsoring Organization: Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP).

Collaborating Partner: State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)—evaluation partner.

Funding Partners: Lumina Foundation for Education and Kresge Foundation.

Origins: In 2009-10, the Education Trust conducted a pilot project to find students who are comparatively easy candidates for credentials, former students: (1) whose records qualify them for associate degrees, but who were never awarded any degree; and (2) who are “academically short” of an associate degree by no more than nine credits. These schools identified a number of problems in finding the students and awarding the degrees, but achieved some measure of success. In August 2010, Project Win-Win was announced, an expansion of the pilot program that involved 35 community colleges and four-year institutions in six states. In August 2011, Project Win-Win expanded again, now with operations in nine states (Fla., La., Mich., Mo., N.Y., Ohio, Ore., Va., Wis.) and involving 64 colleges.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies:

Focusing wholly on the associate degree:

- To match student attainment with its official recognition.
- To improve de facto degree completion rates at participating colleges through a retroactive award process.
- To improve institutional data systems, student tracking, advising, communication with students, understanding of problems in degree qualifications, and degree audit systems.
- To place qualified and interested students back on track to complete degrees in a relatively short time span.

Accomplishments to Date:

- Produced *Project Win-Win: Going to Scale*, which identifies seven distinct “procedural scenarios” for identifying students and awarding degrees.
- 23 institutions identified over 40,000 students on their books who appeared to qualify for the associate degree. Forty percent of these students were eliminated on the grounds of either having earned degrees elsewhere or being currently enrolled elsewhere (based on matches with state and National Student Clearinghouse data).
- 19 institutions completed degree audits on 10,000 students, of whom 2,000 were classified as “eligible” for the associate degree and 4,000 as “potential” completers (nine or fewer credits short).

Time Frame and Future Plans:

- This project will conclude in September 2013. The nine pilot institutions have completed their work, and 14 will finish by September 2012. Forty-one institutions are just starting their work and will finish by September 2013.
- After that point, each participating state central office will decide whether to take the Win-Win model to scale. Exceptions are Oregon (which is including all 17 community colleges from its outset and is already going to scale) and Michigan (where there is no state central authority and the project is being run through the Michigan Community College Association).

Website: <http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-win.cfm>

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