

SMP Update Degree Goal Costs

Promising College Completion Efforts

College Completion Tool Kit

The U.S. Department of Education recently released a “College Completion Tool Kit” intended to support the higher education attainment goals set by the Obama administration. These goals are consistent with the state’s Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education. The tool kit lays out strategies for achieving higher levels of attainment based on growth of jobs requiring postsecondary education, higher income levels associated with additional years of education, and increased educational attainment levels in competing nations.

The Toolkit highlights seven strategies and metrics to achieve greater educational attainment:

- 1) Set completion Goals and Develop Action Plans.** The first strategy is focused on the need for purposeful statewide planning that involves both K-12, higher education, adult education, workforce training, and business leaders. The document points to states that have successfully created P-20 councils to address short-term and long-term completion goals and have developed state action plans. The document also notes the importance of leadership by governors in moving toward these goals.
- 2) Embrace Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education.** A number of states have begun to fund higher education based, at least in part, on progress and completion rather than solely on enrollments. This includes the Student Achievement Initiative in Washington. A more detailed discussion of performance funding approaches is included in the packet.
- 3) Align High School Graduation, Workforce Training, and Adult Education Expectations to Public College Admission and Placement Requirements.** Adoption of common core standards or other standards that align high school and postsecondary expectations are important pieces of this strategy. In addition, it is critical that the sectors work together on a continuing basis and that students are assessed for college readiness in secondary school so students and schools can make curricular adjustments prior to graduation and therefore reduce remediation.

The report also notes the importance of providing opportunities for students to earn college credit while in high school through concurrent enrollment or dual credit programs. Last session the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, ESSHB 1808, which will ensure academically prepared students in Washington have an opportunity to earn one year of college credit in high school through a variety of dual credit and dual enrollment options. These include Running Start, College in the High School, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate.

- 4) Make it Easier for Students to Transfer Among Colleges.** The plan highlights the need for state-level transfer policy. Strategies include development of state-level articulation agreements. In Washington these would include the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) and Associate of Science-Transfer (AS-T) degree. The plan also recommends including successful transfer among the performance rewards (for both the sending and receiving institutions).

- 5) **Use Data to Drive Decision Making.** Ensure student-level data is available at the state level that will allow for analysis of progress and completion across sectors and levels of education. The report outlines a number of elements that should be included, such as demographic characteristics, enrollment and completion data, grades, test scores, courses taken, and ability to match teachers to students. The report also recommends development of data dashboards to provide timely information on key indicators.
- 6) **Accelerate Learning, Reduce Costs, and Stabilize Tuition Growth.** The report points to the need to stabilize tuition growth and asserts that institutions can both cut costs and raise quality by:
- Redesigning courses and leveraging technology based on recommendations from the National Center for Academic Transformation;
 - Making greater use of open courseware; and
 - Reducing administrative costs.

The report also points to the critical need to stabilize state funding for higher education and highlights an approach used in Oregon to transition from state support to a public / private endowment to fund the University of Oregon.

- 7) **Target Adults, Especially Those with “Some College, but No Degree.”** The final strategy is to focus on adults with some college and no degree. Getting more students to go from high school to college is important but not sufficient to meet the goals laid out by the administration. Nationally, roughly the adult population has at least a high school diploma but no postsecondary degree.

The report points to a number of strategies to serve these students including greater use of prior learning assessments, partnerships with employers to award credit for specific training, appropriate developmental education and placement, and completion programs designed to get students who are close to a degree but have not completed yet. Project Win-Win, though not cited in the report, is an excellent example of this last strategy.

Project Win-Win

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and Lumina Foundation for Education have begun a new initiative—working with both community colleges and four-year institutions in select states—to find formerly enrolled college students whose academic records qualify them to be awarded an associate degree retroactively. The three-year \$1.3 million effort, called “Project Win-Win,” also hopes to identify former students who are “academically short” of an associate degree by nine or fewer credits and re-enroll them to earn a degree.

The project includes 35 community colleges and four-year institutions in six states: Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin. For each school, this is a two-year, multi-part process involving a detailed examination of institutional data that includes: identifying students, matching student records with state system records and other available data, conducting degree audits to determine student eligibility, determining any administrative barriers to degree award for those who are eligible, and contacting potential degree earners to help them finish their degrees.

During the 2009-10 academic year, nine Project Win-Win institutions first participated in a pilot program in partnership with Education Trust. The original seven-month project awarded nearly 600 associate degrees and identified almost 1,600 students who were considered potential degree recipients.

While considered successful, the pilot program also identified several challenges along the way, including problems with changes in local data systems, incompatibility between local and state data, insufficient degree audit software, missing transcripts from other institutions, and locating students who might be eligible for degrees, among others. Nonetheless, based on the early results from the pilot institutions, extending the estimates across all of U.S. higher education would mean, at minimum, a 12 percent increase in the number of associate's degrees awardedⁱ.

Project Win-Win is focused on completion of an associate degree. However, the same approach could be implemented for baccalaureate completion.

The basic scenario for all participating institutions involves seven stepsⁱⁱ:

- 1) Identifying students in their data systems who had entered the institutions at any time after 2001, earned at least 60 credits and the minimum grade point average required for graduation, but who had never received the associate degree and had not been enrolled at the institution for at least a year;
- 2) Matching that initial list against state system records to determine who is either currently enrolled elsewhere in the state or earned a degree from another state institution, and removing them from the population under consideration;
- 3) Sending the reduced list from step 2 to the National Student Clearinghouse to determine if anyone on the list is currently enrolled in another state or received a degree in another state, and removing them from the group under consideration;
- 4) Subjecting each student from the residual list in step 3 to a “degree audit” to reach a final determination on degree eligibility;
- 5) For all degree “eligibles” determine whether there are any administrative “holds” on degrees and resolve as many of these as possible;
- 6) For all those for whom the degree audit determined “academic shortfall” by nine or fewer credits, find these “potential” degree earners; and
- 7) Provide as many in step six as can be found with templates for finishing degrees that include formal class work, credit-by-examination, and/or development and review of a dossier that documents and validates experiential learning.

This process takes two years to complete, with the largest amount of time spent on degree audits and locating the potential degree-completers.

ⁱ Based upon press release provided by Institute for Higher Education Policy, August 25, 2010. www.ihep.org/press-room/news_release-detail.cfm?id=189

ⁱⁱ Institute for Higher Education Policy. www.ihep.org/qualifiedstudents.cfm. Downloaded August 22, 2011.