

Complete to Compete: Common College Completion Metrics

Ryan Reyna

NGA Center for Best Practices

Education Division

June 2010

Executive Summary

Increasing degree completion at America's public colleges and universities is pivotal for the nation's economic competitiveness and longterm economic growth. To meet this goal in a time of unprecedented fiscal strain, policymakers and higher education leaders need comprehensive, consistent performance metrics to shape funding strategies and pinpoint areas for improvement. While states and their higher education systems have made strides in reporting and using performance data, more work in this area is urgently needed.

The National Governors Association, under the leadership of incoming NGA Chair West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin III, convened a Work Group on Common College Completion Metrics to make recommendations on the common higher education measures that states should collect and report publicly. The work group members found substantial consensus on which to build their recommendations.

Governors, higher education executive officers, legislators, and college and university presidents must embrace the challenge and work together to implement the policy and data system changes that will produce accurate information. Specifically, the work group recommends the following completion metrics:

OUTCOME METRICS:

- .☐ Degrees and certificates awarded;
- .☐ Graduation rates;
- .☐ Transfer rates; and
- .☐ Time and credits to degree.

PROGRESS METRICS:

- .☐ Enrollment in remedial education;
- .☐ Success beyond remedial education;
- .☐ Success in first-year college courses;
- .☐ Credit accumulation;
- .☐ Retention rates; and
- .☐ Course completion.

Comparable, reliable metrics are essential for states under current fiscal constraints. Information on the progress toward, and degree completion of, all students in higher education allows state leaders to gauge whether policies are successful and helps inform future funding decisions. Collecting and reporting metrics at the campus, system and state levels is a necessary first step for states as they seek to improve completion rates and productivity in higher education.