

The College Completion Agenda

State Policy Guide

Produced in Collaboration with:



NATIONAL CONFERENCE
of STATE LEGISLATURES



Acknowledgments

The College Board Advocacy and Policy Center was formed to make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today. We hope that this policy guide will be the first in a series of publications that help to translate research and innovation into effective public policy. We are pleased to present this work in collaboration with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

We would like to extend special thanks to our advisory committee of legislators and staff who are experts and champions of education from around the country.

- Representative RaeAnn G. Kelsch, North Dakota House of Representatives
- Representative Roy M. Takumi, Hawaii House of Representatives
- (Former) Representative Kory M. Holdaway, Utah House of Representatives
- Representatives Rick Glazier, North Carolina House of Representatives
- Julie Pelegrin, Senior Attorney and Team Leader, Colorado General Assembly
- Paula Dominguez, Director of Research, Rhode Island General Assembly Legislative Council
- Frances Ramírez-Maestas, Director, Legislative Education Study Committee New Mexico Legislature
- Mark Hudson, Legislative Analyst, Arkansas General Assembly

As always, a project like this takes the talents and commitment of many people. Special thanks to Christen Pollock, Executive Director, Advocacy and Government Relations at the College Board, and to Julie Davis Bell of NCSL for their leadership of this project. Thanks also to Barbara Houlik and Erica Cordova of the NCSL Education Program who helped prepare the chapters. Karen Hansen, Leann Stelzer and Julie Lays of the NCSL Communications Department and Jeffrey Hale of the College Board's Advocacy unit spent many hours editing the chapters. Special thanks also to Tom Rudin, Jennifer Jenkins, and Annika Many of the College Board for their support and assistance.

Authors

It would not be possible to create a guide such as this without drawing on the unique educational and public policy expertise of NCSL and College Board staff. These authors have collaborated to bring clarity to extraordinarily complex issues in a form that will be useful to policymakers throughout the country, and we are most grateful for their efforts.

Early Childhood

Jennifer M. Stedron, Program Director, Education Program, NCSL
Tajel Shah, Senior Product Development Analyst, The College Board

Improving Middle and High School College and Career Counseling

Brenda Bautsch, Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL
Patricia Martin, Assistant Vice President, School Counselor Advocacy,
The College Board

Dropout Prevention

Sunny Deyé, Senior Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL
Lamar Bailey, Policy Associate, NCSL
Stephen J. Handel, Senior Director, Community College Initiatives,
The College Board

Standards and Alignment

Natasha Vasavada, Executive Director, Standards, The College Board
Yilan Shen, Policy Associate, Education Program, NCSL

Teacher Quality

Michelle Exstrom, Senior Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL
Sara Shelton, Senior Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL
Helen Santiago, Vice President, College Board Schools, The College Board

College Admission

Julie Davis Bell, Group Director, Education Program, NCSL
Bradley J. Quin, Executive Director, Higher Education Advocacy,
The College Board

College Affordability and Student Financial Aid

Sandy Baum, Independent Policy Analyst, The College Board
Julie Davis Bell, Group Director, Education Program, NCSL
Anne Sturtevant, Director, Enrollment Services and Access, The College Board

College Completion

Brenda Bautsch, Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL
Ronald Williams, Vice President, Community College Initiatives,
The College Board

Adult Education

Pamela Kerouac, Senior Assessment Manager, The College Board
Vincent Badolato, Policy Specialist, Education Program, NCSL

Today we face a crisis across the educational landscape: High school completion rates are dropping. Achievement gaps persist, with significant disparities for students from low-income families and for minority students. The proportion of adults with postsecondary credentials is not keeping pace with that of other industrialized nations, and the United States is facing an alarming education deficit that threatens our global competitiveness and economic future.

There are formidable challenges at every level of the system that confront students who aspire to enroll and succeed in college. In 2007, the College Board formed the Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education to study the educational pipeline as a single continuum and identify solutions to increase the number of students who graduate from college and are prepared to succeed in the 21st century. The commission found that a “torrent of American talent and human potential entering the educational pipeline is reduced to a trickle 16 years later as it moves through the K–16 system.” In short, too many students fall through the cracks at each point of the P–16 pipeline. Led by William “Brit” Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, the commission established 10 interdependent recommendations to reach its goal of ensuring that at least 55 percent of Americans hold a postsecondary degree by 2025. To improve our college completion rates, we must think P–16 and improve education from preschool through higher education. State legislators and policymakers can play a large role in advancing each of the recommendations.

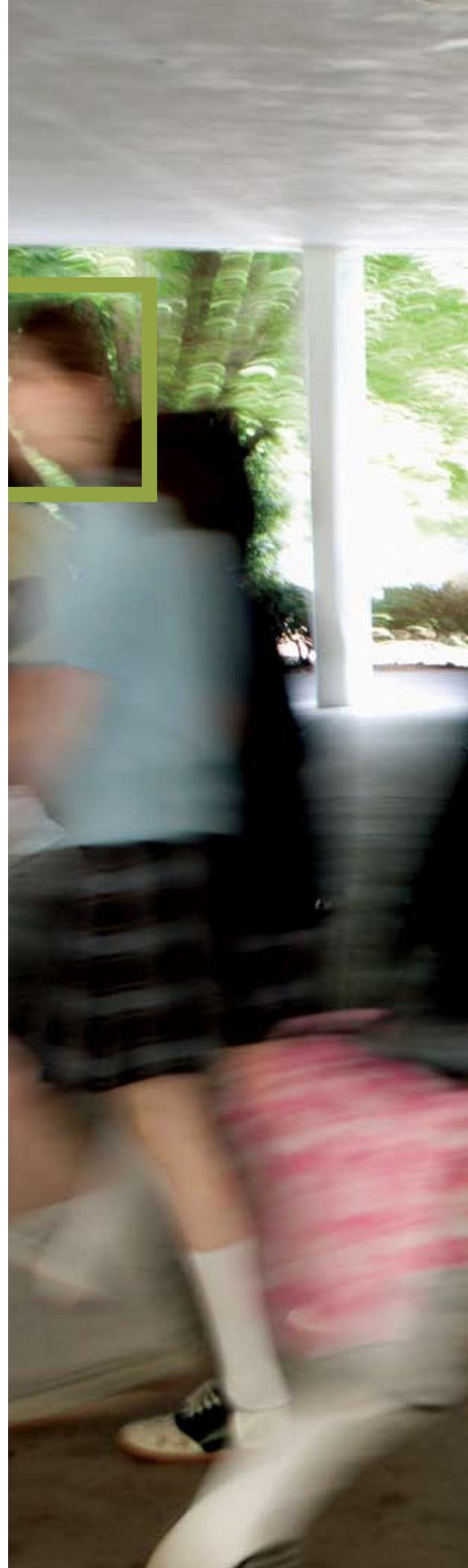
The College Board and the National Conference of State Legislatures joined together to produce a practical policy guide for state legislators to pursue each of the commission’s recommendations. The guide acts as a road map toward increasing the number of Americans who attain a postsecondary degree and empowering legislators to be an even more positive and active force.

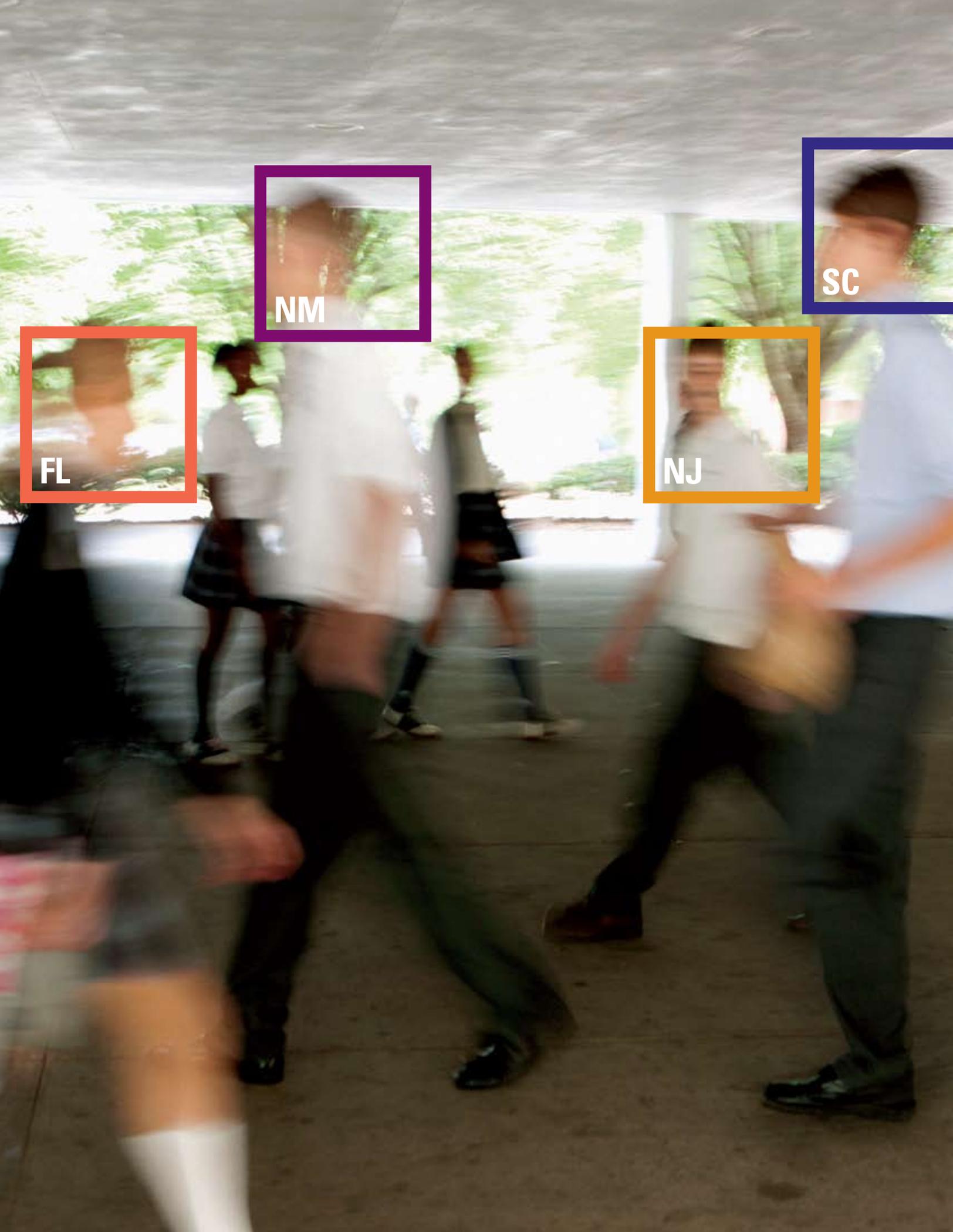
State Policy Guide

The College Board and NCSL have identified coauthors in their respective organizations with policy and practice expertise in each recommendation area to create the individual chapters of this State Policy Guide. The authors actively consulted with specialists from the education community and a legislative advisory group of eight experienced state legislators and staff who have given ongoing guidance to this effort.

The College Board and NCSL authors, in consultation with the advisory group, have worked to ensure that the information in the guide is useful and meaningful to state legislators. Each chapter includes:

- Brief background information on the topic;
- A list of questions that state legislators need to ask about conditions in their own states;
- An overview of current and relevant research;
- Specific strategies for dealing with the problems;
- The cost implications of the policy strategies (including low-, medium- and high-cost options);
- Examples of policies that are currently being implemented in the states; and
- Short-, medium- and long-term action steps state legislators can take.







Each of the commission's recommendations is the focus of a chapter in the State Policy Guide. The ten recommendations are:

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families

Two

Improve middle and high school college and career counseling

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent

Eight

Keep college affordable

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs

One

Early Childhood

Children entering school ready to meet its academic, social and emotional demands are more likely to achieve success in academics and in life. States that want to increase college readiness and success must intervene in the earliest years. States must be strategic and coordinated in their investments in these early years. These include programs to provide:

- Child care;
- Preschool;
- Family supports, including economic and parenting support;
- Child health services; and
- Early identification and intervention for infants and toddlers with disabilities

Examples of state policies:

- Enhancing Oversight Through Coordinated Governance (Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio)
- Providing Stable and Flexible Funding Through Block Grants (Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska)
- Promoting Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Washington)
- Implementing Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessments (Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)

Two

Improving Middle School and High School College and Career Counseling

Promoting college aspirations, ensuring that students enroll in the academic classes they need to be ready for college, guiding them through the admission and financial aid processes and helping them build the social skills necessary to succeed is the role of the school counselor — a role especially vital for first-generation college students and for students from low-income families. In order to ensure that students are ready for college, college counseling services should start early — at least by the middle grades.

Examples of state policies:

- Making College and Career Preparation Part of Graduation Requirements (Kentucky)
- Funding Comprehensive Counseling Programs (Washington)

Three

Dropout Prevention

Each year 1.3 million students leave school without graduating — 7,000 per day. The problem is especially acute for minority students: Only about half of African American, Latino and Native American students earn a high school diploma. With the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma more than 3.25 times higher than the rate for those with a college degree, this has become a national crisis.

Research has shown, however, why many students drop out of school and what might be done to prevent it. For example, identifying at-risk students at an early age, developing individual plans for their education and implementing dropout recovery programs to get students back in school have all proved successful.

Examples of state policies:

- Helping Students to Develop Individual Learning Plans, Providing Quality Student Mentoring and Training Counselors in Effective Dropout Prevention Techniques (California, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina)
- Identifying and Supporting Struggling Students (Colorado, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Washington)
- Reengaging Out-of-School Youth by Implementing Dropout Recovery Programs (California, Illinois, New Mexico, Texas)

Four

Standards and Alignment

Content standards outline the knowledge and skills students should attain at each level of their education across different subjects. These standards serve as the foundations of every other component of raising student achievement. Although each state has the structure in place to articulate the content standards their students should meet, various problems exist across the current state frameworks, including a lack of common assessment measures, different definitions of progress, problems associated with students transferring across state lines and different expectations for teacher training. Such problems ultimately hinder student preparation for college and career. High-quality and rigorous content standards are by no means the silver bullet for raising student achievement, but they are essential for all other strategies to be integrated into a coherent effort toward higher achievement.

Examples of state policies:

- Establishing Standards Workgroups to Set and Evaluate Rigorous Content Standards (Indiana)
- Examining and Comparing Standards Against International Benchmarks (Michigan, Ohio)
- Revising and Improving Standards to Be More Closely Aligned to College and Career Readiness (American Diploma Project states, Colorado, Virginia)
- Establishing Common Standards with States to Set Clear and Rigorous Expectations (Common Core State Standards Initiative)
- Establishing Statewide Program to Align Curriculum, Assessment, Professional Development, Graduation Requirements and Higher Education Placement Tests to Standards (California, Massachusetts, Texas)

Five Educator Quality

About 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first three years; as many as half leave within five years and many of those who do stay are not adequately prepared to teach. High-quality teachers and principals are not distributed equally throughout the system — that is, the best teachers are not typically found in the lowest-performing schools. One-fifth of states' entire general-fund budgets, on average, are devoted to “human capital” — teachers and leaders — employed in K–12 public schools. Effective policies are needed to recruit, train and retain talented educators, especially in the highest-need areas. Recruiting and training effective school principals is equally important: Research shows that there are almost no low-performing schools that have been documented to have turned around without a highly skilled principal.

Examples of state policies:

- Recruiting Students to Return to Their Home Areas as Teachers (Illinois, South Carolina)
- Revamping Teacher Compensation (Minnesota)
- Using Student Achievement as Part of Teacher Evaluation (Michigan, Rhode Island, Tennessee)
- Building Longitudinal Student Data Systems (Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Tennessee)
- Conducting a Statewide Survey of Teacher Working Conditions (North Carolina)
- Creating Leadership Programs (Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina)
- Adopting Policies to Attract Talented School Leaders (Arkansas, Florida)

Six

College Admission Process

Although choosing which students attend a given college has traditionally been the decision of that college, changing demographics — including the rise of returning and other nontraditional students and “swirling” enrollment patterns with students changing colleges one or more times — and other factors combine to have a great effect on states’ goals for college participation and achievement for all students. The complexity of the admission process is a barrier for many students, especially for first-generation and historically underrepresented students.

Examples of state policies:

- Systemwide Application, Information and Management (New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas)
- Ensuring Admission for Low-Income Students (North Carolina, Virginia)
- Guaranteed Admission for Merit (Georgia, Indiana)
- Guaranteed Admission Through Transfer and Articulation (Florida, Ohio)

Seven & Eight

Financial Aid and College Affordability

State legislators and their constituents are very concerned about the rising price of college and the ability of state, federal and family resources to keep pace. Increasingly, lower-income students risk being priced out of college. This is occurring at a time when fewer and fewer jobs in our economy are available to individuals with no college education. A statewide commitment to keeping college affordable not only helps more students obtain a postsecondary degree but also supports state economic development.

Examples of state policies:

- Promise Scholarships/Early Commitment Financial Aid (California, Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon)
- Loan Forgiveness (Many states)
- Aid to Adult Students (Kentucky, Michigan)
- Incentives (Virginia)
- State Savings Programs (Many states)
- Investment in Community Colleges (Many states)

Nine

College Completion

Currently, only 56 percent of students at four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree within six years, and only 28 percent of those at two-year colleges earn an associate degree within three years. Graduation rates for minority students are below 50 percent. Many factors combine to lower the graduation rate, such as the need to work full time, having dependent children, inadequate academic preparation, lack of social preparation and college costs.

Examples of state policies:

- Legislating Reporting Requirements that Include Student Success (Massachusetts)
- Establishing Transfer Policies Between Two- and Four-Year Colleges (Florida, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota)
- Financial Incentives for Transfer and Graduation (New Jersey)
- Legislative Task Forces on Student Success (Arkansas, Illinois, South Carolina)
- Student Support Programs (California, New York)
- Performance-Based Funding (Florida, Indiana, Oklahoma, Ohio)

Ten

Adult Education

There is a pressing need to focus more attention and resources on adult learners. Close to two-thirds of the projected workforce of 2020 are already out of elementary and secondary education and following current trends; by 2025, this nation will fall an expected one million short of the college graduates needed in the workforce.

Adult learners come from many different walks of life and approach educational opportunities at various times. Unlike many traditional students, adults typically have more outside responsibilities competing with their time and ability to advance educationally.

In addition, there is no single group of adult learners; they vary widely in age, have differing levels of academic readiness, and come from different social and economic circumstances. States need to make investments in systems designed to understand the needs of adult learners and support these students while they earn their degrees.

Examples of state policies:

- Make Reaching All Types of Adult Learners an Education Public Policy Priority (Kentucky, Oklahoma)
- Offer Credit for Prior Learning (Ohio)
- Design Clear Articulation and Transfer Policies (Connecticut, Florida)
- Promote Awareness Campaigns (Kentucky, Louisiana)
- Develop Career Pathways for Current or Emerging High-Demand Industries (Arkansas, Oregon, Virginia)
- Address Affordability and Accessibility (Kentucky, Michigan, Washington)

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of U.S. states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues, and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The conference operates from offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

For further information, visit www.ncsl.org.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board is composed of more than 5,700 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college readiness, college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid and enrollment. Among its widely recognized programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®), SpringBoard® and ACCUPLACER®. The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, we work to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. We make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

This report can be downloaded at completionagenda.collegeboard.org.
Hard copies may be ordered by contacting cbadvocacy@collegeboard.org.

advocacy.collegeboard.org