



EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

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Session 242 – The Postsecondary Challenge: Increasing Success, Ensuring Affordability, Maintaining Costs

1. Why is the main topic of the session an important policy issue now?

- The United States is experiencing a decline in the education levels of its population. The percent of adults between the ages of 25-44 have lower college attainment rates than adults age 45-64. In addition, many nations have surpassed the U.S. in the percent of their population with a postsecondary education.
- Lagging attainment is occurring at a time when there is tremendous pressure on higher education institution budgets and student costs to educate.
- The aging population will demand more public resources for health care and other areas.
- The public questions whether more resources for postsecondary education will result in higher college attainment levels.
- The challenge to postsecondary education is to increase productivity of academic programs while utilizing resources more efficiently.

2. What state or district examples were presented to address the session topic?

Model Approaches:

University of Maryland

- Collaborate regents, chancellors, institutional presidents and administrations, and senior campus officials
- Centralize services and procurement to reduce costs
- Implement enrollment management strategies to streamline services to students
- Increase contact hours for faculty
- Limit number of credits for degree programs
- Use technology in instruction and course redesign
- Leverage alternative enrollment strategies – dual enrollment, early colleges, guaranteed spring admission
- Implement voluntary systems of accountability with dashboards to provide transparency to the public

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

- Fully leverage P-20 efforts to create stronger high school curriculum, better alignment between high school exit standards and college entrance requirements
- Fund postsecondary institutions based on student completion, not student enrollment
- Redesign developmental studies programs to better diagnose student needs and target resources more effectively so that students can transition to college-level courses more quickly and with increased completion rates.
- Provide incentives to students to complete their degrees on time with low interest loans through the Texas Be On Time Initiative

State of Colorado

- Limit tuition increases to 5% for low and middle income students
- Dramatically increase need based student financial aid
- Improve college and career planning in high schools
- Improve use of data state and system wide to measure impact of state initiatives

3. What policy options were discussed that would help policymakers address the session topic? What are the pros/cons of the various options (if presented)? What should policymakers take into consideration as they move to enact and implement such policy options?

- Strategies must be systemic, not piecemeal
- Recognize that K-12 and postsecondary education systems react differently to incentives and sanctions
- Funding should follow performance
- Strategies must be relevant to students – appeal to their career goals
- Improved tools to diagnose remedial education – demand better alignment between 12th and 13th grade
- Create incentives for students to succeed in a timely manner
- Examine balance between need and merit based aid and distribute financial aid in a manner that reduces debt load for students from low and middle income families
- States that are seeing decline in number of high school graduates need to look at the data and explore strategies to increase college attainment among a declining population of students
- Statewide goals to increase college attainment rates and close achievement gaps create urgency
- Improve quality of information to students
- Create transparent and voluntary accountability systems that are tied to mission of the institution

4. In summary, what were the three main points of the session? What were the important “take home” messages?

- States and institutions can increase college attainment rates, maintain affordability and control costs with a systemic approach that ranges from state level policy levers to institutional strategies.
- Cost saving efforts must be collaborative, have buy-in of key players and include a voluntary level of accountability that is transparent to the public.
- Entire P-20 system should build incentives for students and institutions to decrease time to degree and increase college attainment rates.

5. Were there any resources, speakers or reports mentioned in this session that would be helpful for participants who did not attend?

Lumina Foundation’s Making Opportunities Affordable Initiative: <http://www.makingopportunityaffordable.org/>

National Center for Academic Transformation: <http://www.center.rpi.edu/>