

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman  
House Education and the Workforce  
Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Education and the Workforce  
Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 24, 2015

Dear Members of Congress:

Thoughtful use of postsecondary data has the power to improve student access to and success in and after college. Data allow students and families to make informed decisions about where to attend college, what to study, and how to pay for it. Data inform the work of college administrators and faculties, helping them remove barriers to success, smooth student pathways to graduation, and prepare students for the workforce and life after college. Data support employers as they recruit employees with the skills and training necessary to succeed in the workforce. And data help policymakers target public resources and evaluate program effectiveness, thereby improving the postsecondary system and further contributing to the public good.

Developing robust and impactful postsecondary data policies is far from simple. Policy leaders must make critical decisions about:

- which collection methods and systems to use;
- what data elements to add, maintain, or remove;
- how to identify and define different metrics for specific purposes, including consumer information, policy development, and institutional improvement;
- who should have access to which data elements and metrics;
- how to appropriately protect data privacy and security; and
- how to convert data into meaningful information for different audiences, including postsecondary institutions, the public, employers, and policymakers.

To help guide these choices, members of the PostsecData Working Group, a diverse set of organizations committed to higher quality postsecondary data, endorse the following principles. We believe these principles should inform the development of postsecondary data policies that promote data use to advance student access and success and educational equity. In particular, we expect these principles will help Congress and the Administration tackle some of today's most pressing postsecondary challenges, such as empowering consumers with valuable information, improving financial aid programs, and stewarding federal investment in colleges and universities. These principles also will ensure that states have the information they need to steer their own education policies, and that institutions can obtain the data they need to guide effective practice.

## Postsecondary Data Policy Principles

1. Good postsecondary policy requires high-quality and clearly-defined data which, if used effectively, can positively influence student outcomes. Policy should expressly acknowledge that data are an important resource for improving postsecondary access, completion, cost, and post-college outcomes.
2. Postsecondary data policy should promote efforts that lead to equity and better outcomes for students, especially low-income and underrepresented students, and should not be used to (intentionally or unintentionally) exclude or deny them access to meaningful and valuable opportunities.
3. Policy should support improved data literacy for educators, policymakers, students, and families, so they can use data more effectively to inform institutional improvement, policy development and analysis, student learning, student choice, and research.
4. Policy should support the effective dissemination of data to students, families, policymakers, colleges and universities, and researchers so the information can be used to affect decision-making.
5. Good data policy makes transparent who has access to what information and for what purposes. Different users should have different levels of access to discrete amounts and types of data, depending on their role in the system. Good policy should avoid data silos and encourage appropriate and important analysis and linkages, such as between education and labor data.
6. Data policy should maintain a deep commitment to protecting student information by promoting implementation of best practices in data privacy and security procedures, including data governance, to ensure data are well-protected at all levels. Access to data, especially personally identifiable information, should be judicious, role-based, and accompanied by the appropriate training, to help safeguard privacy and ensure data are used responsibly.
7. Postsecondary data efforts should be aligned with efforts within early childhood, K-12, and the workforce through a P20-W framework to illuminate pathways and facilitate streamlined educational and workforce experiences. Data policy should promote this P20-W alignment, especially as students move frequently between colleges and the workforce.
8. Policy should leverage the work and recommendations of collaborative efforts among those who provide, collect, and disseminate postsecondary data to better align data definitions, streamline reporting practices to manage burden, and enhance data comparability and utility.

We hope federal policy, including, but not limited to, the next generation of the Higher Education Act and the emerging college ratings system, will recognize that effective data use can support student success, identify and shrink opportunity and achievement gaps, promote efficiencies, and enhance learning and employability. We believe that a committed, coordinated postsecondary community can work together to inform policymakers about needed improvements in data capacity, quality, relevance, security, and use today, while considering the data needs of tomorrow's students and systems. As researchers, practitioners, and advocates for students, we look forward to working with you to ensure data are used effectively and safely to provide students the best possible chance at postsecondary success. For additional information, please contact Michelle Asha Cooper, president of the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) ([cooper@ihep.org](mailto:cooper@ihep.org), 202-861-8224), or Mamie Voight, director of policy research at IHEP ([mvoight@ihep.org](mailto:mvoight@ihep.org), 202-587-4967).

Sincerely,

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)

Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)

Association for Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Complete College America

Data Quality Campaign (DQC)

The Education Trust

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)

National College Access Network (NCAN)

New America

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

Workforce Data Quality Campaign (WDQC)

Young Invincibles

Cc: Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

House Education and the Workforce Committee

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell

Deputy Under Secretary of Education Jamiene Studley

Deputy Under Secretary of Education Jeff Appel