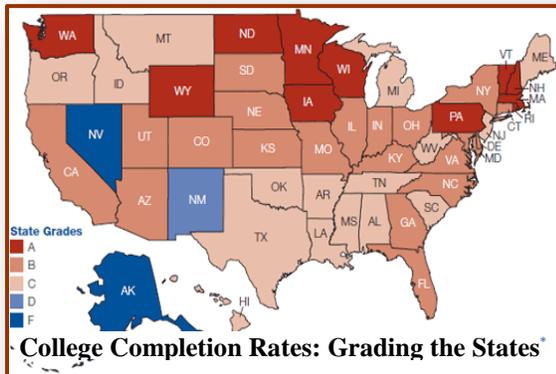


BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY WORKFORCE TO STRENGTHEN STATE ECONOMIES

In difficult economic times, elected officials need proven, cost-effective approaches that improve the lives of children and families. Outlined below are several budget-conscious solutions that will increase college graduation rates in order to build a 21st century workforce in the states.



As the nation recovers from the recession, studies show that the United States will have one million fewer college graduates than will actually be needed to rebuild a strong economy for the future. In 2007, college degrees were awarded to 76 percent of students from high-income families but only 10 percent of students from low-income families. College completion is critical to a state's economic health and each individual citizen's future. Policymakers can improve rates of college completion by strengthening the educational pipeline. The policies¹ below offer research-based solutions – beginning in early childhood years and continuing through post-secondary education strategies – to

increase the percentage of college graduates who are prepared to succeed in the 21st century.

Early Childhood

- **Provide Stable Child Care Funding.** Participation in high-quality early care and education programs from birth through kindergarten [improves](#) child well-being and later school success. This is particularly true for poor children. [Rhode Island](#) offers child-care assistance to families at or below 180 percent of the federal poverty level with no waiting lists and no time limits on assistance. Quality early childhood programs targeting low-income children [save \\$2.36 per dollar invested](#).
- **Implement Early Childhood “Readiness” Assessments.** Children who attend preschool education programs prior to entering kindergarten [show](#) substantial cognitive, social and emotional [benefits](#). Assessing children's readiness for kindergarten enables states to track growth in the state's kindergarten population, compare readiness across schools and school districts and link readiness data to earlier childhood investments and to later school performance. States use this information in different ways, including school improvement, policymaking and guidance for planning of curriculum and instruction. Florida uses its readiness assessment data to evaluate pre-kindergarten programs and determine school readiness statewide. Each year, [Maryland](#)'s Work Sampling System assesses all kindergarten children for written and spoken language skills in order to measure progress toward the statewide school readiness goal.

Preschool Through College

- **Improve School Attendance.** Success in school depends, in part, on [attending school](#). Children who attend regularly are more likely to succeed academically, socially and emotionally and have a greater chance of becoming economically productive, engaged citizens. In [Georgia and Maryland](#), the state education departments require the reporting of absence data to facilitate early intervention and appropriate supports.

*Map Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Measuring Up 2008

¹ Partially adapted from [The College Completion Agenda State Policy Guide, 2010](#).

- **Align Standards from Pre-K through College and Career.** Higher student performance is tied to [aligning learning goals](#) from grade to grade. [Pennsylvania](#) has grade-specific learning standards for kindergarten, first and second grades that are aligned with the state’s academic content standards. [Massachusetts](#) established the nation’s most thoroughly aligned academic standards, which ensure consistency among curriculum, [assessments, accountability measures](#) and teacher certification.

Teacher Quality

- **Attract Talented Educators and Leaders.** Providing excellent teachers and administrators is critical for children who live in poor communities. State incentives to place and keep teachers in high-poverty schools can include low-cost housing loans, repayment of college loans, retirement credit and salary boosts. [Arkansas](#) provides bonuses to principals who serve in high-need schools, and [California](#) offers loan repayment to teachers in low-income areas and low-performing schools.

Dropout Prevention

- **Identify Struggling Students Early.** Numerous [studies](#) show that there are ample warning signs for many students before they drop out, including chronic absenteeism and academic struggles in elementary and middle school. [Georgia](#) provides a graduation coach in middle and high schools to identify at-risk students and mentor them before they drop out. Since the coaches were introduced in 2005-2006, the statewide graduation rate has increased from 65.4 percent in 2004 to 78.9 percent in 2009, [a net increase](#) of nearly 23,000 more students graduating.
- **Implement Dropout Recovery Programs.** [Effective dropout recovery programs](#) provide academic support, flexibly meet student needs and schedules and provide a bridge to post-secondary education and employment. In 2009, [Illinois](#) established the Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education Program to re-enroll high school dropouts in year-round classes, summer school, evening or community college courses, depending on their needs. It is estimated that the program will re-enroll over 24,000 students by 2013.

Scholarships and Aid

- **Provide Targeted Scholarships or Financial Aid.** [Studies](#) show that individuals with post-secondary degrees have higher incomes, volunteer more, make more charitable donations, experience improved health and are less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. [Oregon](#) developed a “Shared Responsibility Model” that requires participating students, universities and private partners all to pay a share of the tuition, including maximizing federal student aid. As a result of the program, 38,000 students have received aid and the state saw a 5 percent increase in four-year college enrollment.

College Admission

- **Guarantee Community College Transfer Admission.** [Transferring credits](#) from a community college to a university remains a barrier to college graduation, even though half of all post-secondary students attend community college at some point in their educational career. [Florida](#) guarantees that all community college graduates will be admitted to a state university as a junior, thereby assuring that they can continue their pathway to a full college degree.

College Graduation

- **Ensure Student Support Programs.** [Research](#) indicates that student retention is improved through student supports such as financial aid and advising, personal counseling, peer mentoring, career planning services and study skills and writing workshops. California and New York both provide financial aid and comprehensive student supports to low-income and academically disadvantaged youth.

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