

Closing the Postsecondary Attainment Gap: A National Imperative

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Setting the Stage

- Changing demands on higher education
 - Increased global competitiveness
 - Changing student demographics
- Eroding public trust in higher education
 - Restricted access and flat attainment, especially for low-income and minority students
 - Skyrocketing cost of attendance and decreased affordability
 - Indicators of declining quality

The National Dialogue

- The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education
- The Secretary of Education's Action Plan for Higher Education
- Public outreach
 - Higher education summits
 - Regional town halls
 - High school and college student roundtables

What We've Heard

- From parents
 - Unclear and inconsistent information about college
- From students
 - Skyrocketing costs: "Is it worth it?"
- From employers
 - The system is not producing graduates who are prepared for the workforce
- From institutions
 - Want to be more accountable, but don't know how to best assess student learning

Mythbusting

- The U.S. Department of Education is not interested in federalizing higher education.
 - Our system's greatest strength is its diversity
 - No interest in implementing a one-size-fits-all measure of quality
- We want to improve the system by providing students, parents, and consumers with **more transparent information** about college performance so they can make important decisions about their investment.

The Department's Focus

- Align high school, college, and work expectations
- Serve adults and other nontraditional students
- Increase need-based aid
- Improve affordability, reduce costs, and increase productivity
- Support and emphasize student learning outcomes

What We've Done So Far

- Access
 - FAFSA4Caster
 - Executive Order on Adult Education
- Affordability
 - Pell Grant increase
 - Working to simplify the federal financial aid process
- Accountability
 - Continuing dialogue with the accreditation community
 - Consumer information pilot projects
 - FIPSE Grant on student learning outcomes

What's Already Happening in the Higher Ed Community

- \$2.45M FIPSE Grant to AAC&U, AASCU, & NASULGC on student learning outcomes
- College Portrait/Voluntary System of Accountability
- Transparency by Design
- Education Conservancy
- Academic Disciplines
- State Assessment Groups

Next Steps

- Moving from conversation to action
 - How can we increase the quantity and quality of information about higher education performance to the public?
 - How can we institutionalize steps to ensure greater buy-in from faculty and students?
 - How can we identify and disseminate promising practices that are already happening across the country?