



# BETTER DATA, BETTER DECISIONS

The Postsecondary Data Partnership helps states and institutions understand data and turn it into action, making it a vital tool to ensure more students complete college.

**COMPLETE  
COLLEGE  
AMERICA**

**NGA**  
NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

 National Student  
Clearinghouse<sup>®</sup>



**I. THE PROBLEM** 6

**Way Too Many Educated Guesses**

States' commitments to tackling long standing inequities have been stifled by missing data, long delays, insufficient data-analysis tools, and the excessive reporting burden placed on states and institutions.

**II. THE CONSEQUENCE** 8

**Stalled Improvement Efforts**

If states hope to achieve their completion and equity goals, they need access to data that doesn't leave them guessing—so they can determine the impact of a specific policy or practice, reinforce more equitable outcomes, and base their state's success on a more complete view of student success.

**III. THE SOLUTION** 14

**A National Data Platform Focused on Student Outcomes**

States' efforts must be driven by a data platform that can quantify the impact of innovative policies, ensure no student demographic is overlooked, and prioritize the outcomes that matter most to students. The National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership is the next evolution in our efforts to make this vision a reality.

**IV. THE COMMITMENT** 24

**Participation in the Postsecondary Data Partnership**

By adding your state to the Postsecondary Data Partnership, you'll join a group of state leaders who are already identifying policies that work, and creating conditions that increase student success. CCA can help you identify critical steps to engage your institutions in the process, then help you turn your state's data into clear priorities that inform tactics.

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Moving to a new data system is complicated, and inertia is a powerful thing. But many states and institutions have already overcome those hurdles, and the potential pay-off for students is enormous. We've collected some common concerns and helpful responses.



# I. THE PROBLEM: WAY TOO MANY EDUCATED GUESSES



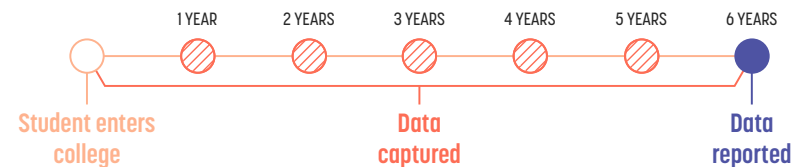
**CCA AND ITS ALLIANCE MEMBERS** have always championed the use of better data to identify and advance proven strategies, so that all students are able to attain a college degree or credential of value. In partnership with the National Governors Association, we helped create the Common Completion Metrics and highlighted the need for disaggregated data. And while these efforts have led to critical victories, the fact remains that missing data, long delays, lack of tools for data analysis, and excessive reporting burdens still make it nearly impossible for education leaders to make timely decisions that drive more equitable outcomes.

## YOU HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT'S WORKING— AND WHAT ISN'T

As a result of too few leading indicators, increasing reporting burdens that balloon costs, and multi-year delays in data reporting, state leaders are forced to make decisions based on outdated and incomplete information.

### TOO LITTLE TOO LATE

*Typical lag between student enrollment and the reporting of most outcomes data.*



## YOU CAN'T BE SURE WHERE TO FOCUS YOUR TIME AND MONEY

Between metrics that exclude large numbers of students and data that can't be sorted by multiple demographics, it's nearly impossible to invest your resources where they matter most.

Education leaders typically receive disaggregated reports that offer no way to drill down by multiple student demographics.

// Lisa Stich

*Former Vice President of Academic & Student Affairs  
at St Cloud Technical and Community College*

# 10M+

Students who don't fit the "full-time first-time" mold, and who are often overlooked as a result.

*Jennifer Kathryn Weber (2017), National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2016)*

## YOU CAN'T QUANTIFY THE REAL LONG-TERM VALUE YOU PROVIDE TO STUDENTS

Limited data on what happens to students after they transfer to a different institution, missing metrics on post-college outcomes, and an inability to assess the true cost of students' attendance means state leaders are unable to base their success on what matters most to students.

## YOU CAN'T IDENTIFY THE STATES AND INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE BLAZING NEW TRAILS

Inconsistent and disconnected data reporting systems make it nearly impossible to make meaningful comparisons across institutions and across states, limiting your ability to innovate.

Nationally, there are a number of different initiatives that are all asking us for data in one form or another. Within our own state system, we have 12 different community colleges using different data platforms that we are working to consolidate into one.

// William Gammell

*Director, Office of Research & System Effectiveness, Connecticut Colleges & Universities System*

## FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Metrics measured by major data initiatives—and the many data points they fail to capture

	ACCESS TO SUCCESS	ACHIEVING THE DREAM	THE ASPEN PRIZE	COMMON DATA SET	COMPLETION BY DESIGN	COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA	COLLEGE MEASURES	COLLEGE SCORECARD	THE CONS. FOR STUDENT RETENTION DATA EXCHANGE	DELTA COST PROJECT	MULTISTATE LONGITUDINAL DATA EXCHANGE	NATIONAL COMM. COLLEGE BENCHMARK PROJECT	NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION	PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS REPORTING FRAMEWORK	STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT MEASURE	VOLUNTARY FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY	VOLUNTARY INSTITUTIONAL METRICS	VOLUNTARY SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY
Access	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Progression	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Completion	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Cost	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Post-College Outcomes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Efficiency	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Equity	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

■ Most or all metrics included ■ Some metrics included □ Few or no metrics included

*SHEEO (2020)*

## II. THE CONSEQUENCE: STALLED IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS



**INEFFICIENT DATA SYSTEMS** have a huge impact on your ability to achieve goals around equity and college completion. Lags in data and inconsistent reporting of leading indicators, such as Gateway Completion rates, leave state leaders guessing at the impact of a specific policy or practice, while missing data and the burden of examining data for specific student populations threaten to reinforce inequitable outcomes. And without metrics that go beyond completion at any one institution, state leaders are basing state success on an incomplete picture of student success.

### INNOVATION IS STIFLED

To improve the student experience, education systems must commit to a continuous cycle of discovery, testing and assessment. Doing so at scale is nearly impossible when dealing with outdated and obsolete data.



No one wants to hear, 'We're going to give you data a decade from now.'

// **Gregory DeSantis**

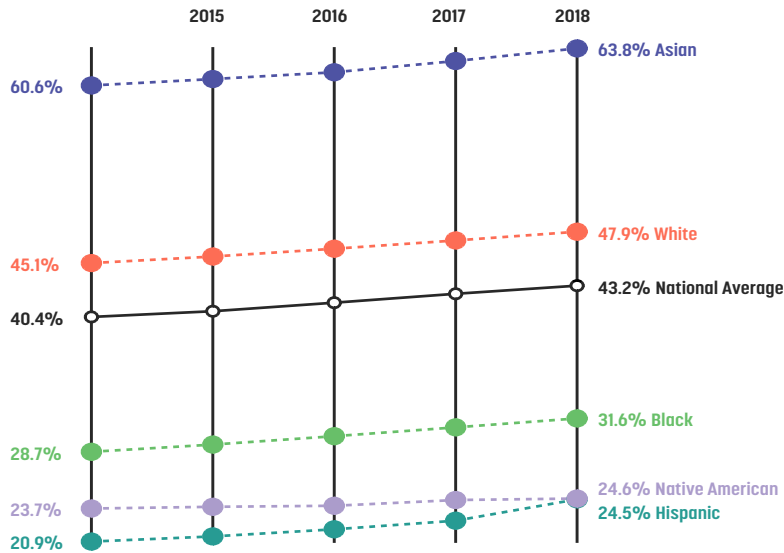
*Associate Vice President of Student Success and Academic Initiatives,  
Connecticut State Colleges and Universities*

### INEQUITABLE STUDENT OUTCOMES PERSIST

Despite widespread recognition that structural barriers lead to inequitable outcomes for adult learners, Black and Latinx students, first-generation students, low-income students, and veterans, efforts to close equity gaps have largely failed. Until we can better understand what's driving these gaps and use data to design targeted solutions, inequitable outcomes will persist.

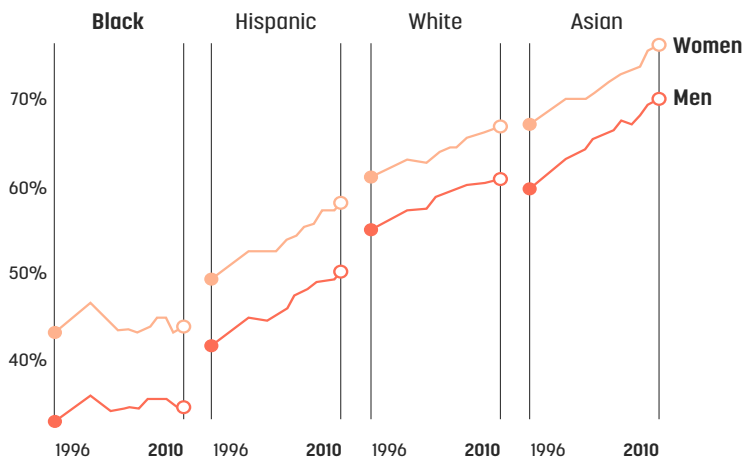
## MIND THE GAPS

Percentage of Americans with an associates degree or higher, by year



*Lumina Foundation (2020)*

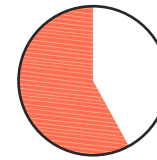
Share of students who graduate from 4-year universities within six years, by the year they entered college



*The Washington Post (2020)*

## STUDENTS QUESTION THE VALUE OF A POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

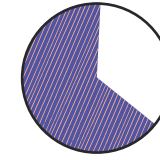
As the cost of a degree continues to rise and workforce needs continue to shift across the country, more and more Americans are beginning to question the value of a postsecondary education. Until states and institutions are able to track and prioritize the outcomes students value most, our ability to design a system that demonstrably meets students' needs will be severely diminished.



**58%**

of students believe colleges put their own long-term interests before those of their students

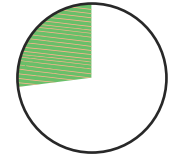
*New America (2017)*



**65%**

of working-class Americans say that a bachelor's degree isn't worth the cost

*NBC News (2017)*



**27%**

decrease in the percentage of Americans who considered a college education very important from 2013 to 2019

*CNBC (2019)*



**ACCESS TO GOOD DATA HAS ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT. WITH COVID-19 WREAKING HAVOC ON OUR NATION, IT'S BECOME IRREPLACEABLE**

**BECAUSE...**

**20-40%**

higher unemployment rates for Latinx, Black and Asian workers than for white workers, as of June 2020

*Center for American Progress (2020)*

**RELIABLE DATA IS CRUCIAL TO...**

Allocate limited resources where they are needed most

**\$765 BILLION**

is the estimated cumulative state budget shortfall over the next three years

*Center for American Progress (2020)*

Invest limited resources in the most promising policies and practices

**50%**

of adults in the U.S. believe attending college classes in person should be forbidden until the coronavirus is under control

*Strada Education (2020)*

Plan for and mitigate the impact of transfers and closures

**21 MILLION**

Americans applied for unemployment benefits in May 2020

*Center for American Progress (2020)*

Align educational offerings with shifting workforce needs



### III. THE SOLUTION: A NATIONAL DATA PLATFORM FOCUSED ON STUDENT OUTCOMES



**IF STATES HOPE TO ACHIEVE** their completion- and equity goals, they'll need a data platform that reduces reporting burdens, facilitates timely analysis of innovative policies and practices, provides for easy comparisons across institutions and states, ensures that no student demographic is overlooked, and prioritizes the outcomes that matter most to students. While CCA & NGA's Common Completion Metrics were essential to getting us closer to this vision, we believe the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) is the next evolution of this work. States participating in PDP will be able to:

#### **SPEND FEWER RESOURCES ON DATA REPORTING AND MORE TIME MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS**

##### **PDP FEATURES & BENEFITS**

- Standardized and streamlined reporting reduces the overall cost of reporting statewide
- Institution data is automatically rolled up into state reports
- Institutions submit data once and automatically report it to numerous entities
- Data is validated and aligned across cohorts, courses and institutions
- States and institutions receive comprehensive files that fill in gaps, such as missing data for students who have transferred between institutions and across state lines
- Exportable images and executive summaries make it easier to create presentations

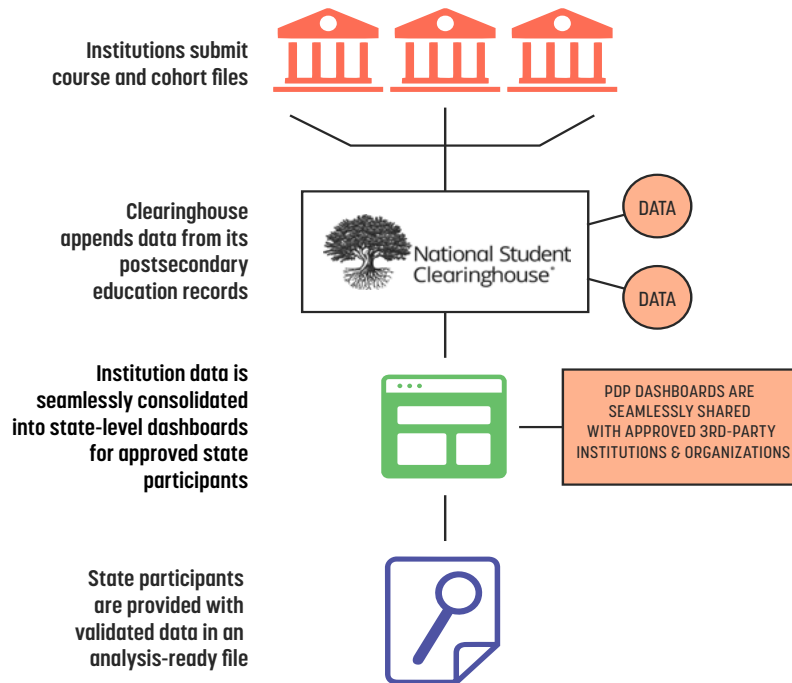


The PDP just makes everything so easy—and all in one spot. We can dive into whatever student outcome data we want to look at.

// Ashley Richmond  
*Institutional Research Analyst,  
 Indian River State College*

### A NEW APPROACH

How the Postsecondary Data Partnership disseminates information, streamlining reporting, standardizing data and making insights more accessible.



## QUICKLY ASSESS AND ANALYZE CURRENT POLICIES AND PRIORITIES

### PDP FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Interactive state- and institution-level dashboards that can help illustrate the impact of legislation and guide efforts to maximize the impact of limited resources
- Dashboards and analysis-ready files are ready within only 3 months of data submission
- Metrics include critical leading indicators that allow for more targeted interventions along the student journey to increase student retention and completion

### FOCUS ON THE STUDENT JOURNEY

How the Postsecondary Data Partnership reveals meaningful trends and informs proven strategies from enrollment to graduation.

#### PDP METRICS

- Enrollment**  
Count of all new students starting each term
- Credit Accumulation Rate**  
% of full-time students who complete sufficient credits each year
- Gateway Course Completion**  
% of full-time students who complete required gateway courses by grade
- Credit Completion Ratio**  
Average ratio of credits attempted to credits earned
- 2-Year Retention**  
% of students enrolled (or completed a credential) at any institution by their 2nd year
- Term-to-Term Retention**  
Proportion of students enrolled (or completed a credential) at any institution on a term-to-term basis
- Transfer**  
The rate at which students transfer to another institution and whether they earn a credential before or after they transfer
- Credential**  
% of students completing a credential at any institution

#### CCA STRATEGIES

- Returning Adult Outreach** PURPOSE
- Concurrent Enrollment** MOMENTUM
- Career Advising** PURPOSE
- Credit for Competency** MOMENTUM
- 15 to Finish** MOMENTUM
- First-Year Experience** PURPOSE
- Corequisite Support** MOMENTUM
- Math Pathways** STRUCTURE
- Meta Majors** STRUCTURE
- Academic Maps & Milestones** STRUCTURE
- Proactive & Purpose-Driven Advising** SUPPORT
- 360° Coaching** SUPPORT
- Smart Scheduling** STRUCTURE
- Active Academic Support** SUPPORT
- Student Basic Needs** SUPPORT
- Stackable Certificates & Credentials** STRUCTURE
- Academic & Career Alignment** PURPOSE

## PROMOTE COLLABORATION AND LEARNING WITH CONSISTENT METRICS AND STANDARDIZED REPORTING

### PDP FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Institutions and state leaders report and analyze the same metrics, so everyone's speaking the same language when considering new practices, policies and legislation
- Interactive dashboards make it easy to compare data across participating institutions and states, allowing nearly every institution to compare data with similar participating institutions, regardless of size or student demographics
- Leading national funders, initiatives and associations partner with PDP, making it the platform most likely to be adopted across the country

As an accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is excited about the PDP's common nomenclature around student achievement. Having consistent and publicly available data creates the foundation for effective institutional decision-making and offers stakeholders and accreditation evaluation teams data to critically evaluate an institution's fulfillment of its promises to its students.

**// Mac Powell**  
*Senior Vice President,  
 Northwest Commission on College and Universities*

### A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Leading national organizations are bolstering PDP's momentum by identifying it as the ideal platform for disseminating higher-education data.<sup>1</sup>



## EASILY SPOT AND ANALYZE EQUITY GAPS

### PDP FEATURES & BENEFITS

Powerful filtering tools allow state leaders to focus limited resources where they matter most by disaggregating data across one or more of the following student demographics:

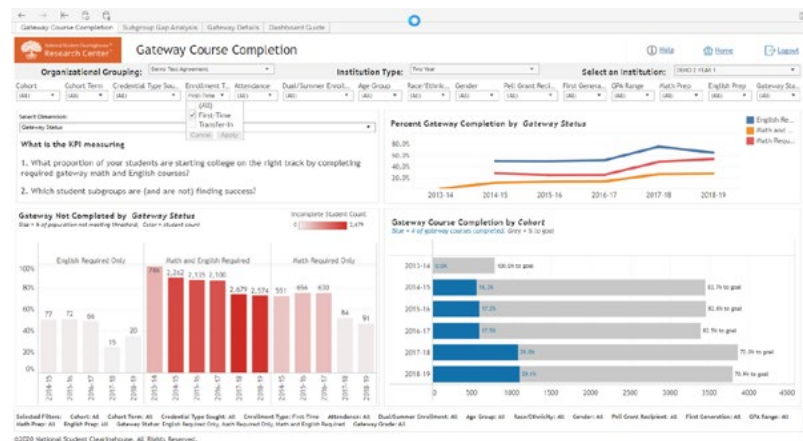
- Age
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- First-generation-student status
- Cohort
- Cohort term
- Credential type sought
- Enrollment status
- Attendance status
- Dual and summer enrollment
- Pell Grant status
- Academic preparedness in math and English
- GPA range

Students bring their whole selves to the college, not segments of themselves, and we must look at them holistically to identify and eliminate any barriers to their success.

// Laurie Heacock

Senior Advisor, Data and Analytics,  
Achieving the Dream, Inc.

### EXAMPLE PDP DASHBOARD



## GAIN A MORE ACCURATE AND INCLUSIVE PICTURE OF THE STUDENTS YOU SERVE

### PDP FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Includes data on all new students starting each term, including part-time and transfer students
- Includes outcomes for students who transfer out of a given institution
- Automatically facilitates reverse transfer—the awarding of associate degrees to students who have met course requirements after moving to a 4-year institution

Traditional measures of student success aren't providing an accurate picture of institutions' student bodies, especially minority and lower-income students. The PDP is the first national data collection to include all new students at an institution: first-year students, transfer students, full-time students, and part-time students, irrespective of if they start in the fall or in the spring semesters.

// Eric Godin

Associate Vice President  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

## BENEFIT FROM ONGOING INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS

Thanks to strong partnerships with national organizations and the stellar reputation of the National Student Clearinghouse, the Postsecondary Data Partnership is poised to be the data system of choice for years to come. Given the Clearinghouse's longstanding dedication to helping researchers and policymakers, and commitment to continued innovation and improvement, the PDP is sure to become an indispensable resource for anyone working to bolster college graduation rates. And every state that commits to the PDP brings that reality one step closer.



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With the PDP, the return on investment is tremendous. If institutions retain even two students per year, it's worth the cost. An added benefit: PDP partner institutions have a voice in the evolution of the platform.

// Laurie Heacock

Senior Advisor, Data and Analytics,  
Achieving the Dream, Inc.

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#### UPCOMING PDP IMPROVEMENTS

- Easier and more cost-effective data submissions
- New dashboards to assess how student transfer and enrollment are shifting in response to COVID-19
- Ability to visualize sources of student expenses and the allocation of financial aid; financial aid data may only be used for the application, award, administration or evaluation of financial aid programs
- More robust comparisons to better showcase successes and opportunities
- More publicly available data for students, policymakers and advocates
- Expanded access to nationwide trends and insights as PDP scales to more states and institutions
- New consolidated files that tee up in-depth analysis of student outcomes across courses



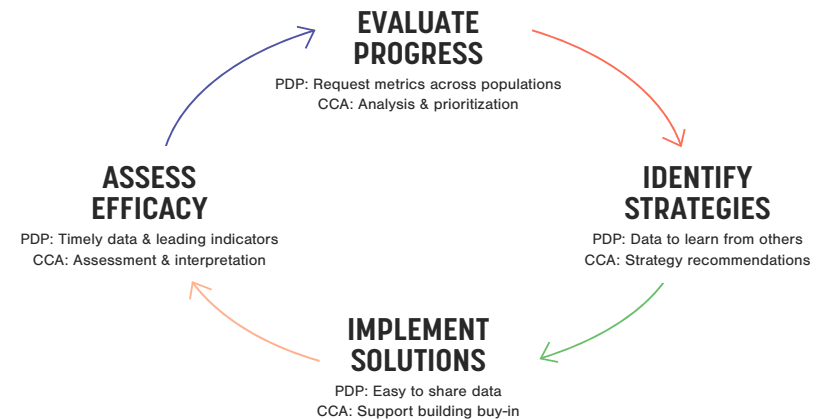
# IV. THE COMMITMENT: PARTICIPATION IN THE POSTSECONDARY DATA PARTNERSHIP



**FROM COREQUISITE SUPPORT** to 15 to Finish, CCA has always used data to help our Alliance members advance strategies proven to have a lasting impact. With Alliance members' participation in the PDP, we will be even better equipped to support them as they partner with institutions to change policy, create conditions for change, and implement targeted strategies. With access to a state's PDP dashboard, the CCA team will be able to review critical data needed to support state leaders as they evaluate their progress, identify strategies to pursue, implement solutions, and assess the efficacy of those solutions.

## CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

The more members of CCA's Alliance report data to the PDP, the better-equipped CCA is to advise state leaders on next steps and best practices.



By adding your state to the PDP, you'll join a group of state leaders who are already identifying policies that work, and creating conditions that increase student success. CCA stands ready to help you identify critical steps to engage your institutions in the process, then help you turn your state's data into clear priorities that inform tactics.

Contact the CCA Research and Data Staff today:  
[data@completecollege.org](mailto:data@completecollege.org)





**MOVING TO A NEW DATA SYSTEM IS COMPLICATED**, and inertia is a powerful thing. But many states and institutions have already overcome those hurdles, and the potential pay-off for students is enormous. We've collected some of the most common concerns and offer some helpful responses. Learn even more on the Clearinghouse website: [studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/pdp](https://studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/pdp)

### **SOME OF OUR INSTITUTIONS HAVE LIMITED RESOURCES OR ONLY ONE PERSON WHO WORKS IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH. WILL THE PDP BE A BURDEN BY ASKING THEM TO DO EVEN MORE?**

Although IR departments will need to invest a little additional time to submit the data, the PDP allows your institution to generate more useful information with limited bandwidth. Beyond meeting multiple compliance and reporting requirements, the PDP allows interactive real-time data to be shared across participating institutions. One set of dashboards can serve the needs of many different groups, thus freeing up time and resources for additional data requests. Instead of focusing on simply pulling the data, IR teams are better able to focus on goals that they often don't get to, including analyzing, understanding, and acting upon data—and training others across the college to do the same.

### **WE AREN'T COMFORTABLE SHARING OUR STUDENTS' DATA. HOW WILL OUR INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?**

Information is only shared at the direction of the participating institutions, subject to a data sharing agreement between the institution and the Clearinghouse. The National Student Clearinghouse takes its commitment to student privacy very seriously and has maintained the confidentiality and privacy of the student records in its care since its beginning in 1993. To learn about the Clearinghouse's commitment to privacy, please visit [studentclearinghouse.org/about/our-privacy-commitment](https://studentclearinghouse.org/about/our-privacy-commitment)



## **WE ALREADY HAVE A DATA SYSTEM. WHAT'S THE POINT IN ADDING ANOTHER ONE?**

The PDP provides interactive dashboards through Tableau, making data easy-to-read and easily understandable. The PDP data and dashboards can be analyzed at the institutional level and rolled up to the state level with ease. And the PDP also allows you to compare organizations and participating institutions to one another with data that's consistent across the country. The PDP will even save you time by allowing for seamless data uploads to several national education organizations, sparing duplicative efforts. Most notably, the PDP allows for the disaggregation of data which provides you with insight into how specific groups of students are progressing.

## **IF THIS LEADS TO MORE FINANCIAL EFFICIENCY, SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT REDUCTION OF FORCE FOR IR PROFESSIONALS?**

No. IR employees will still be needed to submit data related to the PDP, but now they'll have better tools to analyze the data that's been submitted and to present that in easily understandable Tableau forms. By avoiding the duplication of similar reports for multiple organizations, IR professionals will now have more time to pull individual reports at the institutional level.

## **HOW CAN THE PDP HELP LEGISLATORS CRAFT MORE SUPPORTIVE POLICIES FOR INSTITUTIONS?**

If schools and states can identify the pain points facing their students, it's much easier to adopt policies that will address those challenges. For example, if your state still offers traditional prerequisite remediation and data reveals that students are failing to progress through college-level courses to graduate, a legislator may use this to fund a scaled adoption of corequisite support.

## **WE'RE CONCERNED THAT DATA MIGHT BE WEAPONIZED TO FURTHER COMPLICATE STATE EFFORTS TO SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS ADDRESSING EQUITY AND INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE. HOW CAN WE BE SURE THIS WON'T HAPPEN?**

Everyone will have access to the same data, which puts an end to skewed reports or incomplete data designed to steer conversations in a certain direction. Also, Tableau's digestible reports help democratize conversations, and the information will be made accessible to all. Intersectional and disaggregated data will also ensure a more comprehensive discussion around equity.

## **HOW DOES A STATE APPROACH THIS WORK AT SCALE, IF INSTITUTIONS HAVE ALREADY JOINED?**

Based on the levels of commitment and the size of institutions, a state's participation may lower the cost for institutions. States can gain the advantage of seeing where certain institutions are succeeding more than others, to encourage other institutions to adopt those same practices. Overall, the PDP will give you a clearer statewide snapshot of higher education—data that can be shared with legislative bodies to identify outstanding needs and areas for improvement.

## **WHY MOVE TO THE PDP NOW WHEN THERE ARE STILL FEATURES AND METRICS IN DEVELOPMENT?**

Only by investing in a common data platform across the nation will we be able to effectively unify the metrics most essential to student success efforts. Not only is the PDP the most comprehensive platform available, it's also led by an organization committed to ongoing improvement. For example, the National Student Clearinghouse is working now to incorporate financial aid data into PDP dashboards and is exploring opportunities to incorporate employment and income data. (Financial aid data may only be used for the application, award, administration or evaluation of financial aid programs.)

## AS THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE REQUIRES MORE PHILANTHROPIC AND CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR STATES AND SYSTEMS, WILL THE PDP PARTICIPATION BECOME AN EXPECTATION?

Yes, CCA believes consistent definitions and consistent reporting will allow philanthropic partners to easily determine where to allocate resources, so we expect its adoption will shape these conversations.

## WE'RE READY TO GET STARTED. WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

Contact the CCA Research and Data Staff at [data@completecollege.org](mailto:data@completecollege.org), and we'll help you determine what to do next.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the expertise and input of CCA's partners, including the following institutions and individuals:

- National Student Clearinghouse
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- National Governors Association
- Connecticut Colleges & Universities System's Office of Research & System Effectiveness
- Nevada System of Higher Education
- Nevada State College
- The College System of Tennessee
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Community College System of New Hampshire
- Katie Zaback, Higher Education and Data Strategy Consultant
- CCA Fellows & Content Experts

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<sup>1</sup> The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the organizations listed on page 19.

