**Quick Look …**

**Key Issue**
States that adopt effective education policies can increase the success rates of students at four key transition points spanning the period from high school to completion of a college degree. Developing such policies is a state’s primary tool for gaining high numbers of knowledgeable, skilled workers in its workforce.

**Primary Findings**
- More and more, states are moving toward adopting education policies that increase the number of students successfully progressing from ninth grade through high school graduation to a four-year degree.
- Increasing the number of college graduates is more than an educational issue; it is also a key social issue. Residents holding college degrees are the basis of a state’s “educational capital.”
- High levels of educational capital provide the foundation of a state’s economic development and the preferred quality of life for its residents.

**Main Conclusions**
- The success rate of the “educational pipeline” varies radically from state to state. This indicates that educational policies matter.
- Studies show that a range of policies used in combination has the greatest impact.

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**The Educational Pipeline: Big Investment, Big Returns**

Many states are now focusing on improving their “K–16” policies—those local and statewide policies that seek to bolster student success at key transitions from high school into college, and from college admission to completion of a degree. This new trend derives from efforts to create a stronger “educational pipeline,” a productive, integrated system of high schools, colleges and universities within the state.

The educational pipeline is being viewed as the key avenue to increasing a state’s “educational capital.” This is the number of highly knowledgeable, skilled people in a state’s workforce.

Educational capital has a direct impact on a state’s economy and quality of life. With this increased awareness, supported by publications such as *Measuring Up* (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2000, 2002), state leaders are renewing their interest in helping students gain college degrees.

**Benefits**
Encouraging a college-educated population in the workforce results in pivotal benefits to the state:
- Individuals with higher degrees can expect to earn higher incomes. The result: more tax revenue and economic activity for the state.
- An educated, skilled population makes fewer demands on social services such as welfare and corrections. The result: less expense to the state.
- People with more education make more informed health and lifestyle choices. The result: state savings in public resources.
- Educated individuals are more comfortable handling decisions about health care, personal finance, and retirement. The result: less government responsibility in those areas.

**Meeting the Goal**
State policymakers can use three primary methods to increase educational capital:
- Create a high-quality K–16 system for bringing students to a college degree. This is the most direct and reliable way of increasing educational capital.
- Develop and maintain an economy to employ the state’s educated residents.
- Attract educated workers from outside the state by creating an appealing state economy and quality of life.

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Policy Alert and State Inserts available at www.highereducation.org
EDUCATIONAL PIPELINE SUCCESS RATE

FOUR KEY TRANSITION POINTS

Four key transition points mark students’ progress from high school to completion of a college degree. The most effective policies address these important transitions.

1. High School Graduation
   The first key transition measure is the proportion of ninth graders who attain a high school diploma within four years. This is important because increasing numbers of students are dropping out of high school.

2. Entry into Higher Education
   The number of high school graduates who enter college depends on student preparation levels and the capacity of the college and university system. Improving these factors is within the reach of state policies.

3. Persistence in Higher Education
   The highest number of college dropouts generally occurs in the first year. Because of this, the number of freshmen who enroll for a second year is a telling milestone.

4. Completing Higher Education
   Holding a college degree generally increases an individual’s income level. Still, less than 50 percent of first-time, full-time college students complete an associate’s degree within three years or a bachelor’s degree within six years at their original institution.

SOURCES

Data are from 2002. The figures in Tables 1 and 2 are calculated based on data from the following sources:


For more detailed source information, see our web site at http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pipeline/

Table 1 presents the four key transition points using national data for all 50 states. The table uses a starting group of 100 ninth graders. From the left, it presents the figures state by state for:

1. High school students graduating compared to the number of ninth grade students four years earlier.
2. High school graduates immediately entering college.
3. College starters returning for their second year.
4. College entrants completing an associate’s degree within three years or a bachelor’s degree within six years (150% time).
Using the same data and starting group of 100 ninth graders, Table 2 shows the proportion of students lost at each transition point.

Table 2 shows the following trends in state success:

- **Wide Differences in Results.** The states’ results vary widely. The average success rate of the top 25 percent is about double that of the bottom 25 percent. The highest performers are almost three times as productive as the lowest performer.

- **Similar Results, Different Routes.** States with the same final results vary in how they got there. Georgia, Idaho, and Oklahoma are close in results. Yet Idaho and Oklahoma graduate more than 70 percent of their ninth graders. Georgia loses half its ninth graders before high school graduation, but a higher percentage of its high school graduates go to college.

- **Different Degrees of Policy Focus.** Educational needs vary in different states, resulting in widely different levels of attention needed at each transition point.

### Table 2: Loss Rate per 100 Ninth Graders at Each Transition Point (2002)

*150% time refers to college entrants completing an associate’s degree within three years or a bachelor’s degree within six years.

**Delaware data are partly from 2000 because technical colleges did not report first-time freshmen enrollment.
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CONCLUSIONS

★ Creating educational policies to address key transition points in the educational pipeline can pay substantial dividends in educational capital.

★ Changes in educational approach, organization, and delivery result in changes in performance. Policy matters. Policies used in combination have the greatest impact.

★ Those who can prosper in an environment tend to remain, so increasing the state’s benefits to its residents in turn increases the state’s health and wealth.

GET MORE INFORMATION

The concepts reflected in this supplement are from Conceptualizing and Researching the Educational Pipeline, by Peter T. Ewell, Dennis P. Jones, and Patrick J. Kelly of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. For most current data, see The National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis web site at www.higheredinfo.org

RECOMMENDATIONS

★ Increase the Number of High School Graduates. Develop strategies to improve basic skills: involve parents, business leaders, and the community in the educational process, and ensure sufficient financial support of low-income districts.

★ Improve College Access. Create college tuition policies based on median income and support need-based financial aid; build high-capacity, open-entry, two-year college systems that encourage transfer; encourage dual enrollment and advanced placement policies that speed the transition from high school to college.

★ Promote Graduation from College. Set up programs for individual learners; support intensive enrollment in basic coursework in the first college year; develop schedules based on students’ needs; avoid pushing students toward a high education debt; establish transfer policies that retain academic credit.

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