

The College Completion Agenda 2010 Progress Report

Executive Summary



Acknowledgments

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Continuing the Conversation: An Overview

When the Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education (subsequently referred to as the commission) convened in the fall of 2008, the educational landscape was facing a number of issues that the commission's members recognized as formidable challenges to those students who aspire to enroll and succeed in college. The Commission's 2008 report, *Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future*, painted a disheartening portrait of recent trends in education: college and high school completion ranking had dropped dramatically; the proportion of adults with postsecondary credentials was not keeping pace with growth in other industrialized nations; and significant disparities existed for low-income and minority students. As such, the commission faced two key questions: What must be done to improve the nation's education system, and how will we know if these implemented changes are successful?

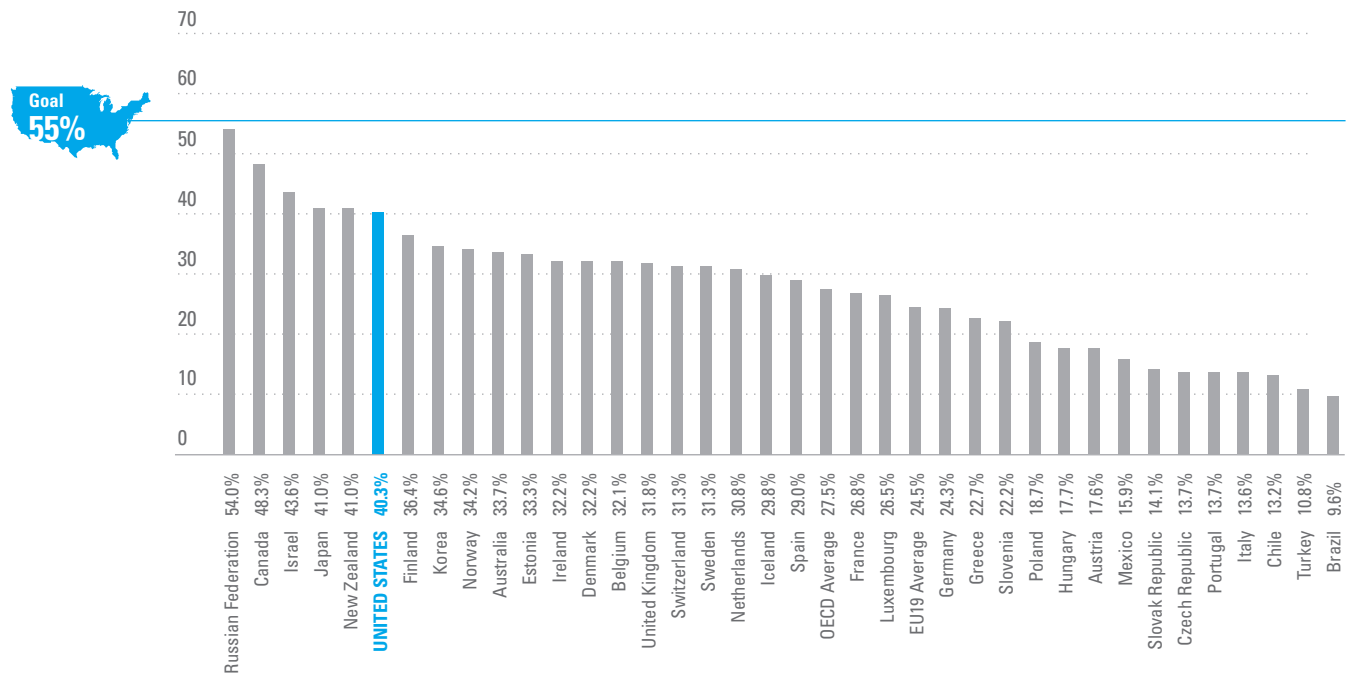
The commission called for the United States to take immediate action to reverse its fall from the top ranks of countries with a college-educated workforce. It warned that if postsecondary success were not made a national priority, our nation's economic and social health would continue to weaken. The commission noted the alarming decline of the U.S. educational attainment ranking in the world among 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States.¹

1.0

Percentage of 25- to 64-Year-Olds with an Associate Degree or Higher, 2007

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009

5
Countries
▲
United States
▼
30
Countries



1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education at a Glance (2009), 30.

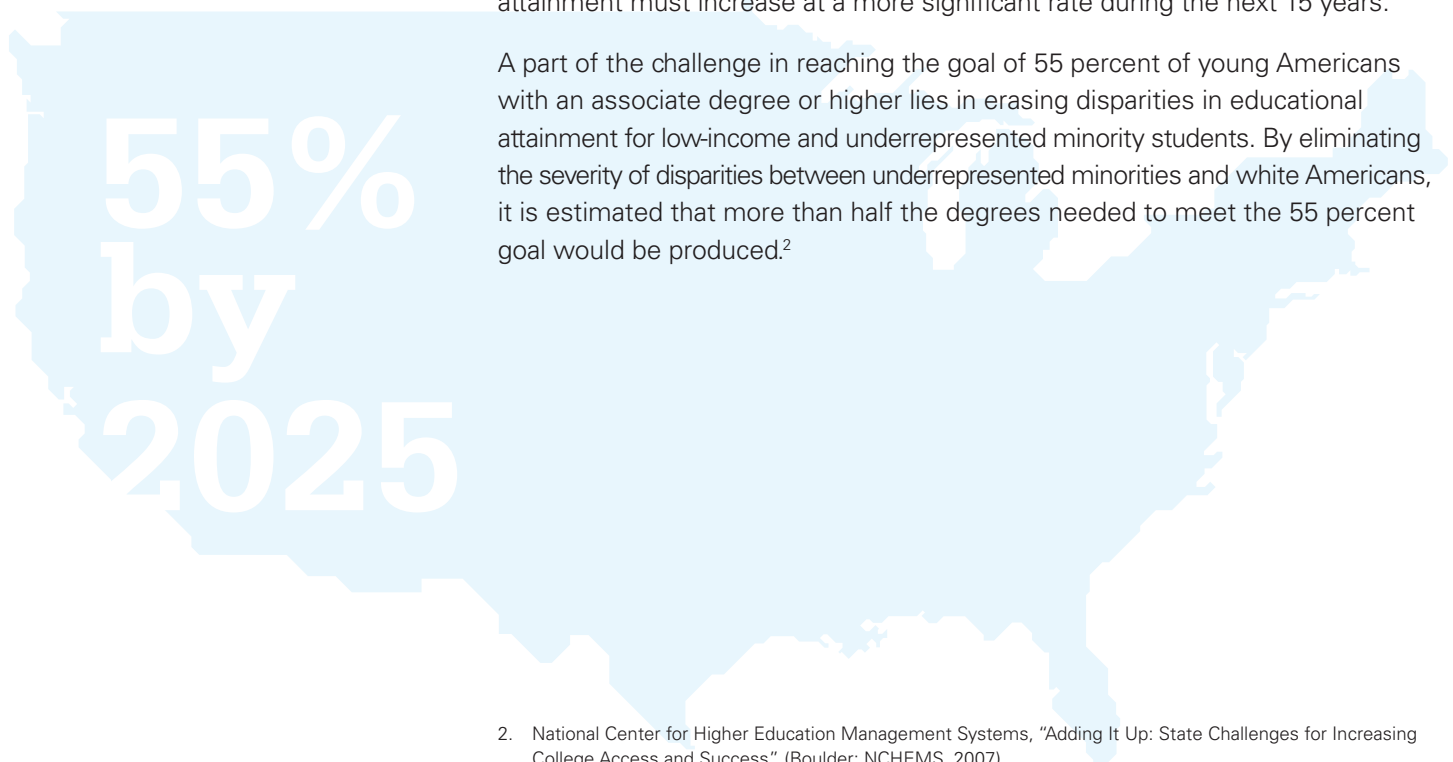
The United States ranked sixth (See Figure 1) in postsecondary attainment in the world among 25- to 64-Year-Olds. Figure 3 shows that the United States ranks fourth in postsecondary attainment for citizens ages 55 to 64. The United States trails the Russian Federation, Israel and Canada in this age group. As America's aging and highly educated workforce moves into retirement, the nation will rely on young Americans to increase our standing in the world. However, Figure 2 illustrates that among citizens who are ages 25 to 34 in developed countries, the United States ranks 12th. Among this key demographic group, Canada, Korea, the Russian Federation, Japan, New Zealand, Ireland, Norway, Israel, France, Belgium and Australia are ahead of the United States. Also, Denmark and Sweden are close to parity with our nation. If the United States is to regain its leadership status in educational attainment, we must make an investment in students' higher education access, admission and success.

America has an aging and highly educated workforce that is preparing to retire. As these adults retire, it is expected that the educational level of the younger generation of Americans will not approach that of their parents' level of education.

The latest statistics from 2008 suggest that 41.6 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States have attained an associate degree or higher (please note that the data presented in Figure 2.0 are from 2007, while this percentage is from 2008).

The nation is currently 13.4 percentage points away from the goal of obtaining 55 percent by 2025. When the view among states is examined, no state has a population of which 55 percent of its citizens have an associate degree or higher. If we are to achieve the goal of 55 percent by 2025, the level of growth in degree attainment must increase at a more significant rate during the next 15 years.

A part of the challenge in reaching the goal of 55 percent of young Americans with an associate degree or higher lies in erasing disparities in educational attainment for low-income and underrepresented minority students. By eliminating the severity of disparities between underrepresented minorities and white Americans, it is estimated that more than half the degrees needed to meet the 55 percent goal would be produced.²



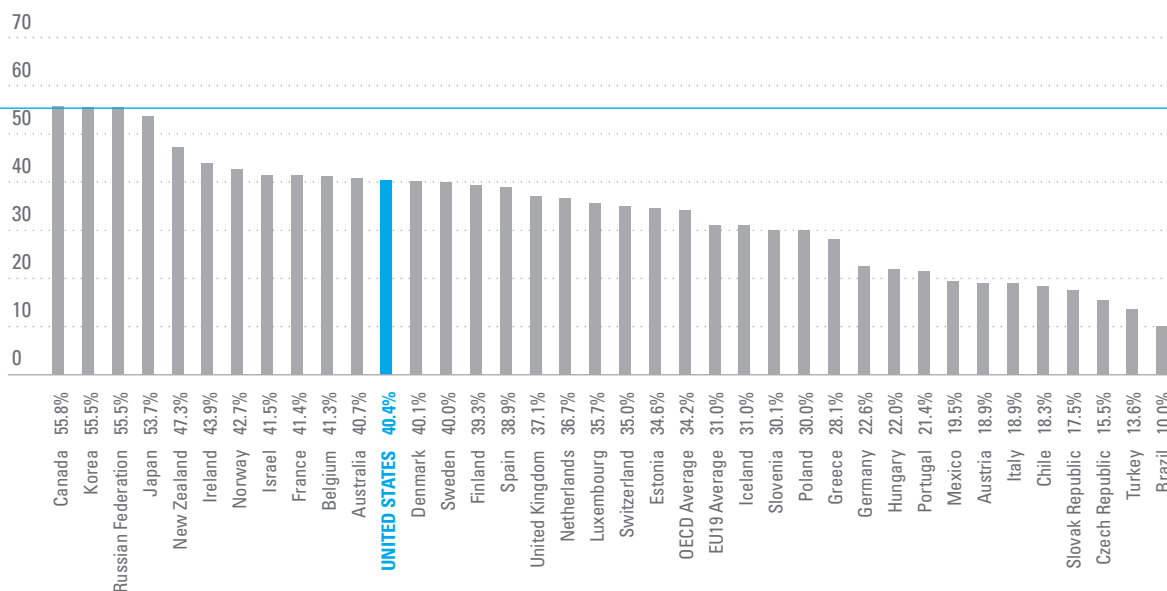
2. National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, "Adding It Up: State Challenges for Increasing College Access and Success" (Boulder: NCHEMS, 2007).

2.0

Percentage of 25- to 34-Year-Olds with an Associate Degree or Higher, 2007

Source: Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development, 2009

11
Countries
United States
24
Countries

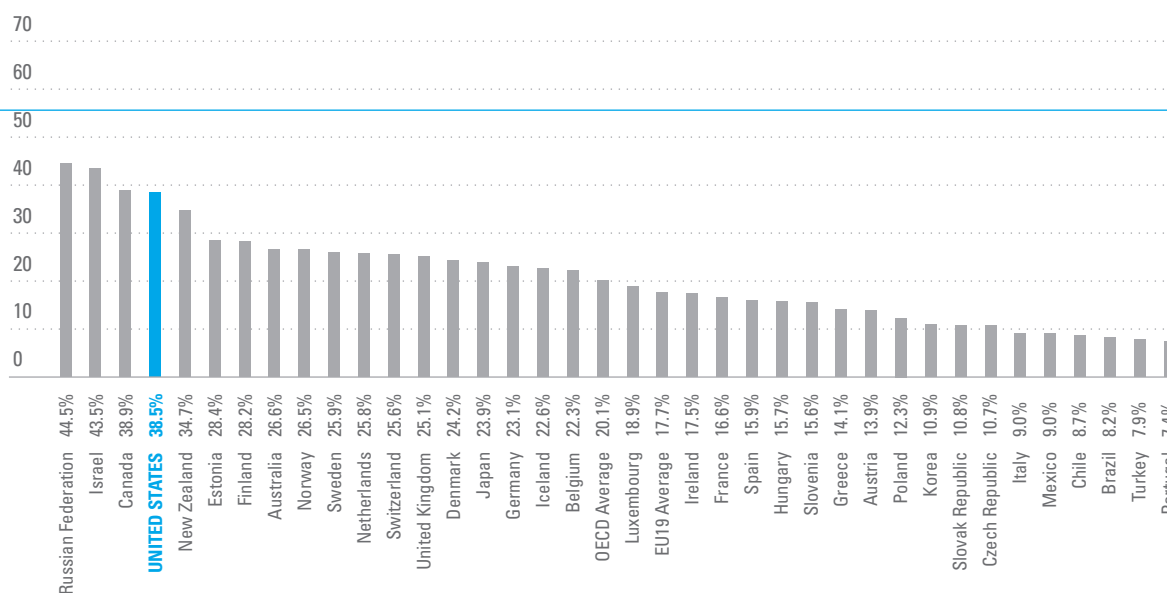


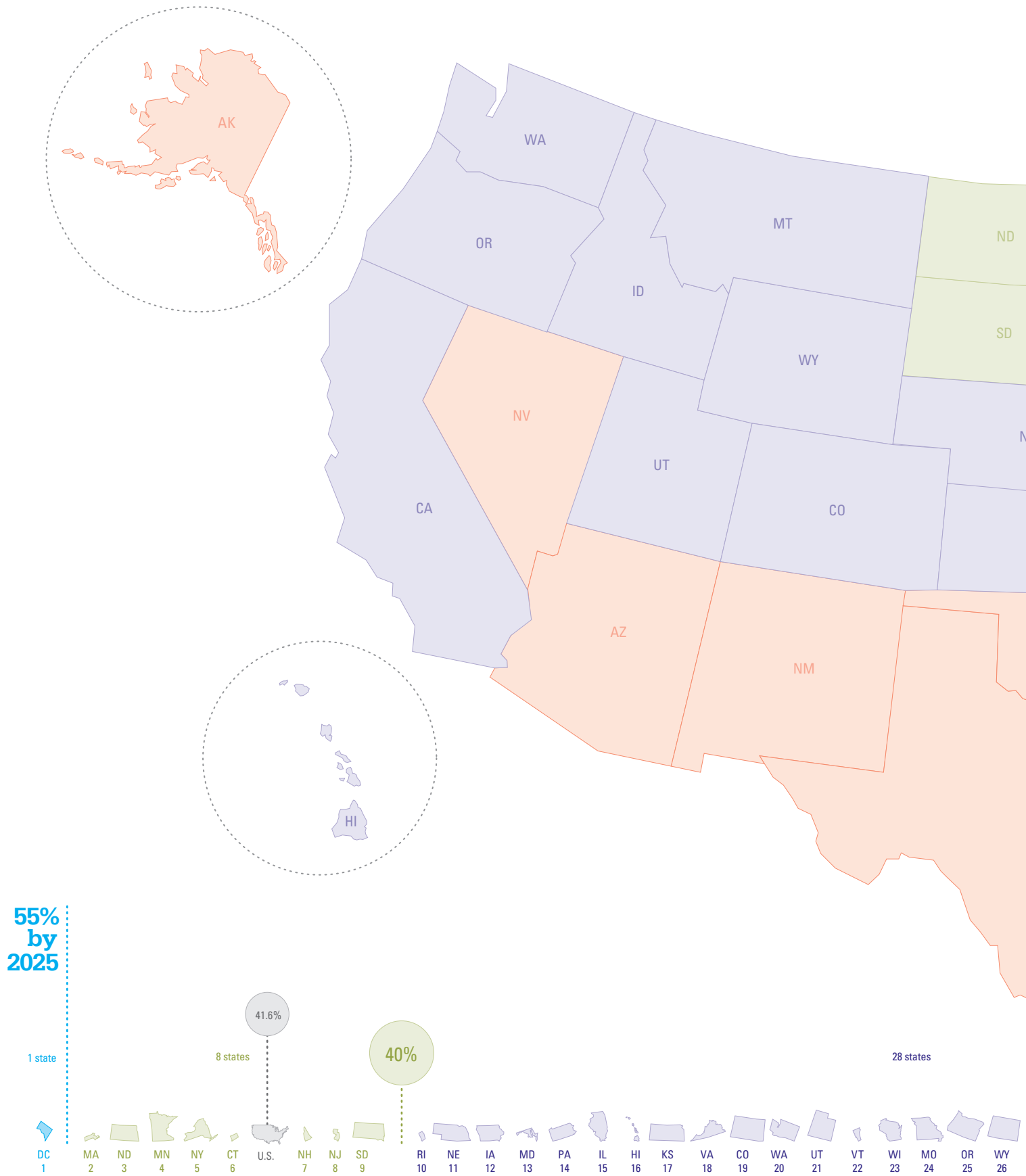
3.0

Percentage of 55- to 64-Year-Olds with an Associate Degree or Higher, 2007

Source: Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development, 2009

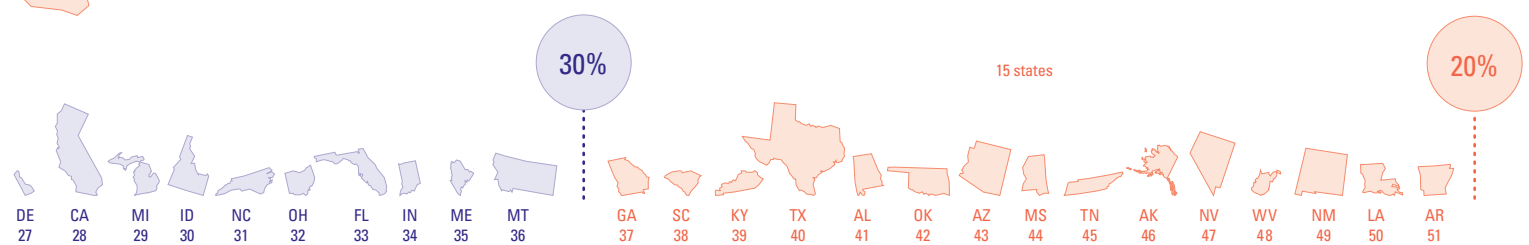
3
Countries
United States
32
Countries





Percentage of 25- to 34-Year-Olds with an Associate Degree or Higher in the United States, 2008

Current U.S. average **41.6%**



The 10 Recommendations

The commission believes that American education is the nation's greatest strength and most powerful force for advancing the common good. To return America to its place as the global leader in educational attainment, the commission recommends a 10-part action agenda. The commission's goals are ambitious, but meeting them is vital if the United States is to maintain its economic competitiveness and remain a world leader in science, technology, engineering, medicine, literature, and social policy. Progress is being made, particularly in simplifying the college application and admission process, strengthening the alignment of K–12 expectations to college admission standards and improving teacher quality. Other indicators, such as those showing progress in universal preschool and middle and high school counseling, are lagging.

Some of the key findings of the commission's 10-part action agenda are presented below.

One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families such that all children at or below 200 percent of the official poverty line have a chance to enter school ready to learn.

- Only 57.0 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds are enrolled in preschool, and only 47.0 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds from families with incomes below the poverty line are enrolled in preschool. In addition, only 3.6 percent of 3-year-olds and 23.0 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded pre-K programs.

Two

Improve middle and high school college counseling by meeting professional staffing standards for counselors and involving colleges and universities in college planning.

- In the 2007-08 school year, the average student-to-counselor ratio in the U.S. was 467:1. Only three states meet the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommendation of 250:1.
- Less than 39.9 percent of schools require college counselors to participate in professional development programs.

Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs; early identification of those students who are at risk of dropping out and subsequently providing them a safety net.

- In 2006, 73.4 percent of public high school students who entered high school as freshmen graduated with a high school diploma.

Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations so that all students are prepared for future opportunities in education, work and life.

- 34.8 percent of schools offer AP® or IB courses in the four core subject areas (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies).
- 28.0 percent of students who enter college require remedial classes.

Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention; an education system can only be as good as its teachers.

- About 80.0 percent of states have teacher professional development standards.
- In 2006, 8.5 percent of bachelor's degrees, 30.6 percent of master's degrees and 29.8 percent of doctoral degrees were awarded in education.
- 8.4 percent of teachers left the field in 2004-05. The figures are the highest for African American and Asian teachers in public schools.

Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process; transparent and less complex process will encourage more first-generation students to apply.

- For the 2008–2009 admission year, 20.4 percent of four-year institutions participated in national application systems that aim to streamline the admission process.
- As of 2007, 67.2 percent of high school graduates enrolled in a two- or four-year college immediately after completing high school.

Seven

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying and making financial aid processes more transparent to minimize student debt and at least keep pace with inflation, make financial aid processes more transparent and predictable, and provide institutions with incentives to enroll and graduate more low-income and first-generation students.

- At public four-year colleges between 2003-04 and 2007-08, average grant aid increased by an average of 4.4 percent or \$283 per year (after adjusting for inflation), for low-income students.
- The median total debt for those who borrowed increased 2.6 percent per year beyond inflation.

Eight

Keep college affordable by controlling college costs, using available aid and resources wisely, and insisting that state governments meet their obligations for funding higher education.

- State support for public higher education declined by 3.1 percent between fiscal year 2009 and fiscal year 2010, even as average family income for low-income families declined 3.7 percent from 1998 to 2008 after adjusting for inflation.
- Average tuition and fees have increased for public four-year institutions, yet they have declined for public two-year and private four-year institutions.
- In 2008, the average earnings for full-time workers ages 25 to 29 in the United States was \$31,925 for high school graduates, compared to \$48,710 for those with a bachelor's degree. Average earnings for full-time workers ages 25 to 29 increased by 0.4 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates by reducing dropouts, easing transfer processes and using data-based approaches to improve completion rates at both two-and four-year institutions.

- As of 2007, 78.0 percent of full-time students across the nation who enter a public four-year institution with the intent to earn a degree are retained from the freshman to the sophomore year.
- As of 2007, 59.0 percent of full-time students across the nation who enter a public two-year institution with the intent to earn a degree are retained from the freshman to the sophomore year.
- As of 2007, 27.8 percent of students across the nation who enter an institution with the intent of earning an associate degree persist to graduation in three years or less.
- As of 2007, 56.1 percent of students across the nation who enter an institution with the intent of earning a bachelor's degree persist to graduation in six years or less.

Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs by supplementing existing basic skills training with a new "honors GED" and with better coordination of existing adult education, veterans' benefits, outreach programs and student aid.

- As of 2008, 58.9 percent of adults ages 25 to 64 across the nation had less than an associate degree.
- As of 2005, 101.7 per 1,000 individuals ages 18 to 64 with less than a high school diploma enrolled in state-administered (ABE) programs.
- As of 2005, 19.1 percent of adults ages 25 to 39 across the nation were enrolled in a postsecondary education program.
- As of 2005, 4.7 percent of adults ages 40 to 64 across the nation were enrolled in a postsecondary education program.

The Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education

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Molly Broad, President	American Council on Education
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The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of U.S. states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues, and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The conference operates from offices in Denver and Washington, D.C.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board is composed of more than 5,700 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college readiness, college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid and enrollment. Among its widely recognized programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®), SpringBoard® and ACCUPLACER®. The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, we work to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. We make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

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