

# FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

## Working Group on Alternative Measures

### Draft Report

May 18, 2011

**Note: The charter of the U.S. Department of Education’s Committee on Measures of Student Success (Committee) provides for working groups to assist the Committee in carrying out its duties. The working groups are responsible for developing materials to be provided to the entire Committee for full deliberation and discussion during its meetings. This draft document has been prepared by a Committee working group. This document does not represent the final recommendations of the Committee. The information and opinions included are the products of working group discussions and do not necessarily represent the views of the entire Committee or the policies of the U.S. Department of Education.**

The purpose of the alternative measures working group was to examine issues related to measures of student success *other than* progression and completion measures such as retention, transfer, completion, and graduation rates. The working group was charged with exploring student learning outcomes, employment outcomes, and other outcomes associated with the multifaceted missions of two-year institutions.

#### **Working Group Members**

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Based on discussions at the Committee’s February 2011 meeting, the working group proposes the following findings and recommendations related to alternative measures of student success:

#### **Findings**

General

1. Two-year degree-granting institutions have multiple, broad missions that serve diverse student populations.

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2. “Success” can mean different things to different students at different types of two-year institutions.
3. Institutional diversity notwithstanding, there is value in establishing a set of alternative measures that are common to two-year institutions.

### Measures of Student Learning

1. Students, families, policymakers, and researchers seek meaningful, comparable information about student learning at a particular institution for consumer information and accountability purposes.
2. Student learning outcomes can be measured in multiple ways across several domains, including developmental education, general education, and occupational education.
3. Institutions have the primary responsibility for determining their programs’ learning outcomes and the appropriate measures of student learning for their students based on their missions.
4. The federal government is calling for institutions to disclose or report results of student learning measures publicly. However, the federal government should not prescribe a “one size fits all” measure of student learning.

### Measures of Employment

1. Students, families, policymakers, and researchers seek meaningful, comparable information about how well a particular institution prepares its students for employment after completion of their programs for consumer information and accountability purposes.
2. Valid, reliable, and comparable data related to students’ employment outcomes are difficult for institutions to collect.
  - For example, data on the results of licensure or certification exams are housed in state agencies and often not released back to institutions.
  - Similarly, institutions’ limited access to state or federal wage unemployment insurance (UI) databases makes collecting reliable data about their specific students’ employment outcomes burdensome or impossible.
  - A challenge is identifying to which cohort of students measures of employment would apply. What about students who don’t complete a program but who experience wage growth; students who may already be employed when they enter a program; or students who may transfer or leave the state and later find employment?

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3. Although some institutions do not have access to wage data, state system offices often do, and there are a number of efforts underway to link state databases or use federal grant funding to build the capacity of state data systems.

## Recommendations

### General

1. The multiple, broad missions of two-year degree-granting institutions should allow for additional measures of success beyond measures that have been traditionally used. The Department should encourage institutions through grants or other incentives to explore other ways to document the success of their students, given their varying missions and given the diverse populations they serve.
2. The Department should encourage institutions to participate in existing accountability initiatives (e.g., VFA, CCA).
3. The administrative burden of disclosing or reporting the results of measures of student learning outcomes and employment should be weighed against the benefits of providing more transparency and information to students and the public.

### Measures of Student Learning

1. The Department should encourage institutions to voluntarily collect, disclose, and report through existing or new data collection vehicles results of measures of student learning, including but not limited to those already being reported to accrediting agencies, state higher education agencies, or voluntary accountability initiatives.
  - a. Along with the data, institutions should provide contextual information on the measures used, how they were developed, and what the results mean. This approach would allow institutions to disclose or report measures that are relevant to their mission.
2. Results of measures of student learning should be made more accessible to the public in a common format for ease of use and comparability.
  - a. Data voluntarily collected, disclosed, or reported by institutions should be made available to the public through College Navigator or other consumer information websites.
3. Results of measures of student learning should be disaggregated by specific student subgroups (e.g., developmental education students, part-time students, first-time students in college, etc.).

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4. Measures of student learning used by institutions should include measures within and across the learning domains.
  - a. Possible metrics to use as proxies for student learning outcomes include licensure exam pass rates, course completion rates, earned to attempted credit hour ratio, and results from external instruments already in use by institutions (such as CSSE, NSSE, CLA, etc.).

### Measures of Employment

1. The Department should encourage institutions to voluntarily collect, disclose, and report through existing or new data collection vehicles results of measures of employment, including but not limited to those already being reported to accrediting agencies, state higher education agencies, or voluntary accountability initiatives.
  - a. Along with the data, institutions should provide contextual information on the measures used, how they were developed, and what the results mean. This approach would allow institutions to disclose or report measures that are relevant to their mission.
2. Results of measures of employment should be made more accessible to the public in a common format for ease of use and comparability.
  - a. Data voluntarily collected, disclosed, or reported by institutions should be made available to the public through College Navigator or other consumer information websites.
3. Results of measures of employment should be disaggregated by specific student subgroups (e.g., developmental education students, part-time students, first-time students in college, etc.).
  - a. Possible metrics that institutions could use to document employment outcomes include:
    - median student debt;
    - licensure exam pass rates;
    - the number of students who earned career/technical education degrees and certificates and were subsequently employed;
    - wage growth of graduates, and;
    - measures related to workforce development, such as:
      - Market Penetration: Annual ratio of undergraduate degrees and certificates (of at least one year in program length) awarded relative to the state's population aged 18-24 years old with a high school diploma.
      - Annual granting of a state or industry-recognized credential (volume)

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- Noncredit programs (not courses): If colleges have programs, report the outcomes of students that complete the program
  - Transition from non-credit to credit: The percentage of students enrolled in non-credit courses that within one year of completing the course enroll in credit course work
  - Annual course enrollments in non-credit workforce development courses
4. Given two-year institutions' workforce development missions, the Department should encourage institutions to develop additional metrics that demonstrate that they are meeting the needs of employers and communities.
5. The Department should use incentive funding or other levers to encourage cross-state or interstate sharing of employment or UI wage data.

### **Outstanding Considerations**

- What is the appropriate role for the Department in calling for collection, disclosure, and reporting of results of alternative measures of student success for two-year degree-granting institutions?
- Should institutions be required to *disclose* or *report* alternative measures of student success?
  - If not, the Committee could recommend that the Department encourage institutions (through funding or other incentives) to voluntarily collect and disclose such measures through avenues such as existing accountability initiatives.
- If these measures are to be disclosed, how should institutions disclose the information to be meaningful and comparable across institutions?
  - The Committee could recommend that the Department require institutions to disclose alternative measures of student success using a common template.
- If these measures are to be reported to the Department, what information should be reported that would be meaningful and comparable across institutions?
  - The Committee could recommend that the Department require institutions to report alternative measures that institutions are currently collecting or reporting to accrediting agencies, state higher education agencies, or voluntary accountability initiatives.
  - Alternately, the Committee could recommend that the Department require institutions to collect and report a specific set of alternative measures (to be defined by the Department) across all institutions.

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- Should the Committee address the roles of other key stakeholders (e.g., states, employers, accrediting agencies, etc.) in calling for collection and disclosure or reporting of alternative measures of student success?
  - Who will determine acceptable levels of performance, if at all?