U.S. Department of Education
Committee on Measures of Student Success

The second meeting of the U.S. Department of Education's Committee on Measures of Student Success (Committee) was held on Wednesday, February 9 and Thursday, February 10, 2011 at 1990 K Street, NW in Washington, DC.

Established by the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008*, the Committee will advise the Secretary of Education in assisting two-year degree-granting institutions of higher education in meeting the completion or graduation rate disclosure requirements outlined in the Act. The Committee may also recommend additional or alternate measures of student success that are comparable alternatives to completion or graduation rates.

The following Committee members were in attendance:

- Dr. Thomas Bailey, Professor of Economics and Education, Columbia University (chair)
- Dr. Margarita Benitez, Senior Associate, Excelencia in Education
- Dr. Wayne Burton, President, North Shore Community College
- Mr. Kevin Carey, Policy Director, Education Sector
- Ms. Alisa Federico Cunningham, Vice President, Institute for Higher Education Policy
- Mr. Jacob Fraire, Assistant Vice President for Educational Alliances, Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation
- Ms. Isabel Friedman, Student, University of Pennsylvania
- Dr. Millie Garcia, President, California State University at Dominguez
- Dr. Sharon Kristovich, Higher Education Consultant
- Mr. Harold Levy, Managing Director, Palm Ventures
- Mr. Patrick Perry, Vice Chancellor, California Community College System
- Dr. Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Deputy Director, MDRC
- Dr. Linda Thor, Chancellor, Foothill-De Anza Community College District
- Dr. Belle Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges

Invited guests included:

- Dr. Thomas Weko, Associate Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics
- Dr. T. Dary Erwin, Professor of Leadership Studies and Psychology, James Madison University
- Dr. Jeff Strohl, Director of Research, Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University
- Dr. Carol Fuller, Higher Education Consultant

- Mr. Tod Massa, Policy Research and Data Warehousing Director, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
- Ms. Andrea Sykes, Laurium Evaluation Group

MEETING SUMMARY

Wednesday February 9, 2011

Welcome

Dr. Thomas Bailey, Committee chair, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and discussed the goals for the two-day meeting. He reported that the leads for the two working groups—the Progression and Completion Measures working group and the Alternative Measures working group—would be making presentations on their work. He hoped that the Committee would be able to set a list of priorities and identify areas that need further exploration and could lead to the development of draft findings and recommendations on the topics presented by the working groups.

In his remarks, Dr. Bailey also noted that he has been part of several discussions with other organizations focused on measuring student success. He shared that some of the other groups looking at progression and completion measures are also looking at other measures, such as those related to student cost and loan repayment. Although the Committee has not looked at those topics directly, he would like the Committee to keep them in mind.

Session #1: Alternative Measures Working Group Report and Committee Discussion

Dr. Sharon Kristovich, the lead for the Alternative Measures working group, shared the group's progress on the topic. Other members of the working group include Mr. Kevin Carey, Mr. Jacob Fraire, Ms. Geri Palast, and Dr. Linda Thor. The working group focused its discussions on three topic areas: (1) student learning, (2) developmental education, and (3) employment. The group reviewed the landscape of work being done in each area and identified a few sample metrics either proposed or used by external student success initiatives.

Student Learning

The working group recognized that there are many ways that outcomes could be measured within the following domains of student learning: developmental, general, and occupational education. The group suggested that the U.S. Department of Education could encourage

colleges to disclose outcomes data related to these domains of learning in a standard format and make those data more accessible to the public. Some possible metrics highlighted include pass rates from licensure exams, course completion rates, earned to attempted credit hour ratio, or results from external survey instruments already in use by institutions.

Committee Discussion:

- Committee members discussed the need to clarify the meaning of "student learning outcomes" and the appropriate role of the federal government in calling for institutions to disclose or report the results of student learning outcome measures.
- Committee members discussed the range of tests institutions already use to measure student learning and that are reported in the accreditation process. Rather than recommending one specific test to be used, the Committee discussed recommending that institutions select a test that best aligns with their mission to assess students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Institutions could disclose or report the results of those tests in the aggregate and provide context on the tests used, how they were developed, and what the results mean. Several Committee members felt that it would provide more transparency to processes already in place for accreditation purposes and would not be overly burdensome to institutions.
- Committee members also raised the issue of using a student's completion of a course as a measure of success. Some felt that this could be viable, while others felt it might be an imperfect measure because standards could be lowered to raise course completion rates.

Developmental Education

Given the increasing role of developmental education at community colleges, the working group felt that the topic should be considered. The group noted that the Committee would need to clearly define developmental education in order to make any disclosure or reporting requirements consistent and comparable. One suggestion from the group was to look at developmental education students as a separate cohort within the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey (GRS), similar to the first-time, full time cohort. Some possible metrics would focus on academic progress in introductory or college-entry courses, such as the number or percent of students who enroll in developmental education or complete a developmental education course.

Employment

The working group also discussed potential measures related to employment and workforce development. The group acknowledged that some measures were already being implemented as part of the Department's "gainful employment" regulations slated to be effective on July 1, 2011. Members noted that they did not necessarily want to tie the Committee's recommendations to the Department's measures related to gainful employment, although some members noted that some consideration of average student debt could be considered.

Some specific measures that were discussed included 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 the volume of non-credit certificates awarded, student transition from non-credit to credit courses, and outcomes of students who complete non-credit programs.

Committee Discussion:

- Committee members discussed how measures of student success on licensure or certification exams could best be captured given that not all exams are required to be taken, small numbers of students may take an exam, and institutions may not have complete information on the results of an exam or test. The Committee also discussed how it may be useful to make a recommendation that institutions disclose or report the results of licensure or certification exams for which they know the results, but there was no consensus on this measure. The working group will explore further how best to provide information about licensure or certification exam pass rates that would be helpful to consumers.
- To document employment in field or wage growth, institutions would need reliable data on students' employment status and the amount of money they earned. Committee members raised several concerns that institutions may use less reliable means to gather such data (e.g., student surveys) because of limited access to state or federal wage unemployment insurance (UI) databases.
- Although some institutions may not have access to wage data, state system offices often do have such access, 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. In particular, the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education has established a Privacy Technical Assistance Center that is tasked with providing guidance on issues related to student privacy and data sharing. The Committee could recommend that the

Department use funding or other levers to encourage cross-state or interstate sharing of employment or UI wage data.

- Committee members also discussed concerns with the student cohort that would be examined (i.e., what students should be included or excluded) as part of this measure. For example, should the cohort include students who don't complete a program but who also experience wage growth; students who may already be employed when they enter the program; or students who may transfer or leave the state and later find employment?
- There was also concern about institutions disclosing or reporting information that would be meaningful to the public. If a program produced small numbers of students with high wage growth, would that be considered a success?
- Employment measures should also reflect that institutions are not only placing students in jobs but also meeting the needs of employers.

In addition, the working group discussed principles that the Committee should consider when developing its recommendations around alternative measures, such as:

- Understanding how success can be defined in different ways by different stakeholder groups;
- Determining if acceptable levels of performance should be established; and
- Establishing whether institutions must disclose or report data, and if so, whether reporting should be voluntary or mandatory.

The group also considered the value of having institutions disclose data for consumer information purposes in a common format, particularly on student subgroups not included in current graduation measures, such as developmental education students, part-time students, first time students in college, or first time students at the institution. The working group recommended that the administrative burden of disclosing such information should be weighed against the benefits of providing more transparency and information to students and the public.

Session #2: Challenges and Implications of Implementing Alternative Measures of Student Success

Dr. Dary Erwin, Professor of Leadership Studies and Psychology at James Madison University and Dr. Jeff Strohl, Director of Research at the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University were invited to share their experiences in measuring student success

through the assessment of student learning and measurement of employment outcomes, respectively.

Dr. Erwin established the assessment center at James Madison University in 1986 and is recognized as a national expert in assessing student learning outcomes. He developed a student assessment for James Madison University that tests entering freshmen on information, quantitative, and scientific literacy. Dr. Erwin noted that assessment results are "specific knowledge, skills, or developmental attributes that students actually develop through their college experience." Dr. Erwin also shared efforts to measure student learning underway at other organizations, noting that the three areas of focus at two-year colleges are commonly professional certifications, general education, and developmental education. Dr. Erwin noted that there are assessments in use that can be used to measure student learning, but in cases where there are learning constructs that are not measured, new assessments should be designed. He also suggested that two-year colleges would benefit from gathering student learning data over time in order to measure changes, or the value-added of a program.

Dr. Strohl shared his experiences examining employment outcomes and related some suggestions on how employment metrics could be developed to measure student success. He stated that labor market outcomes should not be looked at in isolation from issues of equity and access. He highlighted the mission of community colleges to prepare students for specific jobs and prepare a workforce for local employers, even though measuring success in such outcomes can be challenging because of limitations with data. Dr. Strohl also highlighted that community colleges prepare a number of students enrolled in non-credit courses for employment, and current measures exclude those students. He believes that using licensure or certification exam results would capture some of these students.

Following the presentations, the Committee engaged in a discussion about the topics raised by the invited guests.

Committee members debated how two-year colleges could institute a longitudinal design for measuring student learning outcomes given the short-term enrollment of many students. Some members believed that value-added could be captured after a course, a series of courses, or after completing a program. The Committee discussed how colleges are already using established learning outcome assessments and whether those assessments could be used to show "value-added" of a program, or if the assessments should be used more longitudinally. Dr. Erwin advised the Committee to consider carefully the assessments being used and what those assessments actually measure. For example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment is highly correlated with the SAT verbal section, and measuring students' verbal ability may not be

important for some two-year colleges or programs. Given the varied purposes for which assessments are designed, the Committee discussed whether it would be appropriate to recommend that institutions use assessments for pre- and post- testing. Since two-year colleges already conduct a large volume of assessment through a college's placement testing process when students first matriculate, Committee members also discussed whether these data could be used to measure "value added."

Committee members agreed with Dr. Strohl's suggestion on the importance of collecting data about non-credit students because they are a significant portion of the community college population; however, the Committee would need to consider several challenges. For example, there are not consistent definitions of non-credit enrollment, and data are not reported consistently across institutions. The Committee also discussed how institutions would be able to collect data necessary to measure employment outcomes other than through student surveys or a UI database match. Dr. Strohl suggested a more generic approach to assessing whether two-year colleges are producing degree or certificates to meet employment needs in local areas. After some discussion, Committee members debated the merits of a forward-looking measure that compared projections in employment in a local area to college degree production. It was unclear how this measure would differ from labor market surveys already produced by state workforce agencies.

Session #3: Progression and Completion Measures Working Group Report and Committee Discussion

Mr. Patrick Perry, the lead of the Progression and Completion Measures working group, presented the group's draft findings and recommendations. The other members of the working group included Dr. Wayne Burton and Dr. Margarita Benitez. The working group focused on the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) and how data currently reported to GRS could be improved to better measure student success. Mr. Perry noted that suggestions the Committee makes regarding GRS will have an impact on both public and private two-year institutions, and not just community colleges. Mr. Perry highlighted the following issues related to potential improvements to GRS and shared some possible recommendations that the Committee could make:

- **First-time students:** Correctly identifying first-time students through better matching of institutional data with state or National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) databases, defining the number of years since last enrollment (i.e., student has not enrolled in 5 years so would be considered a first-time student), or changing definition to first time at your institution.

- ***Committee discussion:***
  - Although many institutions already use NSC data to identify students who transfer out or for other purposes, members shared some concerns with recommending that institutions use a private database because of financial and privacy related issues.
  - There was some agreement that additional guidance on the application of FERPA for matching institution-level data with NSC data is needed.
  - Committee members also felt that better defining a first-time student was important. To do so, the members discussed whether it was important to consider a student "first-time" based on the number of years since they had last enrolled or the number of credits the student had already earned.

- **Start term:** Including students who start during summer and spring terms in the graduation rate cohort, not just those who start in the fall.

  - ***Committee discussion***:
    - Schools that report to IPEDS on a full-year basis are already doing this. However this would likely increase the burden and costs for community colleges.
    - Several committee members discussed the need to have more data on students who start in the fall term versus the other terms to see if there are differences in the groups that would impact graduation rates.

- **Degree-seeking:** More clearly defining a degree-seeking student either using information reported by students on their intent or linking to student behavior (e.g., complete a certain number of credits or completion of a "gateway" course that would signal intent to pursue a degree or certificate).

  - ***Committee discussion*** :
    - There were several concerns about using student course or credit completion as the marker for identifying intent to earn a degree. Specifically, members were worried about the institutional burden, particularly for schools that may have 60 programs that have different gateway courses and the ongoing need to "refresh" the cohort once students had achieved certain credit thresholds.

- Members also noted that a credit threshold would be appropriate if the measure included students enrolled on a part-time basis to allow institutions to exclude students who take one course for personal interest. Also, using the completion of a gateway course would address the issue of having developmental education students in the GRS cohort.

- **Time to graduation:** Lengthening the amount of time students are tracked from current 150 and 200 percent of normal time to a 10-year tracking term.

  - ***Committee discussion:***
    - Tracking student outcomes over a longer time period would provide a more accurate picture of what is happening at community colleges. The current three-year time period makes the assumption that students who start full-time are always full-time, when in reality there is movement between full- and part-time status.

- **Disaggregate student outcomes:** Differentiating between students who graduate, students who transfer to a four-year institution, students who transfer to another two-year institution (lateral transfer), and students who are still enrolled.

  - ***Committee discussion:***
    - This approach would address a current issue with underreporting of transfer-out data in GRS because students who graduate cannot also be counted as a transfer. Using differentiated outcomes would provide an achievement rate that would count students one time in each outcome.

- **Sub-populations:** Disaggregating graduation rates for additional subpopulations, e.g., by student age, remedial status, socioeconomic or first generation status.

  - ***Committee discussion:***
    - The subgroups would need to be clearly defined. The level of data reported would need to be considered so as not to overly burden institutions.

- **Momentum points:** Disclosing or reporting on student progress on specific momentum points, such as retained until end of first term enrolled, achieved certain credit threshold, or completed sequence of developmental education courses.

- ***Committee discussion:***
  - Again, the terms would need to be clearly defined, particularly those related to developmental education. The members discussed if the remediation measure would focus on students who attempted a course or completed a course.
  - The Committee needs to prioritize the possible measures; otherwise there could be an unwieldy amount of different measures.

Session #4: Context and Challenges of Implementing Progression and Completion Measures

Dr. Carol Fuller, a higher education consultant, was invited to provide the Committee with her perspective on the development of current reporting requirements that are part of the IPEDS GRS. Dr. Fuller participated in the negotiated rulemaking process that followed the passage of the *Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act* in 1990. Dr. Fuller shared that many of the issues raised during the negotiated rulemaking process are still being discussed 20 years later. The graduation rate measure eventually developed for GRS represented a consensus by institutions, higher education associations, and U.S. Department of Education officials about the importance of having comparable graduation rates across all sectors. Dr. Fuller mentioned that there were also considerable discussions about counting transfer out students. During the rulemaking process, there was concern about institutions reporting separate graduation and transfer out rates that could lead to confusion or provide misleading consumer information.

Mr. Tod Massa, Policy Research and Data Warehousing Director at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shared how accountability provisions have been implemented in Virginia. Mr. Massa stated that Virginia has been measuring institutional progress towards the state's higher education goals rather than comparing institutions to each other. Institutions established the targets that need to be achieved. In Virginia there are two graduation measures--average year-to-year retention rate and an alternative graduation rate. The alternative graduation rate that Virginia uses is not calculated as it is for GRS because state officials felt that the rate calculated by GRS was narrowly defined. Mr. Massa said that although GRS has been in place for 13 years, it is a good time to revisit and broaden what the measure reports. For instance, it could better measure two-year institutions' ability to prepare students for what they said they were going to do. States that have student unit record databases can track student transfer behavior and credit accumulation across institutions in the state.

Following the presentations, the Committee engaged in a discussion about the topics raised by the invited guests.

Committee members appreciated the history and perspective of how current graduation rate measures that are part of GRS were developed, but reiterated the notion that current rates are not reflective of the work being done at two-year institutions and the types of students who enroll.

Committee members also noted the changing landscape since the implementation of the current graduation rate measures that are part of GRS. Data are now more readily available, and policymakers and institutional staff utilize data for more in-depth analysis.

Thursday February 10, 2011

Session #1: Day One Recap

Dr. Jack Buckley, Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, greeted the Committee and spoke about the Administration's focus on college completion and its eagerness to see the Committee's recommendations. Chairman Bailey welcomed Committee members back and outlined the goals for the second day of the meeting. He wanted the Committee to discuss topics that were not fully explored during the first day of the meeting, particularly the following: developmental education, general principles to inform the Committee's recommendations, and more specific guidance to the working groups as they move forward in developing their recommendations. Dr. Archie Cubarrubia, Designated Federal Official for the Committee, discussed the process for developing the Committee's final report. After the Committee's next meeting, a draft report will be produced over the summer. The Committee will then meet in the fall to discuss and finalize the draft report. Once the report is finalized, it will be presented to the Secretary and posted to the *Federal Register*.

Developmental Education

Committee members discussed how best to define developmental education and how to identify a developmental education student cohort. Such a cohort could be defined as any student taking or completing a developmental education course, or it could include any student who took developmental education courses exclusively. Institutions could gather data on these students at a subject level—math and English/reading—or by the number of developmental education courses taken. This group could be a subset of the current GRS cohort. While some members thought it would be useful to look at students referred to developmental education, it would be challenging to identify such students within institutional data systems. Committee members also discussed the possibility of differentiating between levels of developmental

education, but since levels are not standardized across the nation, it would be difficult to collect data on students at each level. One suggestion would be to collect data on the number of levels of developmental education offered at an institution, although the linear notion of developmental education is changing because of a "modular" approach being developed in some states.

Another issue the members discussed was the definition of success for developmental education students. If they would be a subset of the IPEDS GRS cohort, the graduation rates for developmental education students might be low. One suggestion for measuring success would be to measure the rate at which students complete developmental education and then enroll in college-level coursework in the same subject. Committee members discussed whether completing college level math or English would be a fair measure of success for developmental education students.

General Principles to Inform the Committee's Recommendations

Committee members identified several principles that could be used to help the working groups further refine their recommendations.

- **Ease of burden:** Committee members suggested that recommendations for increased transparency and information should be weighed against institutional burden. For example, there was discussion among Committee members about making recommendations that the institutions disclose or report information already being collected for other purposes (such as accreditation or as part of voluntary accountability systems).
- **Timeliness:** Committee members discussed considering recommendations that could be implemented more readily (i.e., can be implemented with current statutory or regulatory authority; can be implemented with minimal resources) versus those that might require additional time (i.e., would need statutory or regulatory changes)
- **Comparability:** A guiding principle of the group that developed the original graduation rate measure was that data should be disclosed or reported in a way that allows for comparison across institutions. The Committee discussed whether its recommendations should address comparability. Some Committee members did not believe it would be useful to interested audiences to aggregate incomparable measures, while others felt that it would provide access to data that are currently unavailable to most researchers.
- **Ease of Implementation:** The Committee also discussed making recommendations that may be challenging to implement but that would be important to inform the national conversations about student success in both the short-term and the long-term. For

example, there were discussions about the need for a national student unit record system, recognizing that the federal government is statutorily prohibited from operating such a system. Other suggestions were to make recommendations that could spur changes in state and other data systems, not just federal data systems.

The meeting concluded with each of the working group leads outlining their steps to move forward in crafting recommendations that will be discussed at the Committee's next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

I certify the accuracy of these minutes.

Thomas R. Bailey
Chair

3/25/11
Date