

# REPLENISHING OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

The 2012 Midterm Report of Public Higher Education Systems  
in the Access to Success Initiative



The Education Trust

## TO THE POINT

- ▶ Access to Success is the nation's only concerted effort to help public college and university systems boost both the enrollment and success of low-income students and underrepresented minority students.
- ▶ A2S represents 22 systems, 312 two-year and four-year campuses, and more than 3.5 million students.
- ▶ Four years in, the initiative can point to concrete progress on enrolling and graduating more students of color and low-income students.
- ▶ To meet the nation's educational attainment goals, other colleges and universities must follow the lead of A2S systems, minding the gaps that separate underrepresented and low-income students from their peers.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To preserve our nation's democratic ideals and compete in the global economy, we must improve postsecondary educational attainment. Indeed, the stakes are so high that prominent government and business leaders have set a goal for the United States to regain its status as the world's most educated country by 2020. Given demographic and socioeconomic trends, this shift will require closing the achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from their peers.

To address these issues, leaders from public higher education systems across the country launched the Access to Success Initiative in fall 2007, setting two ambitious goals: increase the number of college graduates in their states and ensure those graduates more broadly represent their states' high school graduates. Indeed, the A2S leaders pledged that by 2015 their systems would halve the gaps in college-going and completion that separate African-American, Latino, and American-Indian students from their white and Asian-American peers — and low-income students from more affluent ones.

Today, the Access to Success Initiative counts 22 member systems and remains the only concerted effort to help public college and university systems boost attainment. Together, A2S systems represent 312 two-year and four-year campuses and serve more than 3.5 million students, educating about 1 in 5 students attending U.S. public institutions and nearly 2 in 5 students of color and low-income students attending public four-year institutions nationwide.

Over the past four years, The Education Trust National Association of System Heads (NASH), and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute have facilitated A2S cross-system work and monitored progress toward the initiative's 2015 goals. This report chronicles progress made and les-

sons learned by A2S systems since the December 2009 release of "Charting a Necessary Path: The Baseline Report of Public Higher Education Systems in the Access to Success Initiative." In addition, 29 detailed system progress reports, including associate's and bachelor's reports, document how individual A2S systems are advancing.

Access to Success systems developed metrics to track not only overall enrollment and completion rates, but measures for many students who are missing from or invisible in national higher education data sets such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), including low-income, part-time, and transfer students. The initiative's focus on both access and success, and its inclusive metrics, sidestep the pitfalls of widening access without graduating more students, or simply excluding more applicants. Overall, the A2S systems have seen the following results:

- Enrollments and degrees have increased across the A2S systems, with climbing numbers among underrepresented minority (URM) students (African-American, Latino, and American-Indian students) and low-income students driving the improvements.
- Access for underrepresented minority and low-income students has risen. Two-year institutions have no access gap; their four-year counterparts are making strides, though some work remains to narrow gaps.
- Success rates need the most attention in two-year colleges, where rates are still low and gaps persistent. Four-year institutions have improved success rates for all students, but increases in these rates fall short of what's needed to narrow gaps.

Now four years into the initiative, Access to Success can point to concrete progress on

enrolling and graduating more students of color and low-income students. Yet like most other U.S. institutions, A2S member systems rely more on increases in input (enrollments) than improvements in throughput (completion rates) to reach attainment goals. Achieving them will require public higher education systems to recommit to the success agenda, even while strengthening access. In fact, several lessons about boosting college-going and completion rates have emerged from top-improving campuses:

- Successful institutions tend to have long-term, visible leaders who articulate and communicate a clear set of goals and build guiding coalitions to achieve them.
- Leaders in successful institutions leverage institutional rhythms and structures, especially those related to shared governance.
- Effective leaders engage their institutional culture to privilege student success.
- Successful institutions use data a lot to inform their improvement efforts.
- Institutions that improve embrace student *learning* as key to increasing student success.

On balance, the goals of the success agenda look well within reach, especially given the record of some A2S systems and campuses, which have made significant gains or have boosted access and success in a short time. We hope that the information presented here helps academic leaders, reformers, and policymakers keep equity front and center in efforts to improve college attainment, affordability, and productivity.

**The following public higher education systems are members of the Access to Success (A2S) Initiative:**

<b>System</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>
California State University System	383,801
Colorado State University System‡	33,666
Connecticut State University System	34,674
State University System of Florida	281,444
University of Hawai'i System	68,330
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education	252,345
University of Louisiana System	83,356
University System of Maryland	130,426
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities	266,938
University of Missouri System	60,758
Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning	66,783
Montana University System	51,581
University of North Carolina System	200,280
City University of New York	291,132
State University of New York	551,442
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education*	114,767
Rhode Island Board of Higher Education	49,137
South Dakota Board of Regents	35,349
Tennessee Board of Regents	216,432
University of Texas System‡	177,439
University of Wisconsin System*	177,062
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,527,142</b>

Source: IPEDS, 12-month Unduplicated Headcount: 2009-2010

\* Denotes systems that joined in Summer 2009

‡ Denotes systems that joined in Fall 2011

Note: Louisiana Board of Regents participates in A2S, but does not report data.

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# ACCESS TO SUCCESS

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# REPLENISHING OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

## The 2012 Midterm Report of Public Higher Education Systems in the Access to Success Initiative

BY JENNIFER ENGLE, JOSEPH YEADO, RIMA BRUSI, AND JOSÉ L. CRUZ

### THE MORAL AND ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE

As Americans, we tell each other and the world two compelling stories about our country.

The first is that we are the land of opportunity. The story goes: Whether your parents came here from Mexico or you grew up in the hollers of West Virginia, if you work hard you can become anything you want to be.

The second is a story of generational advancement: Through saving and hard work, each generation of parents can secure a better education, and a better future, for their children.

These stories are powerful. They are pervasive. And they are dead wrong.

The uncomfortable truth is that U.S. income inequality is on par with that of Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and Morocco.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, our intergenerational mobility roughly matches that of Nepal and Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The dangerous reality is that young Americans today are only *slightly* (1 percentage point) more likely than older Americans to earn a college degree, far trailing other countries.<sup>3</sup> In fact, our young adults now rank 15th in degree attainment internationally.<sup>4</sup> If current trends continue, the United States will have a shortfall of 3 million college graduates by 2018.<sup>5</sup>

To preserve our democratic ideals of opportunity and advancement, and to maintain the global competitiveness of our workforce, our nation must improve postsecondary educational attainment. Indeed, the stakes are so high that prominent government and business leaders have set a goal for the United States to regain its status as the most educated country in the world by 2020. Given demographic and socioeconomic trends, doing this will require minding the achievement gaps that separate our students of color and low-income students from their peers across the educational spectrum.

### THE INITIATIVE

In fall 2007, leaders from public higher education systems across the country launched the Access to Success Initiative (A2S), becoming the vanguard of the college attainment movement. A2S system administrators — all members of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) — joined out of a mutual conviction that their systems could do more to assure student success and that they would benefit from working together toward a shared vision.

To focus their efforts, system leaders set two ambitious and essential goals: to increase the number of college graduates in their states and to ensure that those graduates more broadly represent their states' high school graduates. Specifically, these administrators publicly pledged that by the year 2015, their systems would halve the gaps in college-going and completion that separate African-American, Latino, and American-Indian students from white and Asian-American students — and low-income students from more affluent students.

Today, the Access to Success Initiative remains the only concerted effort to leverage the resources and the role of public higher education systems on behalf of the college attainment agenda. And it's a large-scale effort to boot. The 22 A2S systems represent 312 two-year and four-year campuses, and serve more than 3.5 million students. Together, these systems educate about 20 percent of students attending public institutions nationally, including nearly 40 percent of underrepresented minority and low-income students attending public four-year institutions across the country. Clearly, the likelihood that our country will reach its collective goal of educational attainment depends in no small part on whether A2S systems meet their own.

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## THE METRICS

Experience suggests that students who are not *counted* won't *count* when decisions are made and priorities are set. That is why Access to Success systems developed a set of metrics, protocols, and tools not only to track overall enrollment and completion rates, but to track these measures for many of the students who are missing from or invisible in such national higher education data systems as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) — including low-income, part-time, and transfer students. A high-level overview of the A2S metrics and the rationale behind them is presented below. For more information, please refer to the Technical Appendix: <http://www.edtrust.org/issues/higher-education/access-to-success>

### Access

Despite considerable progress over the last four decades, low-income students and students of color continue to enroll in college at significantly lower rates than their peers. In fact, today's low-income students enroll in college at rates below the college-going rate for high-income students nearly 40 years ago.<sup>6</sup> If the nation is to increase increase degree attainment, it must expand access to these populations, especially since the numbers of low-income students and students of color are growing rapidly and are projected to soon constitute the majority of young people in this country.<sup>7</sup> To that end, the A2S systems track their progress on three key access indicators:

- Are the system and its campuses enrolling more underrepresented minority and low-income students?
- Are the system and its campuses enrolling more underrepresented students as a percentage of the entering class?
- Are the system and its campuses enrolling more underrepresented students relative to their representation among high school graduates in their state?

Access to Success measures the performance of each system in the context of its state population. Why? Because higher education institutions must set their sights on narrowing access gaps — not just increasing enrollment — for underrepresented minority and low-income students to make enough progress to reach educational attainment goals for states and our nation. Leading the way, the Access to Success systems have committed to cutting their access gaps in half for underrepresented populations by 2015.

### Success

Nationally, slightly more than half of the students entering four-year institutions earn bachelor's degrees within six years. Less than a third of students entering two-year institutions earn a credential in three years.<sup>8</sup> This is a massive waste of time, talent, and resources in our country. Worse yet, the students on whom the nation is depending the most to reach its college attainment goals, due to changing demographics, are the students who are least likely to succeed.<sup>9</sup> While expanding access to higher education will drive some progress toward these goals, reaching them will require dramatically improving the rates at which all students, but particularly underrepresented minority and low-income students, complete degrees. For their part, the Access to Success systems are tracking their progress on these key success indicators:

- Are the system and its campuses improving the rate at which underrepresented students succeed?
- Are the system and its campuses improving the rate at which underrepresented students succeed relative to their peers?

The A2S systems have set goals to raise success rates overall, as well as to narrow success-rate gaps, because their leaders know that improving success rates for underserved students will not represent real progress unless their rates increase even faster than those of their peers. This is why the A2S systems have also committed to cutting their success gaps in half by 2015 for underrepresented minority and low-income students.

### Degrees

Finally, the A2S systems are tracking whether they are increasing the number and percentage of degrees awarded to underrepresented students, which is the ultimate aim of our collective attainment agenda.

The initiative's simultaneous focus on access and success, and its metrics, are fundamental to achieving substantial increases in the number of U.S. college graduates. Otherwise, the temptation could be to take one of the two routes that thus far have proved to be so unproductive: (1) widen access without graduating more students or (2) exclude more applicants, so graduation rates will improve without any effort. Neither course would produce more Americans with degrees, which is what our country needs, not only to jump-start our economy but to reverse the dangerous trends toward income inequality and stalled social mobility that threaten our democracy.

## THE WORK

During the past four years, A2S systems have worked to build capacity to lead change and engage, mobilize, and support their campuses around the critical issues that drive improvements in access and success. In this respect, many A2S systems have collaborated in one or more cross-system workgroups led by experts in the field on key topics such as leveraging resources including financial aid, analyzing and employing data on student progression, building implementation processes leading to systemic change, redesigning developmental education courses, and improving “near” degree completion.

Some of the most notable work includes the Win-Win project led by Cliff Adelman from the Institute for Higher Education Policy, the massive developmental math course redesign effort undertaken by the Tennessee Board of Regents with the National Center for Academic Transformation, and the deployment of cost accountability data to improve student success outcomes with the Delta Cost Project. Furthermore, the Leading Indicators Framework developed jointly with the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy and support from the U.S. Education Delivery Institute have been critical to implementing the Access to Success initiative (*see stories pages 7–9*).

Drawing on the cross-system efforts, particularly the delivery framework, A2S participants have worked within their system and campus communities to establish a solid foundation for college attainment and gap closing. For example, participating systems have made the initiative a clear priority by mapping A2S goals into their strategic and operational plans. The California State University (CSU) Graduation Initiative calls for an 8-percentage point increase in the system’s overall six-year graduation rate for freshmen while cutting in half the gap in underrepresented minority completion rates by 2015-16. Meanwhile, as part of its *Growth Agenda for Wisconsin*, the University of Wisconsin System (UW) has committed to producing 80,000 more graduates at the associate’s and bachelor’s degree level by 2025-26. The UW’s More Graduates strategy includes setting explicit goals to cut in half the gap in college-going and completion rates that divide underrepresented minority and low-income students from their peers.

Many A2S systems are also engaging their campuses in strategic planning and goal-setting. The California State University (Cal State) system, for one, has worked with all 23 of its campuses to set graduation-rate targets to raise completion rates relative to their peer institutions and to cut graduation rate gaps in

half for their underrepresented minority students. UW produces annual accountability reports, for the system and for each campus, that track progress on its goals to increase access and success rates for underrepresented minority and low-income students. For its part, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) has built A2S metrics into its performance-based funding model for campuses and will soon evaluate campus presidents on how much progress their institutions make toward A2S goals.

Although *financial* resources are scarce in this era of budget austerity, many systems are making substantial commitments of staff time and effort to support their campuses. The University of Missouri system, for instance, has convened a dynamic team of representatives from each of their four institutions that works closely to plan and oversee campus goals. The team has also developed a system-wide dashboard, which allows users to drill down in real time from system to campus to department to student data, to track their progress and adjust their strategies accordingly.

Meanwhile, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education recently created a network for a subset of its campuses. This network focuses on building implementation capacity, sharing best practices, and peer-to-peer coaching on strategies to increase student outcomes per campus targets, which include goals both for all students and for underrepresented minority and low-income students.

For its part, the Cal State system has dedicated four staff members, each on a part-time basis, to run its Graduation Initiative using delivery methods. Each member of the Graduation Initiative team works closely with a portfolio of campuses, connecting regularly through bimonthly reports submitted by institutions and on-site visits with campus leaders, faculty, staff, and students. The Cal State system also hosts regular workshops for campuses on key strategies for improving student success with leading experts in the field, and has developed a searchable database of exemplary practices already in place on CSU campuses.



## CROSS-SYSTEM WORK

Cross-System work is a critical attribute of the of the A2S Initiative. In this section, we outline five programs within the initiative that are working with the systems to drive improvement in access and success.

### The U. S. Education Delivery Institute

Launched in August 2010 with leadership from The Education Trust and support from McKinsey & Company, the U.S. Education Delivery Institute (EDI) is helping a subset of A2S systems reach their college-attainment targets through an approach known as “delivery,” a methodology developed in the United Kingdom by Sir Michael Barber to improve outcomes in the public sector.

The 11 A2S systems in the EDI network have quickly positioned themselves to get out ahead of the nation’s goal for educational attainment. The systems are divided into two cohorts based on how long they have been using delivery methods. The first cohort began working with delivery in September 2009 as EDI was being formed.

**Cohort 1:** California State University System, Connecticut State University System, University of Missouri System, University of Wisconsin System, University System of Maryland

**Cohort 2:** Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Pennsylvania State System Higher Education, Tennessee Board of Regents, University of Hawai’i System, Colorado State University; The University of Texas System

Assistance from EDI includes intensive on-the-ground support, data analytics, ongoing professional development, and a network through which state systems can collectively build their capacity. The delivery approach seeks to sustain impact by equipping system teams to operate independently.

EDI helps systems spur action at the campus level with real-time data to monitor progress against their A2S goals and emphasizes closing gaps that often separate students of color and low-income students from their peers. The organization focuses on integrating A2S goals into overall system goals and strategic plans, driving campuses to set goals for which they’re accountable, and using data to drive action. In addition, EDI helps embed leading indicators data in system-change strategies to chart progress toward graduation and equity goals.

EDI helps higher education systems to take several key steps:

- Provide a foundational strategy at the system level that ensures continuity of attainment and gap-closing goals during leadership and governance change.
- Allow for mid-course corrections when strategies are not yielding expected results.
- Help systems stretch their goals using EDI as a planning mechanism.
- Empower system teams to disseminate actionable data and best practices among campuses.
- Fostering a transition among systems from writing strategic plans to writing implementation plans.

EDI fosters accountability and continual progress on system plans through an online learning community, network meetings, site visits, and monthly calls to their institutional members. The attention to data is paramount, and drives all of the delivery routines. EDI tailors its approach to each system in order to ensure optimal results, and carefully crafts interventions and recommendations in light of the institutional culture of each system and campus. For more information, visit [www.deliveryinstitute.org](http://www.deliveryinstitute.org).

### **The Leading Indicators Framework**

The Education Trust partnered with Nancy Shulock and the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy (IHELP) in 2010 to produce a research report, *Advancing by Degrees: A Framework for Increasing College Completion*. This research demonstrates that meeting key academic milestones, such as credit accumulation and gateway course completion, during the first year of college provides students with early momentum toward degree attainment. Academic patterns (leading indicators) reveal the probability that students will reach these milestones and graduate on time. Instead of focusing on broad patterns of student success, the leading indicators framework allows practitioners to study the pathways of students who are not meeting particular success milestones and thus intervene most effectively.

Leading indicators are powerful diagnostics to place in the hands of higher education leaders. They statistically improve the predicted probabilities of college completion beyond student characteristics, motivating campuses to use early warning systems to set a foundation for their students, not a ceiling. They avoid altogether deficit models that might explain low completion rates with students' demographic or academic backgrounds.

The leading indicators framework was validated by systems and campuses in eight A2S states. The Education Trust is continuing this work by creating a professional development program for campus teams composed of staff members from academic affairs, student affairs, the faculty, and institutional research. This program, Progression Analytics, will not only expose campus teams to the leading indicators framework, but also equip them with proven tools, processes, and best practices that advance college attainment and gap closing (as identified through our analysis of top gap-closing A2S institutions). In short, Progression Analytics is the application of momentum-point theory, the art and science of institutional research, and the day-to-day efforts of faculty members, academic administrators, and student

support personnel to drive college attainment by aligning access with success.

### **Cost Management for Student Success with the Delta Cost Project**

The A2S initiative was launched in the midst of historic economic shortfalls. That is why we partnered with the Delta Cost Project, which develops data and policy tools to improve productivity and public accountability for performance in post secondary education. For A2S, Delta Cost is helping system leaders to help system leaders understand and manage the reinvestment strategies necessary to support access and success. The goal: to improve system capacity to set and maintain a strategic finance agenda that better connects spending with academic priorities, including increased degree attainment. To tackle these timely issues, expert Jane Wellman led a workgroup of leaders from 10 A2S systems to pursue the following tasks:

- Identify the increases in student access and degree attainment needed to close gaps, meet future workforce needs, and meet national goals.
- Articulate funding strategies to close gaps, including setting goals for increases in state appropriations, tuition, financial aid, and institutional productivity.
- Develop system and institutional goals for productivity increases, with clear targets, metrics, and benchmarks.
- Develop communications strategies to support strategic financial plans, decision making, and accountability.

As a result of the workgroup, Wellman has developed a "cost curriculum" for academic leaders that the A2S and NASH networks are refining and testing. For more information, visit the NASH website at [www.nashonline.org](http://www.nashonline.org).

### **Project Win-Win with the Institute for Higher Education Policy**

Every year, too many students leave college without earning the degree they sought when they entered. Yet, some were actually within close

reach when they stopped out. Project Win-Win, designed and implemented with Cliff Adelman and his colleagues at The Institute for Higher Education Policy, was an effort to identify the many current and former students who have “unrecognized degrees.” Students in this situation have earned the requisite credits, but some record-keeping problem or policy barrier keeps them from gaining a degree.

In 2009-10, three A2S systems participated in the pilot of Project Win-Win, which focuses on community colleges. Selected two-year institutions in these systems mined their data to identify former students, no longer enrolled anywhere and never awarded any degree, whose records qualified them for an associate’s degree, and worked to award those degrees retroactively. The institutions also identified former students who were “academically short” of an associate’s degree by no more than nine to 12 credits, took steps to find them, and created pathways for them to come back and complete their degrees. The project is “win-win” because it helps the institution boost degree attainment while helping students earn valuable credentials. In the process, it also helps the institution identify and remove roadblocks to completion that may prevent its current students from earning their degrees.

Project Win-Win has since expanded to 64 community colleges in nine states across the country. Already, nearly 3,000 students have been found eligible to receive an associate’s degree and another 7,500 have been found to be near completion.<sup>i</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-win.cfm>.

### **Course Redesign with the National Center for Academic Transformation**

Students experience success in college, one course at a time. Unfortunately, many students fail to complete the entry-level courses, particularly in mathematics, that are the gateway to eventually earning a degree. To help our systems address this challenge, we introduced them to the work of

Carol Twigg and the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT). NCAT has pioneered a process in course redesign using information technology to achieve increased success and cost savings within large-enrollment, introductory courses. And it works.

Take it from the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), an early NCAT adopter in the A2S network. From 2006 to 2009, TBR conducted course redesign pilots in six institutions with a focus on remedial math and English. Of the six, four of the pilots were highly successful, with significant gains by students in content mastery and course-completion rates — not to mention considerable reductions in instructional costs. At Cleveland State Community College, for example, pass rates in Elementary Algebra went from 50 percent to 68 percent after the redesign, and from 57 percent to 74 percent in Intermediate Algebra. Cleveland State, which used a math lab model in its redesign, also realized a cost savings of nearly 20 percent.<sup>ii</sup>

Seven A2S systems have partnered with NCAT to pilot or fully implement the course redesign model, as well as many more campuses in the A2S network nationwide. The Education Trust is currently working with three A2S campuses — Chattanooga State Community College (Tennessee), Jefferson Community and Technical College (Kentucky), and the University of Hawai’i—Maui (Hawai’i) — to implement Do the Math! a course redesigned during the TBR pilot under the direction of John Squires. For more information, visit <http://www.thencat.org/> ★

- i. Institute for Higher Education Policy, “Project Win-Win,” (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Higher Education Policy), <http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-win.cfm>.
- ii. Carol A. Twigg, “Tennessee Board of Regents: Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative,” (Saratoga Springs, N.Y.: The National Center for Academic Transformation) <http://www.ncat.org/states/tn/tn%20Outcomes%20Summary.htm>.

## THE STATE OF THE INITIATIVE

*IMPORTANT: The findings in this section are drawn from the data submitted annually to the Education Trust by the Access to Success systems. These data differ from other widely reported measures in higher education such as IPEDS. Most notably, these data track the progress of low-income, part-time, and transfer students, who are not included in IPEDS. They also track student progress anywhere within the system. For more information, please refer to the Technical Appendix: <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/access-to-success-data-metrics-technical-appendix>*

So how is the initiative faring?<sup>10</sup> Across the A2S systems, the number of underrepresented minority and low-income students enrolling and earning degrees has increased considerably since the baseline year, 2005-06. Nearly three-quarters of a million students entered institutions in these systems in 2009-2010, including nearly a quarter of a million low-income students and more than 200,000 underrepresented minority students. And, in 2009-2010, nearly 400,000 students earned degrees from A2S institutions. Overall, degree numbers were up more than 10 percent since 2005-2006; the number of degrees awarded to underrepresented minority and low-income students increased by about 20 percent (*Figure 1*).<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, initiative-wide, increases in enrollment among underrepresented minority and low-income students far outpace increases by other groups, thereby driving the increase in enrollment overall. Likewise, underrepresented students are also driving the increases in the number of degrees conferred across the initiative (*Figure 2*).<sup>12</sup>

### Access

While celebrating the gains the initiative has made in enrolling more underrepresented minority and low-income students, it is also important to examine whether the A2S systems are narrowing access gaps for these populations relative to their representation in the states. Otherwise, the initiative will not make enough progress on this front to do its part to reach the nation's educational attainment goals.

### Two-Year Institutions

Initiative-wide, two-year institutions have no access gap for underrepresented minority and low-income freshmen, relative to their concentration among high school graduates in A2S states. Meanwhile, these colleges show only small access gaps for incoming transfers, which have narrowed in recent years (*Figure 3*). Furthermore, nearly 80 percent of A2S systems have improved or have already met the goal to cut the access gap in half for underrepresented minority and low-income students in the two-year sector (*Figure 6, page 12*).

### Four-Year Institutions

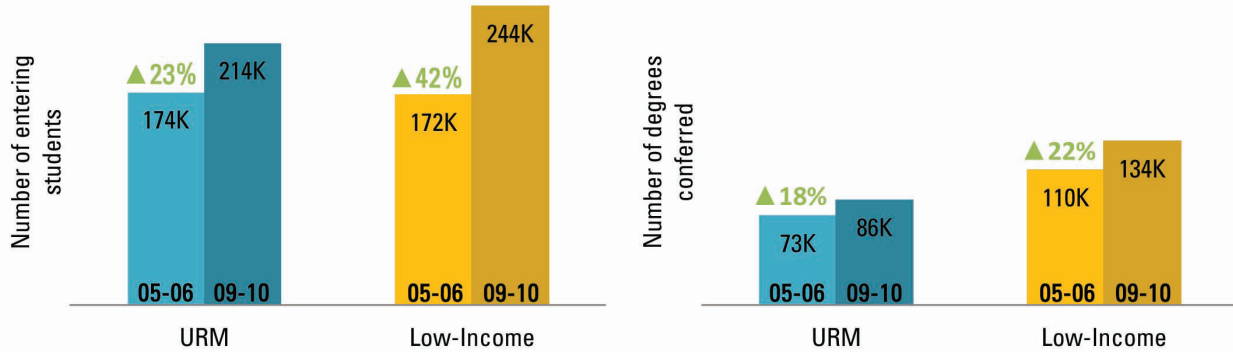
Across the initiative since 2005-06, the access gap for low-income freshmen has been cut in half, from 12 percentage points to 6 points. Meanwhile, the gap for low-income transfers has been closed (*Figure 4, page 12*).<sup>13</sup> Access gaps for underrepresented minority students, on the other hand, narrowed by only 1 point each for freshmen and transfers since the baseline year, with gaps of 6 to 7 percentage points remaining relative to their representation among high school graduates in A2S states (*Figures 4 and 5, page 12*).

As for individual system performance, nearly all systems have improved or met the goal to cut the access gap in half for low-income freshmen and transfers.<sup>14</sup> In addition, 40 percent of systems have improved or met the goal to halve the access gap for underrepresented minority freshmen and transfers in bachelor's programs (*Figure 6, page 12*).

Importantly, the vast majority of systems (upwards of 70 percent) have increased both the number and the percentage of underrepresented minority students enrolling in four-year institutions. Systems that have done one or both certainly are moving in the right direction; but need to intensify their efforts to enroll more students of color to keep pace with the more rapidly changing demographics in their states. For this reason, the A2S metrics measure progress in the context of these demographic shifts. Meanwhile, the Cal State system and the State University System of Florida offer strong evidence that closing access gaps in four-year institutions is indeed possible (*see story, page 16*).

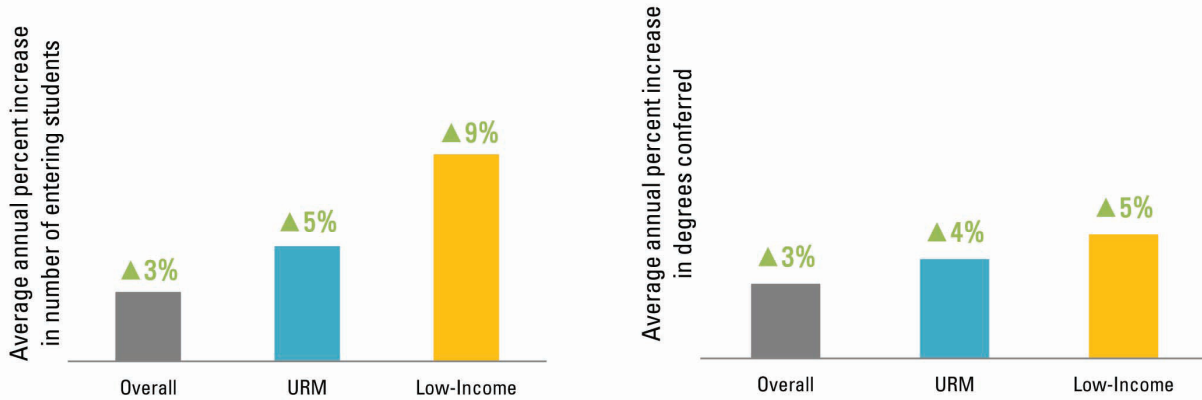
**Across the A2S systems, the number of underrepresented minority and low-income students enrolling and earning degrees has increased considerably since the baseline year, 2005-06.**

**Figure 1: A2S systems are now enrolling and graduating thousands more underrepresented minority and low-income students (2005-06 to 2009-10).**



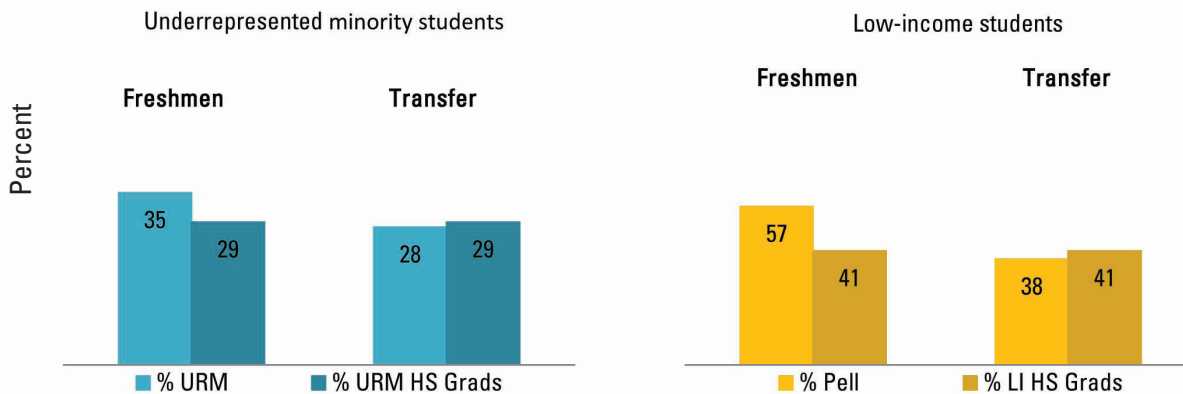
Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set  
 Note: All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 2: Growth in underrepresented minority and low-income enrollment, degree completion drives growth initiative-wide (2005-06 to 2009-10).**



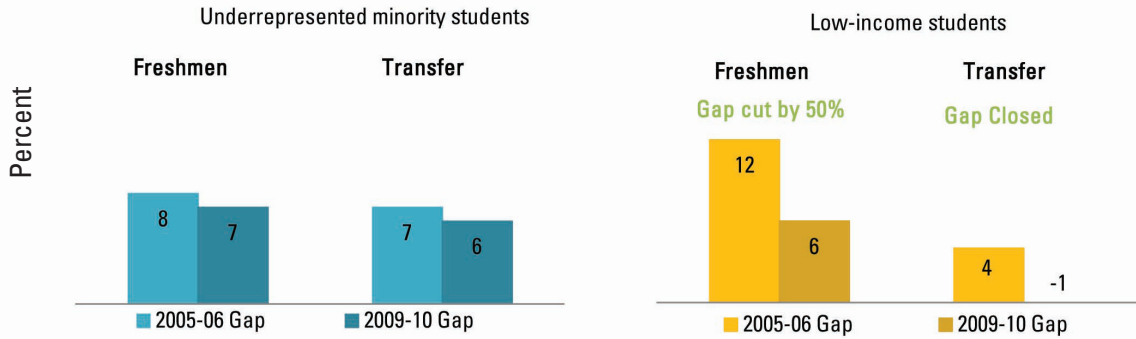
Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set  
 Note: All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 3: Access supplied: Students of color and low-income students are well represented among entering associate's students in A2S systems (2009-10).**



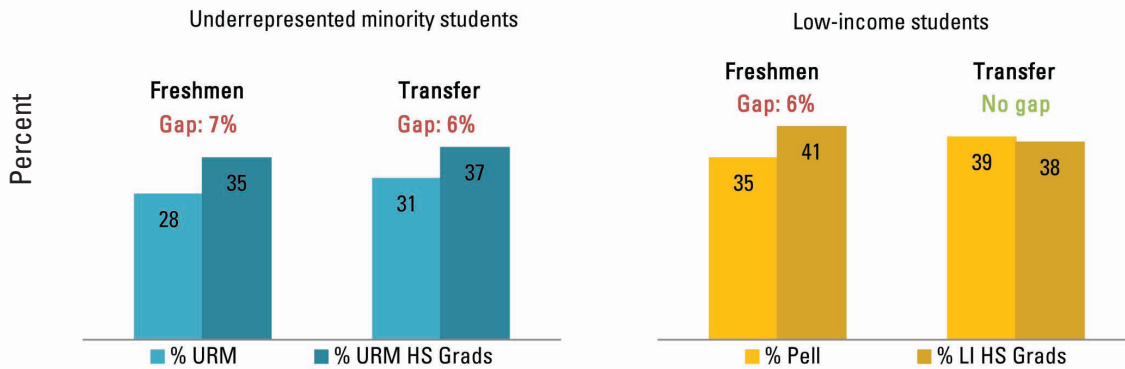
Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set and data from the U.S. Census Bureau.  
 Notes: Freshmen and transfers are compared with 18–34-year-olds without associate's degrees in the state, using the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 4: Access gaps for low-income students narrow more than for students of color in four-year colleges (2005-06 to 2009-10).**



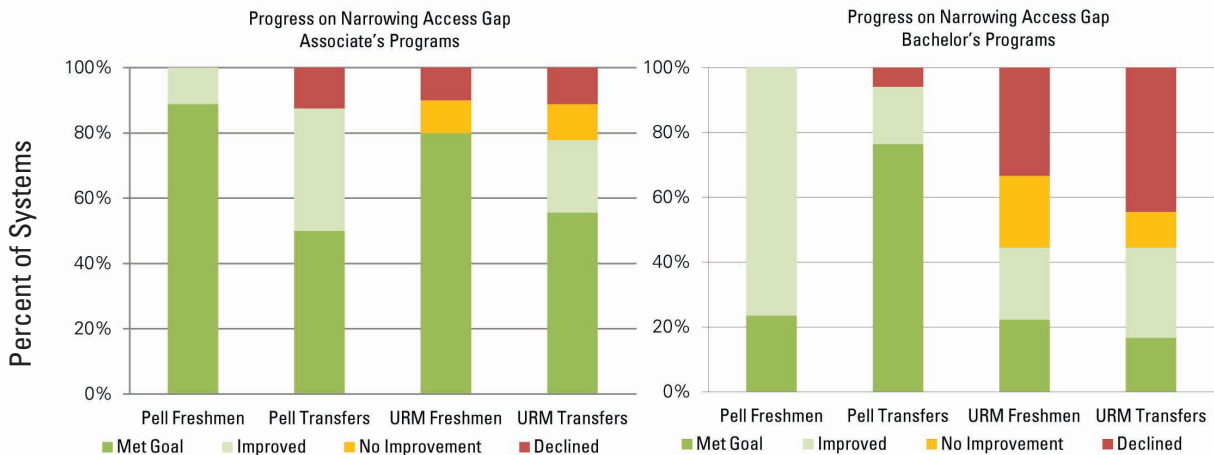
Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set and data from the U.S. Census Bureau  
 Notes: Freshmen are compared with 18–24-year-olds without bachelor’s degrees, while transfers are compared with 18–34-year-olds without bachelor’s degrees in the state using the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 5: Students of color and low-income students remain underrepresented among entering bachelor’s students in A2S systems (2009-10).**



Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set and data from the U.S. Census Bureau  
 Note: Freshmen are compared with 18–24-year-olds without bachelor’s degrees while transfers are compared with 18–34 year olds without bachelor’s degrees in the state using the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. All A2S metrics include full- and part-time students.

**Figure 6: Many A2S systems are making progress or have met the goal on narrowing access gaps (2005-06 to 2009-10).**



Sources: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set and data from the U.S. Census Bureau

## Success

Given that the Access to Success Initiative was launched only four years ago, we wouldn't expect to see much progress yet on success rates and gaps, since there is lag time in reporting graduation and completion rates. For instance, the most recent year of available data, 2009-2010, provides completion rates for cohorts that entered bachelor's programs in Fall 2004 and associate's programs in Fall 2006. These cohorts were in their fourth and second year, respectively, when the initiative began in 2007-08. However, it is useful to examine our systems' progress to date — with a focus on systems and campuses that have made fast or considerable gains — to assess and propel the efforts of the initiative.

## Two-Year Institutions

Reflecting trends nationwide, the two-year institutions in the Access to Success Initiative are characterized by low success rates for all students. Within four years, less than one-third of freshmen entering community colleges in A2S systems complete either a certificate or associate's degree, or transfer to a four-year college in the system. Transfer rates are particularly low: less than 15 percent overall.

The initiative's two-year institutions also face the challenge of large and stubborn success gaps. Only about 1 in 5 underrepresented minority freshmen earn a certificate or an associate's degree, or transfer to a four-year institution in the system within four years compared with about 1 in 3 of their peers (*Figure 7*). And the success rate gaps for underrepresented minority freshmen and transfers have remained unchanged since 2005. Success rate gaps are smaller for low-income students, but the gaps have grown over time (*Figure 8*).

Despite these initiative-wide trends, more than one-third of systems have improved success rates for underrepresented minority and low-income freshmen, and more than one-fifth of systems have improved success rates for transfer students. Further, more than a quarter have closed or narrowed success gaps for low-income students (*Figure 9*).

Clearly, urgent attention is needed to improve completion rates and close gaps in the two-year sector in A2S, not to mention across higher education. The level of the challenge is significant, and the stakes are high. In 2009-10, a third of students entering two-year A2S institutions were from underrepresented minority backgrounds and half were low-income. The good news is that the students entering our two-year institutions in fall 2012 constitute the target cohort for reaching the

goals of the A2S initiative. What's more, the results of the Wisconsin Transfer Equity Study and the City University of New York's ASAP program suggest that the A2S goals are indeed attainable through concerted and intentional action (*see story, pages 17 and 18*).

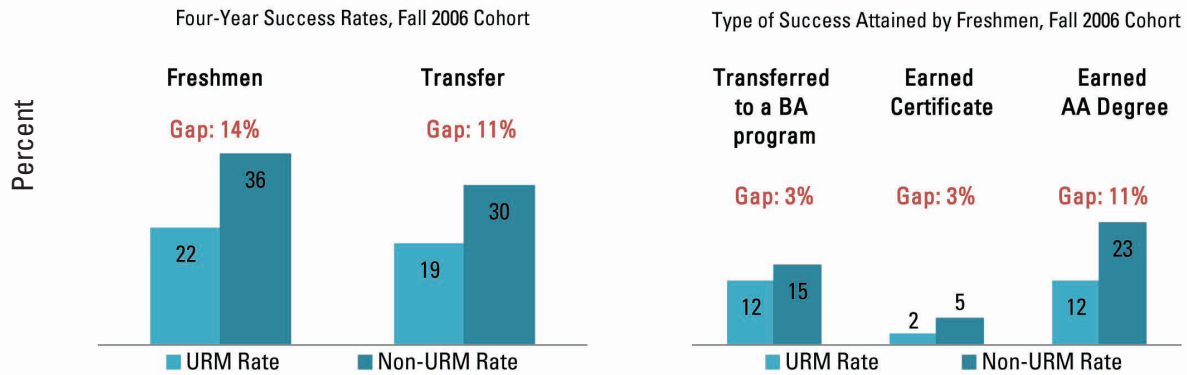
## Four-Year Institutions

In the four-year institutions in A2S systems, success rates are higher and have improved for all groups of students. Additionally, first-year retention rates have also improved for the most recent cohorts overall and for all groups of students even as cohorts have become more diverse over time. As shown in *Figure 10*, however, success gaps remain for underrepresented minority freshmen (16 points) and low-income, first-year students (14 points) as well as for underrepresented minority transfer students (8 points) and their low-income peers (2 points).

It is important to note, however, that more than 60 percent of systems have improved graduation rates for underrepresented minorities and more than 40 percent have done so for low-income students (*Figure 11, page 15*). In other words, success gaps have remained stubborn not because success rates have not improved for underrepresented students, but rather because they haven't improved fast enough relative to their peers. The University System of Maryland's Closing the Achievement Gap Initiative illustrates the diversity of approaches A2S systems are using to accelerate progress (*see story, page 19*).

**... the students entering our two-year institutions in fall 2012 constitute the target cohort for reaching the goals of the A2S initiative.**

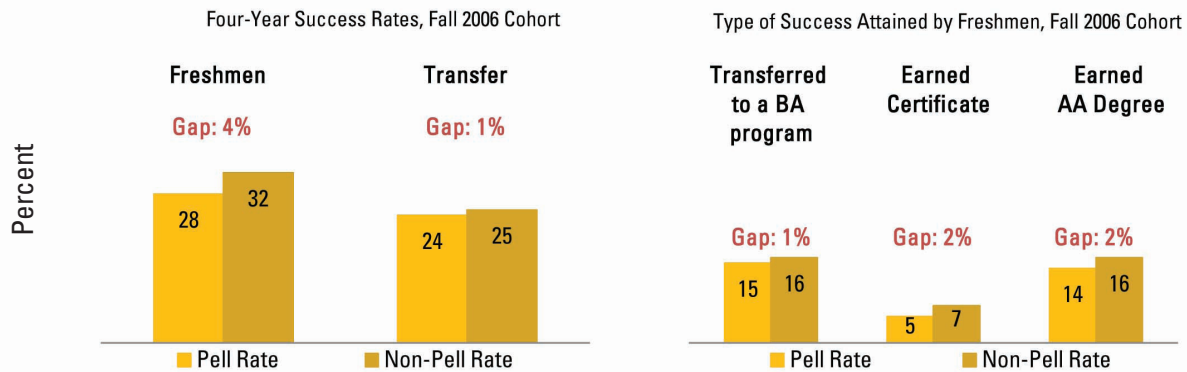
**Figure 7: Two-year colleges provide access, but lose many underrepresented minority students before they succeed (2009-10).**



Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set

Note: For freshmen, success is defined as earning a certificate or associate's degree, or transferring to a bachelor's program in the system within four years. For transfers, success is defined as earning an associate's degree. All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

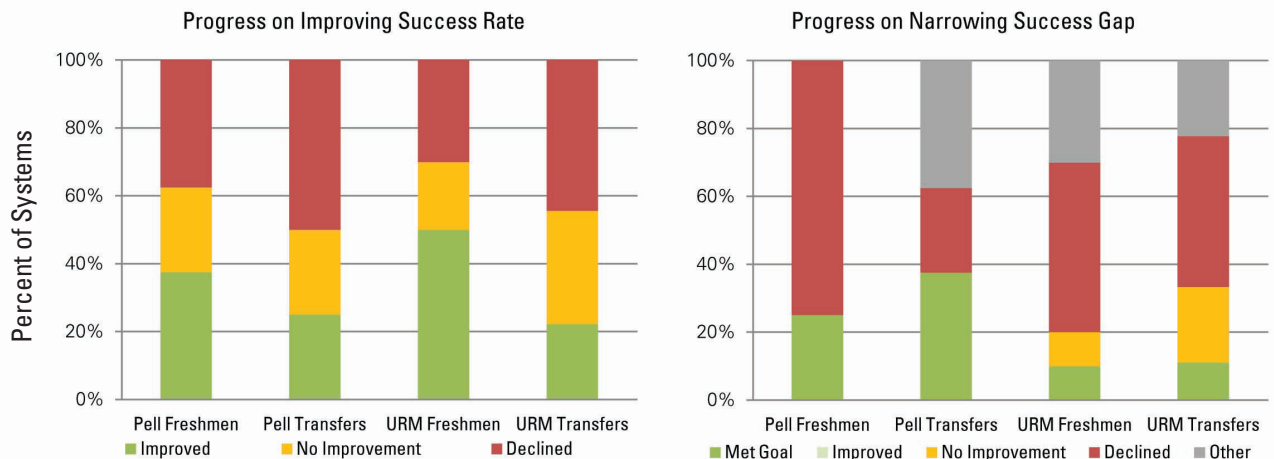
**Figure 8: Two-year colleges provide access, but lose many low-income students before they succeed (2009-10).**



Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set

Note: For freshmen, success is defined as earning a certificate or associate's degree, or transferring to a bachelor's program in the system within four years. For transfers, success is defined as earning an associate's degree. All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 9: Few systems are making progress on improving success rates and narrowing success gaps in two-year institutions (2005-06 to 2009-10).**

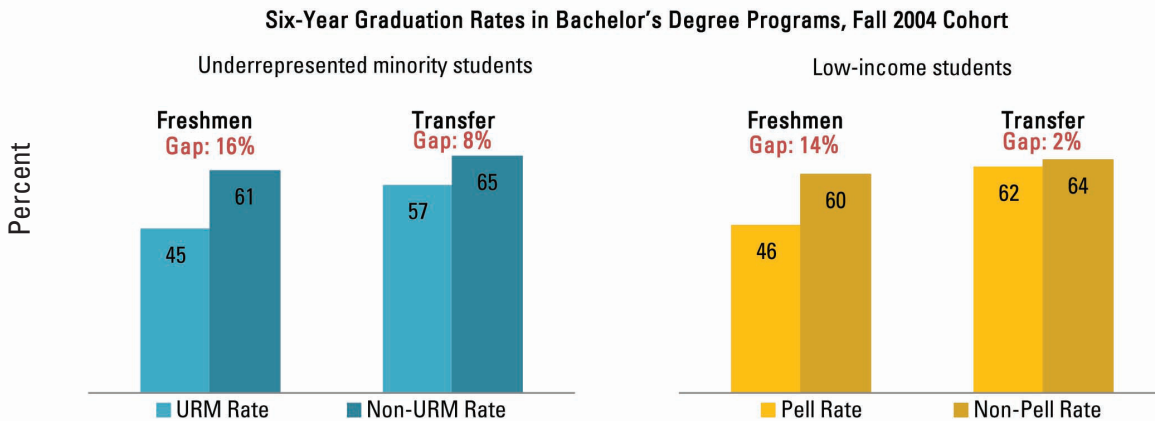


Note: Other indicates that the success gap narrowed due at least in part to declines in the success rates of non-URM or non-Pell students.

Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set



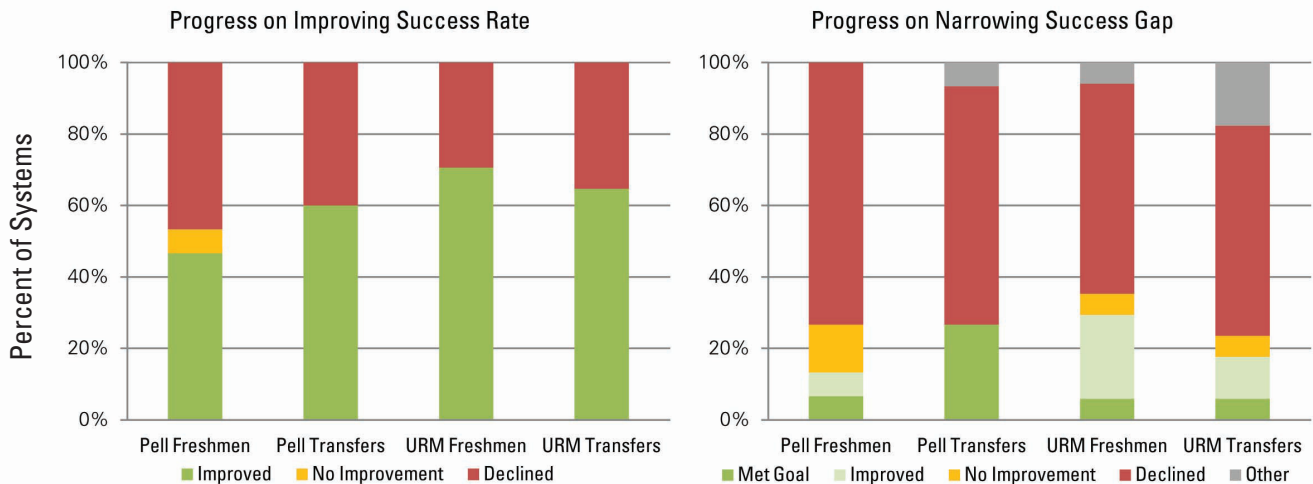
**Figure 10: Underrepresented minority and low-income students still graduate at lower rates in four-year institutions (2009-10).**



Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set

Note: Success is defined as earning a bachelor's degree anywhere in the system within six years. All A2S metrics include full-time and part-time students.

**Figure 11: More systems are making progress on improving success rates than narrowing gaps in four-year institutions (2005-06 to 2009-10).**



Note: Other indicates that the success gap narrowed due at least in part to declines in the success rates of non-URM or non-Pell students.

Source: Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set

**It is important to note that more than 60 percent of A2S systems have improved graduation rates for underrepresented minorities and more than 40 percent have done so for low-income students in four-year colleges.**

## **NARROWING ACCESS GAPS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS**

Two systems in particular, both in rapidly growing and diverse states, have met the goal to cut their access gaps at least in half for underrepresented minority students in four-year institutions.

### **The California State University System**

The California State University System (CSU) is one of the largest and most diverse university systems in the country. Yet when the A2S initiative began, only 37 percent of the system's entering freshmen were African American, Hispanic, American Indian, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander compared with 48 percent of high school graduates in the state. Though limited to drawing from the top third of the state's high school graduates, the Cal State system has increased the percentage of freshmen coming from underrepresented minority backgrounds by 9 percentage points, from 37 to 46 percent, cutting the access gap by more than half since 2005-06. A dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic students entering as freshmen, up more than 6,000, has driven almost all of this improvement.<sup>i</sup>

The CSU system prides itself on its access mission. From its large and long-running Educational Opportunity Program to its well-known Early Assessment Program, the system has committed significant resources to expanding opportunity for underrepresented students in the state. More recently, the system has invested in developing Web-based tools to help prospective students create a roadmap for meeting math and English proficiency requirements before entry and to assist incoming students in choosing coursework that has been shown through research to increase college completion rates.

The CSU campuses are also doing their part to expand access in the state through key partnerships with their local communities. Through initiatives such as Cal State Long Beach's College Promise program and San Diego State University's Compact for Success, CSU campuses are working

directly with area school districts to strengthen the pipeline to college for local students, many of whom come from underserved populations. In fact, San Diego State enrolled the greatest number of new underrepresented minority freshmen in the system since the start of the initiative, which they credit largely to their partnership with the Sweetwater Union High School District.

Started in 2000, the goal of the Sweetwater Compact was to increase the number of Sweetwater District students, the vast majority of whom come from underrepresented minority and low-income backgrounds, attending and graduating from San Diego State. Working together, Sweetwater and San Diego State faculty improved the rigor of the high school curriculum to ensure that Sweetwater students could meet the requirements for college admissions.

In addition, staff members from the two schools have developed advising and other programs aimed at supporting a college-going culture. All Sweetwater students who maintain a 3.0 GPA, complete the A-G course requirements, and pass the math and English placement tests are guaranteed admission to San Diego State. Since 2000, the number of students enrolling in the university from Sweetwater has increased by 111 percent.<sup>ii</sup>

Despite the recent gains in access made in the CSU system, the current budget crisis threatens to undermine its progress, as CSU campuses have had to slash enrollment in response to reduced funding from the state.

### **State University System of Florida**

Among transfer students entering bachelor's programs, the State University System of Florida stands out for cutting the access gap by more than half for underrepresented minorities. Since 2005-06, the percentage of entering transfer students from underrepresented minority backgrounds increased 8 percentage points from 32 to 40 percent. The state's high school graduates were also becoming more

diverse at the same time, but the gains made by the system even outpaced the change in the state demographics, cutting the access gap from 11 to 5 percentage points.<sup>iii</sup>

While almost every institution in the system increased both the number and percentage of underrepresented minorities among their entering transfer classes, two institutions in particular account for nearly 75 percent of the new students: Florida International University and the University of Central Florida. Both are located near major and well-respected community colleges, Miami-Dade College and Valencia Community College, respectively. While Florida has long been considered a leader with strong articulation policies and practices in its 2+2 program (such as a statewide course number system and Common Core course requirements), the University of Central Florida has gone further by creating DirectConnect.

Started in 2006, the DirectConnect program offers guaranteed entrance and accelerated admission to UCF for students who complete an associate's degree from four partner colleges, including Valencia. While graduates from Florida's community colleges are already guaranteed admission to one of the state's 11 public universities, they may not get admitted to the institution they prefer. This program allows freshmen and sophomores at the partner colleges to signal their intent to transfer to UCF early, upon which they are provided ongoing advising from UCF staff, who help them to create a four-year academic plan to ensure a seamless transfer. Today, more than 60 percent of UCF's incoming transfer students enroll through DirectConnect.<sup>iv</sup>★

- i. Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set.
- ii. Compact for Success, "Measuring Our Success," (San Diego: San Diego State University, 2011). <http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/compact/measuring-success.aspx>.
- iii. Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set.
- iv. Davis Moltz, "Waiting in the Wings," Inside Higher Ed; January 8, 2010

## MOVING FROM ACCESS TO SUCCESS IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

While success rates and gaps are stagnant in the two-year sector of the initiative, innovative efforts underway in two Access to Success systems demonstrate that improvements are indeed possible.

### The Wisconsin Transfer Equity Study

Beginning in 2005, the University of Wisconsin System has taken part in the Equity Scorecard, a project led by the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education (CUE) to identify and close achievement gaps for underrepresented minority students. System leaders were concerned by what they learned: On a number of UW's four-year campuses, there were considerable barriers to transfer for students of color as well as significant gaps in bachelor-degree attainment among underrepresented minority students who did transfer in. In fact, only about 20 percent of all students who transfer from technical and transfer colleges (such as the UW colleges) into UW's four-year institutions graduate with bachelor's degrees within six years. Meanwhile, rates for most students of color are less than half the overall rate. To further investigate the problem, UWS partnered with CUE to undertake a comprehensive study of transfer equity across the system.

As part of the two-year project (2008-2010), a team of representatives from the UW system and campuses, as well as from the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), examined several dimensions of the transfer problem:

- Analyzing system and campus data, the team evaluated the transfer pathways of students of color using "transfer maps," and tracked transfer students of color through key curricular milestones and graduation in UW's four-year universities.
- Team members conducted a multistate audit of transfer policies, comparing Wiscon-

sin with other states on transfer articulation, accountability, and support.

- The team surveyed more than 250 transfer professionals in Wisconsin's two-year and four-year institutions about transfer practices, policies, and programs.

The findings from the study prompted UW system leaders to undertake several reforms, building these into the delivery plans for the More Graduates Initiative. Most significantly, the UW system extended its transfer policy to students in the technical college system, where a large number of underrepresented minority students begin their postsecondary careers in the state. Prior to the policy extension, these students were found to experience more barriers to transfer than their transfer-college peers. Additionally, the UW system included a new section focused on equitable transfer outcomes in its annual accountability report. Meanwhile, the campuses involved in the project are worked create a "transfer-centric" culture by improving recruitment, admissions, and support services, including better deploying "transfer advocates" to help students proactively navigate the transfer process.<sup>i</sup>

### **The City University of New York's ASAP Program**

The City University of New York undertook a bold experiment in 2007 when it launched Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, commonly known as ASAP. Operating at six CUNY community colleges, ASAP set an ambitious goal to graduate at least 50 percent of students with associate's degrees within three years. Currently, only 15 percent of CUNY community college students do so.<sup>ii</sup> The first cohort of more than 1,000 ASAP students began their studies in Fall 2007. All students were deemed fully skills-proficient by the start of classes, although about one-third had to complete developmental coursework in the summer to participate in the program.

The results have been extraordinary: Within three years, 55 percent of the inaugural ASAP students earned associate's degrees compared with only

25 percent of similarly prepared CUNY students. Additionally, nearly 50 percent of students in the initial ASAP cohort transferred to four-year institutions within three years, with or without first earning associate's degrees, compared with 35 percent of the comparison group.

How did they do it? The ASAP program provided comprehensive support services, as well as financial resources, to keep students on track toward degree completion. CUNY took the following steps, as part of the program:

- Group students in cohorts based on their major, and schedule small classes in cohort blocks with fellow ASAP students.
- Require students to meet with advisors twice a month and to attend a weekly ASAP seminar.
- Provide individual and group tutoring, and mandate weekly tutoring for students identified as falling behind.
- Waive any gap between students' financial-aid award and tuition and fees; place students into "college-friendly" jobs to reduce barriers to full-time attendance, which is required. Also, furnish free monthly cards for NYC transit and free use of textbooks.

The program has since expanded eligibility to less academically prepared students with equally encouraging results. The two-year graduation rate for the Fall 2009 ASAP cohort is 28 percent compared with 7 percent among a comparison group of students. CUNY plans to expand the program to 4,000 students by Fall 2014 and is also piloting an evening and weekend ASAP program for working adults.<sup>iii</sup> ★

- i. Loni Pazich and Estela Bensimon, "Wisconsin Transfer Equity Study: Final Report," (Los Angeles: Center for Urban Education, November 2010), and Rebecca Martin, "Wisconsin Transfer Equity Study" (Presentation to the UWS Board of Regents' Education Committee, 2011).
- ii. Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set.
- iii. Donna Linderman and Zineta Kolenovic, "Results Thus Far and the Road Ahead: A Follow-up Report on CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)" (New York: City University of New York, 2012).

## **CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP INITIATIVE: THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND (USM)**

The University System of Maryland (USM) launched its Closing the Achievement Gap initiative in 2007, when it also became a founding member of Access to Success. For the system's leader then and now, Chancellor William "Brit" Kirwan, the impetus for this initiative is clear. "Closing the achievement gap is not just a competitiveness issue for our nation," Kirwan says. "It is also the civil rights issue of our day." USM initiative has set a goal for the system's 11 four-year institutions to cut their achievement gaps in half by 2015 and eliminate the gaps by 2020.

From its research universities to its minority-serving institutions to its online university serving mostly part-time students, the institutions in the USM are diverse in mission and population. As such, the USM campuses have adapted the achievement gap goal to the needs of their own students. At the flagship, the University of Maryland—College Park, students of color have among the highest graduation rates in the system. However, those rates are not as high as those of their peers on campus, so UMCP has focused its effort on closing the gap for underrepresented minorities.

Historically Black Institutions like Bowie State University, on the other hand, have set goals to substantially increase graduation rates for all students in order to close the gap with other African-American students in the system. Towson University, a large comprehensive university, has made great strides in raising graduation rates and nearly closing race and income gaps for freshmen in recent years. Now the campus is targeting gaps for first-generation students. Other institutions are aiming to eliminate graduation rate gaps among transfer or part-time students or gaps based on gender.

After a system-wide conference to launch the initiative, USM campuses were asked to develop

detailed plans to close their achievement gaps, with clear goals, timelines, and strategies. While each institution has customized its approach based on its own goals and student population, most strategies focus on one or more of the following leverage points for improving retention:

- Establishing early warning systems
- Implementing course redesign, particularly in entry-level mathematics and English
- Creating learning communities, especially in the first year
- Increasing financial support through need-based aid
- Providing targeted support to at-risk populations

On each campus, a Closing the Achievement Gap team — with representatives from academic affairs, faculty, student affairs, and institutional research — coordinates and monitors these efforts. Furthermore, the system tracks campus progress through annual reports, and campus presidents are evaluated on whether their institutions are making strides toward their goals.<sup>i</sup> ★

i. University System of Maryland Summary of Institutional Achievement Gap Reports submitted to the Board of Regents, September 16, 2010. <http://www.usmd.edu/BOR-Portal/Materials/2010/FB/20101022/PS6e.pdf>

**“Closing the achievement gap is not just a competitiveness issue for our nation. It is also the civil rights issue of our day.”**

*– William “Brit” Kirwan, chancellor,  
The University System of Maryland*

## TOP GAP-CLOSING A2S INSTITUTIONS

Systems cannot reach their goals to increase attainment while narrowing gaps without clearly understanding what drives improvement at the campus level. To deepen our own understanding, we at the Ed Trust decided to investigate the policies and practices of the top-improving campuses in the A2S network. We began by mining the A2S data set to identify institutions that have substantially raised success rates, narrowed success gaps, or both, over time. We then interviewed system leaders and narrowed our focus to three of our top gap-closing campuses, a couple of which have been working hard to close access and success gaps for more than a decade.

**San Diego State University:** San Diego State is one of the 23 campuses in the Cal State system. The Southern California institution is an urban research university serving an increasingly diverse undergraduate population. Today, more than 1 in 3 incoming students are low income and more than 2 in 5 come from underrepresented minority backgrounds.

San Diego State caught the Ed Trust's attention by narrowing the graduation rate gap between its students of color and their peers. From 2005 to 2010, the campus cut its gap for freshmen by more than half from 19 to 8 percentage points. Graduation rates increased for all students during this time period, but rose an impressive 22 points for students of color. Among transfer students, San Diego State also posted double-digit increases in underrepresented minority graduation rates while cutting the gap nearly in half. The university raised rates and narrowed gaps between low-income students and their peers as well.<sup>i</sup>

**University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire:** A comprehensive university enrolling about 11,000 undergraduates in the northwest region of the state, Eau Claire is one of 13 four-year campuses in the University of Wisconsin system. Eau Claire stood out with the gains it has made in narrowing

the graduation rate gap for low-income freshmen. When the A2S initiative began, Eau Claire had one of the largest gaps in graduation rates between low-income freshmen and their peers in the UW system: 12 percentage points. By 2010, however, Eau Claire had cut that gap in half to 6 points. More recent data show that Pell freshmen entering in Fall 2009 were actually retained from the first to second year at higher levels than their peers, 83 versus 80 percent, suggesting that Eau Claire is on track to close the graduation rate gap with this cohort.<sup>ii</sup>

**Florida State University:** Florida State University has long been recognized as an institution that provides a high-quality education to an economically and racially diverse student body.<sup>iii</sup> Located in the state capital, Florida State enrolls more than 30,000 undergraduates, about 25 percent of whom are African American or Hispanic and 25 percent of whom are Pell Grant recipients.<sup>iv</sup>

In 2010, Ed Trust reports featured Florida State for increasing graduation rates for underrepresented minority students<sup>v</sup> and for having consistently small or no gaps in graduation rates between such students and their peers.<sup>vi</sup> The Ed Trust's College Results Online, a college search Web tool, shows FSU positioned at or near the top of its peers in graduation rates for African-American students for the past decade. And since the start of the A2S initiative, the six-year graduation rate for underrepresented minority freshmen has increased by 8 percentage points, from 63 to 71 percent.<sup>vii</sup> ★

i. Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set.

ii. Ibid.

iii. Kevin Carey, "Graduation Rate Watch: Making Minority Student Success a Priority," (Washington, D.C.: Education Sector, 2008).

iv. Education Trust analysis of College Results Online, 2012.

v. Jennifer Engle and Christina Theokas, "Top Gainers: Some Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities Make Big Improvements in Minority Graduation Rates," (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2010).

vi. Mamie Lynch and Jennifer Engle, "Big Gaps, Small Gaps in Serving African-American Students," (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2010).

vii. Education Trust analysis of the A2S data set.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Like no other initiative, Access to Success aims to leverage the resources and the role of systems to generate a multiplier effect across hundreds of campuses and millions of students nationwide. To that end, the A2S systems have reorganized and refocused their capacity to support strategic and systemic change on their campuses. As highlighted earlier in this report, the leaders of these systems have made substantial commitments of time, effort, and resources (when possible) to help their campuses set goals, develop and implement plans, and monitor progress toward improvements in access and success.

At the same time, A2S leaders recognize that systems can learn a lot about how to increase college-going and completion rates from the campuses themselves, which is why they are working hard to identify, disseminate and scale best practices *and* to train best practitioners across their systems. In this section of our report, we share some of the lessons learned from campuses in the A2S network, with a focus on institutions that have made gains in improving graduation rates and cutting gaps for students of color and low-income students.

Now, any campus leaders worth their salt know the research on best practices, and, indeed, most institutions already use them.<sup>15</sup> Through our own field work, we at the Ed Trust have gained a more nuanced understanding of how successful institutions translate these well-known best practices into practices — and practitioners — that work for all students. The following are some of the lessons learned from top-improving campuses in the A2S network, with a focus on three gap-closing institutions: San Diego State University, University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, and Florida State University (*see story, page 20*).

First, successful institutions tend to have long-term, visible leaders who can articulate and communicate a clear set of goals and build guiding coalitions to achieve them. Steven Weber, who recently retired as president of San Diego State University after nearly 15 years, set forth a bold vision for his campus when he asserted the need to “replace the revolving door with a corridor to graduation.” More importantly, though, Weber backed up his commitment to this goal by making it his highest priority, putting a strong leadership team in place, and engaging faculty and staff as key partners in the effort.

Larry Abele, former provost at Florida State University (FSU), says that “if you want to change something on a college campus, you have to go for five years relentlessly without blinking.” Long-term progress, Abele stressed, results from the accumulation of incremental changes

because, in his view, “there’s no silver bullet; you increase retention literally one student at a time.”

Second, leaders in successful institutions leverage institutional rhythms and structures, especially those related to shared governance. “It doesn’t matter what the initiative is,” says Nancy Marlin, provost at San Diego State, leadership in academia “isn’t running out there saying ‘This is what we are going to do,’ because you turn around and there’s nobody behind you.” In her position, Marlin has brokered an effective partnership with the faculty’s University Senate, working closely to manage their retention efforts in ways that preserve the access mission of the institution while improving student outcomes. “You have to value what [faculty] do, and value their opinions and perspectives, because they are the ones who are going to [do the work],” she says.

Larry Abele credits FSU’s success in large part to a team of representatives from departments across campus that convened on a weekly basis. The team used data to identify roadblocks to student retention and assigned clear responsibility to team members for removing them. “The advantage of the weekly meetings is you don’t go a month without knowing about a problem,” Abele says. “If you have to sit in that chair and say exactly what you did that week to help your students, you’ll pay attention.”

Third, successful leaders honor and tap their institution’s culture to privilege student success. When administrators at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire (UWEC) decided to tackle low retention and graduation rates by increasing the number of graduates while decreasing time to degree, faculty expressed concerns about “quantity versus quality.” Academic leaders allayed those concerns by tapping into Eau Claire’s pride as a student-focused institution with a teaching mission. “Faculty [here] are exceptionally devoted to teaching,” notes Patricia Kleine, UWEC’s provost and vice chancellor. “They take serving their students seriously. When we showed them the data ... it bothered them.”

Michael Wick, associate vice provost at UWEC says this approach shifted the mind-set on his campus. “It’s not about a special initiative or project,” he says. “It’s about what everybody does on a daily basis. Our faculty and staff are here because they are dedicated to students. That makes a difference.”

Fourth, successful institutions use data. A lot. Leaders draw on data to engage faculty and staff as partners in raising student achievement, for instance. “We give them the data, but we don’t tell them where the problem is,”

Kleine says of Eau Claire's approach. "They identify the problem, and we encourage them to solve the problem." The result, according to Kleine, is that the faculty and staff "will come up with much better solutions than we could."

Successful campuses also use data to distinguish what works from what merely "feels good." As part of its retention plan, San Diego State comprehensively reviewed data on the use of its support programs in order to ensure that the "right students" get the "right intervention" at the "right time." Doing so not only improved the effectiveness of its programs, it also maximized limited resources in the face of tight budgets.

Finally, improving retention is not solely the purview of student affairs in successful institutions. Instead, the leadership on these campuses embrace student *learning* as key to increasing student success. Raising graduation rates is not about lowering standards and expectations, but rather about high expectations coupled with high levels of support. San Diego State raised its expectations of students by making orientation mandatory, force-registering students into remedial and gateway courses, advising students to take 15 rather than 12 hours, and engaging faculty in the implementation of high-impact practices (HIPS).<sup>16</sup> Yet even as they demanded more, San Diego State also put in place supports that no longer left student success to chance, structuring second chances, when necessary.

Geoff Chase, dean of undergraduate studies at San Diego State, concludes: "What's driving us on this campus is that we've determined that access is not sufficient. And it's not just about success; it's about high achievement." Or as UWEC's Wick says, "Equity and quantity, through quality."

## THE ROAD AHEAD

Since the Access to Success Initiative launched in 2007, its member systems have considerably increased the number of students of color and low-income students who enroll and earn degrees. Strikingly, these public higher education systems have done so amid growing financial and political obstacles. Although we celebrate the results of their efforts, much work remains to improve success rates and narrow success gaps before the 2015 assessment.

The challenge ahead is daunting. But through hard work and staunch commitment to equity and success, A2S systems and institutions now are better poised to contribute to the country's educational goals than most other higher education institutions that, voluntarily or

not, are just now heeding the call for increased college attainment.

The Ed Trust's experience with maintaining and nurturing the A2S network during the past four years suggests a clear way forward that we as an initiative and as a country should follow to reach our educational attainment goals.

First, we must help campus communities contextualize our national, state, and system goals in a manner that is consistent with institutional missions and current performance levels. Some campuses can contribute most to our goals by improving access, others by raising success rates for all, and still others by narrowing success gaps.

Second, we must move beyond just collecting and reporting massive amounts of data, to analyzing, visualizing, and making the data actionable, so that those doing the hard work of supporting students in the classroom and across campuses can leverage their expertise and resources to drive student success.

Third, we must deepen our understanding of best practices by focusing on what characterizes the best practitioners. We also must examine how successful campuses harness the exponential power of incremental reforms to make bold, transformative change.

Fourth, we must broker effective relationships between educators and outside experts and organizations looking to scale up innovative solutions to pervasive problems (such as developmental courses). These new relationships can equip practitioners with the tools, processes, and best practices needed to bring their college-attainment and gap-closing efforts to fruition.

Last but not least, if our nation is to reach its educational attainment goals, we must translate our democratic ideals into policies and practices that once and for all close the achievement gaps that separate young people of color and those of modest means from their peers.

These five recommendations have relevance for colleges and universities across the nation. It is now incumbent on them to validate the lessons and replicate the efforts of the A2S systems and institutions. For their part, policymakers and reformers must foster the conditions for success. This will require **reinvesting** in public higher education, **retargeting** scarce financial-aid dollars to the students who need them most and can contribute most to educational attainment goals, and **modulating** calls for "college productivity" by prioritizing student learning and equity considerations over cost-cutting. Only then will we be well-positioned to replenish the dwindling reserves of opportunity in America. ★



## ENDNOTES

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9. Ibid.
10. This analysis examines the progress of the initiative in the aggregate from the baseline year, 2005-06, to 2009-10, the most recent year of available data. All systems are included with the following exceptions: The systems that joined the initiative this year, Colorado State University and University of Texas System, are not included in the analyses. The Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education (KCPE) is not included in the aggregate analyses due to data quality issues and the University of Maryland System (USM) is not included due to a late submission. However, system-level report cards are available for KCPE and USM. The State University of New York is excluded from all income-related measures due to lack of data availability. The Rhode Island Board of Regents is excluded from all success measures in bachelor's programs due to lack of data availability. Finally, some systems were missing data on some measures in the baseline year (for instance, success rates by Pell status) due to lack of availability, but were able to report data on these measures in later years. These systems remain in the analyses, however, because the impact of their later inclusion was determined not to significantly alter the aggregate trends. Therefore, the aggregate analyses are as maximally inclusive of participating systems as possible rather than constrained to a subset of systems that had data on all measures at all points in time. See Technical Appendix for more information: <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/access-to-success-data-metrics-technical-appendix>.
11. The race and income categories are not mutually exclusive.
12. The Pell Grant program expanded considerably in the 2009-2010 academic year. Some 60 percent of the growth is attributed to changes in the eligibility criteria as well as an increase in the award amount; 40 percent of the growth is attributed to growth in the number of eligible students, which has increased as economic conditions have worsened.
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## THE ACCESS TO SUCCESS INITIATIVE

Launched in 2007, the Access to Success Initiative joins the leaders of public higher education systems in working toward two ambitious goals: increase the number of college graduates in their states and ensure those graduates more broadly represent their states' high school graduates. Indeed, A2S leaders have pledged that by 2015 their systems will halve the gaps in college-going and completion that separate African-American, Latino, and American-Indian students from their white and Asian-American peers — and low-income students from more affluent ones. Now counting 22 member systems, 312 two-year and four-year campuses, and 3.5 million students, the A2S initiative remains the nation's only concerted effort to help public college and university systems boost attainment.



## The Education Trust

### ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

# NASH

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SYSTEM HEADS

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SYSTEM HEADS

The National Association of System Heads (NASH) is the association of the chief executive officers of the 52 public college and university systems of higher education in the United States. Unique among higher education associations in its focus on systems, NASH seeks ways to leverage system capacity to meet current and future needs for higher education. NASH collaboratives, such as the partnership with the Education Trust, are voluntary, and bring together system and campus leaders interested in working together toward the common goal of improved effectiveness.

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