



# COMPLETE COLLEGE

# Ohio

## TASK FORCE REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

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John R. Kasich, Governor  
Jim Petro, Chancellor

University System of Ohio  
Board of Regents

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



# A MESSAGE FROM CHANCELLOR JIM PETRO

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Since becoming Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, I have made it my mission to improve the completion rates here in Ohio and increase the number of Ohioans with a bachelor's degree, associate degree or other meaningful credential. The economic growth of our state is dependent on higher education, and on having qualified workers to fill the jobs of tomorrow.

With that in mind, I convened a Complete College Ohio Task Force earlier this year and charged its members with developing a set of strategic recommendations for increasing the percentage of Ohioans with degrees. I made it clear to task force members that the solutions and recommendations derived from their work must be student-focused and must build on existing student success initiatives.

The task force divided itself into three groups: the Ready for College group, No Time to Waste group and the Help Me Cross the Finish Line group. Groups met individually between meetings of the entire task force, and after several months of meetings, research and collaboration, I am proud to share the results of the task force's efforts in this Complete College Ohio Report.

As you read through this report, you'll see that the task force offers 20 broadly framed recommendations that encompass a full range of issues impacting college completion. Some of these recommendations are

directed to our institutions of higher learning and their partners; others are directed to policymakers. Some require action at the campus level, while others require a state-level response.

It's clear that there is no "one size fits all" solution to increasing completion. In making their recommendations, task force members recognized that different institutions have varying missions and varying student needs. Therefore, all but one of the task force's recommendations are offered as a menu of options that our colleges and universities can consider and customize based on their individual mission, culture and goals. The core recommendation would require each college and university in the state to develop its own Campus Completion Plan. This is an essential commitment that will drive our success in dramatically improving college completion.

The members of the task force and working groups are to be commended for the time and effort put into developing this report. I believe that these recommendations will set into motion the action needed to make significant progress in our effort to improve Ohio's college completion record and bolster Ohio's economy in the years ahead.

Sincerely,



Jim Petro  
Chancellor  
Ohio Board of Regents



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Ohio’s ability to compete and prosper in a global, knowledge economy hinges directly on its citizens’ ability to succeed in jobs that require increasingly higher levels of knowledge and skills.

For our economy to thrive and grow, we must provide businesses with a continual pipeline of highly-skilled workers. The Complete College Ohio Initiative is a call to action that requires us to focus and best utilize our state’s resources to get our students to the finish line – earning meaningful certificates and degrees with the goal of providing a workforce of skilled, critical thinkers that will attract and keep business here in Ohio.

## Ohio’s Challenge

It is well documented that high levels of educational attainment yield substantial economic and noneconomic benefits for individuals and communities.<sup>1</sup> And yet, more than half of all Ohioans who enroll in college fail to earn a degree and often leave with high levels of debt.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the percentage of Ohio adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher remains in the bottom quartile of states, typically five percentage points below the national average.<sup>3</sup>

These realities pose a serious threat to our state’s future. The vast majority of Ohio’s projected job openings and new jobs in the future – nearly 60 percent by 2020<sup>4</sup> – will require some form of credential from education and training beyond high school. Our state currently is not producing nearly enough individuals with college degrees or other postsecondary education credentials of value in the marketplace to meet current and future job demands for workers

1 *Education Pays 2010*, The College Board

2 Ohio Board of Regents

3 U.S. Census Bureau

4 Complete College America, Ohio 2011 data

with globally competitive knowledge and skills. Projections show that if we do not increase our college-going and college completion rates at all over the next decade, Ohio will have 61,000 fewer adults in the workforce with postsecondary credentials.<sup>5</sup> Closing this gap will be no easy task. One study, for example, estimates that Ohio’s colleges and universities will need to increase the number of degrees they confer by 10 percent annually to meet workforce needs for 2018.<sup>6</sup>

Urgent action is needed. It is imperative that Ohio significantly increase the current educational attainment levels of Ohioans to improve our state’s competitiveness in a global economy, create greater economic opportunities for our citizens and ensure a robust supply of critical thinkers, problem-solvers and innovators. If our state is unable to meet business and industry’s growing demand for individuals with postsecondary education credentials and the ability to compete globally, Ohio will be left behind in the fierce competition for investment and jobs.

## Addressing the Challenge

Recognizing these present and future challenges, Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Jim Petro convened the Complete College Ohio Task Force (“Task Force”) to study the issue of college completion and to develop a set of strategic recommendations for significantly increasing both the number and percentage of Ohioans who earn a postsecondary education certificate or degree.

The Chancellor’s charge to the Task Force was clear: Student success must be at the core of its work. He outlined the following guiding principles to frame the group’s work:

- All completions – one-year workforce certificates, two-year associate degrees and four-year bachelor’s degrees – are valued and need to be increased.
- Solutions must be student-focused.

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5 National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, College Attainment Dashboard Tool, July 19, 2012. <<http://www.nchems.org/NCHEMSCLASPOhioModel.swf>>

6 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*, June 2010

- We need to increase both access and success; increased completion rates should not limit access.
- We need to build on existing and previous student success initiatives and campus-level experience and knowledge.
- Data should drive decisions.
- The quality of academic programs must not in any way be compromised.
- One size does not fit all. Solutions must recognize that different institutions have varying missions and varying student needs. Institutions should strive toward adopting systemic approaches.

In response, the Task Force divided into three working groups that focused on (a) strategies that secondary and postsecondary institutions can deploy to ensure students have the academic foundation necessary to be successful in postsecondary certificate and degree programs; (b) strategies for reducing time to degree and minimizing students' drifting through college without earning a degree; and (c) strategies for rewarding student progress and incentives that can increase completion.

## Strategic Recommendations & Tactical Options

This report offers 20 recommendations encompassing a full range of issues that impact college completion and providing a wide selection of tactical options. Some of the recommendations are directed to institutions of higher education and their partners, and require campus-level commitment and action; others are directed to policymakers and require a state-level response.

The Task Force recognizes that we have great diversity among our colleges and universities in Ohio in terms of mission, culture and student and institutional goals. For that reason, the suggestions presented in this report are offered as a menu of options and opportunities for consideration, customization and action.

**The one exception is Recommendation 1, which would require each college, university and adult career technical center in Ohio to develop its own Campus Completion Plan. This recommendation is the centerpiece of this report.**

## CAMPUS COMPLETION PLANS

The Complete College Ohio Task Force believes the key to dramatically increasing the number and percentage of Ohioans with college degrees or other credentials of value in the marketplace is focused, intentional, sustained action at the campus level. Our core, centerpiece recommendation is, therefore, a statewide requirement for all public institutions of higher learning in Ohio to develop and implement institution-specific Campus Completion Plans. We expect each institution to draw heavily from the recommendations and tactical options contained in the report, customized to build on existing institutional strengths and align with institutional mission and priorities. We believe effective execution of these plans begins with college and university campuses embracing, enhancing and advancing the recommendations offered by the Task Force.

- **Recommendation 1:** Require institution-specific Campus Completion Plans.

## FOUNDATIONS FOR ACCESS & SUCCESS

Certain definitional and foundational requirements provide a necessary framework for the improvement strategies and tactics presented in this document. Clear, comprehensive and uniform definitions of “college and career ready” and “college completion” will help ensure all stakeholders have a common understanding of Ohio’s completion objective and the standards and expectations that define readiness to achieve that objective. Collaboration and alignment across the P-16 continuum will ensure that, collectively, students are positioned to succeed, and a new high school assessment system will focus students more than ever before on what constitutes college and career readiness. These “foundational” recommendations are critical to creating an environment in which the Task Force’s other strategic and tactical recommendations can work as intended.

- **Recommendation 2:** Adopt a consistent, statewide definition of “college and career readiness.”
- **Recommendation 3:** Adopt a consistent, comprehensive statewide definition of “college completion” and uniform statewide credit hour requirements for common college credentials.

- **Recommendation 4:** Establish stronger collaboration and tighter alignment across the P-16 education continuum.
- **Recommendation 5:** Establish a new system of high school assessments to improve preparation and readiness for college.

## CONNECTING WITH COLLEGE & PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

Ensuring that students are prepared to succeed in college and careers begins with understanding (a) the imperative for postsecondary learning; (b) postsecondary educational opportunities and expectations; (c) the ways to enhance readiness and the likelihood of success; and (d) the resources available to help when help is needed. These recommendations acknowledge the value of connecting with college and starting preparation for college and careers early.

- **Recommendation 6:** Intensify engagement of students and families prior to students' enrollment in college.
- **Recommendation 7:** Broaden awareness of connections between college completion and career opportunities.
- **Recommendation 8:** Enhance financial literacy and planning for students and families.
- **Recommendation 9:** Expand opportunities for earning college credits that count toward a degree or certificate before graduating from high school.
- **Recommendation 10:** Increase opportunities for adults to earn college credits for meaningful knowledge and skills documented through Prior Learning Assessments.

## ENSURING & SUPPORTING FIRST-YEAR SUCCESS

Ensuring that students get off to a good start in college is a key to successful retention and completion. While being prepared to succeed is important, we know intuitively – and research reinforces – that what happens the first year in

college is a high-stakes experience that can have a huge impact on students' persistence to complete their degree. The following recommendations that deal with placement test policies and practices, remedial education reforms and comprehensive first-year experiences can help students successfully launch their journey to college and career.

- **Recommendation 11:** Adopt more holistic college placement assessments and policies.
- **Recommendation 12:** Redesign and personalize remedial education course content and policies, especially for adults returning to school.
- **Recommendation 13:** Develop comprehensive, mandatory orientation and first-year experiences, as well as robust support and interventions for all students.

## STAYING ON TRACK & ACCELERATING PROGRESS

Keeping students on track and helping them persist until completion are no small undertaking. The reasons students drift or fall behind or stop out of college without having earned a credential are myriad. The following four recommendations outline a set of strategies and tactics designed to connect students to clear pathways to success, support students through all phases of their academic journey, accommodate students' individual circumstances and needs, and intervene and redirect when needed. Together, these recommendations will help move students along the path to completion as timely, efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

- **Recommendation 14:** Develop institutional systems that accelerate students' connection to clear and concise degree pathways, track progress toward academic goals and intervene when help is needed.
- **Recommendation 15:** Implement "intrusive" advising supported by robust academic support systems and services.
- **Recommendation 16:** Devise more innovative scheduling, registration and degree-granting policies and practices.

- **Recommendation 17:** Strategically enhance Ohio’s articulation and credit transfer programs.

## REWARDING SUCCESS & INCENTIVIZING COMPLETION

Incentivizing students to persist to earn a postsecondary education credential and achieve their academic and career goals can take many forms. Incentives can be designed to acknowledge and reward past progress, stimulate and reward continued progress, and facilitate and reward accelerated progress. The following recommendations identify a wide range of options for identifying, assisting and rewarding students who have achieved notable academic success points along the college continuum, as well as for providing both financial and non-financial incentives to drive persistence to completion.

- **Recommendation 18:** Expand programs for rewarding and leveraging meaningful “packages” of academic program work that have been completed, or nearly completed, but not formally credentialed.
- **Recommendation 19:** Expand and diversify financial opportunities and incentives for achieving critical benchmarks and timely completion.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Communication will be a key to enabling many of the recommendations outlined in this report. Students and families need to be much more aware of the continued value of postsecondary education; the link between education and careers; the need for early and thoughtful preparation; and the extensive postsecondary opportunities, resources and supports that are available to them. Adult students returning to school have similar needs. The Task Force’s final recommendation addresses the need for significant state-level commitment to promote and support college completion through an aggressive statewide communication effort.

- **Recommendation 20:** Mount a comprehensive statewide communications strategy about college completion.

## Implementing Completion Initiatives for Ohio's Future

Increasing completion requires action. In addition to developing campus-based completion plans, colleges and universities will need to develop customized approaches to implementation. This will require campus-wide engagement to develop solutions that connect faculty and staff to completion efforts. Task Force members understand that many of the recommendations and tactical options outlined in this report may have certain costs associated with their implementation. Some actions represent little or no cost and may be considered for implementation under current university budgets. Others may require more substantial investments. The expectation is that in most instances institutions will re-evaluate and, as needed, redirect existing resources to better align with a student success agenda championed by the State.

The State of Ohio must act as well. The first task requires the Ohio Board of Regents to collaborate with adult career centers, colleges and universities to develop the framework for Campus Completion Plans. As completion is critical to our state economy, the State of Ohio should re-examine priorities and resources to determine how best to support completion efforts on campuses. The Task Force report presents a variety of opportunities for policy improvement, many of which may be complementary to potential policy actions and administration priorities.

## Initial Steps

The Task Force suggests the following steps for getting started:

1. The Chancellor shall **determine a dissemination strategy** for sharing this report with campus leaders and frontline higher education professionals throughout the University System of Ohio.
2. The Chancellor shall work with state policy leaders to **determine specific state-level commitments and actions** required to advance the recommendations in this report.
3. The Chancellor shall engage higher education leadership to **reach consensus on uniform statewide definitions of “college and career readiness” and “college completion”** as called for in Recommendations 2 and 3.
4. The Chancellor, with input from college and university leadership, shall **develop a framework and timeline for development and submission of campus-level Campus Completion Plans** called for in Recommendation 1. These plans should align with the state biennial budget legislation process.
5. The Chancellor shall **initiate work on developing a comprehensive statewide communications strategy** to drive and support efforts to increase college completion in Ohio.

The Task Force believes these priority actions will set into motion necessary and appropriate levels of attention and action needed to drive significant progress on improving Ohio’s college completion record. The report includes proven ideas and promising ideas that many colleges and universities in Ohio have implemented or are about to implement. Other ideas may require resources that universities may not have. As a more intentional and coordinated system-wide effort to improve completion gets under way, collecting data on the effectiveness of various tactics deployed across the state may be another useful “next step.”



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