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StriveTogether®

Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Data Guides: *Postsecondary Completion*

Postsecondary Completion

StriveTogether recommends calculating two indicators for this outcome: the local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate and postsecondary completion rate of local institutions. This guide provides information on why postsecondary completion matters, recommended indicators, data sources for indicators, detailed data specifications, how to calculate this outcome, data disaggregation, frequently asked questions, learning resources and data sharing. This guide also recommends data collection strategies, sources and methods for building data practices that can be used to better serve communities.

>>>>>>> Why this outcome matters

Key takeaways:

- **Postsecondary completion is a strong predictor of economic and social advancement.**

- **Students who earn a bachelor's degree have higher earnings than those with an associate degree and those with only a high school diploma.**

- **Students of color and those experiencing poverty, and Black students in particular, have lower rates of persistence and completion.**

Postsecondary completion is a strong predictor of economic and social advancement among cradle-to-career outcomes, and postsecondary degrees are key to economic opportunity, leading to substantially higher earnings across occupation, age, race and gender. In particular, college attainment is linked to improved health and social outcomes, and adults with a college education typically live longer and are generally healthier than those without a postsecondary credential (**Riddel 2006**). Moreover, society benefits from a more educated population, including lower instances of child abuse, lower rates of criminal behavior

and fewer teen pregnancies among children of college-educated parents. Typically, adults with postsecondary education also participate more frequently within the civic domain of their community. Workers with any postsecondary degree earn more on a weekly basis than those with just high school diplomas, and the higher the degree, the greater the earnings (**BLS**). Bachelor's degree holders earn 31% more than those with an associate degree and 84% more than those with just a high school diploma (**CEW 2011**).

However, differences in college degree attainment are prevalent among students of color and those experiencing poverty. Students from schools with high poverty rates graduate college at a rate of 25% compared to 61% of students from more affluent schools (**National Student Clearinghouse 2022**). Overall students of color, particularly Black students, have lower persistence and completion rates. Among students who entered college for the first time in the fall of 2017, Black students had the lowest persistence rate (66.2%) compared to their white counterparts (78.1%) (**NSC 2019**).

>>>>>> Recommended indicators

Postsecondary completion rates are the calculated percentages of students who graduate or complete their program within a specified timeframe (**Department of Education**).

StriveTogether recommends using 150% of the "normal timeframe" (e.g., three years for a two-year program, six years for a four-year program, 150% of the normal timeframe that it takes for individual certificate programs, etc.) because graduation rates within 150 percent of "normal time" are required for disclosure and/or reporting purposes under **Student Right-to-Know Act**. This outcome only accounts for certificate, associate and bachelor's degrees and excludes graduate degrees. Postsecondary completion rates can be operationalized as two separate indicators that reflect different goals:

1) **Local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate**, or the number of students that graduated from high schools in the school district(s) that have completed any postsecondary institution degree, divided by the total number of local high school graduates that enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

1) **Postsecondary completion rate of local postsecondary institutions**, or the total number of students that complete a degree from any local postsecondary institution in the community, divided by the total number of students enrolled in local postsecondary institutions.

These indicators provide different information. Therefore, both of these measures are recommended indicators to calculate.

The local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate indicator is designed to measure how well K-12 education systems and other supports have prepared college enrollees for completion.

The postsecondary completion rate of local postsecondary institutions indicator is more closely designed to measure institution performance, meaning how likely it is that students who attend local institutions will finish with a degree or certificate. In general, graduation rate data provides information on institutional productivity and helps institutions comply with reporting requirements of the Student Right-to-Know Act (1990) and the Higher Education Act, amended (2008). A variety of audiences use postsecondary graduation rates. These include but are not limited to:

- policymakers use them to evaluate legislation and programs
- states use them as performance metrics for fund allocations
- postsecondary associations use them to drive organizational missions and priorities
- schools use them for benchmarking purposes
- consumers (e.g., students and parents) use them for college decision making (**Department of Education**))

Examining these indicators by student demographics and by institutional characteristics (i.e., certificate, two-year institution, four-year institution) can demonstrate for which students the community can provide more targeted supports.

Data sources for indicators

The 2008 reauthorization of the **Higher Education Opportunity Act** prohibits a federal database of personally identifiable information tracking students over time, thus making state governments and nonprofit stakeholders responsible for the collection of longitudinal student-level data.

Indicator #1: Local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate

There are three data sources for tracking local high school to postsecondary institution completion rates, and each one will indicate slightly different information about completion rates in the community. Which of the three sources to use will depend on whether your cradle-to-career partnership can leverage relationships with institutions, state-level data via a state longitudinal data system (SLDS) or the National Student Clearinghouse's (NSC) student tracking system.

Relationships with postsecondary institutions

Institutional data can be used to customize data for local public school students and develop strategies to support local students.

State data

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) are a potential source of data for postsecondary completion. The purpose of SLDS is to integrate the data systems that track educational attainment for students from early learning programs through the workforce by integrating preschool, K-12 and postsecondary data systems into one P-20 data system. These data systems include individual student records.

The postsecondary completion data available in SLDS provides information on students from that particular state and whether they graduated from a postsecondary institution in the same state. First identify the high schools located in your community and then use SLDS to determine which of those students went on to enroll and graduate in a postsecondary institution within the same state. These data systems include graduation from in-state postsecondary institutions and tend to have lower coverage rates for private institutions. As of 2021, 27 states link their SLDS to workforce data (**ECS**). Availability: A list of states with SLDS in 2021 is available through this Education Commission of the States **50-state comparison**. The timeliness of this data will depend on the state and their system. StriveTogether also maintains a list of states with SLDS that can be found **here**.

National Student Clearinghouse

Another data source is through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a privately operated postsecondary tracking service. NSC tracks high school seniors who matriculated from participating high schools and identifies whether they graduated from public or private two- and four-year colleges and universities as well as trade and vocational programs. This data source includes graduations from participating postsecondary institutions nationally. First contact your local school districts directly to ensure that your districts participate with NSC. Then, you can refer to **this NSC site** to ensure that the primary two- and four-year colleges and universities where the majority of your community's students continue for their postsecondary educations participate as well.

Availability: Work with your school districts to submit a roster of graduates to the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker and receive a report with data on completion rates, among other information, of the cohort you are attempting to track. Data is generally kept current and can be available in as little as 30 days in some cases.

Indicator #2: Postsecondary completion rate of local institutions
There is one recommended data source for tracking the postsecondary completion rate of local institutions.

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS):
The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is an annual data collection distributed by the Postsecondary Branch of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a nonpartisan center within the Institute of Education Sciences under the U.S. Department of Education. NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S.

The postsecondary completion data available in IPEDS includes the total number of students enrolled and graduated from postsecondary institutions. First identify the postsecondary institutions in your community and then use the IPEDS system to identify institution graduation levels.

Availability: IPEDS releases the previous school year's data in the fall of the following school year. For example, postsecondary completion data from the 2017-2018 school year was posted in September of 2018.

The Urban Institute Data Portal
The Urban Institute Education Data Portal uses the IPEDS data to create graduation rates rather than the levels provided by IPEDS. This data is the same base data as provided in IPEDS with the graduation rates calculated for users. Availability: The Education Data Portal releases the previous school year's data in December of the following school year. For example, postsecondary completion data from the 2017-2018 school year was posted in December of 2018.

>>>>>>> Detailed data specifications

Definitions
Local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate
Using SLDS data, this is the percentage of high school graduates from the community that graduate from public postsecondary institutions within state. The rate using National Student Clearinghouse data is the percentage of high school graduates from the community that graduate from any postsecondary institution.

Postsecondary completion rate of local institutions
Using IPEDS data or Education Data Portal data, this is the percentage of students enrolled in local postsecondary institutions who graduate.

Target population
The target population for this metric includes high school graduates from your cradle-to-career

partnership's school districts. StriveTogether recommends tracking these graduates for up to 150 percent of the normal time to graduation following their enrollment into community colleges, associate programs or two- or four-year colleges or universities. These target populations and their outcome timeframes include:

- local high school graduates who earn a bachelor's degree within six years
- local high school graduates who earn an associate degree within three years
- local high school graduates who earn a certificate within 150% of the program's "normal time"

For some, the target population will be all of the high school graduates in the school district. If, however, your partnership's geographic focus is different from the school district, it may be necessary to collect this data at the school level and aggregate to the appropriate geography.

National Student Clearinghouse details

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to conduct and support objective research related to educational enrollment, progression and completion for the benefit of students, institutions and the public. The Research Center provides StudentTracker reports that use data held by the National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization that serves the education community by facilitating the exchange and understanding of student enrollment, performance and related information. These reports show results at aggregated levels, preventing students and institutions from being individually identified (**NSC 2016**). Users can select specific types

of programs or students, such as Carnegie classifications or student characteristics. However, in order to comply with FERPA and institutional agreements, results from these queries have to be aggregated to a level of at least three institutions and at least 10 (ideally 30) students.

The NSC does not survey students. Instead, it obtains student data directly from registrars, the college and university officers responsible for keeping track of enrollments and degrees. Postsecondary institutions participate with the Clearinghouse voluntarily, pay low or no fees for participating and receive valuable services that the Clearinghouse provides based on the data. The institutions typically send to NSC their complete student enrollment list every month, sometimes more often, so the data is current. NSC also contains over two decades of historical data.

NSC data includes all students who are enrolled in credit-bearing courses at participating institutions. These include:

- students who are enrolled full-time and part-time
- students who are receiving financial aid, and those who are not receiving financial aid
- students who attend on campus and virtually
- students who are concurrently enrolled in more than one institution
- in most cases, students who are dual-enrolled in college courses while still in high school
- undergraduate and graduate students
- degree-seeking, certificate-seeking and non-degree-seeking students

- students who are enrolled during all terms, including the summer, and those in campus-based study-abroad programs

NSC data also keeps track of students when they transfer among institutions, even out of state, and when they stop-out and return, even years later.

The following students are not included:
- students attending most of the U.S. military academies
- students attending most tribal colleges
- students attending very small institutions

International students and undocumented students (non-U.S. citizens) are often not reported to the Clearinghouse, even when they are enrolled at participating U.S. institutions. In those cases when they are reported (NSC estimates it to be less than half), these students are also more difficult to track if they change institutions.

NSC has some limitations in matching and reporting data. Even though nearly all college students are in the NSC database, they may not all be visible in the StudentTracker report that the NSC Research Center sends to a high school or district. There are limitations in the ability to match the students in each graduating cohort to those in the NSC dataset. There are also limitations on which student data can be released once it is found. In order to better understand these potential data limitations, we recommend communicating with your school districts to learn more about where students typically go after high school graduation.

IPEDS details

IPEDS collects data on the number of students who complete a postsecondary education program by type of program and level of award (certificate or degree). Type of program is categorized according to the **Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)**, a detailed coding system for postsecondary instructional programs. This data provides information on the number and location of completers by field. The data also helps satisfy the mandate in the **Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act** for information on completions in postsecondary career and technical education programs. Based on aggregate data reported by institutions, IPEDS publishes three related but distinct measures of degree completion, which are measured at different time points and cover different student populations:

1. The IPEDS graduation rate assesses whether students complete their intended degree within 100%, 150% or 200% of the normal time for that degree type. The graduation measure is calculated only for full-time, first-time degree-seeking students.

2. The IPEDS Outcome Measures survey tracks whether students complete a certificate, associate or bachelor's degree four, six, and eight years after entering the institution. This measure captures degree completion outcomes for more students than the graduation rate measure because it is calculated separately for part-time and non-first-time degree-seeking students in addition to full-time, first-time degree-seeking students. However, the Outcome Measures survey does not track the type of program in which students are enrolled, and so does not provide a measure of the timing of degree completion relative to normal program length.

3. IPEDS also separately tracks the total number and type of degrees awarded at each institution, as well as the number of students completing a degree each year. However, these completion measures are not tied to specific cohorts of students or time of degree completion.

Education Data Portal details
The Education Data Portal can provide a more user-friendly version of IPEDS data. In addition to overall levels, it contains the graduation rate status as of August 31, at the end of the academic year, for the cohort of full-time, first-time degree- or certificate-seeking undergraduates, by race and sex.

Data for four-year institutions includes:
- the number of bachelor's degree-seeking students who enrolled six academic years earlier
- the number of bachelor's degree-seeking students who completed any degree or certificate within 150 percent of normal time
- the number who completed a bachelor's degree within 100%, 125% or 150% of normal time to completion
- the number of bachelor's degree-seeking students who transferred out

Data for students seeking a degree or certificate other than a bachelor's degree is also included for four-year institutions.

Data for two-year institutions includes:
- the number of full-time and part-time students
- first-time students who enrolled three academic years earlier
- the number of students who completed any degree or within 100% or 150% of normal time
- the number of students who transferred out

This data also contains the number of students who completed any degree or certificate by race and ethnicity and gender.

Example

Local high school to postsecondary institution completion rate

SLDS source
1. Obtain the total number of high school graduates from each graduating cohort in the district(s) who attended and graduated from an in-state community college or associate program within three years
2. Obtain the total number of high school graduates from each graduating cohort in the district(s) who attended and graduated from an in-state four-year college or university within six years.
3. Sum the numbers from step (1) and step (2). This is the number of students who obtained a postsecondary degree within the traditional 150% completion time at in-state institutions. This is the numerator.
4. Obtain the total number of students from each graduating cohort in the district(s). This is the denominator.
5. Divide the numerator calculated in step 3 by the denominator in step 4
6. Multiply by 100.

$$\frac{\text{Number of students graduating with AA in less than three years)} + (\text{Number of students graduating with BA or BS in less than six years)}}{\text{Number of students in target high school cohort}} \times 100$$

NSC source
1. Obtain the number of students who graduated in the district(s) that went on to graduate from any post-secondary institution or program. This is the denominator.
2. Submit this list to NCS and obtain the number of students in the cohort that completed a degree within 150% of time. This is three years for a two-year degree or six years for a four-year degree. This is the numerator.
3. Divide the numerator calculated in step 2 by the denominator in step 1.
4. Multiply by 100.

$$\frac{\text{Number of students graduating with AA in less than three years OR Number of students graduating with BA or BS in less than six years}}{\text{Number of students in target high school cohort}} \times 100$$

Postsecondary completion rates of local institutions

IPEDS source
1. Go to the IPEDS – **Compare Institutions** website
2. Select the local institutions in your community.
3. Under variables, select the desired year and "Graduation rate, total cohort" (found under the "Frequently Used Variables" subheading).
4. Download the data.

Education Data Portal source
1. Go to **Portal** website.
2. Select the Data Tool link
3. Select timeframe, state, and college(s)
4. Select desired institutions and graduation rates.
5. Download the data.

Data disaggregation

The availability of postsecondary completion data disaggregated by demographics will depend on data sources (i.e., NSC, SLDS, or IPEDS). In National Student Clearinghouse data, demographic data such as gender, race/ethnicity, enrollment major, etc. are considered optional data elements. While providing this data to NSC enhances NSC's ability to provide additional services, they are not part of the mandatory compliance reporting, and therefore coverage rates vary. You can encourage participating districts to submit demographic data to NSC. Availability of demographic data will depend on each state's SLDS system and demographic data availability. IPEDS provides additional disaggregation such as race/ethnicity and degree types.

Example of calculation for female students:

$$\frac{\text{Number of female students who graduated from postsecondary institutions}}{\text{Number of female students in graduation cohort enrolled in postsecondary institutions}} \times 100$$

>>>>>>> Frequently asked questions

How do I calculate 150% of normal time to completion?

In order to calculate this, we must first define "normal time to completion." IPEDS has adopted the definition developed by the **Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting** (JCAR) as a definition of normal time. As such, "normal time to completion" is defined as "the amount of time necessary for a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to the institution's catalog. This is typically four years (eight semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer sessions) for a bachelor's degree in a standard term-based institution; two years (four semesters or trimesters, or six quarters, excluding summer sessions) for an associate degree in a standard term-based institution; and the various scheduled times for certificate programs." See the following examples:

Many bachelor's degree programs are outlined as four-year programs (eight semesters – typically fall and spring). Extending this to 150% (1.5 x 8) would be 12 semesters or through the end of the spring term of the sixth year.

Similarly, an associate degree program that is advertised as a two-year program (six quarters — fall, winter and spring, with no scheduled summer quarter) would extend to nine quarters (1.5 x 6) or through the end of the spring quarter of the third year.

However, the Technical Amendment to the Student Right-to-Know Act redefined the cohort year to allow you to count completers through August 31 of the summer following the sixth year of a four-year program (or the third year of a two-year program).

Certificate programs must be handled somewhat differently. If a 900-clock hour course is advertised as taking 30 weeks to complete, the calculation of 1.5 x 30 equals 45 weeks after the start date. If the student completes within that 45-week period, they are within 150% of normal time.

How can I assess graduation rates within two-year degree-granting institutions vs. four-year degree-granting institutions? (**NCES example**)

NCES data for four-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs
If your cradle-to-career partnership has information on the types of institutions target students are enrolled in, you may be able to get a general pulse of the institution-level graduation rates by race, age and gender.

You will have to select and specify four-year degree-granting data for your analysis. To understand overall graduation for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students, you must control for institution type (all institutions, private, public, private nonprofit, private for-profit) and include 150% of normal time (within six years) for degree completion from "first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year postsecondary institutions, by various controls."

NCES data for two-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs
Two-year institutions generally focus on providing student instruction and related activities through a range of career-oriented programs at the certificate and associate degree levels and preparing students to transfer to four-year

institutions. You can assess rates for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate degree at two-year granting institutions by specifying NCES data for two-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Similarly, select graduation rate within 150% of normal time for degree completion from "first institution attended for first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking student at two-year postsecondary institutions and controlling institutions, by various controls."

>>>>>>> Learning resources

IPEDS Postsecondary Components- Graduation Rates:
https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/survey-components/9/graduation-rates

IPEDS Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates (May 2022):
https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/ctr/undergrad-retention-graduation

US Department of Education College Scorecard:
https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/

NSC Completing College National and State Reports(November 2022):
https://nscresearchcenter.org/completing-college/

>>>>>>> Data sharing

The StriveTogether **Guide to data sharing** provides important information about requesting, storing and working with data. It is important that cradle-to-career partnerships work with local school districts to obtain achievement and assessment participation data. This may involve entering into a data-sharing agreement with local schools, districts or the state. In some cases, it may be possible to access student-level data for this outcome as part of a request for district- or-state-level data. The data sharing guide provides important information for doing that responsibly.

StriveTogether®

StriveTogether is a national movement with a clear purpose: help every child succeed in school and in life from cradle to career, regardless of race, ethnicity, zip code or circumstance. In partnership with nearly 70 communities across the country, StriveTogether provides resources, best practices and processes to give every child every chance for success. The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network reaches more than 14 million students, including more than 7 million children of color and over 7 million children experiencing poverty. The network spans 29 states and Washington, D.C.

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