

May 16, 2013

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

We are pleased to see a growing recognition within Congress of the need to make basic, but critical, information about the return on investment in higher education available to students and families. As anxiety over student debt and college costs reaches new heights, the public is increasingly questioning the benefit of a college degree. Information about the value of specific degrees will allow those directly affected by higher education—students, families, taxpayers, policymakers, institutions, and employers—to make informed decisions. We applaud those members of Congress who have put specific proposals forward.

Federal taxpayers spend more than \$150 billion a year on federal financial aid and students, states, and employers spend billions more—yet cannot get answers to basic, fundamental questions, including:

- How many part-time, adult, military, remedial, and Pell Grant students are successfully completing their degrees?
- Are students who don't graduate transferring to another school or dropping out altogether?
- How much are students *really* paying for college? How much are institutions, states, and the federal government investing in higher education?
- Are students leaving school saddled with debt, and are they paying back their loans, especially students who don't complete?
- Are students getting jobs in the fields they studied in college? Are they going to graduate school?

Considering the significant federal investment in programs and institutions, policymakers *should demand* better information about the effectiveness of higher education.

This alarming lack of transparency about higher education outcomes spurred the coming together of our diverse organizations. We urge Congress to embrace outcomes-focused data systems that produce information which enable stakeholders to make informed decisions. These systems must provide the data necessary to calculate “return on investment” measures, but also to inform continuous improvement within higher education institutions and training programs, as well as provide valuable feedback to high schools to ensure alignment across the education systems. Timely, contextual, and actionable data are vital to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment—critical pieces of the efforts to improve the outcomes of our education and workforce development systems. We are confident this can be done in a way that will not violate student privacy.

As legislation to collect and use significantly better data from all institutions moves forward, we look forward to working with you to ensure taxpayers' investments are being spent wisely and that students and families are provided the facts they need to make informed decisions on one of the greatest financial investments they will make.

Sincerely,

