



State Policy Toolkit: Access

This is the fourth of five installments in the National College Access Network's State Policy Toolkit. The toolkit reflects NCAN's [Model State Policy Agenda](#), which aims to provide NCAN members and partners, particularly those in networks or coalitions, with resources to advance their state policy agenda. Moreover, the toolkit provides examples of effective policies and programs to help organizations develop and guide their state policy advocacy strategy. Each installment topic is derived from NCAN's model agenda and is categorized under either **affordability** or **talent development**. Subcategories for affordability include *need-based aid* and *funding strategies*. Beneath talent development are *preparation*, *access*, and *success*.

Access — NCAN's stance: Applying to college is a daunting process, but states can alleviate burden by providing students with the information they need. States should: (1) allow all high school graduates of that state to qualify for in-state tuition at public colleges; (2) build a statewide longitudinal data system that links postsecondary outcomes to K-12 education, including college-going and graduation rates by high school; (3) establish state application deadlines and processes that are sensitive to the needs of first-generation and low-income students; and (4) align high school graduation requirements with college acceptance requirements.

Allow all high school graduates of that state to qualify for in-state tuition at public colleges.

In 1982, the United States Supreme Court [struck down](#) a Texas law that denied undocumented students equal access to public, K-12 education. Unfortunately, in 1996, the legislative branch did not follow suit; that year, Congress passed the [Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act](#), which includes a provision that denies undocumented immigrants the right to in-state tuition rates (unless all U.S. citizens have that same access). Since these landmark decisions, several states have taken up the responsibility to meet the underlying economic and moral imperatives tied to this concept, while others have created additional barriers for these students.

- This July 2015 [brief](#) from the National Conference of State Legislatures highlights the efforts of states and university systems that have taken action on this front. In total, 16 states and four university systems have guaranteed in-state tuition rates to undocumented high school graduates since 2001. The report also identifies the five states that offer state financial aid to undocumented students, and the six states that bar undocumented students from paying in-state tuition rates.
- Recent shifts in immigration policy at the federal level have spurred state efforts on both sides of the debate. In July 2017, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education released an analysis tracking this movement. In the [2017-2018 legislative session](#), 12 states had taken up 21 pieces of legislation in this space. The analysis also provides brief, historical context around in-state tuition and undocumented immigrants.
- Research from [The Review of Higher Education](#) (RHE) and the [IZA Institute of Labor Economics](#) (IZA) highlights the positive effects that this policy has on enrollment among undocumented students. Findings from the RHE and IZA reports show that undocumented Latinos are 1.54 times more likely to enroll in higher education if they are granted the in-state tuition rate, and that Hispanic, non-citizen youth were 3.6 percentage points more likely to enroll in college in states with this policy in place.



Build a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) that links postsecondary outcomes to K-12 education, including college-going and graduation rates by high school (e.g., consider using the National Student Clearinghouse to report on all students, not just those attending in-state institutions).

Statewide longitudinal data systems have the potential to provide state policymakers with a complete understanding of the student pipeline in their state. Common components of a statewide system include early education, K-12, postsecondary education, and workforce outcomes. The most efficient SLDSs are nimble enough to link across systems and offer a comprehensive overview for stakeholders to analyze.

- As a result of the Educational Technical Assistance Act, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) began awarding three- to five-year [grants](#) of up to \$20 million to assist states with SLDS development. All but three states have received funding since the first grant round in fiscal year 2006, and each state's application and outcomes are [publically available](#) on the Department's website. ED also offers monthly webinars and other [resources](#) to highlight SLDS best practices.
- The Education Commission of the States (ECS) developed a [dataset](#) that outlines the format of each SLDS in the country, and individual profiles take a closer look at the design of each system. Moreover, ECS released a [brief](#) on SLDS legislation introduced in 2016 and 2017, a snapshot of SLDSs in a [national context](#), and an exhaustive [history](#) of SLDS legislation introduced since 1996.
- In 2006, the Data Quality Campaign released a [report](#) that includes a section on the "Ten Essential Elements" of an SLDS. The report emphasizes "the ability to match student records between P-12 and postsecondary systems," and highlights the critical ability to access data points such as the percentage of graduates who scored proficiently on state exams but still needed remedial courses in college. Such information is invaluable information for educators and policymakers.

Establish state application deadlines and processes that are sensitive to the needs of first-generation and low-income students.

Deadlines and processes that are flexible and uniform are most navigable for students whose parents did not graduate from college and for those from a low-income background. While some states do not require the completion of forms besides the FAFSA, others have their own aid applications with separate deadlines. State efforts to streamline these processes can simplify the college-going process for traditionally underserved students.

- In collaboration with colleges and universities in the state, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) created [ApplyTexas](#), a centralized portal for postsecondary applications. ApplyTexas lets students apply for admission to any public institution as well as participating private institutions in the state simultaneously. Moreover, students can apply for campus-based scholarships and upload college essays.
- The need-based aid program in [Ohio](#), the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG), features both a flexible application deadline and a streamlined process. The annual deadline is Oct. 1, and students become eligible for the [aid](#) upon completion of the FAFSA.
- In June 2011, the Texas state legislature signed into law [Senate Bill 851](#), which created a uniform priority deadline for financial aid. While the bill language gives priority to those who meet the deadline, meeting the deadline does not determine eligibility. The bill also requires the THECB to consult with financial aid administrators before setting the deadline.



Align high school graduation requirements with college acceptance requirements.

As of 2010, [more than half](#) of state high school graduation requirements were less rigorous than the admissions requirements of the respective state's flagship institution. This disconnect has the potential to exclude otherwise qualified and college-ready students from quality, affordable higher education options.

- In October 2014, ECS produced the [Blueprint for College Readiness](#), which describes the issue of high school graduation and postsecondary admission alignment, provides examples of state policies that have proven effective, and offers policy recommendations for states that have room to improve. ECS cites the lack of a world languages high school coursework requirement as a prominent discrepancy between high school graduation and postsecondary admission requirements, and finds that just six states have directly aligned graduation and admission requirements as of 2014.
- Beginning in 2008, Colorado launched a series of [P-20 initiatives](#) in an effort to ensure the state's student pipeline was well-prepared for college and the workforce. The K-12/higher education alignment component of this initiative is known as [Core-to-College](#). The regulations for this initiative, which are housed at the Colorado Department of Education, are enforced by [Senate Bill 08-212](#).
- In 2010, the Washington Student Achievement Council and the State Board of Education established the [College Academic Distribution Requirements](#). While each school district must identify which [courses](#) meet these standards, the standards outline the minimum requirements for high school graduates to gain admission into public postsecondary institutions in Washington.