

State Strategies to Re-Engage Students with Some College and No Degree

At least [36 million adults](#) in the United States have earned some postsecondary education credit without obtaining a credential. [Research](#) suggests these adults, are often referred to as those with some college, but no degree, are well worth the investments needed to help them return and complete their education. Adults in this population frequently indicate their desire to finish what they started but often need proactive support structures and services to help them overcome challenges. States are considering “free college” policies, also known as Promise programs, in addition to wrap-around supports and outreach. Implementing these supports can help states make progress in helping these adults achieve their goals. Reengaging this population also can address postsecondary inequities. While Black and Hispanic students suffer from [lower college completion rates](#) than their white peers, adults in these populations who do return are relatively more [successful](#) at earning both bachelor’s and associates degrees when compared to the general population of Black and Hispanic college students.

The most effective approach to supporting students with some college, but no degree, is to pursue a collection of policies that together ensure this population is both aware of postsecondary opportunities that meet their needs and that they have the resources and supports to successfully overcome barriers to reenrolling and persisting. This brief focuses on actions states and/or state higher education systems can take to help this population reenroll and persist in completing a postsecondary credential. The examples included in this brief should not be considered exhaustive, but rather representative of the types of strategies being explored by states to reengage and support this potential student group.

Reengagement Strategies

Research suggests adults with some college, but no degree are [motivated](#) to return to postsecondary education for a range of personal and professional reasons. However, this population often faces [structural challenges](#) that can prevent them from engaging with and reenrolling at institutions. Institutions in turn may lack information needed to identify these adults and [help them](#) overcome these structural barriers. States can consider a number of different policy actions to address these challenges.

Identify and Communicate with Prospective Students. States can support institutions in identifying the some college, no degree population by leveraging existing state data systems and engaging them through communication tools. For example, **Mississippi’s** [Complete 2 Compete Initiative](#) used state data systems to identify “near completers”, defined as those who have accumulated

close to enough credits to graduate, who were eligible for state postsecondary programs. The initiative then [engaged](#) with prospective students through personalized advertising, social media campaigns, direct mail, email, and through a customized website. **Maryland** created a grant program called [One Step Away](#) which provides funding to institutions to identify, engage, and reenroll near completers. The grant program [details](#) a process which institutions can use to identify potential near completers and obtain contact information from the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration to assist with outreach.

Easy to Use Online Tools. States can develop streamlined online tools to help these adults explore and navigate the postsecondary opportunities available to them. For example, **Washington's** [College and Career Compass](#) helps adults learn about opportunities to finish their education through a centralized web portal. States can also work to simplify the process for adults to engage with specific programs that help them reenroll. For example, **Tennessee's** statewide adult promise program, Tennessee Reconnect, leverages a [simplified intake form](#), and **Indiana's** Next Level Jobs Initiative uses a streamlined [intake form](#) to direct adult students to appropriate postsecondary opportunities. These forms are brief and ask straightforward questions to quickly get students to the next step in the process.

Personalized Reenrollment Supports. [Research](#) suggests adult students are more successful in reenrolling when they have multiple interactions with advisors during the reenrollment process. States can implement systems to ensure adults have access to such advising when seeking to reenroll. For example, **Tennessee** Reconnect gives prospective students access to a staff member called a [Reconnect Navigator](#). This person serves as a single point of contact to help students through the reenrollment process and can also support students once they've enrolled in postsecondary education. **Louisiana** assigns students a coach during the intake process as a part of its [CompleteLA](#) program, and these coaches then help students with a variety of processes, ranging from selecting their degree to reenrolling in the right institution. In **Pennsylvania**, the state system of higher education [opted](#) to work with [ReUp Education](#) to leverage the company's expertise in using data, technology, and coaching to help reengage stop out students in the state.

Overcome Financial Barriers to Reenrolling. Prospective adult students can face financial challenges that can inhibit them from reenrolling in postsecondary education. For example, adults with some college, but no degree may have existing state or institutional debt that results in holds being placed on their transcripts, which can in turn prevent them from obtaining the necessary documents they need to reenroll. States can take steps to forgive student debt by replicating successful debt relief programs such as the **Missouri** [Finish Line Scholarship](#) or **Detroit's** regional debt forgiveness program. States can also act to prohibit institutions from withholding transcripts due to outstanding institutional debt as **California** recently did through [legislation](#). Additionally, states may also look at strategies to provide financial support specifically for adults in this population to return to college and complete their degree. **North Carolina**, **Tennessee**, and **Minnesota** have implemented promise programs specifically targeted towards adults with some college, no degree to incentivize them to reenroll. States may also want to consider creative

financial solutions to incentivize adults to reenroll. For example, some [Florida](#) community colleges saw success in providing a one-course tuition waiver for returning students.

Completion and Student Success Strategies

Once they reenroll, adult students may [stop back out](#) due to a diverse range of personal and financial reasons. States and institutions can pursue several strategies to support these students in persisting and completing a credential once they reenroll.

Financial Supports: Once reenrolled, financial struggles, even with small amounts of money, can cause students to stop out of college. Some states have implemented emergency financial aid programs to help students overcome unexpected financial barriers. For example, **North Carolina's** [Finish Line Grant program](#) provides emergency funding for students who have completed 50 percent of their degree or credential. Additionally, **Wisconsin's** emergency grant aid [program](#) provides students access to up to \$500 per academic year to respond to unexpected financial challenges.

Support Students' Basic Needs: States and systems can take actions to ensure their social services are aligned to support adult students in accessing the specific services they need to be successful. While these services do not exclusively support adults with some college but no degree, they do meet many of the needs of this population as well as adults more broadly. For example, **Arkansas's** [Career Pathways](#) program provides wraparound supports for TANF-eligible students who have a child under age 21 living at home. Additionally, **Connecticut's** State Colleges and Universities are [working together](#) to develop a protocol to link colleges to the regional housing resources available to students, provide enrolled students with easy access to public transportation, and address student hunger concerns by opening food pantries on each college campus.

Advising Services: Providing students with academic supports as they progress through college can [dramatically increase](#) their likelihood of graduating. Strengthening these services will also help students more broadly as these services are often helpful to the entire student body. For example, in **Texas**, a collaboration between the state, community colleges and universities called [GradTX](#) helps students complete their degree by including dedicated advisors, financial aid specialists, and flexible degree program options. In **North Carolina**, a partnership designed to increase student persistence across ten North Carolina community colleges called [Carolina Works](#) assigns success coaches to work with students and help them complete their degree.

Additional Resources

In addition to the above examples, these resources focused on the some college, no degree population may be of interest to state policy makers:

- **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** - [Adept at Adapting: Adult Learner 360 Case Studies on How Institutions Listen to Students, Faculty, and Staff to Redesign Services for Adult Learners](#)
- **The Lumina Foundation** - [Adult Promise Initiative Overview](#)
- **The Graduate! Network and New America** - [The Comeback Story: How Adults Return to School to Complete Their Degree](#)
- **ReUp Education** - [Supporting Stopout Students – Increasing Engagement and Unlocking Scale](#)
- **ReUp Education** - [The Forgotten Students: Understanding the Student Completion Crisis in Higher Education and New Approaches to Solving It](#)
- **The Institute for Higher Education Policy** - [Degrees When Due](#)
- **Ithaka S+R** - [Solving Stranded Credits Report](#)

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