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States Falter in Providing Affordable College Opportunities Disparities Persist by Race/Ethnicity and Income, Eroding Global Competitiveness

San Jose, Calif., and Washington, D.C. — States are making little or no progress in providing affordable college opportunities or improving college completion rates for their residents, says a report released today by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The findings come as states face massive budget shortfalls that threaten higher education funding, and the United States continues to lag behind other advanced nations on measures of higher education performance.

Drawing on nearly two decades of data, the report, *Measuring Up 2008*, finds that while states have made modest gains in preparing students for college, more students are failing to graduate from high school. While college enrollment rates for young adults are improving, enrollment rates are declining for older adults. The report also notes that the burden of paying for college is now higher for students in every state, and low college completion rates have barely improved. Additionally, disparities persist in college access and success by income, race and ethnicity, and state.

“This study reveals that higher education is becoming a roadblock, not a gateway, to success for low-income and middle-class students,” says Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., chair of the National Center’s board of directors and former four-term governor of North Carolina. “States must confront these roadblocks to ensure that the United States can remain competitive with other industrialized nations that have made expansion of opportunity and affordable higher education national priorities.”

“State leaders face a crucial option for higher education policy as they balance their budgets,” notes Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center. “They can respond as most

states have in the past, by continuing to allow tuition to rise dramatically and passing the brunt of the financial distress onto students and families. Or they can establish state policies for tuition and financial aid that balance the financial burden among the state, the institutions of higher education, and students and families. This second option protects educational opportunity at a time when the states and the nation need a better-educated citizenry.”

According to the study, major gaps include:

- **Affordability.** The burden of paying for college has increased for all families, but has increased substantially more for low- and middle-income families. Nationally, families in the lowest-income group (bottom 20 percent of the population) pay 55 percent of their income to attend public four-year colleges and universities (after accounting for all student financial aid)—a jump from 39 percent in 2000. Families in the middle-income group (middle 20 percent of the population) pay 25 percent of their income (up from 18 percent in 2000), and those in the top income group (top 20 percent of the population) pay 9 percent of their income (up from 7 percent in 2000). (See page 8 of *Measuring Up 2008*.)
- Additionally, college is more affordable in some states than others. At community colleges, the proportion of family income needed to pay for college expenses, after financial aid, has increased from 18 percent to 25 percent in Florida, and from 20 percent to 25 percent in Washington State. At public four-year institutions, the percentage of income needed to pay costs, after aid, has increased from 17 percent to 20 percent in Minnesota, from 19 percent to 34 percent in New Jersey, and from 29 percent to 41 percent in Pennsylvania. (See page 15 of *Measuring Up 2008*.)
- **High school completion.** In Illinois, 95 percent of white young adults have a high school credential, compared with 82 percent of blacks. In Texas, 93 percent of white young adults have a high school credential, compared with 74 percent of Hispanics. (See page 14 of *Measuring Up 2008*.)
- **College attendance.** In Connecticut and New York, 50 percent of white young adults are enrolled in college, compared with 34 percent of blacks. In California, 45 percent of whites are enrolled, compared with 27 percent of Hispanics. In Arizona, 40 percent of whites are enrolled, compared with 18 percent of Native Americans. (See page 14 of *Measuring Up 2008*.)
- **College graduation.** In Delaware, 73 percent of white students complete a bachelor’s degree within six years of enrolling in college, compared with 41 percent of black students. In New York, 63 percent of whites do so, compared with 43 percent of Hispanics. In New Mexico, 47 percent of whites graduate within six years, compared with 25 percent of Native Americans. (See page 16 of *Measuring Up 2008*.)

As a result of these inequities, U.S. higher education performance has been declining compared to other nations in recent years.

- In college completion, which has never been a strength of American higher education, the United States falls in the middle of the pack: 15th among 29 countries compared.

- The U.S. adult population ages 35 and older still ranks among the world leaders (second only to their peers in Canada) in the percentage who have college degrees, reflecting the educational progress of earlier times.
- Among 25- to 34-year-olds, however, the United States has slipped to 10th in the percentage having college degrees. This relative erosion of our national “educational capital” reflects the lack of significant improvement in the rates of college participation and completion in the U.S. in recent years, compared with other countries.

“Given the U.S. decline internationally, neither the nation nor any state can afford to maintain the status quo,” added Callan. “Even the best-performing states have gaps in performance they need to address. Narrowing those gaps will improve educational and economic opportunity in those states and for the nation.”

Measuring Up 2008 is the fifth in a series of biennial report cards issued by the National Center, based in San Jose, California. Like the earlier reports, this edition measures the performance of the nation and of each state in providing education and training beyond high school. Each state receives an A-to-F grade in each of five performance areas.

In addition to the national report card, detailed individual report cards are available for each of the 50 states. Upon release of *Measuring Up 2008*, the national and state report cards will be posted on the National Center’s Web site: www.highereducation.org.

**(Please note: *Measuring Up 2008* is embargoed until Wednesday, Dec. 3.
The findings of the report cannot appear before December 3.)**

The *Measuring Up 2008* national and state report cards on higher education were made possible by grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education promotes public policies that enhance Americans’ opportunities to pursue and achieve a quality higher education. Established in 1998 by a consortium of national foundations, the National Center is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. It is not associated with any institution of higher education, with any political party, or with any government agency. The National Center is solely responsible for *Measuring Up 2008*.

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State Grades 2008

	Preparation	Participation	Affordability	Completion	Benefits	Learning
Alabama	D+	D+	F	C-	C	I
Alaska	C+	F	F	F	C+	I
Arizona	D	A	F	B	B-	I
Arkansas	C-	D+	F	C-	D+	I
California	C+	C	C-	B-	B+	I
Colorado	A-	C+	F	B-	B+	I
Connecticut	A	C-	F	B-	A-	I
Delaware	C+	C-	F	B	C+	I
Florida	C	D	F	B+	C	I
Georgia	C+	D-	F	B-	B	I
Hawaii	C-	D	F	C	B-	I
Idaho	C	D	F	C	C-	I
Illinois	B	C	F	B+	B	I
Indiana	C	C	F	B-	D+	I
Iowa	B	A	F	A	C+	I
Kansas	B	B-	F	B	C+	I
Kentucky	C	C	F	B	D+	I
Louisiana	D-	F	F	C+	D	I
Maine	B-	C-	F	C+	C	I
Maryland	A-	C	F	B-	A	I
Massachusetts	A	B-	F	A	A	I
Michigan	C	C	F	C+	B+	I
Minnesota	B	B	F	A	B	I
Mississippi	D	D+	F	C	D	I
Missouri	C+	C	F	B	C+	I
Montana	B-	D+	F	C-	C+	I
Nebraska	B-	B	F	B+	B	I
Nevada	C	F	F	F	D	I
New Hampshire	B	C-	F	A-	B	I
New Jersey	A-	C	F	C+	A-	I
New Mexico	D-	B-	F	D+	C+	I
New York	B	D+	F	B+	B	I
North Carolina	B-	D+	F	B-	C+	I
North Dakota	B-	B+	F	A	D	I
Ohio	B-	C-	F	B-	C+	I
Oklahoma	C-	C-	F	C	D+	I
Oregon	C+	D	F	C+	B+	I
Pennsylvania	B-	C-	F	A	C	I
Rhode Island	C+	C+	F	A	B-	I
South Carolina	C+	D-	F	C+	C	I
South Dakota	B	B	F	B	D+	I
Tennessee	C	D	F	C	C	I
Texas	B	D-	F	C-	C+	I
Utah	B	B-	F	B+	B	I
Vermont	A-	C	F	A-	C+	I
Virginia	B+	C	F	B	A	I
Washington	C+	D	F	A-	B	I
West Virginia	C	C	F	C	F	I
Wisconsin	B	C+	F	A-	C	I
Wyoming	C	C	F	A	D-	I