



Momentum Pathways Idaho Case Statement

Section I: Problem Statement

Postsecondary education and training after high school are essential to the economic and social mobility of today's workforce. According to the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, 65% of jobs in the U.S. economy require some form of postsecondary education and training. As the economy continues to evolve and generate more jobs requiring the higher level skills that postsecondary education delivers, postsecondary institutions must rise to meet demand by more effectively and efficiently increasing the number of U.S. residents with a postsecondary certificate or degree.

As a result of these economic trends, the pursuit of social and economic mobility for more Americans will increasingly rely on low-income students and students of color having access to and experiencing success in higher education.

While the demand for a more highly educated workforce grows, demographic trends indicate that the number of high school graduates is on the decline. As a result, the nation will not be able to achieve the postsecondary attainment goals required to meet economic demand. This new economy will demand that postsecondary institutions graduate a higher percentage of students who enroll. In particular, postsecondary institutions will need to more effectively serve student populations who have not traditionally fared well in postsecondary education, to include low-income students, students of color and adults who started postsecondary education and exited before earning a postsecondary credential.

One of the most significant challenges toward achieving gains in Idaho is overcoming the mindset of students from all backgrounds, which often leads them to believe they do not have the ability to succeed in college. Much of this stems from cultural and generational misunderstanding of higher education. Students often hail from communities that do not ascribe a high value proposition to the attainment of a postsecondary credential.

For those that do go on to college, far too few earn a postsecondary credential. With the state maintaining the lowest degree completion rates among its bordering neighbors, an extremely low percentage of students earn a postsecondary credential on time (two years at a community college and four years at a baccalaureate institution). Data collected by the Idaho State Board of Education find:

- 20% of first-time full-time students from Idaho public four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree in four years.
- 42% of first-time full-time students from Idaho public four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree in six years.
- 11% of first-time full-time students from Idaho community colleges earn an Associate degree in two years.
- 22% of first-time full-time students from Idaho community colleges earn an Associate degree in three years.

In comparison, national rates from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics reveal:

- 36% of first-time full-time students from all public four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree in four years.
- 59% of first-time full-time students from all public four-year institutions earn a bachelor's degree in six years.
- 13% of first-time full-time students from community colleges earn an Associate degree in two years.
- 24% of first-time full-time students from community colleges earn an Associate degree in three years.

Further, low-income students and students of color are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential on time, creating a significant postsecondary attainment gap; this attainment gap significantly undermines each state's and the nation's efforts to improve social mobility.

Not only do postsecondary education institutions have unacceptably low completion rates, those who do complete a degree often take too much time to earn a postsecondary credential. According to data collected from states by Complete College America, the average time to degree for students far exceeds the traditional on-time graduation rate. Among first-time full-time students the median time to degree are:

- 4.4 years for a four-year degree from public high-research institutions
- 4.8 years for a four-year degree from all other public bachelor's degree institutions
- 3.9 years for a two-year degree from a public community college
- 2.7 years for a certificate from a community or technical college.

In addition to students taking far too much time, students also complete far more credits than are required for a degree. Too many students take more than the typical 120 credits for a bachelor's degree and 60 credits for an Associate degree or two year certificate. Complete College America data reveal that the median credits to degree for graduates are:

- 136 credits for a bachelor's degree from a public high-research institution.
- 135 credits for a bachelor's degree from all other public four-year institutions
- 82 credits for an Associate degree from a public community college
- 62 credits for a two-year certificate.

There is ample evidence that the longer it takes a student to earn a postsecondary credential, the greater chance that life will get in the way. The challenges of navigating higher education are even greater for adults and low-income students who must balance work, family and school obligations.

Further, longer time to degree and credits degree translate to greater costs to students, particularly for those who can least afford it. Longer time to degree will translate into higher loan debt burdens for students - over \$30,000, on average, for college graduates.

In Idaho a perception exists there are narrowly defined and rigid approaches to pursuing a two-year or four-year degree, which contributes to uncertainty and apprehension about the achievability of a college education. The national data provided above speaks to this, suggesting both the state and country can dramatically increase college attainment rates by focusing on strategies that enable students to more effectively navigate degree programs, reducing time and credits to a degree.

Section II: Root Causes - Students who achieve early momentum are more likely to graduate.

For high school students and adult learners, Idaho has recently made significant strides to reduce the financial burden to attend college, such as through the Advanced Opportunities early college program and the expansion of the Idaho Opportunity Scholarship, in addition to aid by provided by institutions. However, for all students there remain several issues that need to be addressed in order to consider a degree as a pathway to a career. This includes the need to help all students develop a vision for their aspirations, to remove the uncertainty shared for the academic and student support available to them, and to resolve concerns about curriculum that is inaccessible or is irrelevant to their career path.

Complete College America has identified a set of structural barriers that often undermine student success. These barriers have been universally recognized by state and national leaders who are highly engaged in institutional transformation efforts to dramatically increase college completion rates. Among the barriers are:

- Prerequisite remedial education course sequences that deny students, particularly low-income students and students of color access to college-level math and English courses.
- The lack of clearly defined pathways into and through programs of study.
- Poor communication with students about credit and course enrollment requirements needed for on time college completion.
- Lack of advising that ensures students make an informed choice of a program, develop a degree plan and stay on their degree plan to graduation.

These, and other structural barriers, undermine students' ability to achieve critical benchmarks in their first academic year, preventing students from building the momentum they need to earn a postsecondary credential.

While the challenge of increasing college completion rates appear daunting, there is research that has shown that students who can build early momentum in their first academic year by achieving the following benchmarks in their first year are far more likely to earn a postsecondary credential:

- Completion of 30 Credits Per Year
- Completion of Gateway Math and English Courses
- Selection of a Major or Meta-Major (Focus Field, Career Cluster, etc.)
- Completion of 6-9 Credits in a Program Path in the First Year

Data collected by the Idaho State Board of Education for FY2018 reveal:

- 20% of all college students completed 30 credits. (26% at four-year institutions.)
- 40% of part-time and full-time degree-seeking freshmen completed a gateway Math course in the first two years.
- 29% of total students in FY2017 needing remediation passed a subsequent credit-bearing Math course with a C- or higher in the first or second year.
- 67% of total students in FY2017 needing remediation passed a subsequent credit-bearing English course with a C- or higher in the first or second year.
- 70% of all full-time, first-time students returned for the second year. (75% at four-year institutions.)

Section III: The Solution - Momentum Pathways enable students to achieve critical first year and return year momentum, and ensure that students stay on path to complete a credential.

In order to address the aforementioned root causes, there are several key practices that could be undertaken by institutions that would be of greatest help to Idaho students in hurdling these obstacles. This includes a commitment to message or incentivize early and often the importance of timely course completion, as well as offering a diverse array of instructional delivery models to meet the needs of all learners, such as providing online and competency-based learning. This can involve a fixed calendar for course offerings (such as block scheduling) and compressed and on-demand delivery.

For students in high school, they must be afforded formal and flexible secondary-to-postsecondary pathways by their college and career advisors, so as to effectively integrate early college programs and high school curriculum. Accomplishing this will foster engagement, improve preparedness, allow for guided academic and career exploration, enable progress to a postsecondary credential, and develop greater knowledge for the value proposition of higher education. Upon arrival to college both recent high school graduates and adult learners should be provided with a clear map to program completion so as to understand their expectations. Such plans should incorporate access to credit-bearing gateway math course and appropriate support in the first year, with an alignment of gateway math requirements that are most applicable to the career path of the credential.

These concepts, when combined, are emblematic of the unified continuum of learning sought by the Board to be achieved across the K-16 spectrum, benefitting students at any point of entry in their academic career.

Fortunately, there is more evidence than ever around fundamental structural changes colleges can make to ensure students reach first-year and return-year benchmarks that generate the momentum they need to earn a postsecondary credential.

The field is galvanizing around a set of concrete strategies that when implemented at scale and in concert with one another as part of Momentum Pathways strategy will dramatically increase the likelihood of college completion for thousands of students. The strategies are as follows:

- Fully articulated **Academic Maps** that enable college students, high school students, and adult learners to follow a program path through and among collaborating postsecondary institutions. Academic Maps should include 6-9 hours of program-specific courses available to students in the first year.
- **Math Pathways** that ensure appropriate, discipline-specific gateway math courses taken at one institution meet program requirements at both the institution delivering the course and the receiving institution where a student might transfer.
- Full access to gateway math and English courses in the first year, without the requirement for prior completion of traditional remediation courses or courses that do not meet gateway equivalency. This can be accomplished through either direct placement into college-level courses or placement into the courses with **Corequisite Support** for students in need of additional academic support.
- Commitment to increased credit completion for students, with a goal of students earning 30 credits a year, including the use of summer and intersession terms, through a consistent messaging campaign such as **Think 30**. The design of academic maps and multiple enrollment opportunities to include summer terms, mini-semesters, online courses, prior learning assessments and other strategies should also ensure students can complete their credential on time.
- Comprehensive onboarding practices called the **Momentum Year** that result in students:
 - Identifying their “Purpose First” through dedicated advising, various career and academic interest tools, program exploration exercises, as well as consideration of current workforce data to empower an informed choice of program.
 - Selecting meta-majors (focus fields, career clusters, etc.), providing students content in broad areas of study (e.g., social sciences, health) that channel into specific programs of study, and without expense to degree progress should the student switch to a different meta-major in the first 45 hours of enrollment.
 - Enrolling into a default course schedule aligned to their selected meta-major or program of study.
- **Proactive Advising** that prioritizes personalized interventions to ensure students follow a path to and through a program of study.

Institutions that have deployed these practices have seen dramatic improvements in the critical first-year and return-year momentum benchmarks, as well as student retention and degree completion. Given as much, Idaho’s current and future college students stand to benefit from a consistent and cohesive delivery of these strategies across the state’s public postsecondary system.