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MEDIA CONTACT: Jason Bearce
(317) 464-4400 x. 119
jbearce@che.in.gov

Commission sets sights on closing college achievement gap

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Commission for Higher Education today adopted a bold goal to close the state’s achievement gap in college completion rates by the year 2025. Less than a third of Hoosier college students currently earn a four-year degree on time and just over half graduate after six years, but a closer look at college completion rates reveals even deeper disparities between student demographic groups.

Indiana’s current four-year college completion rates are 40 percent for White students, 35 percent for Hispanic students and 16 percent for Black students. Indiana’s current six-year college completion rates are 59 percent for White students, 53 percent for Hispanic students and 34 percent for Black students.

“Indiana has a moral and economic imperative to dramatically increase the success rates of all Indiana college students,” said Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “Far too many students start college and never finish, and we cannot afford to leave another generation of Hoosiers behind.”

Only a third of Hoosiers have completed education beyond high school, ranking Indiana 40th nationally in education attainment. The Commission has set a goal of raising Indiana’s attainment rate to 60 percent of the state’s population by the year 2025. Indiana’s adult attainment rate shows similar demographic disparities with 35 percent of White adults, 24 percent of Black adults and 18 percent of Hispanic adults having completed education beyond high school.

A call to close the achievement gap

Recognizing that Indiana must significantly increase college completion rates for both recent high school graduates and returning adult students, the Commission:

- 1) Resolved to cut the college completion gap between underrepresented student populations and Indiana’s overall student population in half by the year 2018 and eliminate it altogether by 2025.
- 2) Called upon Indiana’s colleges and universities to publicly set targets for closing completion rate gaps for underrepresented populations on their campuses.
- 3) Pledged to annually publish the college completion rates for student demographic groups and highlight successful strategies for closing the achievement gap as part of the new Indiana College Completion Report.

Strategies to close the achievement gap

The Commission is working on multiple fronts to build momentum for increasing college access and completion for all Hoosier students, including:

- 1) Pending legislation that would provide every Indiana college student with a clear semester-by-semester roadmap to earning their degree and more financial aid for staying on track to graduate.
- 2) Performance funding incentives that reward Indiana colleges for graduating more at-risk students in addition to improvements in overall degree completion.
- 3) Better guidance and support for low-income and first-generation college students, as illustrated by recent changes to the state’s 21st Century Scholars program that ensure students complete specific steps at each grade level to help them plan, prepare and pay for college.

Learn more about the Commission’s “Reaching Higher, Achieving More” strategic plan at www.che.in.gov.