



June 8, 2020

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
1201 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and Labor  
2462 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &  
Pensions  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, &  
Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, Chairman Alexander, and Ranking Member Murray:

This letter is submitted on behalf of these 24 undersigned members and partners of the Postsecondary Data Collaborative (PostsecData). PostsecData is comprised of organizations committed to the use of high-quality postsecondary data to improve student success and advance educational equity.

PostsecData recognizes the unprecedented challenges facing our nation's students and our higher education system as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health crisis. While the full impact on postsecondary education is still unknown, we do know that colleges and universities have closed campus doors, program instruction has shifted to online modalities, and students have faced enormous and unforeseen challenges to completing the Spring semester and continuing on their path to a degree or credential. As Congress considers additional measures to address the effects of COVID-19 on higher education, policymakers must have timely data to answer questions about how the broad and sudden shift to distance education has impacted college access, persistence, and success.

In this time of crisis and eventual recovery, the overall importance of accurate, timely data cannot be understated— it will serve an essential resource for lawmakers to craft evidence-based policies to support students through the public health crisis and beyond. At minimum, policymakers need timely information on how the initial shift to online learning and eventual shift back to campus-based or hybrid instruction will affect postsecondary students' enrollment status and progression.

**We ask Congress to utilize our existing postsecondary data infrastructure to answer these important questions by adding new fields to the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) using definitions from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).** By adding elements to NSLDS needed to denote if students were enrolled in distance education before March 2020 and how students move into and out of distance education moving forward, we can provide policymakers with timely, responsive data



to inform future investments and better target interventions. This approach would minimize additional burdens for institutions, who are already required to report the number of students who are enrolled exclusively in distance education, partially in distance education, or not in distance education annually to IPEDS, and already report information on enrollment, persistence, and completion to NSLDS.

**Congress should also require the Department of Education (ED) to use these data to publicly report summary statistics on metrics including enrollment, Pell Grant and loan receipt, and withdrawals by distance status to inform responsive policymaking.**

While this distance education data would be limited to students who receive Title IV funding due to the lack of a more comprehensive postsecondary data network, it would provide policymakers with a much clearer picture of the public health crisis' impact on students and help identify opportunities to support them in the semesters and years to come.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Mamie Voight, vice president of policy research at the Institute for Higher Education Policy ([mvoight@ihep.org](mailto:mvoight@ihep.org) or 202-587-4967).

Sincerely,

AccuRounds  
Achieve Atlanta  
Advance CTE  
Alloy Engineering Co & METAL  
Center for American Progress  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce  
Data Quality Campaign  
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce  
Higher Learning Advocates  
Institute for Higher Education Policy  
Knowledge Alliance  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National College Attainment Network  
Naugatuck Adult Education  
New America Higher Education Program  
Nexus Research and Policy Center  
Public Insight Data Corporation  
Skills2Compete - Colorado  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
The Education Trust  
The Institute for College Access and Success  
Third Way  
Women Employed