



MHEC

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

**Facilitating the Sharing of Student
Information in Maryland's
Near Completer Incentive Plan and
Communication Campaign**

#9761

January 2014

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BACKGROUND

Section 5 of the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013 states the following:

That, on or before December 1, 2013, the Maryland Higher Education Commission shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly, regarding obstacles and barriers, if any, toward facilitating the sharing of student information among institutions of higher education in the State in furtherance of the communication campaign required under § 11-209 of the Education Article.

In December 2013, a “Statewide Near Completer Incentive Plan and Communication Campaign” was submitted to the Governor and General Assembly by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), as Report #9499. Near Completers are defined as students who have completed some college credits but do not have a college degree and are no longer attending an institution of higher education. In Maryland, the primary focus for Near Completers is on former community college students who have earned at least 45 credit hours and former students at senior higher education institutions who have earned at least 90 credit hours.

MHEC’s report included an analysis of the State’s capacity and readiness to systematically identify and re-enroll Near Completers, including existing institutional and student incentives and potential areas for the expansion of support, including financial aid. The report also outlined plans for a statewide Near Completer communication campaign, including the development of a network of centralized and campus-based contacts, market research, communication media, messaging, budget and resources, and a timeline for implementation.

Building on this work, the purpose of this present report is to identify potential obstacles and barriers that have been identified (or that are anticipated) in the implementation of the State’s Near Completer incentive plan and communication campaign.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Prior to the enactment of the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013 on July 1, 2013, MHEC was engaged (and continues to be engaged) in the statewide coordination of the One Step Away (OSA) grant program. OSA provides funding to support both institutional and student incentives for the identification, re-enrollment, progression, and graduation of Near Completers. Eight four-year institutions in Maryland are currently participating in this grant program, with a second round of four or five additional institutions to be added in FY14. To date, no major obstacles or barriers have been identified by MHEC staff

or by the participating OSA institutions themselves with respect to the sharing of student information on Near Completers, including the identification of eligible students, institutional outreach (including obtaining current contact information for students who have left), or subsequent re-enrollment at the institution of origin.

Since Maryland institutions that are currently engaged in Near Completer initiatives are not sharing student transcripts or student records from institution-to-institution, no immediate Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) issues or concerns have been raised. Many institutions have been using National Student Clearinghouse data to determine if students who have left their institution have subsequently re-enrolled and/or graduated from another higher education institution. The Clearinghouse only releases student directory-level information that confirms an individual's attendance or degrees. (In addition to obtaining data on Near Completers, institutions commonly use the Clearinghouse for a wide range of student verification and reporting services.)

Further, MHEC has assisted some institutions with securing mailing addresses for previously enrolled college and university students through the use of Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) records, which are commonly used by MHEC's Office of Student Financial Assistance. Again, only student directory-level information is exchanged through these methods. Interestingly, many institutions have found through their OSA Near Completer grant work that campus email addresses are still relatively reliable methods for contacting former students, as they have maintained access to their email account even though they are no longer enrolled at the institution.

Since primary outreach efforts for reach Near Completers to date have typically been coordinated by individual institutions and targeted toward their own formerly enrolled students, protocols for the sharing of student information have been relatively straightforward and aligned with existing institutional policies and practices. As the State's Near Completer program matures and expands, as there is more cross-institutional collaboration, and as Near Completers potentially decide to finish their degrees at different institutions than their institution of origin, the issues behind the sharing of student information may become more complex. For example, State regulations and institutional policies and practices would have to be examined and potentially modified in order to allow for a student to be considered a Near Completer and attend another institution other than their institution of origin. However, similar to the State's reverse transfer initiative (Associate Degree Award for Pre-degree Transfer Students, or ADAPTS), special protocols and procedures, and capacity can be developed as necessary over time to allow Near Completer students to release their transcripts from one institution to another or to MHEC.

This is an issue that MHEC will continue to track as it works with individual institutions to support their Near Completer campaigns through OSA, and as it works across institutions to facilitate the statewide implementation of the Near Completer incentive plan and communication campaign.