



SREB's Strategy to Increase Success for Underserved Student Populations

Defining Postsecondary Student Success

The mission of the Southern Regional Education Board is to guide and support states as they advance all levels of education in order to improve the social and economic vitality of the 16-state region. At the postsecondary level, this entails a deep commitment to student success.

SREB defines student success as increased college access and completion rates for postsecondary credentials that lead to higher wages for adults in the SREB region. This involves a focused effort on student retention, progression and graduation, as well as a clear understanding of how well graduates are prepared to enter the workforce and begin careers after earning their postsecondary credential.

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This policy brief is one of three covering Postsecondary Student Success, Equity and Inclusion. For more information, please contact stevie.lawrence@sreb.org or visit SREB.org/completion.

Building capacity for postsecondary attainment — so that states and the people in them prosper — has been the heart of SREB’s mission since its founding. Today, SREB reaffirms this commitment, articulating a specific focus on success for groups who have been historically underserved by higher education: Black, Hispanic and Native American students, rural students, and those who come from low-income families or would be the first in their families to attend college.

In addition to SREB’s longstanding and more recent programs to support student success, we are pursuing new strategies — and funding and partners to support them.

Foundational to SREB’s mission is the vision a Southern region where *every student* has access to high-quality education opportunities that build on the rich diversity of the region. This means it is crucial to consider student success through a lens of diversity, equity and inclusion. This third in a three-brief series on SREB’s approach to postsecondary student success outlines how SREB’s postsecondary strategies will expand student success for targeted student populations in the South. (The full series is at [SREB.org/completion](https://www.sreb.org/completion).)

Ongoing SREB Programs to Support Student Success

College and Career Readiness

Student success in postsecondary education relies on readiness — being prepared to succeed in college-level studies. SREB has offered [broad and deep support](#) for states as they implemented readiness standards to align expectations from high school to college. This includes convening leaders to share practices and policy, tracking and reporting on what works, and training educators to lead students to higher levels.

SREB worked with expert state educators to develop [Readiness Courses](#) that get students the preparation they need during high school. The alternative — college remedial courses — costs families and slows students’ progress toward degrees.

The recognition that readiness is fundamental to college student success led SREB to expand its work in the 1980s from higher education into K-12. For decades, SREB school improvement services have helped schools focus on rigorous career pathways that incorporate college-ready academics. Today, SREB helps states [align education with local workforce demands](#) and drive for continuous improvement.



Higher Education Policy and Data

SREB convenes policymakers around barriers to raising educational attainment, in forums that provide insight, inspiration and actionable data.

Commissions chaired by governors have spearheaded progress on expanding graduate programs, connecting schools, colleges and the workplace, funding and accountability, and student success and college completion. More recently, SREB commissions have brought forth recommendations on [community colleges](#) and [teacher preparation](#), and a [Dual Enrollment](#) Initiative Advisory Panel is studying solutions to improve equity and quality in a multi-year initiative.

In response to state priorities, SREB also brings together higher ed professionals who have made important progress by collaborating around nursing education, college access marketing, counseling for college and careers, educational technology and other concerns.

Data and state policy profiles often form the basis for these discussions. [The Fact Book on Higher Education](#) is a leading reference for reliable, comparable data on trends in population, enrollment, finances and completion. Its foundation is the SREB-State Data Exchange of state higher ed professionals working to align data elements across states. To help leaders enact change, SREB supports decision-making with annual state profiles on college [affordability](#) data, policy briefs, reports on state progress and custom research for legislators.

College Access Programs

Academic Common Market

SREB's [Academic Common Market](#) is a program for college students who want to pursue degrees not offered by public institutions in their state — a hub for states, universities and college students to share access to uncommon degree programs. Students can sometimes enroll in out-of-state institutions that offer specialized degree programs and pay in-state tuition rates. More than 100 colleges and universities offer over 2,200 undergraduate and graduate opportunities.

Regional Contract Program

SREB's [Regional Contract Program](#) is a tuition-savings program for students pursuing professional health degrees. Qualified students may pursue degrees at participating out-of-state universities, paying in-state tuition at public institutions and reduced tuition at private ones. Eligible students in participating states can earn degrees in dentistry, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatry and veterinary medicine.

States have an opportunity to expand the number of health professionals who serve their communities without the high cost of building their own specialized health programs. More than 18,500 students have gained the opportunity to prepare for these professions at reduced tuition rates. SREB is the fiscal agent and handles administrative duties for participating states.

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

A collaboration of states is making it easier and safer for students to find and pursue online college courses. The [State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements](#) make it easier for states to regulate interstate distance education and eliminate approval costs for colleges and universities that are often passed to students.

Accreditors, government agencies and higher education organizations developed nationwide reciprocity agreements, with states responsible for authorizing education offered to their residents from institutions in other states. The SARA system:

- Broadens offerings and lowers costs for students
- Saves institutions from seeking approvals for their classes and degree programs on a case-by-case basis
- Allows states to focus on oversight of their own institutions



SARA is overseen by a national council and administered by the four regional higher education compacts: MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and WICHE.

Open Educational Resources

[Open educational resources](#) are high-quality teaching, learning and research materials that are freely accessible to all. Using OER in K-12 and postsecondary education creates more accessible and equitable educational opportunities. Open licensing allows educators, students and institutions to customize and share resources — from a single lesson plan to entire textbooks — without cost or copyright restrictions.

State leaders, postsecondary institutions and educators are working across state lines to promote the adoption of open educational resources to help millions of students access lessons and textbooks that are free for students — and easy for faculty to personalize to engage students with fresh, relevant content.

With renewed support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the four regional higher education compacts — the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education — have joined to provide policy leaders, institution leaders, researchers and faculty with research and tools to support the use of these openly licensed materials.

The four compacts — representing 49 states, two territories and six affiliates — are leveraging their longstanding networks of policymakers (governors, legislators, community leaders and higher education leaders) to identify and implement strategies that can scale OER, including for dual enrollment. Specific OER solutions may vary by state, and the compacts will work with each state to find ways to sustain open educational resources across their colleges and universities.

Initiatives to Diversify College Faculty and the P-12 Teaching Force

More than one-third of America's college students are people of color. But racial and ethnic minorities make up only small fractions of college faculty. Percentages of Black and Hispanic college faculty members are not keeping pace with the changing student demographics in many states, according to SREB's [16 state profiles and regional data](#) on student and faculty diversity. In 2017-18 only about 9.2% of full- and part-time faculty members were Black and 5.1% were Hispanic at public four-year institutions in the 16-state SREB region. In those same colleges and universities, 17.9% of undergraduate students were Black and 16.1% Hispanic.

The [SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program](#) is working to increase the number of underrepresented minority students who earn doctorates and choose to become faculty at colleges and universities. Since its founding in 1993, the program has supported more than 1,800 scholars attending 107 institutions in more than 30 states.

The Doctoral Scholars Program provides multiple layers of support — not only financial assistance and research funding, but also career counseling, job postings and a scholar directory for networking and recruiting. Mentoring and advocacy for scholars is crucial, and support continues into the early career stage as graduates become faculty members. And each fall, more than 1,000 scholars and young faculty members convene to learn from and support one another at the [Institute on Teaching and Mentoring](#).



In addition to increasing the diversity of college faculty, SREB also has an initiative to increase the diversity, quality and quantity of the P-12 teacher workforce. SREB helps state leaders address teacher shortages and improve policies related to teacher preparation, certification, compensation and professional growth.

Emergency certifications — temporary licenses issued to people with little or no teacher training — are at an all-time high. And [14 of the 16 states](#) are seeing declines in the number of new teacher candidates graduating from preparation programs. Only 4% of high school students expressed the intent to pursue a career in education, ACT reported in 2018. State leaders will need to find long-term solutions if they are to increase the quantity, quality and diversity of our teachers. A complex web of policies and effects is at play, none of which can be addressed in isolation: inadequate pay, school budget cuts, declining respect for the profession. This will take educators and leaders coming together to review state policies across the teacher career continuum, with the goal of making the profession more attractive and respected. Such policies would address teacher preparation, recruitment, certification, induction, compensation, growth, retention and advancement.

Four states have completed these reviews, creating plans to adjust and redesign policies with a holistic approach. SREB is facilitating those conversations, sharing a [growing inventory of research and recommendations](#) on teacher workforce policy.

New SREB Strategies for Targeted Student Success

In addition to continuing its focus on research and state-level policy to increase college readiness, access and completion, SREB plans to launch initiatives to increase postsecondary access and success specifically for students from rural or low-income backgrounds, students who would be the first in their families to attend college, as well as Black, Latino and Native American students in the South.

Student Success Advisory Council

Retaining minority students in higher education: A framework for success mapped five key components to get students into and through college: financial aid, recruitment and admissions, academic services, curriculum and instruction, and student services, including campus climate. SREB is developing a Student Success Advisory Council to examine existing policies around student success and determine their effectiveness in supporting students from low-income or rural backgrounds, as well as Black, American Indian, Hispanic and first-generation students.



SREB will convene leaders, including state higher education executive officers, college and university faculty, leaders and scholars. This group will identify challenges, shared interests, and recommend changes in policy and practice to support the retention, graduation and workforce entry of Native American, Hispanic and Black students, as well as first-generation students and those from low-income families or rural areas. This work will support SREB states in fulfilling critical employment demands as they seek to build a stronger economy. The SREB Student Success Advisory Council will:

1. Facilitate challenging conversations on how to improve policies, statewide initiatives and associated services that support the retention, graduation and workforce entry of students as they earn postsecondary credentials of value.
2. Provide custom research and facilitate in-state and regional convenings focused on improving student success outcomes.
3. Develop recommendations and create action plans for state and institutional policy to promote student success.

SREB believes that student success requires an ongoing conversation among those who develop state policies for higher education, provide leadership for the region's colleges and universities, and work with students daily, helping them persist in postsecondary education. The initial work will focus on the following questions:

- What are the best practices for increasing postsecondary student enrollment?

- What are the best practices for increasing postsecondary student retention?
- What are the best practices for increasing postsecondary student graduation?
- What are the best practices for increasing successful workforce entry after receiving a postsecondary credential?
- How do these practices vary based on student demographics, specifically for Black, Hispanic and Native American students, first-generation college students, and those from low-income families or rural communities?

The work of this council will bridge research and practice in order to create more equitable student outcomes. This council and the resulting report will establish a strong foundation for institutional and state work in the postsecondary sector.

SREB HBCU-MSI Collaborative

The HBCU-MSI Collaborative seeks to increase SREB's efforts to build strategic partnerships with minority-serving institutions. The collaborative creates partnerships with agencies, educational and philanthropic organizations to increase equity and access in higher education throughout the 16-state region, while building capacity and competitiveness for historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions.

The collaborative's executive committee includes:

- Larry Robinson, President, Florida A & M University, Chair
- Roslyn Clark-Artis, President, Benedict College, Co-Chair
- Derek Gilmore, Executive Vice President, Stillman College
- Charles Gibbs, Chief of Staff & Vice President for University Affairs, Clark-Atlanta University

The role of the committee is to act as an advisory body for the HBCU-MSI Collaborative, assisting SREB's leadership in the strategic planning and execution of goals and objectives created to enhance collaborative efforts with HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions.

Rural Student Initiative

SREB is well positioned to enhance college success opportunities for students from rural areas. Through its networks of higher education leaders and trusted partners, SREB plans to create a network of rural institutions committed to enhancing their efforts in student support from a variety of perspectives. This network will help students develop and strengthen their skills, complete a postsecondary credential and enter the workforce ready and able to meet the employment demands of the future.

The project was conceived with the following objectives:

1. Assemble leaders in postsecondary education, business and industry, and civic and community organizations into networked improvement communities to redefine college success strategies for students from low-income and rural communities.
2. Generate a model of promising innovations that can be implemented at rural postsecondary institutions to increase college success.
3. Identify a cohort of partnering postsecondary educational institutions to implement the promising innovations identified by the networked improvement communities.
4. Develop a process to assist rural postsecondary institutions in building capacity in the areas of student success, teaching and learning, and the use of predictive analytics, with the goal of improving retention, graduation and employment rates for the students these institutions serve.
5. Generate a report that describes the promising innovations in college success, which can be used as a guide for increasing success for rural, low-income students around the nation.

SREB also proposes to develop an assessment tool for college leaders to identify student success issues that require attention to improve outcomes for students from rural communities and low-income backgrounds. Building on assessment tools developed for SREB's school improvement work, this assessment will: (1) identify a problem of practice or need; (2) determine root causes or drivers; (3) establish goals and determine measures; (4) develop action plans; (5) test actions; (6) adopt broadly, adapt and retest, or abandon; and (7) implement, monitor progress, and adapt. Once the student success issues are identified, SREB will help institution leaders assemble network improvement communities to address the challenges. These will be real conversations leading to real change.

As institutions identify their areas of need, SREB plans to provide mini-grants for campuses to develop pilot programs. The rural network as well as this funding will allow institutions to provide a stipend for administrators, staff or faculty leading the work to create innovations that will lead to greater student success.

College Access Guide

A new SREB College Access Guide will provide a comprehensive manual for parents and students to navigate the postsecondary application, selection and entry process. This guide will be a key component of SREB's focus on student success, a resource that can be used directly by students, parents and educators to help ensure that high schoolers are prepared for life after graduation. First-generation, low-income, rural and minority students are a key inspiration in developing this guide, as these students often have less access to information, advising, exposure and other direct support. Preparing for and completing a postsecondary credential will position these students to establish lifelong careers that provide for the life they desire.

Staff collected advice for students starting in eighth grade and extending through the first year of college. The guide is designed to expand student awareness of the different types of postsecondary education and its benefits as they begin the transition to a career. It will equip students with the resources to make informed decisions to achieve their goals, including advice on:

- Preparing for higher education and career pathways
- Financial planning and aid options
- Planning and setting transition goals
- Staying on track to complete a credential or degree
- Making the most of experiences along the way

SREB plans to develop an interactive online format, with advice for students who take paths other than a bachelor's degree program, such as community or technical college, industry training and certification, apprenticeship or the military.

Partnering with SREB

To support our new student success initiatives, or expansion of our initiatives to diversify college faculty and the P-12 teacher workforce, contact Stevie L. Lawrence II, Vice President, Postsecondary Education, (404) 879-5617 or stevie.lawrence@sreb.org.



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Staff biographies are available at [SREB.org/PostsecondaryStaff](https://www.sreb.org/postsecondary-staff).

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