

RE-IMAGINING OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING:

Using Metrics to Foster Higher Education Equity



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STATE LEADERS HAVE BEEN REVISING THE FORMULAS THAT DETERMINE HOW FUNDING IS DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE COLLEGES IN THEIR STATES.

Driven by a growing economic need across the U.S. for more college graduates, and an interest in holding colleges accountable for graduating the students they enroll, more than 30 states have adopted outcomes-based or performance-based funding models that allocate some funds based, in part, on the number or proportion of students who earn a degree. While the models vary from state to state, typically a state will tie all or some portion of higher education funding to specific and measurable student success metrics.

Unfortunately, many of these models have done little to improve resource equity or boost student success overall. The institutional haves tend to remain the winners under these formulas — because they had more money to begin with. Many models favor rich and predominantly White institutions that are better-placed to meet these metrics over less-resourced peer institutions that serve more students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.¹

Moreover, there's little evidence that existing outcomes-based funding (OBF) policies have been effective at closing enrollment and completion gaps between student groups. In some cases, they led states to cut funding at underresourced institutions; in others, they led institutions to reduce access and increase selectivity by admitting fewer low-income students and students of color.

In theory, these policies are meant to get institutions to improve outcomes — by providing clear goals and rewarding those who meet them. But in practice, they often do more harm than good, perpetuating resource inequities that have long deprived certain student groups of an equitable chance at postsecondary success.

With more intentional design and implementation, however, OBF policies could be a lever for achieving racial and economic justice in higher education. State-funding formulas that provide enough incentives and resources to help colleges successfully serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds would go a long way toward closing attainment gaps and putting states and institutions on a path to equitable educational opportunity and outcomes for all students.

This report analyzes how well existing state policies address equity concerns and makes recommendations for designing and implementing OBF policies that better advance equity.

We examined all 50 states, as well as the territories of the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa, to see whether they had actively funded OBF policies in fiscal years 2017-2020. We found that 33 states had allocated funding to two-year or four-year public institutions (or both) through at least one OBF policy. In all, 26 states have an OBF policy for four-year institutions, and 29 states have an OBF policy for two-year institutions.

To better understand how these policies address equity, we examined the extent to which they prioritize the enrollment and success of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, two groups that are consistently underserved by most colleges and universities.

1. Fry, R. and Cilluffo, A. (2019). *A Rising Share of Undergraduates Are From Poor Families, Especially at Less Selective Colleges*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/05/22/a-rising-share-of-undergraduates-are-from-poor-families-especially-at-less-selective-colleges/>

WE IDENTIFIED FIVE EQUITY-FOCUSED METRICS IN STATE OBF POLICIES:



ENROLLMENT
of students of color



ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS
from low-income backgrounds



SUCCESS
of students of color



SUCCESS OF STUDENTS
from low-income backgrounds



CAMPUS RACIAL
climate

These metrics are key to creating an equity-focused, outcomes-based funding policy which prioritizes both access (*i.e.*, enrollment) and success (*i.e.*, retention and graduation) for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. While we consider the inclusion of these metrics to be essential, how they are deployed is equally key. So, we also examined whether the metrics are mandatory, optional, or weighted.

Some states let institutions select their own metrics. While this gives institutions flexibility and autonomy, it can be counterproductive if institutions fail to focus on equity in their selection. States can incentivize institutions to focus on equity by making metrics mandatory and/or by weighting metrics, that is, assigning a different point or percentage value to metrics pertaining to race and low-income status. The more a metric is worth, the more likely institutions are to focus on it. When equity metrics determine but a small portion of the funding pool, institutions are far less inclined to focus on them.

With the right design and implementation, OBF policies have the potential to be catalysts of equity at the student and institutional levels. To do this, they must recognize the longstanding limitations placed on students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, and on the institutions that enroll the majority of them; consider an institution's context and award more funding to institutions that have less, so they will be better equipped to support their students; disaggregate metrics by race and ethnicity to highlight inequities; and hold institutions accountable for what happens between enrollment and graduation (and, in some cases, thereafter).

The following design and implementation changes to OBF models can also help ensure that institutions are supporting students of color and students from low-income backgrounds holistically:

10 STEPS FOR DESIGN



DESIGN
STEP 1

MAKE EQUITY METRICS MANDATORY.



DESIGN
STEP 2

USE EQUITY METRICS THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS.



DESIGN
STEP 3

USE EQUITY METRICS THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF RACE.



DESIGN
STEP 4

GIVE ADDITIONAL WEIGHT FOR ENROLLING STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR.



DESIGN
STEP 5

DISCOURAGE INSTITUTIONS FROM REDUCING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY DEGREES OR CREDENTIALS FOR STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR.



DESIGN
STEP 6

INVEST IN STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGIES.



DESIGN
STEP 7

INCENTIVIZE A POSITIVE CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE.



DESIGN
STEP 8

AVOID INSTABILITY AND APPROACH FUNDING CUTS (IF UNAVOIDABLE) WITH EQUITY.



DESIGN
STEP 9

REWARD INSTITUTIONS FOR INCREMENTAL PROGRESS TOWARD LARGER GOALS.



DESIGN
STEP 10

INVEST A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF STATE FUNDS THROUGH THE OBF FORMULA.

5 STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION



STEP 1

DIVERSIFY STATE OFFICER RANKS WITH EQUITY ADVOCATES WHO ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR AND GRADUATES OF UNDERREPRESENTED INSTITUTIONS, LIKE HBCUs AND MSIs.



STEP 2

SEEK THE INPUT OF INSTITUTIONS THAT SERVE STUDENTS OF COLOR AND STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS IN OBF DESIGN AND CHANGES.



STEP 3

INVEST IN INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF UNDER-RESOURCED INSTITUTIONS.



STEP 4

PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO BETTER ADDRESS AND PLAN FOR EQUITY ISSUES.



STEP 5

HOLD INSTITUTIONS HARMLESS IN INITIAL (OR TRANSITION) YEARS OF OBF AND MATCH PREVIOUS-YEAR FUNDING.

It's time to trade funding models that favor colleges that have traditionally received more than their fair share of resources for an improved approach that fosters racial and economic justice by prioritizing students from low-income backgrounds and students of color and the colleges that are most committed to their success.

RE-IMAGINING OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING:

Using Metrics to Foster Higher Education Equity

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COLLEGE STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FACULTY ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE DEMANDING GREATER RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION, where longstanding inequities create barriers for students who are Black, Latino, or from low-income backgrounds to earn a postsecondary degree. They join advocates and protestors around the world who are demanding change across sectors — criminal justice, health care, social services, and education — collectively calling for a more just society. In response, policymakers and higher education leaders have made public statements confirming their commitment to racial justice and equity more broadly.

Statements, however, are just a start. What matters most are the policy decisions that directly impact the lives of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

One set of policy decisions that higher education advocates are calling into question is how state leaders allocate resources and funds. Consider that each year, states decide how to distribute the over \$290 billion they spend on higher education annually.¹ And year after year, a disproportionate share of those dollars go to the colleges that already have the most resources, primarily state flagships that in many instances under-enroll students from low-income backgrounds, Black students, and Latino students.² Meanwhile, the colleges that enroll the majority of these students, *i.e.*, community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and regional public colleges, are left to do more with much less. Additionally, states generally have disinvested from higher education in recent decades. The average state spent \$1,502 (16%) less per student in 2018 than in 2008. Institutions have responded by increasing tuition and shifting the burden onto students. Over those 10 years, the annual published tuition at four-year public colleges rose by \$2,651 (36%) on average.³ Decisions such as these only perpetuate the longstanding racial and socioeconomic inequities that plague our higher education system.

The good news is that over the last decade state leaders have been revisiting the formulas that determine how funding is distributed among the colleges in their states. Driven by an interest in holding colleges responsible for actually graduating the students they enroll and an economic need to have more college-educated residents, more than 30 states now distribute some funds based in part on whether students earn a degree. These outcomes-based or performance-based funding models differ from state to state, but typically a state will tie all or a portion of higher education funding to specific and measurable student success metrics. California, for example, ties a portion of community college funding to success metrics for students from low-income backgrounds. Wisconsin links funding for its technical colleges, in part, to the success of incarcerated students. Some outcomes-based funding policies are adopted and overseen by the state legislature, and others by a state higher education board. In each case, institutions that perform better on established metrics get more funding than those that do worse.

Unfortunately, the new funding models have done little to fix resource inequities or improve student success overall. Too often, better resourced colleges are the winners under these formulas, which continue to award more money to them than to peer institutions serving more students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.⁴ Outcomes-based funding policies in some states have led institutions to become more selective and to push students to earn certificates instead of associates or bachelor's degrees.⁵ State officials and staff at 18 public institutions in Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee, reported raising admissions requirements, establishing general restrictions, increasing selective student recruitment, or increasing non-need-based financial aid as a result of outcomes-based funding.⁶ Some experts suggest that outcomes-based funding may only be effective in limited circumstances and recommend that states instead emphasize capacity building and equity.⁷

Moreover, there's little evidence that existing outcomes-based funding models have made an impact on closing enrollment and completion gaps between student groups. In some cases, outcomes-based funding presented an opportunity for states to cut costs and for institutions to raise their status in national ranking systems by increasing completion rates, but not necessarily by successfully serving more students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. One study found that outcomes-based funding models, on the whole, do not meaningfully affect the enrollment of students of color in any way.⁸ In fact, minority-serving institutions in states with outcomes-based funding lost significant per-student funding compared with both non-MSIs in those same states and MSIs in states without outcomes-based funding.⁹

In theory, outcomes-based funding policies are meant to get institutions to improve. They provide clear expectations and reward institutions for meeting them. But in practice, these policies, at least as currently designed, often do more harm than good, perpetuating the same resource inequities that have for decades deprived certain groups of students of an equitable chance at postsecondary success. With intentional design and implementation, however, outcomes-based funding policies could be a lever for achieving racial and economic justice in higher education. State-funding formulas that provide enough incentives and resources to help colleges successfully serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds would go a long way toward closing attainment gaps and putting both states and institutions on a path to equitable educational opportunity and outcomes for all students.

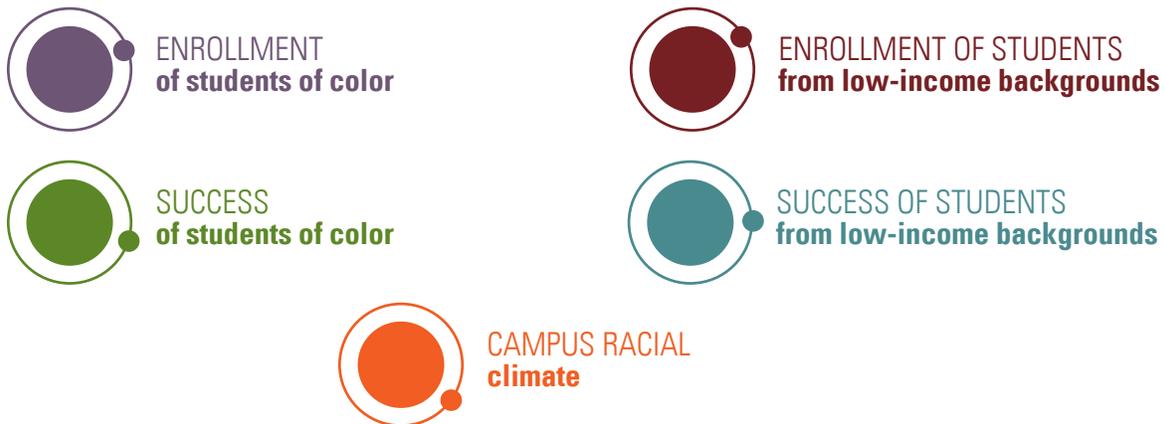
This report introduces five key metrics to help state leaders develop equity-focused outcomes-based funding policies. It analyzes how well existing state policies address equity concerns and concludes with specific recommendations for both designing and implementing outcomes-based funding policies that advance equity. It also includes a [state-focused handbook](#) or practice guide that takes a closer look at the policies in three states: Illinois, Ohio, and Tennessee.

5 METRICS FOR EQUITY-FOCUSED OBF POLICIES

For this report, we examined all 50 states, as well as the territories of the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa, to determine whether they had actively funded outcomes-based funding (OBF) policies in fiscal years 2017-2020. We found that 33 states had allocated funding to two-year or four-year public institutions (or both) through at least one OBF policy. In all, 26 states have an OBF policy for four-year institutions and 29 states have an OBF policy for two-year institutions.

Next, to better understand how these policies address equity, we examined the level to which they prioritize the enrollment and success of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, two groups that are underserved by colleges and universities. Recent Education Trust research found that Black and Latino students, in particular, are underrepresented at public institutions.¹⁰ And although more students from low-income backgrounds are enrolling in college, they often require additional resources and support. What's more, one study found that the total share of undergraduate students who come from poor families increased from 12% in 1996 to 20% in 2016.¹¹

We identified five equity-focused metrics within state OBF policies:



These metrics are key to creating an equity-focused, outcomes-based funding policy that prioritizes both access (*i.e.*, enrollment) and success (*i.e.*, retention, and ultimately, graduation) for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. (See key terms and considerations.) While we consider the inclusion of these metrics to be essential, how they are deployed is equally as important. Therefore, we also examined whether the metrics were mandatory, optional, or weighted. Institutions are required to adhere to mandatory metrics, but can choose optional ones. Weighted metrics have additional value, meaning that a strong institutional performance on them would garner greater advantage or funding.

KEY TERMS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Students of color refers to any student group that is non-White. This may include Black students, Latino/a students, Asian American students, Native students, or students who are indigenous to a specific state (Native American or Native Hawaiian).

Students from low-income backgrounds refers to Pell Grant eligibility. We used this as a proxy for students from low-income backgrounds, which is in line with most federal, state, and institutional practices for determining students' socioeconomic status. We also considered other indicators, like participation in state need-based financial aid programs or federal programs such as TRIO.

Enrollment refers to the number of students currently enrolled and receiving credits. It can be expressed as a headcount or a percentage of the number of students.

Success includes both retention and completion. It can be measured in several ways, *e.g.*, the total number of credits accumulated, the number of developmental courses passed, the number of students who transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution or are awarded a credential.

Campus racial climate refers to the experiences of students of color on campus that impact their success. It can be measured by climate surveys, faculty and administrator diversity, the share of institutional aid based on financial need, the size of institutional endowment and share spent on institutional aid for underserved students, or the size of institutional budget and share spent on institutional aid for underserved students. (See textbox on Campus Racial Climate).

CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE

It is important that institutions and states create campus environments that are conducive to the success of students. In almost every state, Black and Latino students remain underrepresented in public higher education.¹² Campus racial climate is important for equity because it prioritizes the experience of students, and not just their presence on campus. Despite the advantage that attending college can provide, Black students who make it to college often face additional barriers. Some of these barriers include a limited opportunity to interact with faculty and curricula that are reflective of their cultural background and experience¹³; greater struggles paying for living expenses, books, and fees while in college¹⁴; not being able to talk to a counselor of color after experiencing racial discrimination and isolation¹⁵; and more. These barriers result in different outcomes for students of color and White students.



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EQUITY-FOCUSED OBF POLICIES WITHIN THE STATES

Common Equity Metrics

Student success metrics for students from low-income backgrounds are the most common of the five equity metrics used by states: 26 states measure and reward institutions for increasing the success of students from low-income backgrounds. Success metrics for students of color, however, exist in only 19 states. (See Table 1.)

Enrollment metrics are less prevalent: Only 10 states include them. (See Table 2.) Among those states, six have an enrollment metric for students of color. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin are the only states that have mandatory enrollment metrics for students of color, but even these are limited. For example, Wisconsin's enrollment metric for students of color is mandatory for four-year institutions but optional for two-year institutions. In Rhode Island, the enrollment of students of color is a metric for the University of Rhode Island (URI), but not for Rhode Island College (RIC) or the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). Pennsylvania has mandatory metrics for first-time freshmen who are Pell recipients or students of color, and optional metrics for the percentage of total students who are Pell recipients or students of color. In the other states where enrollment metrics for students of color have been used (Kansas, Tennessee, and Wisconsin's four-year system), institutions are allowed to opt in or create their own metrics. In such cases, the institutions are committing to increase access, even though the state has not required it.

Campus climate metrics are the most rare. Four state policies include or allow a measure of campus racial climate. (See Table 3.) Only Rhode Island's metric is mandatory. Both Rhode Island and Pennsylvania assess campus racial climate by measuring faculty diversity. On its own, this is a good, but insufficient metric, given that, in 2018, Black, Latino, and Indigenous faculty collectively were less than 13% of full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions.¹⁶ Many states collect data on campus diversity and climate. This is a step in the right direction but should be connected to funding to incentivize institutions to work on improving campus racial climate. (See Tables A, B, and C in the Appendix for a complete listing of states with OBF policies in two- and four-year colleges and states with equity metrics for race.)

Distinguishing "Equity" Populations

OBF policies differ in scope depending on the state, the policy, and the public institutions within the state. Several OBF policies have unique features that highlight their focus on equity. States often designate "special populations" to incentivize institutions to prioritize the success of specific student groups. In Wisconsin, the technical college system employs a "special population" metric that includes students of color, Pell Grant recipients, military veterans, incarcerated individuals, dislocated workers, and persons with disabilities. In Virginia, the two-year system allocates funding to "underserved populations," which include students who are first-generation college students, "minority," and Pell-eligible.

Many states use the general description "underrepresented minorities" or "nonmajority" students to represent students of color, but most states specifically name Black and Latino students, while some also name Native American students.¹⁷ Wisconsin's OBF policy for four-year institutions is unique in explicitly naming Southeast Asian students. Some states prioritize ethnic groups that reside there. For example, Montana's OBF policy prioritizes Native Americans, and Hawaii's policy prioritizes Native Hawaiian students.

The most common distinguisher of low-income status is Pell eligibility, which institutions can track using federal financial aid data. However, some states, like California, use state low-income aid eligibility as a distinguisher. This allows the state to account for undocumented students who do not apply for federal financial aid but do complete the state aid form. In New Mexico, the Student Aid Index, formerly Expected Family Contribution, gathered from FAFSA information is used to determine a student's low-income status. In Nevada, because there are many "working poor" who do not qualify for Title IV federal grant aid, the institutions may determine low-income student status independently of Title IV guidelines.

Using Choice to Encourage or Discourage Equity

Some states allow institutions to choose metrics. While this gives institutions flexibility and autonomy, it can be counterproductive if institutions do not focus on equity in their selection. In Florida, the system board chooses a metric on which all institutions will be measured. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the system board chose the metric, "Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded Without Excess Hours."¹⁸ Additionally, each institution's board selects the metric on which they will be measured. For example, Florida Gulf Coast University's board chose an equity-focused metric as their institutional choice metric: "number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Hispanic and African Americans."¹⁹ In Nevada, institutions are measured by mandatory metrics that are sector specific, but they have an additional choice metric related to the "economic development" of the state. For example, the University of Nevada-Reno uses psychology graduates for their economic development metric, while the University of Nevada-Las Vegas counts business and management graduates.

In Kansas, institutions abide by "performance agreements" with the state, where they choose metrics that are aligned with the state's strategic plan for higher education. The institutions have considerable autonomy in choosing the metrics that best align with their specific mission and scope, but they are under no obligation to focus those choice metrics on equity. In 2018, however, Kansas State University, Pittsburg State University, Wichita State University, Coffeyville Community College, Kansas City Kansas Community College, Flint Hills Technical College, Northwest Kansas Technical College, and Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology chose metrics focused on equity in access and/or success.

Benefits of Weighted Metrics

While choice metrics are one way of providing flexibility and autonomy to institutions, states can also incentivize institutions to focus on equity by weighting metrics, that is, assigning a different point value or percentage value to metrics pertaining to race and low-income status. The more a metric is worth, the more institutions are incentivized to focus on it. In Alabama's two-year system, an extra 25% weight is applied to the completion metric for every degree or certificate earned by an adult student (25 years or older), student of color, and Pell-eligible student. A 25% weight is awarded for each factor met, up to a maximum of 75%. Oregon's four-year institutions receive additional weight for every undergraduate and graduate degree earned by a student of color, student from a low-income background, rural student, and veteran student.

However, when equity metrics determine a small portion of the funding pool, institutions have less incentive to focus on them. In Montana, institutions' performance on equity metrics only determines 5% of institutions' total outcomes-based funding. Some states reduce or undermine these incentives even more by only tying a very limited percentage of their overall funding to their OBF policy. In North Carolina, for example, only 2% of overall funding for community colleges in the state goes to outcomes-based funding. It's unlikely that this would be enough to incentivize an institution to focus on equity.

TABLE 1 Success metrics across states

Success Metrics for Students of Color		Success Metrics for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds	
2-Year Institutions (14 states)	4-Year Institutions (16 states)	2-Year Institutions (22 states)	4-Year Institutions (20 states)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alabama Arkansas Colorado Hawaii Kansas* Kentucky Louisiana Montana Nevada New York Ohio Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* Virginia Washington 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arkansas Colorado Florida* Hawaii Kansas* Kentucky Louisiana Montana Nevada New Jersey New York Ohio Oregon Pennsylvania* Rhode Island (University of Rhode Island) Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alabama Arkansas California Colorado Florida Hawaii Illinois Indiana Kansas* Kentucky Louisiana Massachusetts Montana Nevada New Mexico New York Ohio Oklahoma Tennessee Outcomes-Based Funding Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* Utah Virginia Washington 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arkansas Colorado Florida* Hawaii Indiana Kansas* Kentucky Louisiana Montana Nevada New Mexico New York Ohio Oklahoma Oregon Pennsylvania* Rhode Island (University of Rhode Island) Tennessee Outcomes-Based Funding Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* Utah Wisconsin

* These states have metrics that are optional. Optional metrics are metrics that institutions may opt in to but are not required.

TABLE 2 Enrollment metrics across states

Enrollment Metrics for Students of Color		Enrollment Metrics for Students From Low-Income Backgrounds	
2-Year Institutions (3 states)	4-Year Institutions (6 states)	2-Year Institutions (4 states)	4-Year Institutions (8 states)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kansas* • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* • Wisconsin* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kansas* • Massachusetts • Pennsylvania* • Rhode Island (University of Rhode Island) • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* • Wisconsin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California • Kansas* • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* • Wisconsin* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida • Kansas* • Massachusetts • Michigan • New Jersey • Pennsylvania* • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* • Wisconsin

* These states have metrics that are optional. Optional metrics are metrics that institutions may opt in to but are not required.

TABLE 3 Campus climate metrics across states

2-Year Institutions (2 states)	4-Year Institutions (4 states)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kansas* • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kansas* • Pennsylvania* • Rhode Island (Rhode Island College) • Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)*

*These states have metrics that are optional. Optional metrics are metrics that institutions may opt in to but are not required.



HOW STATES CAN ADVANCE EQUITY IN OBF FORMULAS

With the right design and implementation, OBF policies have the potential to be catalysts of equity at the student and institutional levels. However, to do this, they must recognize the long-standing limitations placed on students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, as well as on the institutions that enroll the majority of these students.

An equity-focused OBF policy should consider an institution's context and award more funding to institutions that have less, so that they are better equipped to support their students. HBCUs and MSIs serve more students that would benefit the most from additional campus supports and resources, and, yet, they are often underfunded. Policies that threaten to reduce their resources even more would exacerbate this problem, and most importantly, take away already limited resources from students who need them the most.

In Ohio, for example, Central State University, the state's only public HBCU, received the lowest amount of funding per student in three of the six years of OBF (2019, 2018, 2014). In the other three years, the institution's per-student funding level was still consistently lower than that of most other four-year institutions. In some years, community colleges of similar size actually received higher OBF allocations than Central State. In the 2018-2019 year, Ohio State received \$5,690 in OBF per student, Central State received \$1,811 per student, and Washington State Community College received \$3,057 per student.

OBF metrics must also be disaggregated by race and ethnicity to address inequities. While many states have metrics for students from low-income backgrounds, many are still hesitant to explicitly address race. General metrics do not paint an accurate picture of the experiences or the needs of students of color.

Equity-focused OBF policies should also go beyond incentivizing the enrollment and academic outcomes of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Institutions should also be held accountable for what happens between access and attainment.

With these innovative changes, OBF models can ensure that institutions are not just enrolling and graduating students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, but truly supporting them holistically.

10 STEPS FOR DESIGN



DESIGN
STEP 1

MAKE EQUITY METRICS MANDATORY.

When equity metrics are optional, there is less likelihood that they will lead to institutional change. Moreover, it seems highly plausible that the campuses that opt out of equity metrics are those that are most in need of a greater focus on equity.



DESIGN
STEP 2

USE EQUITY METRICS THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS.

State OBF policies could set targets for institutions to enroll a certain percentage of students from low-income families. We recommend a minimum target of 20% or the average share of low-income families in the state, whichever is higher.²⁰ Annual OBF metrics can use incremental benchmarks, giving institutions a chance to work toward the target. Also, since Pell Grant eligibility alone may not be the best indicator of a student's income and need, it would be helpful to include students who fall just above the threshold for Pell eligibility. Having state-level data would also be useful, since Pell eligibility does not capture undocumented students' need because they do not have access to federal funding.



DESIGN
STEP 3

USE EQUITY METRICS THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF RACE.

Using income as a substitute for race will not bring about racial equity. Even when controlling for income and other relevant characteristics, racial gaps in enrollment and attainment still persist.²¹ Without disaggregation, it is impossible to adequately support students of color.



DESIGN
STEP 4

GIVE ADDITIONAL WEIGHT FOR ENROLLING STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR.

States can use weights or premiums to incentivize the enrollment and success of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. This recognizes the effort of institutions that do the lion's share of serving these students and entices other institutions to do their part as well.



DESIGN
STEP 5

DISCOURAGE INSTITUTIONS FROM REDUCING ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY DEGREES OR CREDENTIALS FOR STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR.

OBF should not allow institutions to game the system by changing whom they admit in order to increase outcomes. Instead, states can use OBF to prevent institutions from increasing selectivity by penalizing institutions that, for example, decrease their percentage of Pell Grant students by more than 5 percentage points over time. Additionally, OBF should not encourage HBCUs and MSIs to deviate from their missions by increasing their enrollment of White students to meet racial diversity metrics. Such actions would erode the already limited higher education opportunities for students of color. Finally, OBF policies should not reward institutions that increase outcomes by guiding students toward low-value credentials instead of high-quality degrees or steering them away from their educational goals.



DESIGN
STEP 6

INVEST IN STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGIES.

All too often, OBF policies increase the demand for better student outcomes without increasing actual support for the strategies that would increase students' success. States should dedicate funding to and provide guidance and directives on promising and evidence-based strategies that would increase student success on certain metrics. For example, states that have retention or credit accumulation metrics should provide guidance on high-quality advising,²² tutoring,²³ and career counseling programs.²⁴



DESIGN
STEP 7

INCENTIVIZE A POSITIVE CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE.

OBF can be used to reward institutions for fostering a positive campus climate for students of color and educating students on issues of race. Possible measurements and metrics include audits and assessments of faculty diversity; reviews of curricula/syllabi; supports such as events on diversity and inclusion; cultural and advocacy centers with extracurricular activities, and relevant policies, as well as reports of bias incidents or violence on campus. States can identify baselines and incremental goals by using established surveys on campus climate, academic self-concept, mentorship interactions, and the impact of diversity courses.



DESIGN
STEP 8

AVOID INSTABILITY AND APPROACH FUNDING CUTS (IF UNAVOIDABLE) WITH EQUITY.

States can reduce an institution's financial instability and volatility by limiting structural changes to OBF policies to every two to three years. Additionally, OBF policies should not include all-or-nothing cutoffs, which do not reward marginal gains and often result in steep one-year funding drops.



DESIGN
STEP 9

REWARD INSTITUTIONS FOR INCREMENTAL PROGRESS TOWARD LARGER GOALS.

OBF metrics should be aligned with larger state equity goals for enrollment and degree attainment, as well as goals related to workforce needs, and institutions should be rewarded for meeting various benchmarks along the way. As such, OBF policies should avoid harmful tactics that prevent institutions from being rewarded for incremental growth, such as absolute rankings, which unfairly pit institutions against one another; one-size-fits-all metrics, which ignore institutional demographics and resources; and punitive practices like rescinding an institution's recurring funds.



DESIGN
STEP 10

INVEST A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF STATE FUNDS THROUGH THE OBF FORMULA.

State OBF policies should allocate enough money to induce institutions to support students. When the amount of funding tied to OBF is a miniscule part of an institution's overall funding, there is no financial incentive to change behavior. Equity metrics in an underfunded system are just symbolic gestures.

5 STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION



DIVERSIFY STATE OFFICER RANKS WITH EQUITY ADVOCATES WHO ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR AND GRADUATES OF UNDERREPRESENTED INSTITUTIONS, LIKE HBCUs AND MSIs.

While OBF policies are enacted by state legislatures, they are typically implemented and overseen by appointed board members, higher education executive officers, and state administrators. Alternatively, these policies are sometimes adopted at the state higher education system level by a board and then, similarly, implemented and overseen by higher education executive officers and state administrators. If the state level leadership is not diverse, it will not be reflective of students of color or the institutions where these students are clustered. Including and empowering people of color in the design and implementation of OBF will help to ensure that such policies are informed by advocates who can speak firsthand about what it is like to navigate higher education as a Black, Latino, or Native student.



SEEK THE INPUT OF INSTITUTIONS THAT SERVE STUDENTS OF COLOR AND STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS IN OBF DESIGN AND CHANGES.

In addition to hiring and appointing people of color to leadership positions, states should also seek and rely on the input of institutions that enroll and support underserved students. It's important to consider how different types of institutions are likely to perform under a given OBF policy. Poorly designed policies will exacerbate existing funding inequities between selective flagships, regional institutions, community colleges, and minority-serving institutions.



INVEST IN INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF UNDER-RESOURCED INSTITUTIONS.

States should provide under-resourced institutions access to the technical assistance, technology, and human capital they will need to scale existing promising practices. States should invest in student-facing strategies, like providing access to high-quality advising and academic programs, and institutional capacity-building for improving abilities to gather, analyze, and act on data. States can also invest in increasing institutions' capacity to address students' basic needs such as food and housing, child care, and transportation.



PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO BETTER ADDRESS AND PLAN FOR EQUITY ISSUES.

States should engage expert advocates, scholars, and consultants to provide institutions with capacity building and training around advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on their campuses. Assistance might include support for student recruitment, faculty diversity, campus climate surveys, culturally responsive pedagogy, and diversity curricula. Institutions will also need assistance with planning, goal setting, and assessment.



HOLD INSTITUTIONS HARMLESS IN INITIAL (OR TRANSITION) YEARS OF OBF AND MATCH PREVIOUS-YEAR FUNDING.

Institutions need time to adjust to the new demands of OBF. States can provide a grace period when phasing in new requirements. During this time, states should allocate base funding based on the previous year's allocation, as institutions undergo the necessary strategic planning, hiring, budgeting, and programming to transition to an OBF environment. This is essential for under-resourced institutions working with less human, financial, and political capital.



① Storytelling

- Features / Story Fundamentals

Company / Branding

Interview / voice-over
Short documentary / film
Infographic

② Educational Videos

Infographic
Timeline
Legal...

Topic

8 weeks

RE-IMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING AND STUDENT SUPPORT

It's time to move away from higher education funding models that favor colleges and universities that have traditionally gotten more than their fair share of resources. Instead, there must be a new way of thinking, one that revisits funding formulas as a means of achieving racial and economic justice, by prioritizing students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, along with the colleges that are committed to their success.

In theory, OBF is meant to drive institutions to deliver the outcomes states demand. It puts a hard stake in the ground for establishing institutional performance expectations. However, OBF policies have inadvertently shined a light on existing inequities for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, and, in many instances, further defunded the already under-resourced institutions many of these students attend.

With some re-imagining, OBF policies centered on equity and informed by a state's student demographics, needs, and challenges could greatly improve higher education funding and support for the students who have been most underserved.

Imagine a state that works across sectors to reduce recidivism by incentivizing the success of formerly incarcerated students, or to support working families by providing premiums to institutions that provide child-care and transportation support to student parents. OBF policies can foster inclusivity and address students' food insecurity and other basic needs by rewarding institutions that accept SNAP benefits or Medicaid on campus. State higher education and labor offices can work together to identify future workforce shortages and weight metrics for enrollment and success in these programs. With the support of family services, OBF policies can set goals and benchmarks for the success and support of students in foster care and those who have aged out of the system.

Moreover, as states and institutions brace for drastic budget cuts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, centering equity in OBF will ensure that those institutions that are doing the hard work of educating students with the fewest resources are supported. State budgets will likely shrink as a result of COVID-19, and ensuring that key resources go to the students and institutions that need them most will matter more than ever. A million-dollar shortfall at an already under-resourced college could result in lost degree programs, jobs, and educational opportunity for students at a time when they need it most.

Fortunately, with competent leaders, appropriate policies, and sufficient resources aligned with equity, institutions can close completion gaps for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. Equity-focused OBF policies have the potential to ensure that higher education achieves its most important goal of creating opportunity, providing high-quality experiences, and producing successful outcomes for all students.

APPENDIX

TABLE A States with OBF policies for two-year colleges

State	Enrollment metric for students of color	Success metric for students of color	Enrollment metric for students from low-income backgrounds	Success metric for students from low-income backgrounds	Measure related to campus climate	Initial year
Alabama	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2018
Arkansas	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2017
California	None	None	Mandatory	Mandatory	None	2018
Colorado	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
Connecticut	None	None	None	None	None	2018
Florida	None	None	None	Weight	None	2015
Hawaii	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2016
Illinois	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2012
Indiana	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2003
Kansas	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	2001
Kentucky	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2017
Louisiana	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
Massachusetts	None	None	None	Weight	None	2014
Michigan	None	None	None	None	None	2005
Montana	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2013
Nevada	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2012
New Mexico	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2011
New York	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
North Carolina	None	None	None	None	None	1998
North Dakota	None	None	None	None	None	2013
Ohio	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2012
Oklahoma	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2012
Rhode Island	None	None	None	None	None	2016
Tennessee (Outcomes-Based Funding)	None	None	None	Weight	None	2010
Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	1978
Texas	None	None	None	None	None	2013
Utah	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2017
Virginia	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2015
Washington	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2010
Wisconsin Tech	Optional	None	Optional	None	None	2013

TABLE B States with outcomes-based funding policies for four-year colleges and universities

State	Enrollment metric for students of color	Success metric for students of color	Enrollment metric for students from low-income backgrounds	Success metric for students from low-income backgrounds	Measure related to campus climate	Initial year
Arkansas	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2017
Colorado	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
Connecticut	None	None	None	None	None	2018
Florida	None	Optional	Mandatory	Optional	None	2012
Hawaii	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2016
Indiana	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2003
Kansas	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	2001
Kentucky	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2017
Louisiana	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
Massachusetts	Mandatory	None	Mandatory*	None	None	2015
Michigan	None	None	Mandatory	None	None	2012
Montana	None	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2013
Nevada	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2012
New Jersey	None	Mandatory	Mandatory	None	None	2019
New Mexico	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2011
New York	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2014
North Dakota	None	None	None	None	None	2013
Ohio	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2012
Oklahoma	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2012
Oregon	None	Weight	None	Weight	None	2015
Pennsylvania	Mandatory & Optional	Mandatory & Optional	Mandatory & Optional	Mandatory & Optional	Optional	2011
Rhode Island (Rhode Island College)	None	None	None	None	Mandatory	2016
Rhode Island (University of Rhode Island)	Mandatory	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	None	2016
Tennessee (Outcomes-Based Funding)	None	None	None	Weight	None	2010
Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	1978
Utah	None	None	None	Mandatory	None	2017
Virginia: Degree Targets	None	None	None	None	None	2005
Virginia: Tech Talent Investment	None	None	None	None	None	2019
Wisconsin	Mandatory	None	Mandatory	Mandatory	None	2017

* Only applies to select institutions.

TABLE C States with equity metrics for race

State	Sector	Type of Metric	Metric
Alabama	2 year	Weight	Two-year institutions receive additional weighting for the progression of underserved minority students.
Arkansas	2 year 4 year	Weight	Two- and four-year institution metrics receive additional weighting for the completion and progression of underserved minority (URM) students.
Colorado	2 year 4 year	Weight	Two- and four-year institutions have weighted metrics for underrepresented minority students who complete a credential and/or transfer.
Florida	4 year	Optional	Institutions can choose one metric each year. For example, in 2014-2015, Florida International University chose a metric on the percentage of Bachelor’s degrees awarded to Black and Latino students.
Hawaii	2 year 4 year	Mandatory	Two- and four-year institutions both have mandatory metrics for degrees and certificates awarded to Native Hawaiian students.
Kansas	2 year 4 year	Optional	Two- and four-year institutions have the option to focus on minority student success when designing their respective performance agreements with the state.
Kentucky	2 year 4 year	Mandatory	Two- and four-year institutions both have mandatory success metrics for degrees earned by minority students.
Louisiana	2 year 4 year	Weight	Two- and four-year institutions have mandatory metrics for “equity completers,” classified as degree completion by underrepresented minorities.
Massachusetts	4 year	Mandatory	20% of the OBF score is based on college participation. A portion of this score is based on “closing the URM gap.”
Montana	2 year 4 year	Mandatory	Two- and four-year institutions have mandatory retention and completion metrics for “underrepresented/at-risk” student groups, classified as American Indian students.
Nevada	2 year 4 year	Weight	Two- and four-year institutions have weighted metrics for degrees and certificates awarded to minorities.
New Jersey	4 year	Mandatory	Four-year institutions have mandatory completion metrics for underrepresented minority students.
New York	2 year 4 year	Weight	New York’s Next Generation Job Linkage program provided bonuses for minority and/or female graduates in STEM fields to CUNY and SUNY institutions.

APPENDIX Table C continued

State	Sector	Type of Metric	Metric
Ohio	2 year 4 year	Weight	Ohio two-year institutions have weighted metrics for “at-risk” access and success for minority students. Ohio four-year institutions have weighted metrics for “at risk” access and success (degree & course completion) for minority students.
Oregon	4 year	Weight	Oregon four-year institutions have weighted metrics for underrepresented minority students who complete degrees in critical areas for the state.
Pennsylvania	4 year	2 Mandatory 2 Optional	Pennsylvania has a total of four metrics for students of color: Two are optional and two are mandatory. Institutions must report closing the access and achievement gaps for first-time underrepresented minority students. They may choose from a list of optional metrics, which includes closing the transfer achievement gap for underrepresented minorities, and the percentage of total student enrollment that is “nonmajority.”
Rhode Island (University of Rhode Island)	4 year	Mandatory	The University of Rhode Island includes equity metrics for students of color. The institution uses four- and six-year graduation rates for students of color and counts the number of students of color at the institution.
Tennessee (Quality Assurance Funding)	2 year 4 year	Optional	Tennessee has a bonus funding model called Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) that awards additional funding for focusing on the success of underrepresented students. Institutions can select a historically underserved population that’s significant to their mission and work to increase outcomes for that population on qualitative and quantitative metrics.
Virginia	2 year	Weight	Virginia two-year institutions have weighted metrics for the number of minority students who earn one or more awards within a given academic year.
Washington	2 year	Weight	Washington two-year institutions receive additional points in the OBF model for the number of minority students who successfully complete their first 15 college credits and/or degrees/apprenticeships.
Wisconsin	2 year 4 year	1 Mandatory 1 Optional	Wisconsin technical institutions can choose a “special populations” metric based on the enrollment of students of color. Wisconsin four-year institutions all have mandatory metrics for the enrollment of students of color.

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- Throughout this report, as well as the accompanying handbook and map, when referring to a specific state's policy we made a concerted effort to use the same terminology used by that state, even when it did not conform to Ed Trust style. Table C, for example, includes language used by each of the states that have equity metrics for race.
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The Education Trust is a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income families. Through our research and advocacy, Ed Trust supports efforts that expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through college; increase college access and completion, particularly for historically underserved students; engage diverse communities dedicated to education equity; and increase political and public will to act on equity issues.



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