

States Should Be Involved in Providing Student Support Services, Report Says

By [ELYSE ASHBURN](#)

To increase their pool of highly educated workers, states should take a more active role in managing the quality and quantity of student services on college campuses, a function that has long been the purview of individual institutions, according to a report scheduled for release today by the Workforce Strategy Center.

The [report](#), "Working Together: Aligning State Systems and Policies for Individual and Regional Prosperity," argues that support services, like student advising and counseling, are key to increasing college graduation rates and the supply of well-educated workers. A large body of research has made that same connection between student-support services and graduation rates.

But where the Workforce Strategy Center's report differs from many is in focusing on what states, not just colleges, should do to improve student services. Policy makers can draw attention to the issue, direct money to such services, rework their general appropriations models, and reward successful performance, the report says.

"States need to use economic-development dollars not only to attract and subsidize business but to strategically develop the work force," said Melissa E. Goldberg, a senior associate and director of operations for the center, a nonprofit organization in Brooklyn, N.Y. "By and large, student support services do take place at the institutional level, but there are ways that states can encourage institutions to make investments in those areas."

The report cites California as one state that is doing just that, in large part through its Extended Opportunity Programs and Services program, which gives colleges cash to provide additional counseling and tutoring for academically underprepared students and those from low-income families. The program also provides grant money to cover the cost of textbooks for some of those students.

In addition to emphasizing support services, the report argues that states need to make higher-education accessible to more students, build capacity at higher-education institutions, incorporate employer demand and economic-development priorities into educational planning, measure results, and encourage transitions between the various levels of education and between the work force and education. All of those steps would help build a more highly-educated work force and foster economic growth, the report says.

"The big concept is that policy makers need to support work-force development by aligning a lot of different resources," Ms. Goldberg said.

The Workforce Strategy Center plans to send the report to state leaders across the country. The report is the third in a series the center has produced this year on aligning education and work-force development (*The Chronicle*, [August 31](#) and [November 14](#)).

The Joyce Foundation provided money for the three reports, which are available on the center's [Web site](#). The center also is supported by numerous organizations, including the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.