

*A Statement of Common Purpose:*  
**Chief State School Officers and State Higher Education Executives**  
**Promote the Voluntary Adoption of a Model of Common Data Standards**

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the association of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) are collaborating with their members, the U.S. Department of Education, and national educational entities toward the development of model data standards for K-12 and postsecondary education. The goal of this collaborative effort is to leverage and create model data standards that will attract widespread, voluntary adoption and ultimately enhance policy-making and student achievement. Initially, the project will focus on data related to the transition from high school to postsecondary education.

The diversity of America's elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools and institutions is a national asset. But an unintended consequence of diversity is that schools and institutions may define and collect core data elements in slightly different ways. These discrepancies in data collection can cause students to lose momentum when they move from school to school, and state educational leaders often have difficulty identifying and monitoring student needs and communicating key information to the public.

For example, these small differences make it harder to communicate student needs and previous achievements when they transfer or begin college, and they can make it impossible to come up with valid information on relatively simple questions such as student achievement, drop-out rates, teacher mobility and shortages, or graduation rates for a school, district, or state. Education in the United States could be improved if most schools and institutions used common standards for the core data they identify, collect, retain, and use.

Standard measures and procedures are crucial in business, computing, health care, engineering, and construction – just about every part of life. The key questions involve deciding *what needs* to be standardized, *what does not need* to be standardized, and *why* standardization will serve important purposes. Such decisions need to consider different purposes at different levels (individual schools, districts or systems, states, and the nation), the benefits of standardizing different kinds of information, the costs of changing existing systems in order to achieve greater standardization, and *how* data standards and practices can be improved in a reasonable time frame and at a reasonable cost.

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CCSSO and SHEEO will work with their respective members, partner on communications with the Data Quality Campaign funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation for this effort, provide feedback on standards design to the U.S. Department of Education, and engage policy and information system experts from the states, standards groups, associations, and individual schools and colleges to address the *what*, *why*, and *how* questions for model data standards.

The U.S. Department of Education will facilitate the leveraging, and where needed, the development of model common data standards for a core set of student-level variables to increase comparability of data, interoperability and portability of data, and reduce collection burden. A Technical Working Group comprised of representatives of key stakeholders will identify the core subset of student variables and common definitions, model business rules and technical specifications for these variables. The list of variables and model standards will be shared with states, districts and postsecondary stakeholders for feedback and discussion, in order to achieve broad consensus and voluntary adoption. Existing definitions, standards and guidelines for state and federal reports will provide a foundation for this work, but proposals for improving definitions and guidelines will be invited and considered.

CCSSO and SHEEO will promote the voluntary adoption of these model data standards by states, districts, K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions and marketplace providers. While this initiative's fundamental purpose is to provide better information to those seeking to improve education, it also will make it easier for schools, colleges, and states to meet existing reporting requirements. Recently authorized and funded federal grant programs are available to help finance such improvements in educational data systems. Decision makers in individual states, schools, and colleges will make the ultimate decisions about their data standards, but the project seeks to develop highly useful and valuable standards that will attract widespread adoption.