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19 college systems will measure progress in educating minority and needy students

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Washington – A group of 19 college systems in 16 states and Puerto Rico plans to announce today

a new effort to drastically improve the education of minority and low-income students, partly by submitting data for annual reports documenting how well they are closing achievement gaps.

The new undertaking is being mounted by the National Association of System Heads with technical

help from the Education Trust and financial support from the Lumina Foundation for Education and

the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The participating systems, which together serve about a third of

the low-income and minority students enrolled at the nation's four-year public colleges, have as their goal reducing gaps in college-going and college-success rates by at least half by 2015.

As part of their effort, called "Access to Success," the systems have agreed to collect and publish some

information that has never been publicly available before, including the graduation rates of nontraditional and low-income students.

"The future of our nation demands more college graduates, and I'm pleased that our partners in

university systems across the country are committed to meeting this challenge," Thomas C. Meredith,

Mississippi's commissioner of higher education and the president of the National Association of

System Heads, said in a written statement announcing the endeavor.

Just 18 percent of black students and 11 percent of Hispanic students now earn bachelor's degrees by

age 24, compared with 34 percent of white students, the statement said. Just 9 percent of low-income students earn bachelor's degrees by age 24, compared with 75 percent of students from economically privileged backgrounds.

Sense, Sensibility, and Incentives

Ross Wiener, the Education Trust's vice president for program and policy, said the systems had come together partly because they wanted to develop ways to measure their own success, rather than sitting back and letting standards be set for them by government agencies or magazines that publish college rankings. "Many of them are frustrated with how the rankings play out and what those rankings incentivize," Mr. Wiener said, noting that several measures used by ranking systems have the effect of punishing colleges for serving substantial numbers of students who are disadvantaged.

Among the areas the effort will focus on are increasing student success in remedial and introductory courses, managing college costs, improving how well entering students are prepared for colleges, and helping low-income students get more access to financial aid.

The 19 college systems involved are: the California State University system; the Connecticut State University system, the State University System of Florida, the University of Hawaii system, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the University of Louisiana system, the Southern University and A&M College system (in Louisiana), the University of Maine system, the University System of Maryland, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, **the University of Missouri system**, the Montana University system, the City University of New York, the State University of New York, the University of Puerto Rico system, the

Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, the South Dakota Board of Regents, and the Vermont State College system.