College Transparency Act

The College Transparency Act is a bipartisan proposed federal law that lifts a ban on collecting student-level data to create a secure, centralized database on college costs, graduation rates, and post-graduation earnings.

Key Goals of the Act

- **Lifts Data Bans:** Overturns a 2008 federal restriction that stopped the government from tracking individual student progress.
- **Tracks All Students:** Includes every student, not just those receiving federal financial aid or attending full-time.
- **Measures Real Outcomes:** Shows accurate graduation rates, transfer rates, and post-college earnings broken down by specific majors and student backgrounds.
- **Simplifies Reporting:** Replaces messy, duplicate reporting rules with a single streamlined system run by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Current Status

- **Bipartisan Support:** Championed heavily by Senators Bill Cassidy and Elizabeth Warren.
- **Committee Action:** Advanced out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee by a 21-1 vote.
- **Next Steps:** Faces an ongoing political push in Congress to pass the full chambers and become law.

Sources:

1. https://acct.org/node/633
2. https://www.highereddive.com/news/will-the-college-transparency-act-get-the-green-light-from-lawmakers/826512/
3. https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2030
4. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/2026/08/06/cassidy-eyes-final-push-pass-college-transparency-act
5. https://accjc.org/announcement/cta-policy-brief/

Why Accreditors Support Federal Data Transparency

Institutional accreditors have a public responsibility to ensure that colleges and universities meet standards of quality, integrity, and continuous improvement. A modernized federal data system would strengthen that work in several ways.

First, better data would improve student-centered accountability. Students should be able to understand the likely outcomes of different institutions and programs, including completion, transfer, debt, earnings, licensure, and employment where applicable. These data should be presented in a user-friendly way and should help students compare programs without reducing educational value to a single metric.

Second, better data would support institutional improvement rather than compliance alone. Accreditors do not simply identify poor performance; they work with institutions to understand trends, address gaps, and improve outcomes. Federal data should be fed back to states and institutions so they can implement targeted, data-informed strategies to support student success.

Third, better data would advance fairness and context in accountability. Institutions serve different missions, communities, and student populations. Community colleges, regional universities, minority-serving institutions, tribal colleges, faith-based institutions, adult-serving institutions, and workforce-focused providers should be evaluated with data that reflect who they serve and what their students are trying to accomplish. Disaggregated, privacy-protected data can help identify inequities while also avoiding misleading comparisons that ignore student goals, institutional mission, and local labor-market context.

Fourth, better data would reduce unnecessary reporting burden. Institutions currently report overlapping information to multiple federal, state, accreditation, and public-facing systems. The College Transparency Act's emphasis on leveraging existing federal and institutional data and streamlining burdensome reporting requirements is especially important. A well-designed federal data network should reduce duplication, not add another disconnected reporting layer.