



# Wisconsin

## Postsecondary Education Focus

### Student Outcomes: 2012 - 2015

An analysis of outcomes data collected to track student progress over a four-year period in EAB-approved schools, colleges and universities.

#### Summary of Findings

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- New yearly enrollment in schools approved by the Educational Approval Board declined by more than 3,500 students between 2012 and 2015.
- Because of state reciprocity agreements through NC-SARA, 65 institutions are now exempt from Wisconsin's student protection standards and from student outcomes data reporting requirements.
- More students drop out of programs than complete them during their first two years, but that trend reverses as completions accelerate during the third and fourth years.
- More students drop out of online programs than on-ground programs.
- More students drop out of programs at for-profit institutions than at nonprofit institutions.
- More students drop out of programs at degree-granting institutions than at nondegree-granting institutions.
- More than two-thirds of students enroll in non-degree/certificate or associate-level programs.
- Non-degree/certificate-level programs produce the most student completions.
- Associate-level programs produce the most student drops/withdrawals.
- 18 EAB-approved schools have drop/withdrawal rates that exceed 50 percent; these schools enroll 24,420 students and comprise 36 percent of total enrollment in EAB-approved schools.

#### Introduction

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##### *Context for Collecting Student Outcomes Data*

The Educational Approval Board (EAB) is responsible for approving and overseeing private, for-profit and certain non-profit postsecondary institutions in support of its role to protect Wisconsin students.<sup>1</sup> For two decades, the EAB has collected student outcomes information to help students make informed educational choices and hold schools, colleges, and universities accountable for student results. Technology and the ever-changing postsecondary education environment lead the EAB to modify its

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Statute s.38.50 (1)(e) exempts certain institutions from EAB oversight.

collection methods to improve and simplify the reporting process, and allow the agency to more purposefully gather, analyze and disseminate student outcomes data.

Following an in-depth review completed in 2010, the EAB identified a need to improve student outcomes data processes and school performance. Previous snapshot collection methods offered limited insight into student performance in the many differently-structured programs at EAB-approved schools. To address these limitations the EAB implemented a 12-month cohort-based method of data collection to track student enrollment and outcomes in every program offered by EAB-approved schools. This cohort-level data is used to examine student progress through programs and provides information that future prospective students can use to make choices about enrolling in programs.

### *The EAB's Statutory Responsibility*

The EAB's governing statutes dictate that its fundamental responsibility is to protect Wisconsin consumers. Under s.38.50 (2), Wis. Stats., "[t]he board shall protect the general public by inspecting and approving private...schools doing business in Wisconsin whether located within or out-side this state." Further, the EAB is expected "to protect students and encourage schools to maintain [programs] consistent in quality, content, and length with generally accepted educational standards."

The EAB assesses the adequacy of programs offered by schools to Wisconsin residents and establishes minimum program-specific standards for those courses. Additionally, the EAB approves programs, schools, changes in ownership or school control and teaching locations to ensure they meet the minimum requirements and standards as established by the Board. The statutes and administrative code place a focus on encouraging and supporting schools to be educationally sound.

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## **Methodology**

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The EAB's standard cohort year runs from July 1 through the following June 30, although schools may use an alternative 12-month period that is more compatible with their program structure, such as a calendar year or a business fiscal year. This cohort consists of all students who start a program during a given academic year. Data about student outcomes from a given cohort is reported each year until all students have completed, dropped, or transferred from the program.

Incoming students enrolling in a cohort period are defined as either "new starts" or "transfers in/from" in Year 1 of a cohort. During the EAB's annual reporting cycle, institutions report the status of those students after their first year enrolled in their programs by indicating the number of students that transferred to another program or institution, withdrew/dropped out, completed, or will continue into the following year. No additional new students are added to a cohort in subsequent years, but the status of those continuing from each prior year are reported at the end of each reporting period. The cohort is tracked each year until all students have completed, transferred, or dropped out. The EAB currently has outcomes data for four distinct cohorts that began in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.

The following sections identify patterns in the data and provide insights for programmatic and policy questions about student outcomes. Variables considered include the following:

- A school’s drop/withdrawal rate, or proportion of enrolled students who drop out or discontinue (without transferring to another program) and earn no credential. This variable is considered a proxy for school performance and its ability to retain and serve students.
- Completion rate, or the proportion of enrolled students who finish their program and earn their credential. Completion is the assumed goal for any program at an EAB-approved school.

Figures are calculated using the EAB’s student outcomes data, which now include four cohorts: 2012 Cohort (Year 1, 2, 3 & 4); 2013 Cohort (Year 1, 2 & 3); 2014 Cohort (Year 1 & 2); and 2015 Cohort (Year 1). The 2012 Cohort is used as a point of comparison between aggregate and cumulative data because it has data over the most reporting periods and, therefore, provides the most information on student outcomes trends over time.

Outcomes numbers for each reporting year of any cohort include “input” numbers like new starts (NS) and transfers in/from another school or program (TI/TF) as well as “output” numbers like drop/withdrawals (DW), completions (CP) and transfers out/to another school or program (TO/TT). The number of students in each cohort who are continuing their program in the following year (CN) is determined by subtracting the student output numbers from the new starts and transfers in/from (NS and TI/TF) number in Year 1 or the prior year continuing (PYC) number in the following cohort years. This is more simply expressed by a summary formula:

$$CN = PYC \text{ (or } NS + TI + TF) - DW - CP - TO - TT$$

This report highlights drop/withdrawal and completion rates across student cohorts to reveal student progress through their programs over time. It further compares student outcomes between different institutional characteristics and across program levels to reveal which types of schools and programs are performing well, and which schools are struggling to serve their students.

### *Impact of State Reciprocity Agreements*

Under the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA), organized by the four regional higher education compacts, participating states recognize the regulations of the home state for postsecondary institutions that offer distance learning programs. Wisconsin became a member of SARA in 2016 and its implementation has had considerable impact on the EAB’s ability to collect and evaluate student outcomes. To illustrate the decline in available information, the 2012 Cohort of students in EAB-approved schools included outcomes for 25,729 students during the first year this data was reported. There were 25,424 reported students in this cohort during its second reporting year and 23,411 students in the third reporting year. Because of SARA, just 18,647 students are accounted for in the 2012 Cohort’s fourth-year student outcomes data reported by approved schools. Because fewer schools are EAB-approved and report their outcomes data, the EAB is no longer able to

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The EAB is no longer able to collect and evaluate the progress of thousands of students because of SARA.

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collect and evaluate the progress of thousands of students in these programs. This report reflects data on 65 fewer schools than the EAB would otherwise have collected.

## Cohort Data

### *All Cohorts: 2012 - 2015*

Of the EAB's 217 currently-approved schools, 199 reported outcomes data for the first year of their 2015 Cohort. The beginning enrollment for each new cohort is smaller than previous cohorts at currently approved schools because of overall declining enrollment. This figure is not skewed by SARA exemptions because this section only considers trends by schools that are currently approved. Table 3 illustrates the gradual decline of students enrolled in this sector and reflects national trends. Beginning enrollment figures are the combination of students beginning a program (new starts) and students transferring into a program from another institution or from another program. Cumulative drops and completions expectedly grow each year within a given cohort, though these patterns of growth differ by cohort, year, and program type as analyzed in sections the following sections of this report.

All figures in the Table 3 are cumulative. For example, completion and drop figures for the 2012 cohort include all subsequent completions and drops in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 data reporting years. This methodology provides a picture of the total progress of all students who enrolled in programs in 2012.

**Table 3.** Total Students Enrolled in EAB-Approved Institutions by Cohort, as of the 2016 Reporting Cycle

Cohort	Beginning Enrollment	Drops/ Withdrawals	Completions	Dropout Rate	Completion Rate
2012	18647	8759	8714	47%	47%
2013	18064	8412	7577	47%	35%
2014	16918	7630	5390	45%	32%
2015	15050	4365	3722	29%	25%
Total	68679	29121	25403	42%	37%

### *2012 Cohort: Years 1, 2, 3 & 4*

There were 140 currently-approved institutions that initially enrolled students in the 2012 Cohort. While 92 schools no longer have active 2012 Cohort students still enrolled in programs, 48 schools still have active students and report outcomes data for students in the 2016 reporting cycle. Table 4 shows that 18,647 students began a program in 2012. It also shows outcomes for these students for their first, second, third, and fourth years. The Transfers, Drops/Withdrawals, Completions and Following Year columns shows the outcome status for all remaining students in each year. The Cumulative Drop and Completion Rate columns show the percentage of initially enrolled students with each of those outcome results in each year, increasing over time.

**Table 4.** 2012 Cohort Student Outcomes: Years 1 - 4

Year	Beginning Students	Transfers Out	Drops/Withdrawals	Completions	Enrolled in Following Year	Cumulative Drop Rate	Cumulative Completion Rate
1	18647	277	4913	4712	8745	26%	25%
2	-	253	2583	2169	3741	40%	37%
3	-	121	923	1397	1300	45%	44%
4		21	340	436	458	47%	47%
Total	18647	672	8759	8714	-	47%	47%

Over the four years these students were enrolled in programs, slightly more students dropped out or withdrew from programs than completed their programs. While drops exceeded completions during the first two years of the program, completions exceeded drops during students' third and fourth years of these programs. As of the 2016 reporting cycle, 458 students in the 2012 Cohort were still enrolled in the remaining 48 schools.

#### *2013 Cohort: Years 1, 2 & 3*

There were 165 currently-approved institutions that initially enrolled students in the 2013 Cohort, 74 of which reported outcomes data in active cohorts in the 2016 reporting cycle. Of these institutions, 91 no longer have active student cohorts to report. Table 5 shows that 18,064 students began a program in 2013.

**Table 5.** 2013 Cohort Student Outcomes: Years 1 - 3

Year	Beginning Students	Transfers Out	Drops/Withdrawals	Completions	Enrolled in Following Year	Cumulative Drop Rate	Cumulative Completion Rate
1	18064	276	5281	4650	7857	26%	26%
2	-	422	2372	1680	3378	42%	35%
3	-	106	759	1247	1208	47%	42%
Total	18064	804	8412	7577	-	47%	42%

Over the three years these students were enrolled in programs, more students dropped out or withdrew from programs than completed their programs. Similar to the outcomes observed in the 2012 Cohort, drops exceeded completions during the first two years of the program and completions exceeded drops in the third year of the program. As of the 2016 reporting cycle, 1,208 students in the 2013 Cohort were still enrolled in the remaining 74 active schools.

#### *2014 Cohort: Years 1 & 2*

There were 187 currently-approved institutions that initially enrolled students in the 2014 Cohort, 103 of which reported outcomes data in active cohorts in the 2016 reporting cycle. Of currently approved schools, 84 no longer have active student cohorts to report. Table 6 shows that 16,918 students began a program in 2014.

**Table 6.** 2014 Cohort Student Outcomes: Years 1 & 2

Year	Beginning Students	Transfers Out	Drops/ Withdrawals	Completions	Enrolled in Following Year	Cumulative Drop Rate	Cumulative Completion Rate
1	16918	381	5249	3430	7858	31%	20%
2	-	224	2381	1960	3208	45%	32%
Total	16918	605	7630	5390	-	45%	32%

During both years students in the 2014 Cohort were enrolled in programs, more students dropped out of or withdrew from programs than completed their programs. As of the 2016 reporting cycle, 3,208 students in the 2014 Cohort were still enrolled in the remaining 103 active programs.

#### *2015 Cohort: Year 1*

There were 199 institutions that reported student outcomes data for the first year of the 2015 Cohort. Table 7 shows that 16,918 students began a program in 2015.

**Table 7.** 2015 Cohort Student Outcomes: Year 1

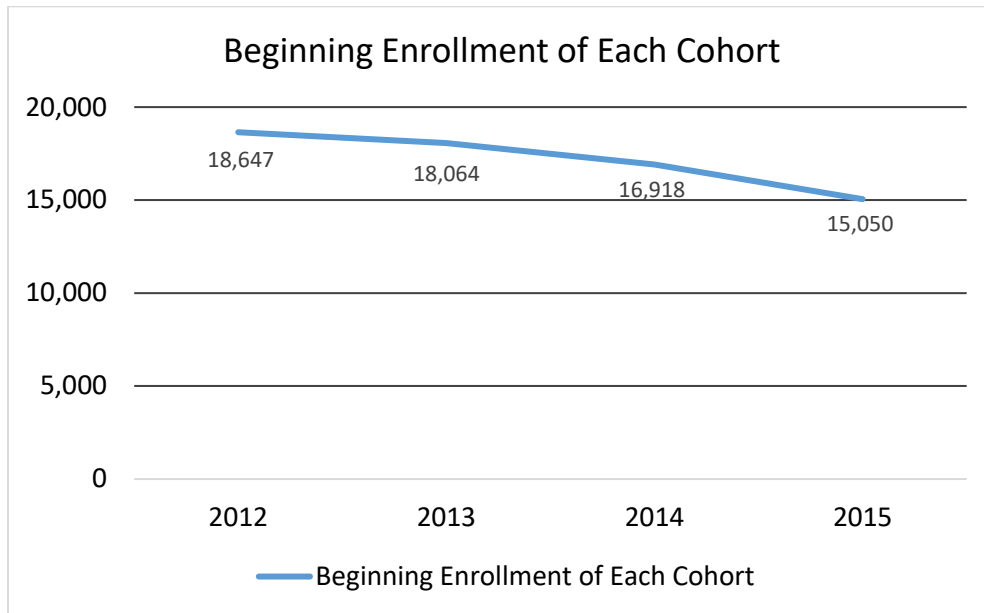
Year	Beginning Students	Transfers Out	Drops/ Withdrawals	Completions	Enrolled in Following Year	Cumulative Drop Rate	Cumulative Completion Rate
1	15050	253	4365	3722	6719	29%	25%

Over the first year that these students were enrolled in programs, more students dropped out of or withdrew from programs than completed their programs. Specifically, drops exceeded completions during the first two years of the program, but completions exceeded drops during students' third and fourth years of these programs. As of the 2016 reporting cycle, 6,719 students in the 2015 Cohort were enrolled in the 199 active programs.

#### *Enrollment Trends*

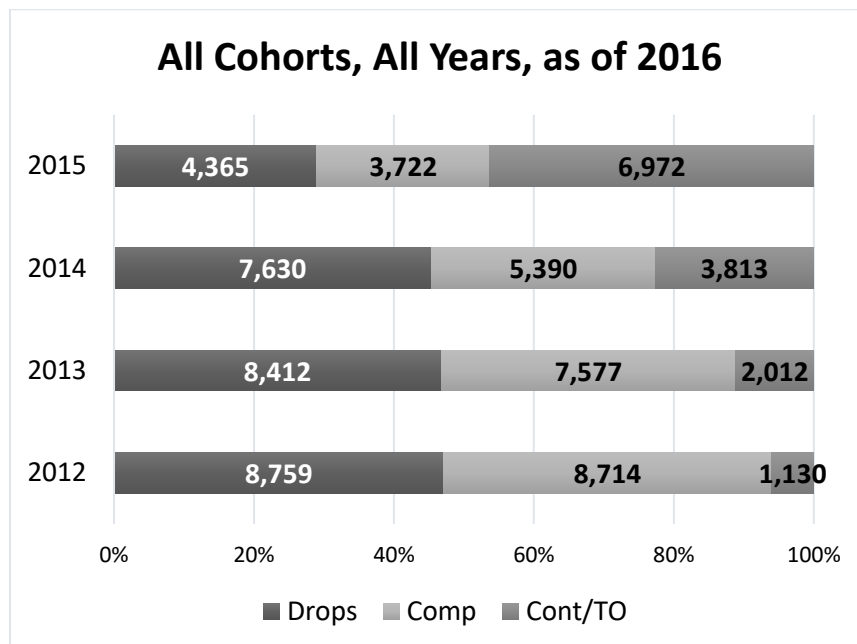
Enrollment at currently-approved institutions has been in decline for the last four years, as demonstrated by Graph 1 below. The 2013 Cohort's 18,064 new student enrollment represents a 3 percent decrease from the 2012 Cohort; the 2014 Cohort's enrollment fell 6 percent from 2013 and the 2015 Cohort's enrollment fell another 11 percent. Reciprocity agreement exemptions do not skew this finding as these cohort enrollment figures are program cohorts at currently-approved institutions. This decline is consistent with broader national enrollment trends in private proprietary institutions, likely driven by student concerns about quality that result from well-publicized school closures, federal crackdowns on this sector with rules that limit eligibility to Title-IV federal loans, and improvements in the economy resulting in more potential students choosing employment over pursuing vocational education programs.

**Graph 1.** Gradual Enrollment Decline in For-Profit Sector Programs



The cumulative outcomes figures in Graph 2 reveal the total to-date drops, completions, and continuing students in each cohort as of the 2015 reporting cycle. Predictably, the number of students remaining in programs declines each year while the completion and drops categories steadily grow. EAB’s currently-available data shows that drops/withdrawals grow more quickly during the first two years of a program, and completions grow more quickly during the following years of a program.

**Graph 2.** Cumulative Student Outcomes by Cohort: Continuing or Transferring, Completions & Dropouts



## Institutional Data

Separating the outcomes data into categories by institution type reveals how institutional characteristics affect completion and dropout rates. For example, separating all EAB-approved schools by type of education delivery shows that students taking programs at on-ground campuses have lower dropout rates than students in enrolled in online programs. The total drop rates for all four cohorts based on these categories are listed in Tables 8a-8c.

On-ground enrollment in institutions that reported data accounts for 56 percent and online enrollment accounts for 44 percent of students at EAB-approved institutions.<sup>2</sup> Students enrolled in online programs and in on-ground programs have similar outcomes after the first year: 24 and 26 percent for the 2012 Cohort, 29 and 30 percent for the 2013 Cohort, 30 and 33 percent for the 2014 Cohort, and both are 29 percent in the 2015 Cohort.

In following years, however, students in online programs drop out of programs at a greater rate. For the 2012 cohort, the cohort with the most observed data, two percent more online program students drop out after their first year than on-ground program students; this disparity grows to nine percent after the fourth year.

### Students in online programs drop out at a greater rate

**Table 8a.** On-ground versus online drop/withdrawal rates, by cohort and year of each cohort.

	Total Drop %	Total Enrollment Number / Percent	Cohorts									
			2012				2013			2014		2015
			Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 1
On-Ground	38	42,866 / 62	24	36	40	41	29	39	42	30	39	29
Online	50	25,813 / 38	26	42	47	50	30	49	55	33	55	29

Among EAB-approved schools, enrollment at for-profit institutions accounts for 87 percent of students. Those enrolled in programs at for-profit institutions had higher drop/withdrawal rates for the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Cohorts, though this trend is less clear in the 2012 cohort outcomes. The drop-out rate for non-profit program students in the 2012 Cohort grows from 24 percent after the first year to 49 percent after the fourth year, compared to that of for-profit program students which starts at 26 percent after the first year and grows to 46 percent after the fourth year.

For the other three cohorts, students in non-profit institutions have significantly lower drop-out rates than their peers at for-profit institutions after all observed years of data. This anomaly of the 2012 Cohort is also observable in previous outcomes reports from past years. This is perhaps because the 2012 Cohort was the first group of students for which approved institutions were required to track and report cohort

<sup>2</sup> The EAB has available data from slightly fewer institutions than are approved at any given time: newly-approved institutions do not yet have cohorts of students with a year of outcomes to report, and some institutions have “inactive” programs that do not have students during a reporting period.



data. Following this first year of new reporting methods, schools likely institutionalized reporting practices in ways that made the following years of data more accurate and consistent.

**Table 8b.** Non-profit versus for-profit drop/withdrawal rates, by cohort and year of each cohort.

	Total Drop	Total Enrollment	Cohorts									
			2012				2013			2014		2015
			Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 1
%	Number / Percent	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	1	
Non-profit	33	9,893 / 14	24	35	47	49	19	33	40	9	22	13
For-Profit	44	58,786 / 86	26	40	44	46	31	44	48	34	48	32

Students in non-degree programs, accounting for 24 percent of enrollment, have significantly lower drop rates than their peers in degree-granting programs. For example, students in the 2012 cohort concluded their first year with 13 percent of non-degree and 34 percent of degree students dropping out; 19 percent of students in this cohort dropped out by the end of their fourth year, compared to 64 percent of their peers in degree-granting programs. Outcomes for non-degree students in more recent cohorts are getting worse, however. The first-year dropout rate for the 2012 cohort is 13 percent, for the 2013 cohort is 16 percent, the 2014 cohort is 21 percent and the 2015 cohort is 22 percent.

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Students in non-degree programs have significantly lower drop rates than their peers in degree-granting programs.

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**Table 8c.** Non-degree versus degree-granting drop/withdrawal rates, by cohort and year of each cohort.

	Total Drop	Total Enrollment	Cohorts									
			2012				2013			2014		2015
			Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 1
%	Number / Percent	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	1	
Non-Degree	22	27,040 / 39	13	18	19	19	16	19	20	21	26	22
Degree	56	41,639 / 61	34	53	61	64	38	58	64	37	56	35

## Program Level Data

Of the 1,862 programs approved by the EAB with actively enrolled students, the 522 non-degree programs (certificate and diploma credentials) have the highest number of total beginning enrollments by far, amounting to 40 percent of total enrollment as shown in Table 9 below. From 2012 to 2015, 71 percent of all completions occurred in non-degree programs. Associate degree programs had the highest drop

rate of 65 percent over the 4-year time periods considered for reported programs, closely followed by Bachelor's Degree programs with 53 percent. More than half of students in programs at both levels withdrew from their program without earning a credential.

**Table 9.** Total Drops and Completions by Education Level

Education Level	Total Programs		Beginning Enrollment		Completions		Drops		Drop Rates
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Percent
Non-Degree	522	28	27,035	40	18,136	71	5,844	20	22
Associate's	313	17	19,058	28	3,398	14	12,277	42	65
Bachelor's	546	29	17,375	25	2,388	9	9,254	32	53
Advanced	481	26	5,211	7	1,481	6	1,746	6	34
Total	1,862	-	68,679	-	25,403	-	29,121	-	42

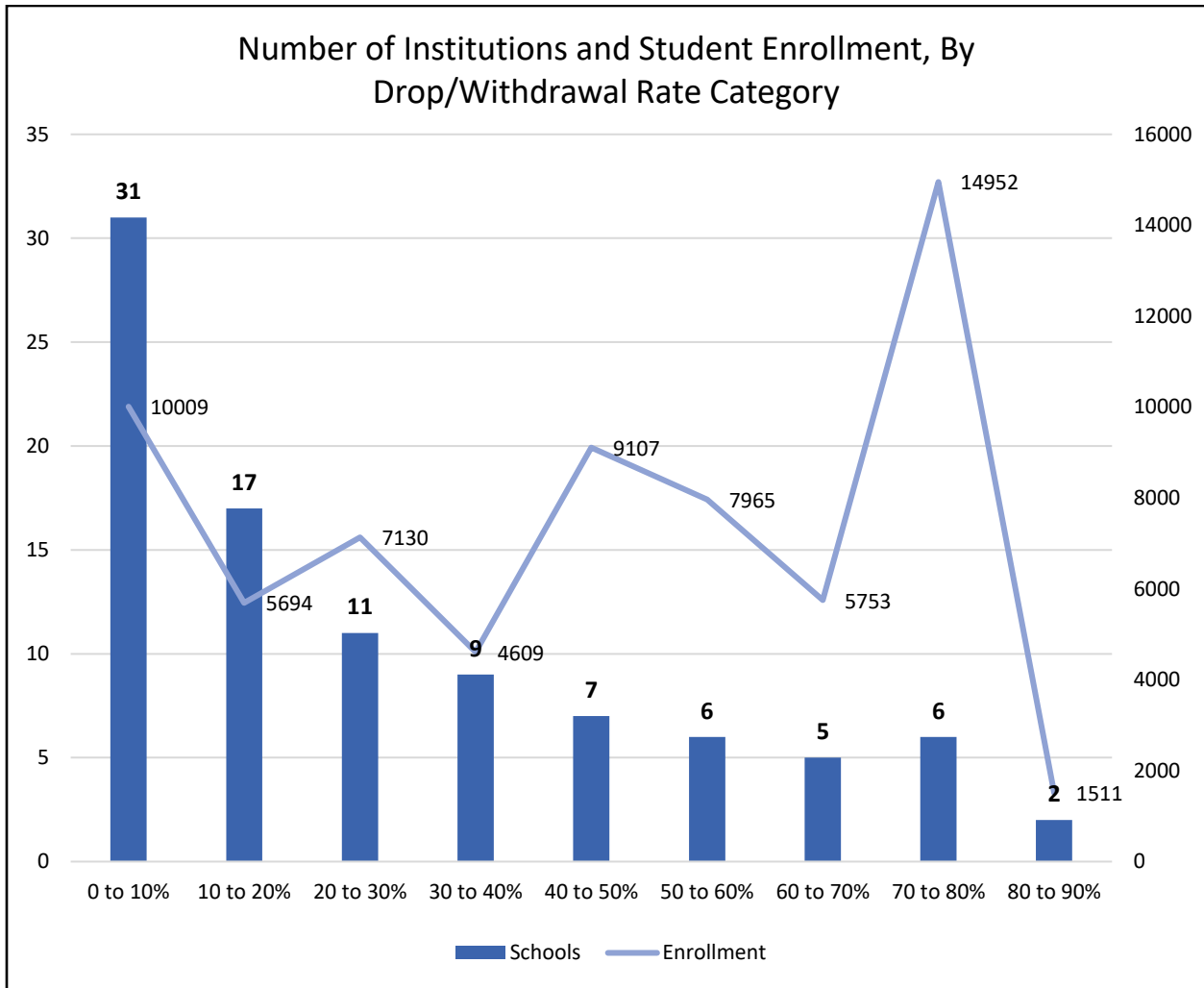
## Schools with High Drop Rates

The EAB's analysis of student outcomes at approved institutions reveals that several institutions have particularly high drop/withdrawal rates. As stated previously, these rates are important because they serve as a proxy for the institutions' ability to serve their students and produce graduates for Wisconsin's workforce.

Students who fail to complete a program and who have a large amount of student debt face the burden of loan payments they frequently struggle to afford without a degree. Table 10 shows a distribution of the 94 institutions that enrolled at least 50 students over the EAB's four years of data, divided into categories based on their drop/withdrawal rates. For example, the category with the lowest drop/withdrawal rates of zero to ten percent includes 31 institutions that enroll a total of 10,009 students. This distribution shows that most EAB-approved institutions have relatively low drop/withdrawal rates, but the few institutions with high drop/withdrawal rates enroll far more students overall (and per institution). The category of institutions with drop/withdrawal rates of 70 to 80 percent contains just six institutions, but those six institutions together enroll far more students than any other category of institutions in this distribution.

Students who drop out of their programs and who have student debt face the burden of student loan payments they frequently struggle to afford without a degree.

**Table 10.** Categories of Institutions by Drop Rate and Total Enrollment Per Category



### Comparing Outcomes to Other Sectors

While it is valuable to understand the outcomes at EAB-approved institutions, it is equally important to understand the comparison to other higher education institutions on student outcomes measures. This presents a data issue because the EAB’s cohort-based data reporting process is more useful for aggregate outcomes measures than the data collected and reported by Wisconsin’s comparable postsecondary education institutions. The greatest share of students in programs at EAB-approved schools are enrolled in non-degree programs (40 percent), followed by associate’s programs (28 percent). Therefore, these programs are most comparable in content, length, and intended employment sectors to students within the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS).

Data available from WTCS, however, merely consists of a survey administered to graduates about their employment status, thus overlooking the category of students who do not complete programs. Therefore, it is not possible to compare the drop/withdrawal and completion rates of students at WTCS schools with those of students at EAB-Approved institutions. Even after implementing “performance-based funding” as required by the governor and legislature, the WTCS does not have to measure student outcomes. The current nature of data reporting among Wisconsin’s institutions of higher education is inconsistent and makes outcomes comparisons difficult.

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However, it is possible to use EAB’s cohort-based outcomes information to other groups of schools using more sophisticated datasets. A recent report by the Third Way, a nonpartisan public policy research organization, used federal data to examine trends in federal money going to low-performing higher education institutions.<sup>3</sup> Of the 106 U.S. institutions who report a graduation rate of 10 percent or less, 72 are public schools. Of those, 67 are public schools that list associates’ or certificate programs as their predominant degree issued, suggesting that this category of institutions are comparable in education level to Wisconsin’s public technical colleges and to many programs at EAB-approved schools. While we do not know the graduation rate at WTCS schools, the sector most comparable to EAB-approved institutions, we do know that 71 percent of certificate/non-degree students and 14 percent of associate degree students graduate from EAB-approved schools and thus outperform the institutions in the Third-Way analysis. Fortunately, none of the public or private institutions with graduation rates below 10 percent are located in Wisconsin.

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## Discussion

### *Student population at these schools*

In 2013 and 2014 the EAB contacted those institutions with the most concerning student outcomes, all of which were for-profit, to ask what was being done to address the high student dropout rates. Responses included variations of the same response: this sector’s institutions enroll a large nontraditional, working, older-than-typical student population that faces academic barriers to completion. Research confirms that for-profit institutions disproportionately enroll a greater number of nontraditional students, typically characterized by a lower socioeconomic status, part-time attendance, and are age 25 or older. However,

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<sup>3</sup> The data used for this report includes information on the nearly 5,400 institutions who participate in Title IV funding and are therefore included in the U.S. Department of Education’s Postsecondary Education Participants System (PEPS).

Source: Itzkowitz, M. (2017). “A Risky Bet: Billions in Tax Dollars Fund Lowest Performing Institutions.” Report by Third Way. Accessed 5/4/2017 from: <http://www.thirdway.org/memo/a-risky-bet-billions-in-tax-dollars-fund-lowest-performing-institutions>.

there is little or no empirical evidence that institutions' efforts to improve student success has improved outcomes.

The EAB recognizes that these institutions meet a market demand and provide opportunities for students not well served in traditional settings. That said, if underperforming institutions with high dropout rates and few completions want to be successful working with a nontraditional student population, they must develop effective methods to address the challenges faced by this student population and find effective strategies for fostering student success.

#### *Data Collection & Reciprocity*

The EAB remains concerned with the significant loss of student outcomes data for the thousands of students enrolled in institutions that no longer report outcomes data. While federal data reporting requirements are useful, they are limited to institutions participating in Title IV Federal Student Aid. Those data sets exclude information on the many smaller and non-degree schools operating in Wisconsin that do not participate in Title IV. Moreover, institutions that report under Title IV eligibility rules are only required to report the data on first-time, full-time students, thus missing outcomes trends among the thousands of Wisconsin students who transferred to or from for-profit schools. The EAB is the only organization examining student outcomes for this population, so the outcomes at exempt schools that do not report outcomes are being ignored. On measures of student success and consumer protection, the analysis in this report identifies these very schools as being the greatest cause for concern.

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## Underperforming institutions must develop effective methods to address the challenges faced by this student population and find effective strategies for fostering student success

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### **Conclusion**

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Analyzing four years of student outcomes data for programs at EAB-approved institutions reveals how students complete or drop/withdraw from their programs over time and at different rates depending on the institution type and program level. The four years of data for the 2012 Cohort show that slightly more students drop out than complete their programs by the end of their fourth year. This is also true after the three available years of 2013 Cohort data and after the two available years of 2014 Cohort data. Another interesting finding is that, for the two cohorts for which we have more than two years of data, drop/withdrawal rates rise quickly during the first two years of programs, while completion rates tend to rise quickly after two years. After the fourth year of the 2012 Cohort, nearly as many students completed their programs as had dropped out of their programs.

Student outcomes across cohorts differ by institutional characteristics and by program level, suggesting that some methods or structures of these schools and programs are more effective than others at serving their student population. Students in all four cohorts drop out at higher rates in online institutions than in on-ground institutions, in for-profit institutions than in nonprofit institutions and in degree institutions than in non-degree institutions. Most students in diploma-level or certificate-level programs, which

account for the largest degree-level enrollment group at EAB-approved institutions, successfully complete their degree. Most students in associate and Bachelor's degree programs drop out without completing their program. While this is the big-picture overview of outcomes among categories of programs, more information on specific programs or institutions can be found at the EAB's website: <http://eab.state.wi.us>.

There is a growing difficulty of measuring student outcomes and of collecting and evaluating that data. Findings reveal how well institutions are preparing students to join Wisconsin's workforce and can be used to adapt policy in a way to best support and protect these students. An increasing number of distance learning institutions who enroll Wisconsin students do not report meaningful data. In addition, making meaningful performance comparisons between different sectors of higher education is very difficult because of the inconsistency and inadequacy of how this information is measured.