IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
In order to increase the number of people with postsecondary credentials and ensure that the United States remains internationally competitive, it is necessary to allocate more energy and resources to ensuring that adult students complete their degrees or certificates. Based on our findings, this report concludes with implications and recommendations for helping more adult prospective students attain postsecondary success.

• **Broaden the conversation about college costs to include not only tuition, but housing, transportation and food.** About half of adult prospective students say that attending college will make it harder for them to afford rent or mortgage payments, and 39 percent say it will be harder to afford food. It is essential to support these students financially beyond tuition. Emergency financial aid, transportation stipends and food assistance can all be scaled up to alleviate some of the most pressing affordability burdens of attending college, helping more students complete their degrees. This is especially important for low-income students.

• **Help adult prospective students gain a more realistic understanding of how to pay for college, and provide comprehensive counseling on loans and the financial aid process.** Since most adult prospective students are worried about taking on debt, it is understandable that more say they will rely on grants and scholarships than on loans. But for many students, loans may be unavoidable. Applying for loans can be daunting, and more than half of those who are looking to apply for loans are worried about understanding the financial aid process. While many schools offer financial aid counseling to enrolled students, such counseling is clearly a priority for adult prospective students. Financial aid counseling need not be limited to entrance and exit interviews. Relevant, easily accessible financial aid counseling should be available when choosing a college, during enrollment and even after college completion.

• **Provide guidance about when to transfer, and help adults understand potential challenges.** Few adult prospective students think it is absolutely essential that students enrolled at a particular school have successfully transferred into bachelor’s programs. Yet about half of them are looking to transfer at some point, including 26 percent who will transfer with only some credits or a certificate, thus missing out on labor market and financial benefits. Adult prospective students need to be engaged on when and how to transfer to maximize their likelihood of graduating and minimize their costs and time spent in school. They need to understand that some schools have higher transfer rates than others—before they start investing time and money in an institution.
• Create structures to help undecided adult prospective students pick a program of study prior to enrollment or soon thereafter. Studies have found a correlation between early program entry and degree completion or successfully transferring. It is therefore concerning that since 2013, the percent of adults who are unsure of what they want to study increased 10 percent. Enrolling undeclared means students may use up valuable time and money deciding on a field of study. Approaches such as intensive advising or guided pathway programs can help students narrow down their options so that they enter a program of study earlier and start earning credits toward their major. These approaches may be especially helpful for low-income students, who are even more likely to enter college unsure of what to study.

• Provide additional support for adult prospective students to stay on track and ensure they graduate. Unlike traditional students, adult prospective students may have to go to school part-time, transfer between schools or take more classes online—all factors related to a lower likelihood of graduation. Adult prospective students will need more support to stay on track, and they appear open to such help. Consider ways different departments such as academic affairs and career services can work together and provide easily accessible and relevant tutoring or other services that can address students’ academic needs.

• Colleges and universities should prioritize faculty. Most adult prospective students say that when choosing a school, it is absolutely essential that instructors care about students and know how to teach. Although they are looking for high-quality teachers once they enroll, they recognize that faculty can also play an important role prior to enrollment, by helping them decide which colleges are right for them. Therefore, it is essential for colleges and universities to attract and retain high-quality faculty and give them the time they need to connect with adult prospective students and serve as advisers.

• Find innovative ways to provide workplace-relevant instruction in classrooms. Many adult prospective students are planning to pursue a degree or certificate to broaden their career options, and most think it is absolutely essential to gain skills that are relevant to the workplace. Graduates’ career success is increasingly one of the metrics by which the quality of colleges and universities is measured. However, internships are not appealing to most adult prospective students. Colleges and faculty need to find other ways to integrate workplace-relevant skills and foster experiential learning into their curricula and instruction.
• The metrics that matter to experts—such as graduation rates—need to be made relevant to adult prospective students. Many experts believe that making information about the cost and quality of schools more transparent will help adult prospective students identify and choose higher-performing institutions. However, most adults do not think information such as graduation rates or the number of graduates who get a job in the field they studied is absolutely essential. While transparency is important for leaders and policymakers to hold institutions accountable, more needs to be done to help individual adult prospective students understand how those metrics matter to them.

• Ensure that colleges and universities are equipped to help adult prospective students make informed choices. Most adult prospective students would turn directly to schools for information. Faculty, current students and staff should be provided with the time, training and information needed to enable them to engage adult prospective students and help them make informed choices. School websites should be easy to navigate, have information specific to adult learners and provide ways for adult prospective students to connect directly with faculty, students, alumni and advisers.

• Encourage businesses and community organizations to work together to support adult prospective students. While adult prospective students may attribute postsecondary success more to students themselves than to colleges, they clearly believe that other entities in their communities can play roles in helping adults graduate. Consider ways to create partnerships between businesses, community organizations and colleges themselves to create support systems for adult learners. Such support will help adult students gain workplace-relevant skills, transfer without encountering barriers and find support for critical needs such as food and transportation.