

College Transparency Act FAQs

The College Transparency Act (CTA) of 2017 is a bipartisan bill in both the House (H.R. 2434) and Senate (S. 1121). It would create a student-level data network at the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to provide students, colleges, employers, policy leaders, and the public with more complete information about what programs are helping students to earn credentials and get good jobs.

How would the CTA work?

The bill would require all postsecondary institutions receiving Title IV federal funding to submit student-level data to NCES on all of their students, not only those students receiving federal aid, and overturn the 2008 ban on the federal government creating a student-level database.¹ Non-Title IV institutions could submit information voluntarily.

Colleges would submit data to NCES, including:

- First-time or transfer student status
- Credential level sought
- Program of study
- Credit accumulation and completion
- Full-time or part-time status
- Race/ethnicity, sex, age intervals
- Institutional grants and loans
- Military or Veteran status

NCES would securely match this student-level information with existing data from other federal agencies to show postsecondary outcomes. Agencies suggested in the legislation include the Office of Federal Student Aid at ED, the U.S. Department of Treasury, the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Census Bureau. This system would replace the student components of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), like the Graduation Rate and enrollment surveys.

What information would the CTA provide to the public?

The CTA requires the creation of a website that would allow students, researchers, policymakers, and other members of the public to see customizable, aggregated data about postsecondary programs and outcomes. Data would include:

- Admission selectivity and enrollment
- Federal grant and loan recipient status
- Retention and persistence rates
- Transfer and completion/graduation rates
- Measures of student costs
- Employment rates and median earnings
- Loan repayment and default rates
- Graduate education rates

The system would aggregate information by institution, degree level (including occupational certificates), and program. Users could view information about education and training options across the country.

How would the CTA secure data and protect student privacy?

The legislation requires rigorous standards that would ensure the privacy and security of the data, and would only generate aggregate data. The CTA includes prohibitions on the sale of data, penalties for illegally obtaining information, prohibitions on collection of health data and other sensitive information, as well as strong limitations on disclosing any information about individuals. It also requires the data system to use up-to-date security standards.

1. Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008, Public Law 110-315, Sec. 113, and Sec. 134, Amendments to Higher Education Act of 1965.



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