The College Transparency Act of 2017
Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA),
Bill Cassidy (R-LA), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

Today's students and their families need accurate, accessible, and comprehensive information in order to choose the college that is the best fit for their individual needs. Unfortunately, important information about whether or not a particular college or major pays off for students is currently incomplete. For example, despite the vast majority of students citing finding a good job as their primary reason for going to college, there is currently no easy way to evaluate the labor-market success of various programs or majors. Moreover, our current, burdensome reporting system is antiquated, it leaves critical questions unanswered, and does not reflect the realities of today's students. The legislation would modernize the postsecondary data reporting framework in order to more accurately report college outcomes, allowing for greater transparency for the public, students, families, and policymakers.

What are the problems with the current system?
Colleges currently report postsecondary data in a manner that is highly burdensome because it is reported at the institution level rather than at the student level. Institution level data is significantly more complex for colleges to report because they have to aggregate and calculate various duplicative metrics to satisfy current federal reporting requirements. Despite this complicated reporting scheme, the public is still largely in the dark on graduation and outcome information because colleges only report completion data for first-time, full-time students who receive federal aid. These limitations do not reflect today's student population—where nearly two out of three students attend at least two schools before graduating and nearly 40% of undergraduate students attend on a part-time basis. Furthermore, the current reporting system fails to release complete information on outcomes by basic student demographics, major, or by credential level.

The College Transparency Act of 2017
This legislation would address the shortcomings of the current reporting system by:
- Ensuring accurate and complete reporting on student outcomes including enrollment, retention, completion, and post-collegiate outcomes across colleges and majors;
- Taking appropriate steps to ensure student privacy is protected, and data remains secure;
- Strengthening transparency, institutional improvement, and analysis of Federal student aid programs;
- Providing actionable and customizable information for students and families making important decisions about higher education;
- Modernizing the reporting system and ultimately reducing the reporting burden on institutions of higher education.

This bill would establish a secure, privacy-protected postsecondary student data system at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Colleges would report data to this new data system in lieu of the current, burdensome reporting mechanisms, and NCES would be responsible for presenting the information in a user-friendly manner for students and the public, while safeguarding student privacy. NCES would be able to connect with other federal agencies in order to report on certain student outcomes. This bill prohibits a federal college ratings or rankings scheme, while providing important information to researchers and colleges for institutional improvement. The bill has provisions to ensure that student information is protected, including: disclosure limitations, prohibitions on the sale of data, penalties for illegally obtaining information, protections for vulnerable students, prohibition on law enforcement access, and strong limitations personally identifiable information.