



# Obama To Promote Little Schools That Can't?

By: [Neal McCluskey](#)

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Today, depending on when this is posted, President Obama either will have delivered a speech, or is about to, extolling the virtues of community colleges. The talk is expected to be a preview of the upcoming State of the Union address, in which Obama has promoted community colleges – the little schools that can – before. Or are they really the little schools that can't?

All signs, alas, point to the latter. By a lot.

First, a trip down *Digest of Education Statistics* Lane reveals an [atrocious completion rate](#) for students at two-year, public institutions. Only a dismal 19.5 percent of first-time, full-time students at public two-year institutions complete within 150 percent of the time their program is supposed to take, and that rate has been dropping for years.

That is awful, but don't a lot of students from such schools transfer to four-year institutions? Not really. According to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#), only [20 percent of community college students](#) transfer to four-year schools, and only 72 percent of those will have finished or remained enrolled four years later. So, from what we can tell, we are looking at completion for around just 34 percent of community colleges students. I don't see much to celebrate in that.

Of course, what is politically appealing about community colleges is that they are relatively cheap to students, and, of course, they are officially nonprofit, which means they must be pure as the driven snow. But the completion data simply don't justify a loving embrace of these schools, and policy will only ultimately be successful if it is grounded in reality. Of course, higher education policy hasn't been so grounded in decades, so why shouldn't community colleges get a pass?

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