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K-through-college database eyed

By Jennifer Brown
Denver Post Staff Writer

The federal government would assign every student in America a number, then follow them from kindergarten to college to work.

The massive database could keep track of how many students completed degrees, when they dropped out of college or how much of their own money they spent to make it to graduation.

The system is one idea under consideration as Congress looks for ways to make colleges and universities more accountable for the tax dollars they spend, educators meeting in Denver said Wednesday.

Lawmakers "feel they are putting a lot of taxpayer money into higher education and they're not sure what they're getting out of it," said George Conant, legislative director for California State University's Office of Federal Relations in Washington, D.C.

Conant was a speaker at the 2005 National Forum on Education Policy.

Congress is working to renew the Higher Education Act, a law as thick as a novel that governs most student-aid programs. Lawmakers are considering a system to keep track of student retention and graduation rates, data they could use to distribute financial aid.

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ever, but fear some lawmakers view higher education as "more of a consumer good and less of an intellectual experience," said Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The database would have safeguards to protect private information, said Paul Lingenfelter, executive director of State Higher Education Executive Officers in Boulder.

He likened the system to supermarket cards that track buying trends with bar codes.

"They don't really care about me personally, but they learn about what people like me shop for and they stock their shelves differently," he said.

The database could show how well colleges are using their financial resources and even whether lower-income students have to work too many hours to handle their course load, he said.

database eyed

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