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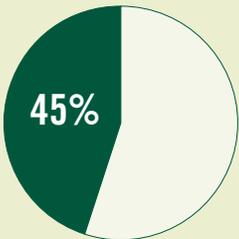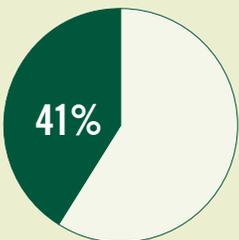## *is what counts*

ACHIEVING
THE DREAM®
COMMUNITY
COLLEGES
COUNT

Fewer than half of community college students meet their educational goals

45%

Nationally, of community college students who seek an associate degree or higher, 45 percent earn an associate or a bachelor's degree or transfer to a four-year institution within six years.

41%

Nationally, of students enrolled in a certificate program (study oriented toward a particular job or industry), 41 percent achieve that goal, earn a degree or transfer to a four-year institution within six years.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2001). Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 1996–2001 (BPS:96/01). Analysis by Community College Research Center.

Achieving the Dream was created to help more community college students succeed — complete courses, earn certificates and earn degrees. The initiative is built on the belief that broad institutional change — informed by student achievement data — is critical to achieve this result.

Community colleges offer broad access to higher education through open admissions. When their students succeed, the benefits are far-reaching. Community colleges educate new workers so our nation can stay competitive, and they retrain current workers to address evolving jobs or circumstances. In the process, community colleges prepare students for lives as productive, engaged members of society — preparation that serves both the students and their communities.

But today, many students leave college without meeting their educational goals and there are significant achievement gaps for low-income students, students of color and others. Community colleges have to do more. Achieving the Dream is designed to help.

A multiyear national initiative with 84 colleges in 15 states, Achieving the Dream acts on multiple fronts. The initiative:

- Provides planning and implementation grants to colleges and state policy efforts

- Helps colleges develop and implement strategies to improve student success and build a culture of evidence in which decisions are based on data about student achievement

- Conducts research about effective practices and student achievement at community colleges

- Works to influence public policy so it supports colleges' improvement efforts

- Engages communities, businesses and the public

Participating colleges enroll high percentages of low-income students and students of color, who are less likely to attain their educational goals. These colleges are working to close achievement gaps while maintaining open access and increasing student success overall. To do so, colleges will have to make lasting changes in their practices and cultures.

About Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream asks colleges to focus on a student-centered vision, build a culture of evidence and promote the twin goals of equity and excellence.

A student-centered vision. Achieving the Dream colleges have made specific commitments to improve student achievement on their campuses. They have pledged to maintain open access while working to increase the percentage of first-time credential-seeking students who:

- Complete developmental courses and move on to credit-bearing courses. Now, 27 percent of students referred to developmental education courses complete those courses.

- Enroll in and complete gatekeeper courses, such as introductory math and English. Now, 11 percent complete gatekeeper courses in both math and English.

- Complete the courses they take, earning a grade of C or higher. Our data allow us to measure course completion with any grade. Now, 59 percent of credits attempted are completed with any grade.

- Re-enroll from one semester to the next. Now, 70 percent of first-semester students re-enroll for the second semester; 44 percent of first-semester students re-enroll for both the second and third semesters.

- Earn certificates and degrees. Now, 11 percent earn some type of credential (certificate or degree).[1]

To improve student achievement, colleges have agreed to use data to drive strategies, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes; develop strategies to close performance gaps among students; involve their faculty, students, staff and communities in their efforts; report data and outcomes broadly, both on and off campus; form partnerships with their communities, local businesses and others; and advocate for state and national policy changes as needed.

A culture of evidence. All Achieving the Dream participants are committed to understanding and using student achievement data to improve student outcomes. Colleges that were accustomed to basing decisions on anecdotal evidence now are developing strategies based on data, implementing those strategies and then evaluating whether they help students succeed.

Colleges describe this process as working within a culture of evidence. They are referring to a collective mindset, one in which critical decisions affecting students — from selecting educational strategies and allocating resources to scheduling classes and organizing student services — are informed by data and evaluated in light of whether student achievement increases.

Central to this work is being open and forthright about current performance; setting measurable goals that consider outcomes of all students, not just the top performers; and making lasting, institutional change to attain them. Because there are disparities in student outcomes, this work includes disaggregating student achievement data — breaking it down by race, age, income level and other demographic characteristics — to better understand and begin to close performance gaps.

Equity and excellence. Assumptions about who can achieve, and at what level they can achieve, are at the heart of student success. They also are at the heart of Achieving the Dream.

In the context of closing achievement gaps, many people believe that equity can be advanced only with a corresponding decrease in excellence. Achieving the Dream, by contrast, does not believe in a tradeoff between equity and excellence. The initiative establishes equity and excellence as twin goals — both of which must be met to help students succeed.

Achieving the Dream data

While many colleges look at data at single points in time, Achieving the Dream colleges use longitudinal data — data that track cohorts (groups) of students over a period of time. The 2005 cohort, for example, is made up of students who started college in fall 2005. A longitudinal study identifies a group of students and tracks their educational progress over a number of years. As a result, researchers can accurately gauge, for example, what percentage of students are persisting, completing courses, earning credentials and leaving college.

The initiative also collects these data from colleges and assembles them in the Achieving the Dream database. The database includes all part-time and full-time students seeking degrees at Achieving the Dream colleges. Achieving the Dream researchers use these data to track and analyze the students' progress and to examine trends across the initiative.

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[1]Among students in the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort, which includes only first-time credential-seeking students at participating colleges. Except where noted, the cohort includes 26 colleges and 66,136 students.

- Developmental education: 20 colleges; 36,689 students were referred to developmental education; 9,930 students completed the developmental courses to which they were referred.
- Gatekeeper courses: 7,526 students completed both gatekeeper courses.
- Re-enrollment: 46,323 students re-enrolled for the second semester; 29,010 students re-enrolled for both the second and third semesters.
- Earning credentials: 7,455 students earned a certificate or degree.

Community Colleges: Challenges and Benefits

Almost half (45 percent) of all undergraduate students attend community colleges.[2] Americans turn to community colleges to provide the education that leads to greater economic opportunity and improved quality of life. This work is becoming more critical — and more challenging — as we strive to maintain a sound, competitive economy and a well-functioning democracy.

Globalization is driving changes in our economy, and our need for an educated workforce is increasing. Sixty-three percent of the 18.9 million new jobs that will be created by 2014 will require some postsecondary education.[3] New jobs are more demanding, and the demographics of the workforce are changing. As a result, employers increasingly rely on the very students who currently are least likely to complete their education.

As a nation, we need to educate a competitive workforce and stimulate local economies. To achieve these goals, we must provide opportunity and maximize success for everyone. This is the critical work of community

[2]American Association of Community Colleges, 2006.

[3]Bureau of Labor Statistics (November 2005). "Occupational Employment Projections to 2014," *Monthly Labor Review*, p. 80.

colleges. Helping these colleges — making sure they are places where everyone can find educational opportunity and achieve educational success — is the critical work of Achieving the Dream.

Community College Characteristics and Challenges

Community colleges educate a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals, including getting a better job, earning a community college certificate or an associate degree, and earning a bachelor's degree.

Many community college students face academic, personal and financial challenges. They are adults returning to education after a long period of time as well as individuals who work, care for dependents and juggle other commitments.

If students aren't well served by their community colleges, many of them won't have other opportunities for education — and are likely to drain resources from society rather than contribute to it. However, when students do attain their educational goals (complete courses, earn certificates and earn degrees), they improve their own lives and benefit the nation.

Achieving the Dream participants

Achieving the Dream has 19 funders and eight national partner organizations that contribute diverse strengths and expertise to helping community colleges better serve their students.

FUNDERS

FLORIDA, NEW MEXICO, NORTH CAROLINA, TEXAS AND VIRGINIA

Lumina Foundation for Education
www.luminafoundation.org

Lumina Foundation for Education provided funding for the initiative's startup, funds the 2004 colleges and provides ongoing support for other elements of the initiative.

ARKANSAS COLLEGES

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
www.wrfoundation.org

CONNECTICUT COLLEGES

Nellie Mae Education Foundation
www.nmefdn.org

HAWAII COLLEGES

Kamehameha Schools
www.ksbe.edu

Office of Hawaiian Affairs
www.oha.org

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges
www.hawaii.edu/offices/cc/index.html

HOUSTON-AREA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Houston Endowment Inc.
www.houstonendowment.org

MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGES

The Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation
www.bankofamerica.com/grantmakingsolutions

The Boston Foundation
www.tbf.org

TERI
www.teri.org

The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
www.davisfdn.org

MICHIGAN COLLEGES

W.K. Kellogg Foundation
www.wkkf.org

The Kresge Foundation
www.kresge.org

OHIO COLLEGES

KnowledgeWorks Foundation
www.kwfdn.org

OKLAHOMA COLLEGES

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
www.okhighered.org

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGES

The Heinz Endowments
www.heinz.org

SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGES

Palmetto Institute
www.palmettoinstitute.org

South Carolina Technical College System
www.sctechsystem.com

WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGES

College Spark Washington
www.collegespark.org

NATIONAL PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of Community Colleges
www.aacc.nche.edu

Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin
www.utexas.edu/academic/cclp

Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University
ccrc.tc.columbia.edu

Institute for Higher Education, University of Florida
www.education.ufl.edu/Leadership/ihe/Institute.html

Jobs for the Future
www.jff.org

MDC (managing partner)
www.mdcinc.org

MDRC
www.mdrc.org

Public Agenda
www.publicagenda.org

STATE POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

The organizations leading the state policy efforts are the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Connecticut Community Colleges system office, Florida Department of Education, KnowledgeWorks Foundation (OH), Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, Michigan Community College Association, New Mexico Higher Education Department, North Carolina Community College System, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, South Carolina Technical College System, Texas Association of Community Colleges, University of Hawaii Community College System, Virginia Community College System, and Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.

Community Colleges by the Numbers

Student Characteristics

41% Students who are first-generation college students[4]

29% Students who have household incomes less than $20,000[5]

35% Students who are parents or have other dependents[6]

17% Students who are single parents[7]

79% Students who work (full time and part time) in addition to taking classes[8]

41% Students who work full-time jobs in addition to taking classes[9]

69% Students who attend college part time[10]

35% Students who are at least 30 years old[11]

Student Achievement

45% Students seeking an associate degree or higher who earn an associate degree, earn a bachelor's degree or transfer to a four-year institution within six years[12]

41% Students enrolled in a certificate program (study oriented toward a particular job or industry) who achieve that goal, earn a degree or transfer to a four-year institution within six years[13]

Employment Needs

60% Jobs that are held by workers with at least some postsecondary education or training[14]

63% Percentage of the 18.9 million new jobs to be created by 2014 that will require some postsecondary education[15]

Economic and Societal Impact

20–30% The difference in earnings of people who hold associate degrees as compared with those who hold only high school diplomas.[16] Higher levels of education lead to higher earnings for all racial and ethnic groups and for both men and women. Higher education yields other benefits, including access to health care and better opportunities for the next generation. Higher levels of education also correlate positively with higher levels of civic participation, including community service, voting and charitable giving.

5–15% Economic growth that results from increasing a state's or country's average level of schooling by one year[17]

3:1 Ratio of state and local tax dollars (from regional economic development and growth) to taxpayer dollars invested in a community college.[18] Investing in community colleges also leads to economic benefits that result from lower poverty rates, reduced crime and incarceration rates, improved health habits, reduced unemployment, and reduced dependence on welfare and other social safety-net programs.

[4]U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2006). *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions: 2003–04*, p. 107.

[5]Ibid., p. 91.

[6]Ibid., p. 99.

[7]Ibid., p. 99.

[8]Ibid., p. 13.

[9]Ibid., p. 13.

[10]Ibid., p. 13.

[11]Ibid., p. 9.

[12]U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2001). *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 1996–2001 (BPS:96/01)*. Analysis by Community College Research Center (CCRC).

[13]Ibid.

[14]Carnevale, Anthony P., and Desrochers, Donna M. (July 2004)."Why Learning? The Value of Higher Education to Society and the Individual," *Keeping America's Promise,* p. 39. Education Commission of the States and the League for Innovation in the Community College.

[15]Bureau of Labor Statistics (November 2005). "Occupational Employment Projections to 2014," *Monthly Labor Review,* p. 80.

[16]Bailey, T., Kienzl, G., and Marcotte, D. (August 2004). "Who Benefits from Postsecondary Occupational Education?"

Findings from the 1980s and 1990s (CCRC Brief No. 23). New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

[17]Carnevale, Anthony P., and Desrochers, Donna M. (July 2004)."Why Learning? The Value of Higher Education to Society and the Individual," *Keeping America's Promise,* p. 39. Education Commission of the States and the League for Innovation in the Community College.

[18]Association of Community College Trustees, press release, September 18, 2003.

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For media inquiries, contact Bonnie Gordon, 919.968.4531 x314; bgordon@mdcinc.org.

Strategies for Improvement

Achieving the Dream colleges are identifying practices that will help more students — particularly students of color and low-income students — succeed. Examples of colleges' strategies include:

Developmental education. Developmental education in reading, writing and math (often called remedial education) either refreshes students' skills or helps them acquire the core skills they need for college-level work. Students who enter college underprepared for college-level coursework (as determined by a placement test) are referred to developmental education.

Achieving the Dream colleges enroll large numbers of students who require developmental education, and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) don't complete these courses.[19] But when students successfully complete developmental education, they have at least the same chances of completing a degree or transferring as their peers who began their studies in college-level courses.

Colleges' strategies include refining course placement so students enroll in the courses they need, incorporating study skills into the developmental education curriculum and making individual education plans for students.

The first-year experience. Community colleges typically lose about half of their students prior to the beginning of the sophomore year.[20] Engaging students, however, helps students build connections and motivates them to stick with their studies. To improve retention, some colleges are implementing strategies such as making orientation mandatory; requiring courses that focus on time management, study techniques and other key skills; and other tactics that increase contact between the college and students early in their collegiate experience.

Instructional techniques, such as collaborative learning and learning communities. Learning communities, for example, are combinations of two, three or four courses that usually have related or linked content. Students in the learning community take the classes together as a group, creating a more intensive learning environment and one in which students typically get high levels of support from one another and from the faculty.

Advising services. For many community college students, academic planning and advising make the difference between succeeding and dropping out. Strategies include developing case management systems, creating early warning systems that identify students at high risk of failure, and professional development to help more faculty and staff serve as advisers.

K–14 strategies. Data at some Achieving the Dream colleges reveal that large numbers of recent high school graduates enter college underprepared for college-level work. In response, colleges have planned collaborative efforts with K–12 education leaders to improve students' college readiness. Strategies include working with local schools to align high school curricula with college curricula, offering college success classes for high school seniors, and developing summer college prep courses for high school students.

Supporting the colleges

In addition to receiving planning and implementation grants, Achieving the Dream colleges are supported by partner organizations that help the colleges lead change, analyze data, identify strategies, involve stakeholders and influence policy.

- **Coaching.** Each college receives at-the-elbow support from a coach and a data facilitator experienced in community college administration. Coaches and data facilitators guide colleges as they analyze their student data, set priorities, develop strategies, and implement and evaluate institutional improvements. Many coaches are former college presidents. Data facilitators typically are trained as institutional researchers. Colleges also receive assistance with reaching out to their communities' stakeholders and other audiences.

- **Public policy.** Achieving the Dream is working in its colleges' states to influence policy so it becomes more supportive of student success. The initiative provides state policy teams with research, strategic consultation and opportunities for peer learning. Policy priorities focus on how state data systems can be better designed and used to drive student success, how states can strengthen incentives and supports for quality developmental education, and how states can engage community colleges to help improve the alignment of college and high school expectations.

- **Research.** Achieving the Dream partner organizations are conducting research related to improving student outcomes at community colleges. To date, the body of research includes a national assessment of institutional research at community colleges; an analysis of how college success courses affect graduation and transfer rates; a series of studies on the relationship between institutional practices associated with a culture of evidence and student outcomes; and a survey of faculty and administrators at Achieving the Dream colleges to examine how they use data to design and deliver programs and services.

[19]Among students in the 2002 Achieving the Dream cohort at 20 colleges (36,389 students were referred to developmental education; 26,759 did not complete the developmental courses to which they were referred).

[20]Community College Survey of Student Engagement, *Engagement by Design,* 2004.

Achieving the Dream Institutions

Achieving the Dream includes 80 community colleges in 15 states and four Texas universities. These institutions should be commended for having the courage to be open and straightforward about their current performance and taking bold action to improve it.
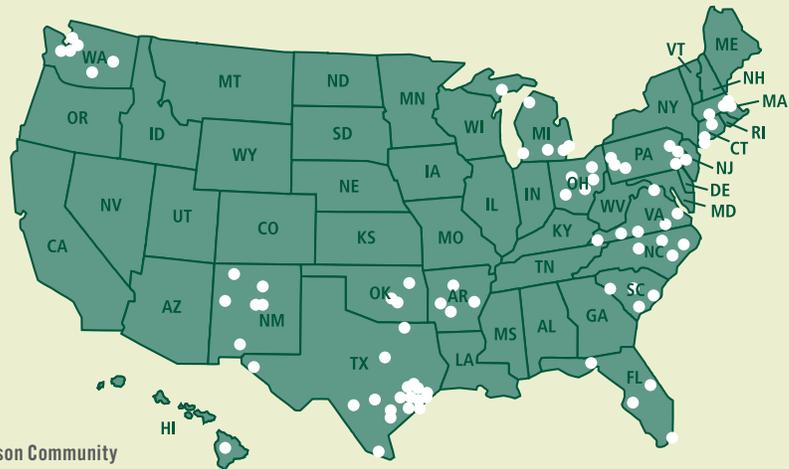
2004
INSTITUTIONS

FLORIDA

Broward Community College, *Fort Lauderdale*

Hillsborough Community College, *Tampa*

Tallahassee Community College, *Tallahassee*

Valencia Community College, *Orlando*

NEW MEXICO

Central New Mexico Community College, *Albuquerque*

New Mexico State University-Dona Ana, *Las Cruces*

San Juan College, *Farmington*

Santa Fe Community College, *Santa Fe*

Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, *Albuquerque*

University of New Mexico-Gallup, *Gallup*

NORTH CAROLINA

Durham Technical Community College, *Durham*

Guilford Technical Community College, *Jamestown*

Martin Community College, *Williamston*

Wayne Community College, *Goldsboro*

TEXAS

Alamo Community College District, *San Antonio*

Brookhaven College, *Dallas*

Coastal Bend College, *Beeville*

El Paso Community College District, *El Paso*

Galveston College, *Galveston*

Houston Community College System, *Houston*

South Texas College, *McAllen*

Southwest Texas Junior College, *Uvalde*

VIRGINIA

Danville Community College, *Danville*

Mountain Empire Community College, *Big Stone Gap*

Patrick Henry Community College, *Martinsville*

Paul D. Camp Community College, *Franklin*

Tidewater Community College, *Norfolk*

2005
INSTITUTIONS

CONNECTICUT

Capital Community College, *Hartford*

Housatonic Community College, *Bridgeport*

Norwalk Community College, *Norwalk*

OHIO

Cuyahoga Community College, *Cleveland*

Jefferson Community College, *Steubenville*

North Central State College, *Mansfield*

Sinclair Community College, *Dayton*

Zane State College, *Zanesville*

2006
INSTITUTIONS

PENNSYLVANIA

Community College of Allegheny County, *Pittsburgh*

Community College of Beaver County, *Monaca*

Community College of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia*

Delaware County Community College, *Media*

Montgomery County Community College, *Blue Bell*

Northampton Community College, *Bethlehem*

Westmoreland County Community College, *Youngwood*

TEXAS

Alvin Community College, *Alvin*

Brazosport College, *Lake Jackson*

College of the Mainland, *Texas City*

Lee College, *Baytown*

North Harris Montgomery Community College District, *The Woodlands*

Prairie View A&M University, *Prairie View*

San Jacinto College, *Pasadena*

Texas Southern University, *Houston*

University of Houston-Downtown, *Houston*

Wharton County Junior College, *Wharton*

WASHINGTON

Big Bend Community College, *Moses Lake*

Highline Community College, *Des Moines*

Renton Technical College, *Renton*

Seattle Central Community College, *Seattle*

Tacoma Community College, *Tacoma*

Yakima Valley Community College, *Yakima*

2007
INSTITUTIONS

ARKANSAS

National Park Community College, *Hot Springs*

Ouachita Technical College, *Malvern*

Phillips Community College, *Helena*

Pulaski Technical College, *North Little Rock*

HAWAII

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges, *Honolulu*

MASSACHUSETTS

Bunker Hill Community College, *Boston*

Northern Essex Community College, *Lawrence*

Roxbury Community College, *Roxbury*

Springfield Technical Community College, *Springfield*

MICHIGAN

Bay de Noc Community College, *Escanaba*

Henry Ford Community College, *Dearborn*

Jackson Community College, *Jackson*

Lake Michigan College, *Benton Harbor*

North Central Michigan College, *Petoskey*

Wayne County Community College, *Detroit*

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma City Community College, *Oklahoma City*

Rose State College, *Midwest City*

Tulsa Community College, *Tulsa*

SOUTH CAROLINA

Aiken Technical College, *Aiken*

Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, *Orangeburg*

Technical College of the Lowcountry, *Beaufort*

Trident Technical College, *Charleston*

TEXAS

Paris Junior College, *Paris*

The Victoria College, *Victoria*

University of Houston, *Houston*

VIRGINIA

Northern Virginia Community College, *Annandale*