

## Mich. colleges find success with pathways



BY **ELLIE ASHFORD** FEBRUARY 7, 2018

Community colleges in Michigan have made significant progress in redesigning programs and services to help students succeed through the implementation of career pathways.

Since 2015, when 23 colleges joined the Michigan Guided Pathways Institute, those colleges have taken steps toward implementing pathways principles, according to “**Guided Pathways: The Scale of Adoption in Michigan**” from the **Michigan Center for Student Success (MCSS)**, a program of the **Michigan Community College Association**.

Nearly all of the colleges reported progress in mapping programs intended for transfer or leading directly to a career. Three-quarters of the colleges are making headway in redesigning advising and orientation to connect students with programs earlier.

With leadership from MCSS, these colleges are helping students “complete programs more efficiently and affordably,” said co-author Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at the **Community College Research Center** (CCRC) at Columbia University. “Other states are looking to Michigan to learn how to make big improvements in a short timeframe.”

Each college completed a Scale of Adoption Assessment, developed by CCRC, to measure implementation of guided pathways before participating in the Guided Pathways Institute and again in July 2017.

In one example from the report, **Grand Rapids Community College** has developed 10 pathways that include both career and transfer programs, plus a “pathways degree” for students who haven’t yet identified a major. Students in this program are prompted to enroll in a set of Priority 1 courses, including math and English composition. There’s also a pathways degree with a business concentration for students interested in business but undecided about a specific program.

**Macomb Community College** is one of several colleges that has organized its meta-major clusters to integrate degree, certificate and non-credit workforce certifications into program clusters.

One common approach highlighted in the report is expanding first-year experience courses. **Montcalm Community College**, for example, fully scaled its college success course and integrated it into its culture. Instructors serve as resources for students throughout the semester.

Several colleges, including **Jackson College** and **Lansing Community College**, have aligned their meta-majors with a career exploration and planning framework used in K-12 schools. **Glen Oaks Community College** offers free Accuplacer testing for high school students to better gauge whether they may need extra help to avoid taking developmental education in college.

Jackson and Macomb are among several colleges that have revamped their online course catalogs to provide more detailed information to students on what courses they need and the sequence in which to take them.

## Next steps

Colleges that participated in the Pathways Institute say their most pressing need is for support in monitoring student progress and intervening to ensure students stay on track.

To maintain the progress, the report notes MCSS will partner with the [American Association of Community Colleges' Voluntary Framework for Accountability](#), which, in part, helps participating colleges gauge “early momentum” metrics that CCRC and others have identified as useful leading indicators of the effect of guided pathways reforms.

The report on Michigan’s guided pathways program can benefit community colleges across the nation that “want to see evidence and examples of how guided pathways can put more students, including low-income and underrepresented students, on track to graduate,” said Caroline Altman Smith, deputy director for education programs at the [Kresge Foundation](#), which helped fund MCSS.

MCSS “has really helped the MCCA support our member colleges on a deeper level. This is just one example of how a network of colleges can work together to enact needed reforms to advance student success,” said MCAA President Michael Hansen.

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