

FIVE STATES OF POLICY:
A BRIEF ON STATE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
POLICIES AND POLICY NEEDS
IN THE FIRST FIVE
ACHIEVING THE DREAM
STATES

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This brief provides a condensed summary of a larger report on state policies toward community college access and success for minority and low-income students in five states (Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) that are part of the first round of the Lumina Foundation for Education’s “Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count” initiative. The larger report, *State Policies to Achieve the Dream in Five States*, has been issued in February 2006 by the Community College Research Center for the Achieving the Dream initiative.

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FIVE STATES OF POLICY

In 2003, the Lumina Foundation for Education launched a major initiative, “Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count,” to increase student success at community colleges. The initiative focuses on colleges with high enrollments of low-income students and students of color. In the first round, 27 colleges in five states were selected.

The initiative aims to help more students succeed, while maintaining access to community college for groups that traditionally have faced barriers. A key means to improve the performance of colleges is through enhancement of their capacities to gather, analyze, and act on data on student outcomes, including data on students grouped by race, income, age, sex, and other characteristics.

From the beginning, a central component of this effort has been state policy. In each of the states where Achieving the Dream colleges are located, the initiative is working with a lead organization (typically the state community college system office or state association of community colleges) to develop policies that will enhance student success.

To help guide that policy effort, the Lumina Foundation commissioned an audit of state policy affecting access to, and success in, community colleges. An in-depth analysis was conducted of the initial five Achieving the Dream states (New Mexico, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia), to be supplemented later by a survey of all 50 states. This report summarizes that initial in-depth analysis of the first five Achieving the Dream states.

THE POLICIES EXAMINED

Access Policies

Despite the huge growth in higher education in the United States over the last 100 years, large differences in college access still remain, particularly by race and income. For example, among 1992 high school graduates, 75% had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education by the year 2000. However, the figures for Hispanics, Native Americans, and those in the bottom quartile in socioeconomic status (SES) in the eighth grade were only 70%, 66%, and 52%, respectively (Ingels, Curtin, Kaufman, Alt, & Chen, 2002).

Admissions policy is of interest because, while community colleges are open door in ethos, this policy is under pressure as colleges face both increasing enrollment demand and more stingy state and local government funding (Hebel, 2004). Moreover, the increasing number of undocumented students raises important questions for an institution committed to access for the disadvantaged.

Tuition and financial aid are of immediate concern given that both significantly affect whether students go to college (Heller, 1999; St. John, 1991).

Because outreach is important for low-income and minority students, there is a need for state support of programs to encourage interest in college by minority and low-income students, including the provision of funding for early intervention and dual-enrollment programs (Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success, 2005; Bailey and Karp, 2003; Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004, 2005).

Provisions for an accessible curriculum are of interest because many low-income and minority students are attracted to higher education by the availability of occupational, adult, and continuing education programs (Grubb, Badway, & Bell, 2003; Prince & Jenkins, 2005).

Finally, because minority and low-income students are more place and time bound (Choy & Ottinger, 1998), we have sought to determine whether states have encouraged community colleges to establish satellite campuses, schedule courses at nontraditional times, offer distance education, or offer short-term courses or fractional credit.

Success Policies

Success within the community college remains an issue because many community college entrants leave higher education without a degree, and this number is particularly great for low-income and minority students.

State policies need to address remedial and developmental education because many low-income and minority students come into college with inadequate academic skills (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). Policies should also cover academic and non-academic counseling and guidance, shown to have significant impacts on college persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Transfer to the four-year college has become increasingly important as low-income and minority students are increasingly priced out of four-year colleges and states increasingly encourage baccalaureate aspirants to start at community colleges because it is cheaper for the states (Robertson, 2005; Wellman, 2002).

Baccalaureate provision at community colleges – either by community colleges themselves or by universities through centers at community colleges – has become increasingly attractive, particularly in response to the needs of place-bound students, labor market shortages, and cost-pressures on state governments (Floyd, Skolnik, & Walker, 2005). But what role have states taken in encouraging and regulating this development of the community college baccalaureate?

Noncredit to credit articulation has become increasingly imperative as more low-income and minority individuals access the community college through the noncredit side, whether through English as a second language, adult basic education, high school equivalency (GED), or other such programs. But if they are to find a secure pathway to economic advancement, such noncredit entrants need to find their way to the credit side of the curriculum, where the most remunerative credentials are to be found (Grubb et al., 2003; Prince & Jenkins, 2005).

Finally, because minority and low-income students must find jobs, it is important not only that they get trained but that remunerative jobs be available. Hence, the role state policy plays in aiding community colleges both to train workers and create new jobs is of interest (Dougherty & Bakia, 1999).

Performance Accountability

Performance accountability spans both access and success. States are increasingly using measures of community college performance – both for student access and student success – as ways of monitoring and rewarding colleges. But to effectively serve the goals of equality of access and success, the right measures must be used, particularly ones that directly address equality for minority and low-income students. Moreover, there must also be means to ensure that state policymakers respond to those performance outcome indicators in their policy decisions and budget allocations to the colleges, and that local community college officials use data on their performance to make changes in their own institutional practices affecting student access and success (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

RESEARCH METHODS

To secure information on what policies the states have and how well they are working, we conducted many interviews and reviewed the written academic and non-academic literature on these subjects. We also attended the Policy Listening Tour meetings in each of the states, conducted by the Futures Project, in order to observe discussions among policymakers and informally converse with them. Our interviews were conducted over the telephone and averaged twelve in each state. We interviewed officials of the state agencies coordinating the community colleges, the governor's educational advisor, state legislators or staff members from both houses, the head of the state community college association (if one existed), the presidents or top officials of three or four community colleges (differing in degree of urbanicity and area of the state), and representatives of community organizations representing the African American, Latino, and low-income communities in each state.

VARIATIONS IN STATE ACTIVITY ACROSS POLICY AREAS

Access Policies

We have looked at state policies affecting institutional practices with regard to access in these areas: admissions, tuition, student financial aid, outreach programs, accessible curriculum, and convenient access at distant locations and nontraditional times. However, we begin by analyzing the states' degree of public commitment to increasing student access.

Public Commitment to Increasing Student Access

All five of the first-round Achieving the Dream states have made public commitments to expanding access to community college. However, the states differ in how formal these commitments are. For example, is their commitment instantiated in formal plans and mission statements (Texas and Virginia), public statements of a less formal nature (Florida and New Mexico), or programs addressing the needs specifically of low-income and minority students such as need-based aid or minority mentoring programs (all five of the states)? Moreover, the states differ in whether they explicitly set targets for increased access for minority and low-income students. Only Texas has set specific targets for increased access by minority students (Latinos and blacks), and none of the states has set targets for low-income students.

Admissions

Open door admissions have been one of the hallmarks of the community college, as witness canonical references to the “Open Door College.”

All but one state (New Mexico) has statutory language stating that the community college is an open door institution: that is, open to all high school graduates and even to students who do not have a high school degree. However, this typically does not mean that all parts of the community college are open. To enter a degree program, particularly an associate degree program, students usually have to have a high school diploma: either a regular diploma or a GED (which they can earn at the community college). Moreover, credit programs require a certain level of academic proficiency as determined by college placement exams. Finally, some programs – such as nursing – have additional academic proficiency requirements of their own.

Even if the open door is statutorily open, there is some question about whether colleges have informally narrowed it when overwhelmed by enrollments. Due to budgetary stringencies, they have not offered all the sections that students demand.

A key consideration for the open door is the eligibility of undocumented students for admission. Only Texas and New Mexico have legislated that undocumented students are eligible. However, legislation to do so has failed in the other three states, and in one of them (Virginia), the Attorney General issued an opinion stating that colleges should not admit undocumented students and the Legislature passed (though the governor vetoed) legislation prohibiting their admission. However, in all three of these states (Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida), community colleges have been allowed to admit undocumented students at their discretion, with the North Carolina Community College System issuing a regulation making this discretion explicit (Biswas, 2005; North Carolina Community College System, 2004).

Tuition

As both observation and research note, tuition affects enrollment, and the impact is greater for less advantaged students. For example, Heller (1999) found that, during the years 1976 to 1994, a \$1,000 increase in average community college tuition (in constant 1994 dollars) led to an average drop of 2.1 percentage points in the proportion of a state's population age 18 to 24 years old enrolled in community colleges.

Average tuitions for community colleges differ greatly across the states, with average tuitions in 2005-06 ranging between \$1191 in New Mexico and \$2135 in Virginia (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2006). However, tuition costs have to be balanced against how much aid students are getting and what the family income levels are in a state. If we look at net cost of community college (tuition, room, and board minus student aid) as a percentage of the median income of families in the lower 40% of the family income distribution, we find that the proportion ranges between 29% in Virginia and 38% in Florida, with the other states clustered around 32 and 33% (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004). Hence, for the most part, the states converge on net cost, with Florida being somewhat of an outlier.

One area of great divergence is whether undocumented students are allowed to pay instate tuition as opposed to the usually much higher out-of-state rate. New Mexico and Texas allow the former, but the other three states do not.

All five states have some commitment to keeping down tuition. Texas and Virginia have made a formal commitment to keeping down tuition. In a third state (North Carolina) there is an informal commitment, and in the remaining two states mechanisms exist that tend to keep down tuition.

Student Aid

State student aid expenditures affect enrollment rates in a state, both in community colleges and public higher education more generally. In his study covering the period 1976 to 1994, Heller (1999) found that a \$100 increase in spending for student aid grants was associated with a significant increase in community college enrollments for blacks (though not for other racial or ethnic groups or for students generally). Moreover, low-income students are considerably more responsive to a given size grant than are upper income students, though less responsive in the case of loans (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

The five states vary greatly in the proportion of their total student aid devoted to need-based grants. In 2003-04, Texas devoted 84% to need-based grants, Virginia and North Carolina 58% and 50% respectively, and New Mexico and Florida 30% and 23%. The national average is 62% (National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, 2005: 8).

None of the states provides any substantial aid specifically earmarked for minority students, in good part because doing so has become increasingly difficult to defend legally and politically.

The states differ considerably on whether they provide aid specifically for two groups that are disproportionately low income and minority in composition: part-time and undocumented students. Three states have aid programs specifically for part-time students (Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia).¹ However, all five states allow part-time students taking at least 6 or 9 credits a semester (depending on the state) to be eligible for the regular aid programs.

Meanwhile, only two states – again, New Mexico and Texas – make undocumented students eligible for state student aid. However, in states where that is not the case, community colleges have sometimes provided student aid that they have raised on their own. States where undocumented students are not eligible for student aid may wish to consider making such students eligible. They may come to share the conclusion of Texas policymakers that providing college opportunities for undocumented students who have been in the country for a significant amount of time is important – even if opponents find arguments of social justice unconvincing – in order to ensure that the state economy has an adequate supply of skilled workers.

Three of the states (Florida, Texas, and Virginia) have policies of linking student aid to tuition, so as tuition rises so does aid. In the case of Texas, the state requires colleges to put a portion of their tuition revenues into what is called the Texas Public Education Grants, which are then awarded as need-based aid to students. Florida has an informal policy of linking aid to tuition but it only applies to the merit-based Bright Futures program.

Outreach to Students

There are a few careful evaluations that have found that participating in an outreach program during high school significantly increases the odds of high school graduates enrolling in college (Perna & Swail, 2001). All five states have some kind of outreach program. However, the programs are much better developed in some states (particularly Florida, North Carolina, and Texas) than others (New Mexico and Virginia).

Dual-enrollment programs are quite popular with states but they have not received much careful evaluation although findings suggest that dually enrolled students are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college. One disquieting finding is that many four-year colleges are leery of giving credit for dual-enrollment courses offered at high schools (Bailey and Karp, 2003; Karp, Bailey, Hughes, and Fermin, 2004: 26, 28). All five of the first-round Achieving the Dream states support dual enrollment by providing state funding to both community colleges and high schools for the same student who is taking community college courses while still in high school. One of the main variations among the states is whether students are charged tuition. In two states (Florida and North Carolina), students do not have to pay college tuition when participating in dual-enrollment programs. In the other three states it is left to the discretion of the community colleges (see also Karp et al., 2004, 2005).

Accessible Curriculum

The community college has long been characterized as a comprehensive institution. Hence, besides the university-parallel curriculum for students pursuing a baccalaureate degree, community colleges offer occupational, adult, and continuing education programs. These programs – which often have a large noncredit component – have proved to be important entry points for nontraditional students, whether older in age or less advantaged in background (Grubb et al., 2003; Prince & Jenkins, 2005). Here we focus on state policies governing the provision of such programs, but in the success section, we will also consider state policies to make sure that those entering the community college through these nontraditional portals do succeed in attaining valuable credentials from community colleges.

With regard to occupational education, all the states but New Mexico provide by statute that community colleges must offer occupational education, and all five of the states fund it through their regular enrollment-based funding formulas.

Adult education (including adult basic education and English as a second language) is a statutory responsibility of the community college in Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, though community colleges get funded to do it in all five states.

Convenient Access

Community college students are more likely to mention location and schedule as important considerations in choosing a college than are other students. For example, in the 1995-96 Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:96), location was especially important to beginning students at public two-year institutions: 46% of them mentioned being close to home as being an important consideration in choosing the college, while only 32% of four-year college students mentioned the same. In fact, community college students mentioned location-related reasons more often than any other reason (Choy & Ottinger, 1998).

The five states have made an effort to make sure that community colleges are widely scattered across the state, so that the colleges are within easy commuting distance of students. However, none of the states mandates that community colleges create satellite facilities or use nontraditional scheduling or short courses. Also only one state provides extra funding for such efforts. (North Carolina provides extra funding for the added overhead of satellite facilities).

All five states (except possibly North Carolina) fund distance education through their regular enrollment-based state funding formulas, and all provide one or another form of infrastructural aid: for example, a state webpage where students can find distance education courses statewide.

Success Policies

Before we begin, it is important to note the significant impact of tuition and student aid on student success and not just access. Tuition and student aid levels significantly affect student persistence and degree completion, particularly in the case of low-income students (St. John, Hu, & Weber, 2001).

Public Commitment to Increasing Student Success

All five of the first-round Achieving the Dream states have publicly committed themselves to improving student success in the community college. However, as with access, the states differ in how formal these commitments are: formal plans and mission statements (Texas and Virginia), public statements of a less formal nature (Florida and New Mexico), or programs addressing the needs specifically of low-income and minority students such as need-based aid or minority mentoring programs (all five of the states). Moreover, the states differ in whether they the degree to which they explicitly set targets for increased success for minority and low-income students. Only Texas has set specific targets for increased success by minority students (Hispanics and blacks), and none of the states has set targets for low-income students.

Remedial Education

Virtually all community colleges offer remedial education (also called developmental education), and nearly half their students avail themselves of it (Parsad and Lewis, 2003). Given the importance of remediation, it is important that community college students have ready access to high quality remediation, receive financial aid while receiving remediation, and not have their stay in remediation exhaust their time and financial aid to such an extent that they cannot secure a degree. Unfortunately, the research on remediation has not reached definitive conclusions on what kind of remediation works best with what kinds of students. Thoughtful researchers greatly disagree on whether there is a good enough body of research to definitively settle what form it should take (Dougherty, 2002: 312-314; Phipps and Merisotis, 2000; Roueche, Ely, and Roueche, 2001).² Where state policy has focused is on such things as mandatory assessment and placement of students. Yet, although such policies seem on the face of it to make a lot of sense, we do not even have definitive evaluations of whether they actually work, either in securing uniform compliance from colleges or in fostering effective remediation for students.

All five states provide state financing for remediation programs through their enrollment-based funding system. Moreover, all these states allow students to receive state student aid while they are receiving remediation. However, the states differ in whether they put limits on how often the state will pay for remediation in the case of a given student. Florida, Texas, and Virginia have such limits: for example, in Florida, the state does not pay the college for a student's remedial course if he or she must take it more than twice. Any subsequent time goes without state funding. However, it is not at all clear that states have any way of really keeping track of how often

students have taken courses, so this may be more a symbolic show of fiscal discipline than anything else.

All of the states but New Mexico mandate that community college students must be tested for purposes of course placement. In the four states with mandatory testing, students are explicitly exempted if they achieve certain scores on national tests such as the SAT or ACT. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that colleges informally exempt students. For example, a study of two community colleges in Florida found that one did not test most occupational students and, when it did test students, it waited until they had declared a major before testing them. And examining two colleges in Texas, that same study found that one of them did not assess students' writing skills (Perin, 2006). We found evidence of informal exemptions at work in Virginia as well.

Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia mandate which tests can be used for academic placement, and three of them set explicit cutoff scores designating whether someone is in need of remediation (Prince, 2004). Virginia, while mandating testing, has not set explicit cutoff scores but has left it to the discretion of the colleges.³

There is considerable variation in whether states make remediation mandatory in cases where students have failed the test. Only Florida and Virginia have made assignment to remediation mandatory. North Carolina and Texas have left it to the discretion of the colleges. And of course New Mexico does not have mandatory testing. Texas had made assignment mandatory under the old Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) program, but under the current Texas Success Initiative (TSI), the state has moved to leaving this up to the discretion of the colleges. The result has been – as a recent survey found – that one-third of community colleges report no longer requiring mandatory remedial education for students failing the placement test (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2005).

Only Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia appear to regulate the content of remedial education, to the extent that they require remedial courses to be listed in the state Common Course library or numbering system.

Two states (Florida and Virginia) have ruled that four-year colleges should not be offering remediation, but rather should relegate it to the community colleges.

Only Florida explicitly states that students should be allowed to take college-credit courses in skill areas in which they are not being remediated. Virginia has encouraged community colleges to consider this. Such a policy may be important as a means to keep students moving through college and not getting bogged down in remediation.

Only Florida regulates the conditions under which a student is deemed ready to leave remediation.

Many community college students who need remediation are adults who have been out of school for years. However, a substantial number of recent high school graduates also enter college with inadequate math, reading, or writing skills. To remedy this problem, all five states have acted to promote better alignment between the skills that colleges expect and those that high schools

produce, a major recommendation by Michael Kirst and his colleagues (Kirst, Venezia, & Lising, 2004). This effort has taken such forms as pushing high schools and community colleges to align their exit and entry requirements (Florida and New Mexico) and reporting to the high schools how many of their graduates require remediation when entering college (Florida, North Carolina, and Texas). Moreover, Florida and Virginia have encouraged community colleges to administer their placement tests to high school sophomores. Finally, in all these states – particularly Virginia – dual-enrollment programs are seen as carrying the promise of fostering greater curricular alignment between high school and college.

The lack of much state policy guidance regarding the content of remediation, whether students can take college-level courses in non-remedial areas, and the proper conditions for exiting from remediation is striking. It is questionable whether such important decisions should be entirely left to institutional discretion. However, as noted above, states are hampered by the fact that there is still no firm consensus on what works in remediation.

Counseling and Guidance: Academic and Non-Academic

Counseling – particularly in the form of comprehensive support and retention programs – has a significant positive effect on student retention and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students often enter with academic skills that are below college grade, and they need to be guided to the right form of remediation. Their aspirations are frequently unclear or contradictory. As they enter the community college, they encounter a wide variety of programs, whose payoffs and requirements are quite different but not easy to discern. And if they have been away a long time from school or are not coming from college-educated families, the bureaucratic routines of registering for classes, getting financial aid, and choosing a major may be daunting. Yet counseling often is not readily available or of high quality (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003; Grubb, 2001).

One of our most striking findings is that the five states all exhibit the same pattern of inaction in this area. None provides dedicated funding for counseling and guidance. The services are funded by colleges under their general state funding for instruction or student support services. Moreover, none sets standards for the form and content of that counseling and guidance. This absence of state standards leaves the possibility of great variation across community colleges in the quality of counseling and guidance being provided. Even if states are reluctant to impose standards, there is still great room for them to encourage community colleges to provide sufficient levels of guidance and counseling and to explore what are the best means of providing it. We will come back to what might be desirable state policies in this area.

Transfer Assistance

Successful transfer is particularly important for minority and low-income baccalaureate aspirants, since a majority of them start in community colleges. Transfer problems are a major reason that such students do not achieve a baccalaureate degree at the same rates as their more advantaged peers (Dougherty, 1994, 2002; Wellman, 2002). Even among students entering community college with the intent of completing a bachelor's degree or higher, the majority do not transfer to a four-year college within the next five years and there are large age, race, and social class gaps in transfer (Bradburn, Hurst, & Peng, 2001; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006).

None of the five states provides dedicated student aid funding for transfer students, which is an issue because such students have needs different from other students. Moreover, none provides dedicated funding or standards for transfer advising by community colleges. Colleges finance transfer advising at their discretion from the state instructional or student services appropriation and whatever local funds they wish to apply.⁴

Instead, the main focus of the states has been to ensure that the credits that students acquire at the community college are successfully transferred. All but Virginia⁵ have created general education transfer modules that are guaranteed transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges, created statewide guidelines to ease the transfer of occupational credits, defined common prerequisites for certain majors, and mandated common course numbering for courses with the same content across different institutions.

Baccalaureate Provision

One of the most interesting changes in the community college in recent years is the appearance of programs by which community colleges themselves offer baccalaureate degrees, particularly in applied areas (Floyd et al., 2005). Perhaps because of the recency of the community college baccalaureate movement, there is much less consensus across the five states on this policy than on many aspects of transfer policy. Only three (Florida, New Mexico, and Texas) have authorized community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees and New Mexico's effort is very recent. Meanwhile, although four states (Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Virginia) provide some encouragement for state universities to offer upper-division instruction at community colleges, this encouragement does not take the form of a mandate or of financing. For example, in New Mexico, universities began to offer upper-division instruction at community colleges when the Council for Higher Education (the predecessor of the current Higher Education Department) put distance education on the same funding level as on-campus instruction and removed service area limits.

Noncredit to Credit Articulation

Adult education students are a key community college constituency, particularly if one is thinking of the community college role in ensuring equality of opportunity. It is estimated that 33% of adult education enrollees are in community colleges and such students make up 7% of total credit and noncredit FTE enrollments in community colleges. About three-quarters of these community college adult-education students are in the bottom half in SES and about half are nonwhite (Grubb et al., 2003; Morest, 2004; Prince & Jenkins, 2005).

Despite the hopes for adult education programs, there is little evidence that they bring significant income benefits if they do not lead to a degree (Grubb et al., 2003; Prince & Jenkins, 2005). Yet many adult education students enter the community college through the noncredit side – whether taking high school equivalency (GED), adult basic education (ABE), English as a second language (ESL), and so forth – and fail to acquire economically valuable credits and credentials.

Clearly, it is important that low-income adults entering noncredit programs successfully move on to college-credit programs. However, none of the five states mandates, provides funds, or sets standards to encourage the movement of students from the noncredit to the credit curriculum.

Workforce and Economic Development

Workforce and economic development has become a major commitment of community colleges over many decades, with this role broadening from preservice training through credit programs to include inservice training, much of it through noncredit programs. State policy has played a major role in this development, both through mission definition, funding, and more recently performance accountability (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000; Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006).

All five states encourage the community colleges to engage in workforce and economic development such as contract training or small business development. All but New Mexico make workforce development a statutory obligation and all five provide encouragement and funding.

Performance Accountability

Beginning in the 1990s, state governments actively joined the performance accountability (PA) movement. The leading theme of this movement has been making higher education institutions perform better by focusing not on enrollment growth but rather on gains in student outcomes. By 2003, 47 states had some form of PA: 46 had performance reporting; 21, performance budgeting (in which the state government states that performance will be used to inform appropriation decisions); and 15, performance funding (where an explicit formula ties some portion of institutional funding to performance) (Burke & Minassians, 2003).

State performance accountability policies have the potential of serving the goals of equality of access and success, but the right indicators must be used, particularly ones that directly address equality for minority and low-income students. Moreover, there must be support for state policymakers and local community college officials to recognize and respond to those performance indicators

Performance Indicators

We have analyzed what kinds of performance indicators the states collect and then report. It should be noted that states often collect more data than they actually publicly report or use as performance measures. Our focus here is on what performance data are publicly reported, though we also note what data are reported to the legislature or to the community colleges themselves.

Measures of Student Access

The states all collect and publicly report measures of the racial-ethnic composition of their enrollments. Florida, Texas, and Virginia also publicly break down enrollments by student income.

Measures of Student Success

The states collect and report a wide variety of measures of student success such as rates of persistence, graduation, transfer, and job placement.

Persistence. All five states report data on one year (fall to fall) persistence of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students. In the case of all but New Mexico, these data are reported as part of the State Data Project of the Southern Regional Education Board. Only Texas publicly breaks down these data by race, and none of the states does so by student income. New Mexico and Virginia also report data for fall to spring persistence, again not broken down publicly by race or income.

Successful Remediation. Three of the states report measures of successful remediation (Florida, North Carolina, and Texas). For example, North Carolina reports data on the percentage of developmental students completing a course with a C or better, the percentage of basic skills students moving to a higher level, and the percentage of developmental education completers who get a C or better in a subsequent college level course. Only Florida reports these data by race,⁶ and no state does so by income.

Course Completion. Only two of the states (New Mexico and Texas) report measures of course completion. For example, New Mexico reports what percentage of courses attempted are actually completed. Neither state publicly reports course completion rates by race or income, though New Mexico is planning to do so in the future.

Skill Attainment. Three states (Florida, Texas, and Virginia) measure the attainment of skills. For example, Florida reports to the community colleges the proportion of students with 60 or more credit hours who pass the rising junior College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST). Texas measures the number of marketable skills award completers. Only Texas breaks these skill-attainment results down by race; none of the states does so by income.

Graduation. All five states report measures of graduation, both gross numbers and sometimes proportions of an entering cohort. Often the rates are broken down by type of degree such as associate and certificate. Florida, New Mexico, and Texas publicly break down these figures by race-ethnicity, but only Florida does a limited breakdown by income (as defined by eligibility for either Pell, SEOG, or Florida need-based aid). These figures are limited to first-time and generally full-time students.

Graduation Efficiency. Three states (Florida, New Mexico, and Virginia) report various measures of graduation efficiency or time to degree. For example, the latter two states report the proportion of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who complete their programs within 150% of their program length. None of these states reports these data by student race or income.

Transfer. All the states except North Carolina report data on the number transferring and, typically, the transfer rate. Florida and Texas publicly break down these figures by race-ethnicity, but only Florida does so by income.

Success after Transfer. All but Texas report measures of student success after transferring. For example, Virginia uses three different measures: (1) average GPA for community college entrants who earned 12 or more credits at the community college and transferred within four years of entrance; (2) the proportion completing a baccalaureate or higher degree within eight years of entrance among community college entrants who earned 12 credits and transferred within four years; and (3) the percentage who are in good standing one year after graduation. None of the states publicly report their post-transfer success measures by race-ethnicity and income.

Licensure Exam Passage. All but Virginia report rates of passage of licensure exams for students whose discipline requires passage of such an exam. None of the states publicly breaks these rates down by student race or income, except for Texas, which reports teacher education passage rates by race.

Job Placement. All five states publish data on job placement rates for graduates. Typically, the followup period is one year after graduation. Only New Mexico and Texas publicly report a breakdown by race-ethnicity (and in the case of New Mexico, it is only for the state system as a whole rather than by individual college). None of the states reports a breakdown by student income.

Data Collection Procedures

All the states have established a capacity to aggregate and analyze data across their entire community college systems. However, only Florida and Texas have established data warehouses that allow aggregation and analysis of the data across the boundaries of the community college, university, and K-12 sectors.

Connection of Performance Indicators to State Funding

Three states have established performance funding systems – Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia – by which performance data directly shape state allocations to the community colleges.⁷ Florida’s system goes back to 1996, whereas North Carolina’s was enacted in 1999 and Virginia’s only in 2005. In addition, Texas has a performance budgeting system in which systemwide performance data are weighed by a special legislative body – the Legislative Budget Bureau – as it assesses the proposed budget for the community college system. However, there is little evidence that performance data have had much of any effect on appropriations to the Texas community colleges.

Evaluations of Impact

Impact on State Policymaking:

In only two states (Florida and Texas) is there clear evidence that community college performance data have shaped state policy. In the case of Texas, it was widely held that performance data played an important part in leading state officials to launch the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s well-known “Closing the Gaps” initiative to increase student access and success for minority students, particularly Latinos and Blacks (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000).

But even in Florida and Texas, it is not clear how much influence performance data have outside the lead state community college education agency. There is little evidence that legislators and state gubernatorial advisors are much affected by, or even all that aware of, state community college performance data. For example, a Florida state official noted: “We certainly look at those numbers....[The Chancellor] shares them with the rest of the folks in DOE all the time. Having watched some of the legislative processes, how much they are actually used I am not sure.”

And in the other states, the effort to use performance data to craft state policy is still nascent. As a state official in Virginia noted, “we are struggling with understanding who is dropping out and why and I think we’ll come to a greater understanding of that soon, but we are in that process. Then having that information...inform policy development, we haven’t crossed that threshold.”

Impact on Community College Practice

Performance accountability systems – even when they involve performance funding – seem to have at best a moderately strong influence on actions by the community colleges. This conclusion stems both from reports by state and local officials we interviewed for this study and the results of another study that the senior author conducted on performance accountability in six states, two of which are Achieving the Dream states: Florida, Texas, Illinois, California, Washington, and New York (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press). That study found only weak evidence that states with seemingly stronger accountability systems (indexed by the presence and strength of a performance funding system) have indeed produced stronger student outcomes.

There is certainly evidence that state performance accountability systems lead community colleges to take actions to improve their remediation results. Yet, because of incompatible measures of remediation success across states, it is hard to tell whether states with stronger accountability systems,⁸ such as Florida, actually have higher rates of remedial success than do the other states with weaker systems or, in New York's case, no state system of performance accountability for community colleges.

There is considerable evidence that the rising state emphasis on retention and graduation has led community colleges to move to improve both. Despite all these efforts, the association between the strength of state accountability systems and changes in state retention and graduation rates is moderate at best (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

Higher rates of transfer between community colleges and four-year colleges are a frequent goal of performance accountability systems, but evidence that greater attention has indeed produced significant results is weak. Florida has had far smaller increases in numbers transferring than states with weaker accountability systems (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

Finally, the five states with state performance accountability systems (all but New York) showed improvements on various measures of job placement. But as with remediation, the indices the states use are not comparable, making it difficult to reach any clear conclusion about the association between the strength of a state's accountability system and its degree of success in job placement (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

One reason that may account for the fact that states with performance funding do not seem to have clearly stronger results than states with only performance reporting is that the performance funding money involved is not all that large. Moreover, community colleges encounter significant obstacles in responding to performance demands: poorly designed measures of success; funding that is unstable and does not keep pace with increasing enrollments; and inequalities in institutional capacity to meet performance demands (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

The intended impacts of performance accountability are not the only ones at issue. Publicly unintended, and unfortunately negative, impacts apparently occur as well. They include a weakening of academic standards, imposition of costs of complying with accountability

demands, and more speculatively, constriction of open door admissions and a narrowing of institutional missions (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

While the above should make us leery of claims that performance accountability is any kind of policy panacea, we should not simply dismiss its significance or utility. There is evidence that performance accountability does have an impact, even if it is not as big as its advocates have claimed. Arguably, the most important part of this impact comes with performance reporting, even if no financial rewards or penalties are attached by states to the outcomes. The fact that colleges have to collect data and report it to the state not only leads them to become more aware of state priorities and of their own performance but also to build up their own technical and intellectual capacity for self-analysis (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STATE POLICY

The profiles of the states in terms of policy suggest particular areas in which they may wish to adopt the policies of other states. There are also some notable areas of omission across all the states that should be addressed by all the states.

Access Policies

Admissions Policies

Though open door admissions are strongly supported in the states, areas of policy action still remain:

Providing additional funding when community colleges are faced with unusually big increases in enrollments: Even if the open door is statutorily open, community colleges have – when overwhelmed by enrollments – informally narrowed it by not offering all the sections that students demand. They need state financial support to keep their doors open when under such pressure.

Setting explicit targets for access and success for minority and low-income students: One of the most notable features of state community college policy in Texas has been the setting of explicit targets – as part of the state Coordinating Board’s *Closing the Gaps* initiative – for increased access and success by minority and low-income students. This is a strategy that other states should strongly consider.

Revisiting the issue of access for undocumented students: If the political climate changes, the states where undocumented students are not statutorily eligible for enrollment in the community college (Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida) may wish to revisit the issue of such a guarantee. It would not leave the admission of undocumented immigrants to institutional discretion and, quite likely, uneven application.

Tuition

Given the negative impact of higher tuition on access and persistence and the fact that community college tuitions have been rising rapidly, states need to find ways to keep them down:

Keeping down tuition: Though the five states have variously made efforts to keep down tuitions, those that have not already done so should consider making a more formal commitment to such a policy and instituting concrete mechanisms to insure it.

Allowing instate tuition for undocumented students: Three of the states do not provide this, instead allowing such students to be charged the higher out-of-state tuition. Again, if the political climate concerning immigration changes, these three states may wish to legislate that instate tuition be charged to undocumented immigrants who have gone to high school in the state.

Student Aid

States have made great strides in providing student aid for community college students. Nonetheless, they may wish to consider three important areas of further policymaking:

Increasing the amount that is need-based: Those states that are below the national average in the proportion of state aid that is need-based grants (62%) should make strong efforts to raise the need-based grant component of their total state aid.

Providing dedicated funding for part-time students: The two states that do not have dedicated aid for part-time students should consider it, given the special needs of this body of students.

Making undocumented students eligible for state aid: The three states that do not provide such eligibility should consider doing so.

Ensuring that students do not largely exhaust their eligibility while still in remediation: Means need to be found to ensure that students requiring extensive remediation do not largely exhaust their eligibility for student aid while still being remediated, leaving little aid to support their college-level studies.

Outreach Programs

The Achieving the Dream states have made notable efforts to create programs to attract students to college and the community college in particular, but more can be done:

More vigorous outreach efforts in some states: Though all the states support outreach programs, some of the states have considerably less developed programs than others and should consider expanding their efforts.

Ensuring that dual-enrollment programs are widely used by disadvantaged students: Dual-enrollment programs are attractive to community colleges in part because they are ways of attracting the interest and political support of affluent students and parents who would otherwise first think of attending four-year colleges (Bailey & Morest, 2004). But because of this incentive, states need to consider how to provide incentives for community colleges to vigorously extend dual-enrollment opportunities to minority and low-income students.

Providing a tuition waiver for dual-enrollment students: The three states that do not provide guaranteed tuition waivers for dual-enrollment students should consider doing so.

Accessible Curriculum

Mandating a community college role in adult education: For the most part community colleges are actively involved in providing adult education, but only three of the states make this a statutory responsibility. Given the key role community colleges can and do play in college opportunities for adults, the remaining states should consider mandating such a role.

Convenient Access

Providing state support for community college efforts to make access more convenient: States should provide funding and other support for community colleges to provide maximum access for place- and time-bound students through satellite facilities, evening and weekend classes, and short-term and fractional courses. To be sure, colleges often make such efforts, but it would be useful to have this backed up by state policy instruments.

Success Policies

Remedial Education

Though states have been very active in remediation policy, areas for further policy effort still remain:

Providing incentives for community colleges to vigorously experiment with new remediation techniques: One of the imperatives for such an effort is the finding that nonwhite and low-income students are more likely to participate in remediation but less likely to complete it

(Bettinger & Long, 2005). The lack of certainty in the research literature about what form of remediation works best does not mean that states should drop the issue of best practices. One thing that states could certainly do is to provide incentives for community colleges to vigorously experiment with new remediation techniques, by providing state funding for innovative programs and by making remedial success a performance reporting measure. Moreover, states should – as Florida is doing – actively disseminate information on best practices for which there is a solid research basis.

Providing state support for having students take credit courses while in remedial education: States need to explore how to prevent students from becoming mired in remedial education and leaving the community college without a degree. One way might be for states to mandate – and not just allow – that community college encourage students being remediated in one skill (such as math) to take at the same time credit courses in areas that do not depend on the skill being remediated. However, this policy recommendation needs to be validated by research.

Providing state support for research on best practices in state policy: Just as there is still a relative dearth of conclusive research on best institutional practices in remedial education, there is also a lack of research on what state policies best support effective local practice. The mere fact that substantial variation in local practice occurs even in areas subject to state remediation policy suggests that such state policy may be problematic, certainly in execution but perhaps even in intent. Too often, states have enacted remediation policies without having clear research warrant that such policies really result in more effective remediation, much less secure a uniformity of institutional practice.

Counseling and Guidance

The absence of state policy regarding counseling and guidance – despite the importance of good quality counseling for student success – is striking. While state caution in being prescriptive is understandable, it also means that the counseling and guidance function of the community college is receiving inadequate support and standardization. Recommendations are these:

Providing dedicated state funding for counseling and guidance: The lack of specific funding leaves guidance and counseling at the mercy of the ebb and flow of community college funding and the belief that counseling can be cut when other demands are pressing.⁹

Establishing state standards for counseling and guidance: States are leery of prescribing standards in this area – much as they are with instruction – but this absence leaves the possibility of great variation across community colleges in the quality of counseling and guidance being provided. States should incrementally move – particularly as supportive research evidence appears – to defining what counts for effective counseling and guidance practice.

Transfer Assistance

While the states have done much in the area of transfer, more remains to be done:

Providing student aid for transfer students: None of the states has a financial aid program specifically for transfer students, though the issue has been raised in Virginia. Yet transfer students have unique needs. They take longer to achieve a baccalaureate degree than four-year entrants, if only because they are more likely to undergo extensive college remediation, lose credits as they progress, and stop out of college (Dougherty, 2002; Wellman, 2002).

Providing funding and establishing standards for transfer advising: As with counseling and guidance generally, the states are reluctant to prescribe standards. But they should provide dedicated funding for this important function and guidance on how community colleges should carry it out. Certainly, there are useful models of state initiatives to improve the transfer advising process (Dougherty, 1994, 2002).

Offering guaranteed junior status for academic associate graduates: The Achieving the Dream states could do more to ensure that community college students graduating with an academic associate degree will be admitted to a state university and given junior status. At present, only two states (Florida and North Carolina) have state policies guaranteeing this status.

Articulating transfer to private institutions: More needs to be done to ease the transfer of students to private four-year colleges, including for-profit institutions, given the importance of the private sector in many states and the not infrequent resistance of public four-year colleges to admit many transfer students (Ignash & Townsend, 2001; Wellman, 2002). Yet, across the Achieving the Dream states, the focus is on easing the transfer between the community colleges and the *public* four-year colleges, though private four-year colleges have become signatories to state transfer agreements, as is the case in Florida.

Enhancing transferability of occupational credits:¹⁰ Though the Achieving the Dream states are making notable efforts to ease the transfer of occupational students to baccalaureate programs, those efforts are still in their early stages. The greater inclusion of the for-profit colleges in articulation efforts may be especially helpful since they have been more open to occupational transfer than have other kinds of colleges (Dougherty, 2002). Besides furthering current efforts to develop articulation agreements involving occupational majors, states can also encourage the establishment of “capstone” programs, as in Florida, where occupational education courses in community colleges are credited by four-year colleges against a major in a technical field and the bulk of students’ upper-division course load is devoted to meeting four-year colleges’ general education requirements. Other promising devices are to introduce more general education into occupational programs so that they are more transferable and to ensure that the general education courses already required in those programs are meeting state requirements for transferable general education (Dougherty, 2002).

Guaranteeing the transferability of dual-enrollments credits: Since many community college dual-enrollment students will end up going to four-year schools, states need to take steps to ensure that dual-enrollment credits are accepted by the four-year schools, given the evidence of four-year college suspicion of such credits (Johnstone & Del Genio, 2001; Karp et al., 2004).

Considering transfer measures as accountability measures for four-year institutions: Transfer outcomes should be monitored not just in the case of community colleges but also of the four-year colleges and universities. One way to do this is to make transfer performance measures apply to the entire higher education sector and not just to individual institutions, two-year or four-year (Wellman, 2002). Certainly, there is evidence from Virginia that the state's making articulation a four-year college accountability measure has resulted in the four-year colleges becoming much more eager to ease transfer.

Considering post-transfer success as an important accountability measure: State performance accountability systems should address not just transfer numbers and rates but also post-transfer success, given that even after transfer community college students still encounter significant rates of dropout and failure to secure degrees (Dougherty, 2002; Wellman, 2002). Four states do have post-transfer performance measures, but for two the measure only addresses student grade point average after transfer. The measure of post-transfer success needs to be broadened to include graduation and – as with accountability measures generally – disaggregated by student income and race, since there are large social class, race, and age differences in transfer rates and post-transfer success (Dougherty, 2002; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006).

Noncredit to Credit Movement

Despite the importance of facilitating the movement of students from the noncredit to credit side of the community college, none of the Achieving the Dream states provides funding or other direct support for doing so. Recommended state policy changes include the following:

Providing state financial and other direct support for greater community college efforts: This support would aim to stimulate community colleges to better publicize the desirability and possibility of moving into the credit program, provide financial aid and support services, and establish articulation agreements with the credit programs to allow for more conversion of noncredit into credit courses. Several colleges in the Maricopa District (Phoenix, AZ) have been pioneering such programs, and the Washington State community college system is exploring ways of facilitating the transfer of adult students from noncredit to credit programs (Grubb et al., 2003; Prince & Jenkins, 2005).

Making adult noncredit to credit transition a performance measure for community colleges: The inclusion of such a measure makes it more likely that community colleges will attend to the issue of noncredit to credit transfer.

Performance Accountability

While the states have done much in performance accountability, important gaps still remain.

Performance Indicators

Using a fuller range of indicators: All the Achieving the Dream states should include in their performance accountability systems measures for successful remediation, post-transfer success beyond just the GPA, and – something that none does now – successful movement from the noncredit to the credit program. These success measures should be balanced with measures of diversity of student enrollment, in order to insure that colleges do not try to secure higher remedial success and retention and graduation rates by quietly making it harder for less prepared students – who tend to be less advantaged – to enter the community college (Dougherty & Hong, 2005 and in press).

Breaking down performance data consistently by income and race: The states are quite spotty in breaking down performance indicators – at least in public reports – by student race and particularly income. Yet, without such breakdowns, state agencies and local colleges remain unaware of the direction and size of inequalities. To be sure, getting a measure of income is very hard given that many students do not fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, alternatives – albeit imperfect ones – are available, such as the use of the average income of a student’s zip code area.

Use of Performance Data

Measuring state use of performance data: The evidence is very uneven that state officials do use performance accountability data in their own decision making. One way to encourage this is to develop measures of use of performance data by state officials.

Funding and otherwise supporting the institutional research efforts of community colleges: While community colleges do show more evidence of taking performance data into account, there remains the fact that this practice is more difficult for under-resourced colleges for whom having a full-time, much less a well financed and well trained, institutional research capacity is at issue. Thus, there is a need for state funding of information technology infrastructure at the colleges and for training and technical assistance for institutional researchers.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Florida's part-time aid program is a specific provision of its larger Florida Student Aid Grant program.

² In fact, there is still debate over whether remediation even helps students. Adelman (1998) found that the more remediation a student received, the less likely they were to graduate. However, more recent studies – using sophisticated controls for the fact that remedial students are usually quite different from nonremedial students in ways that will affect later student success – have found positive effects of remediation, though they are still not very large (Bettinger and Long, 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005: 398-400).

³ North Carolina has decided on explicit cut-off scores but it has not yet announced them as of this writing.

⁴ Florida does have an elaborate state computer-based advising system: Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students (FACTS.org). The other states, besides New Mexico, also have some web-based advising, but it is much less developed than Florida's.

⁵ Virginia has done state policy work in all these areas but it has not crystallized to the same degree as in the other states. It has made efforts to define a transferable general education core but it is still not mandatory as in the case of the other states. It has stated that the public four year colleges should give associate degree graduates junior standing and treat them as having met all lower-division general education requirements, but this is not mandatory. Virginia has worked out common prerequisites for transfer between majors between the community colleges and Old Dominion University and is working on similar agreements with the other state universities. However, these are at best bilateral agreements between the community college system and individual public universities and not systemwide compacts as is the case in the other states. However, all of these developments seem to be accelerating and deepening with the advent of the state's recently established performance funding system. By making transfer rates one of its measures of institutional excellence for four-year colleges, this system is spurring those colleges to actively work with the community colleges to improve the transfer process.

⁶ These data are not publicly reported. They are part of the performance reporting data that go to community colleges themselves.

⁷ New Mexico did establish a Performance Incentive Fund in 2003 but it has yet to be voted funds by the state Legislature.

⁸ States with performance funding systems in addition to performance reporting systems are taken as having stronger performance accountability systems than states that only have performance reporting.

⁹ However, it appears that in at least one state, the community college system has avoided asking for funds earmarked for guidance and counseling for fear such an earmark will provide an obvious target for legislative cutbacks (Richard Kazis, personal communication).

¹⁰ The importance of improving the transfer of occupational credits is highlighted by the finding of Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) that – even with controls for differences in student background, precollege preparation, and educational and occupational aspirations – occupational majors are still significantly less likely to transfer than academic majors.