Most efforts to improve community college student outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins. Achieving the Dream is based on the premise that to improve student success on a substantial scale, colleges need to fundamentally change the way they operate.

Achieving the Dream colleges commit to our Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement. Based on five principles, the model frames the overall work of helping more students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Each college approaches the work differently, but Achieving the Dream’s five-step process provides practical guidelines for keeping the focus where it belongs and building momentum over time. Throughout the process, Achieving the Dream coaches offer customized support and help each college’s core team implement data-informed programs and policies that build long-term, institution-wide commitment to student success.

Five Principles:

1. **Committed Leadership**
   Senior college leaders actively support efforts to improve student success, not just to increase enrollments, and are committed to achieving equity in student outcomes across racial, ethnic, and income groups. Administrators, board members, and faculty and staff leaders demonstrate a willingness to make changes in policies, programs, and resource allocation to improve student success.

2. **Use of Evidence to Improve Programs and Services**
   The college establishes processes for using data about student progression and outcomes to identify achievement gaps among student groups, formulates strategies for addressing the gaps identified and improving student success overall, and evaluates the effectiveness of those strategies.

3. **Broad Engagement**
   Faculty, student services staff, and administrators share responsibility for student success, and collaborate on assessing the effectiveness of programs and services and improving them. Other stakeholders with influence on student success (K-12 systems, community groups, employers, etc.) are included in discussions about student performance, desired outcomes, and potential improvement strategies. The college also gains invaluable insight about ways to improve student success from students themselves through surveys, focus groups, and/or advisory councils.

4. **Systemic Institutional Improvement**
   The college establishes planning processes that rely on data to set goals for student success and then uses the data to measure goal attainment. The college regularly evaluates its academic programs and services to determine how well they promote student success and how they can be improved. Decisions about budget allocations are based on evidence of program effectiveness and are linked to plans to increase student success. Faculty and staff are afforded professional development opportunities that reinforce efforts that help to close achievement gaps and improve overall student success.

5. **Equity**
   Achieving the Dream colleges commit to eliminating achievement gaps among student groups, including students of color and low income students while improving outcomes for all students. When an achievement gap exists, institutions engage faculty, staff, and administration in developing and implementing strategic changes that ensure pedagogy and services are tailored to students’ unique needs. Colleges establish an educational environment where all students have the best opportunities to succeed. A commitment to equity ensures that institutions focus on achieving high rates of success and completion for all students, especially those who have traditionally faced the most significant barriers to achievement.
One Goal – Success for All Students:
Achieving the Dream seeks to help more students earn postsecondary credentials, including occupational certificates and degrees. Since community college students often take several years to earn certificates or degrees, Achieving the Dream works with institutions to improve student progression through intermediate milestones.

These indicators include the rates at which students:

1. Successfully complete remedial or developmental instruction and advance to credit-bearing courses
2. Enroll in and successfully complete the initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English
3. Complete the courses they take with a grade of “C” or better
4. Persistence from one term to the next
5. Attain a credential