Community colleges find themselves in the center of a demanding environment. In fewer than ten years, 65% of all jobs in the American economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school. Wealth and income inequality have grown significantly, leaving a diminished middle class more reliant on community colleges to provide affordable preparation for jobs with family-sustaining wages.

Yet the value of higher education has come under scrutiny, and the pressure to improve student outcomes has intensified, especially at community colleges where only 40% of students who began their studies in 2007 had completed a degree or certificate by 2013. Community colleges are committed to meeting these challenges and realizing their potential as institutions that can help the nation create a competitive workforce for the global economy, offer more opportunities for students to earn college credentials, and support a more economically and socially equitable society. With so much at stake, the success of their work is both a moral and economic imperative.

Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a national organization dedicated to community college student access and success. Over 10 years, ATD has built a network of more than 200 community colleges committed to helping more students, especially low-income students and students of color, complete certificates, earn associates degrees, or transfer to four-year institutions. Achieving the Dream guides and supports the colleges through coaching, peer learning opportunities, and adoption of effective practices and policies. Strategic partnerships enhance the network’s progress.

Achieving the Dream has completed a multi-year strategic plan with five priority areas and created new vision and mission statements. The plan builds on recognized strengths and defines new directions. Informed by a decade of experience, the priorities will direct Achieving the Dream and its Network community colleges toward solutions to the challenges that define this era in higher education. Engaging partners and investors will remain a hallmark of Achieving the Dream's approach to defining and advancing the community college reform agenda and improving performance and accountability.

With over 200 institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 15 state policy teams – working throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia – the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network serves 3.8 million community college students.

**Vision**
A nation in which community colleges are highly valued for preserving access and assuring that their students, especially low income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity.

**Mission**
To lead and support a national network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions and effective practices and policies leading to improved outcomes for all students.

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1. Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020, Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Jeff Strohl, Center for Education and the Workforce, 2013
2. Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates – Fall 2007 Cohort, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2013
Achieving the Dream’s strategic approach will strengthen its position as a national leader by guiding, supporting and inspiring Network community colleges to reaffirm their commitment to access while striving for greater student achievement. New focus areas and enhanced services, informed by 10 years of experience, will maximize learning and change for community colleges in the network. Priorities include:

1. Leading colleges through a process of institutional change that supports prompt adoption of effective practices, prioritizes change management, and nurtures innovations aimed at closing achievement gaps while substantially increasing the attainment of credentials.

2. Assisting colleges in improving pedagogy and restructuring curriculum across the student experience to increase student outcomes significantly.

3. Raising Network community colleges’ awareness of the power of data to inform institutional change and decision-making, and deepen their ability to collect, analyze, and present data on essential student outcomes as well as institutional change processes.

4. Facilitating the development of strategic partnerships among Network colleges, corporations, and community organizations to leverage resources that will increase student outcomes, strengthen regional economies and improve civic life.

5. Influencing practice and policy through active dissemination of knowledge and thought leadership.
Achieving the Dream will lead colleges through a process of institutional change that supports prompt adoption of effective practices, prioritizes change management, and nurtures innovations aimed at closing achievement gaps and substantially increasing the attainment of credentials.

With 10 years of experience informing its approach, Achieving the Dream will customize, deepen and speed the institutional change process for network community colleges. Instead of following an established timeline, colleges will advance from level to level once they achieve clearly-defined milestones. New colleges in Phase 1 will begin the change process more quickly through a streamlined planning process and will adopt and adapt proven policies and practices more quickly. Advanced colleges in Phase 3 will participate in new peer learning events and explore and share cutting-edge practices. Phase 2 colleges will focus on managing change and scaling interventions proven effective in the network or national initiatives.

A more integrated, aligned approach to leadership and data coaching will accelerate the change process and enable Achieving the Dream to capture critical lessons about college progression. The lessons learned will be disseminated quickly throughout the Achieving the Dream Network and beyond.

**Priority One: Institutional Change**

**Achieving the Dream** will assist colleges in improving pedagogy and restructuring curriculum across the student experience to increase student outcomes significantly.

The redesigned institutional change process reflects a growing realization that better student outcomes are impossible without continuous faculty inquiry into best teaching and learning practices and curriculum redesign. With Achieving the Dream support, colleges will examine the fundamental components of student success in the classroom at every phase of the change process, especially engaging full-time and part-time faculty and staff. Identifying and implementing the conditions that support improvements in teaching and learning also will become a fundamental element of institutional change.

To date, Achieving the Dream has concentrated on strengthening developmental education and the first-year student experience. However, many colleges working to reform developmental education already have begun to explore the potential for improvement in teaching and learning across the student experience. With support, colleges will adopt, adapt, and scale teaching and learning practices beyond developmental education found effective in the Achieving the Dream Network and by Achieving the Dream’s partner organizations.

**Objectives**

- Redesign and implement a three-phase institutional change model to allow colleges to advance once they have achieved designated milestones.
  - In Phase I, accelerate new colleges’ institutional change process, including attention to teaching and learning and adoption of proven practices and policies.
  - In Phase II, intensify the focus on scaling proven interventions and help colleges work with trustees, manage change, deepen their attention to teaching and learning, expand strategic partnerships, and deepen data capacity.
  - In Phase III, create and facilitate opportunities for the most sophisticated colleges to serve as innovators and exemplars for the Achieving the Dream Network.
- Throughout the process, emphasize a pathways approach that encompasses all phases of the student experience through credential attainment, supported by subject matter experts as necessary to create a more customized approach.
- Strengthen and coordinate leadership and data coaching to focus on achievement of milestones, adoption of effective practices, and change management.
- Introduce new metrics for institutional change, equity and student outcomes.
- Align and integrate colleges’ academic and workforce efforts.
- Leverage partnerships to expand knowledge of best practices in teaching and learning.
- Disseminate information on teaching and learning strategies drawn from the Achieving the Dream Network, partner organizations, and other outstanding institutions across the nation.
- Integrate teaching and learning practices into Achieving the Dream’s coaching work to help colleges rethink and redesign curriculum and pedagogy.
- Expand efforts to engage full- and part-time faculty on teaching and learning initiatives.
Raising Network community colleges’ awareness of the power of data to inform institutional change and decision-making and deepen their ability to collect, analyze, and present data on essential student outcomes as well as institutional change processes.

Achieving the Dream will continue to assist colleges in building a culture of evidence and inquiry. The collection, analysis and presentation of data will remain a cornerstone of its collaborative work with Network community colleges. Tailored coaching on the use of data, new data-focused learning events, and assistance from subject matter experts will build colleges’ expertise and capacity to use data effectively in a cycle of continuous improvement. A new diagnostic tool and other support tools will enable colleges to identify challenges and begin using their data more quickly and capably. And a thorough re-examination of Achieving the Dream’s student outcome measures and the development of institutional change measures will ensure that data collection and analysis is aligned with changing higher education policies.

Objectives

- Develop and/or identify and adopt nuanced student outcome and institutional change measures.
- Develop diagnostic instruments to identify colleges’ data strengths and challenges, enabling the creation of customized services.
- Strengthen and focus data coaching to match colleges’ needs more closely.
- Redesign data collection and reporting processes.
- Offer robust professional services to college staff including new learning events and assistance from subject matter experts, as necessary.
- Deepen colleges’ capacity to use workforce data to inform institutional decision-making.

Priority Four: Strategic Partnerships

Achieving the Dream will facilitate the development of strategic partnerships among Network colleges, corporations, and community organizations to leverage resources that will increase student outcomes, strengthen regional economies and improve civic life.

Achieving the Dream’s attention to strategic partnerships recognizes how much entire communities and regions stand to gain when their members, often led by community colleges, commit to working together toward greater student success. This approach suggests that all organizations work collaboratively to develop a seamless path for students from early childhood through career. No single institution or sector alone can provide everything students need; only an approach that brings together the expertise and resources resident in schools, colleges, businesses, non-profits and government can create the comprehensive support students need to be successful.

Many colleges are already leaders in their communities, so Achieving the Dream will support their efforts to expand and deepen existing relationships with partners. Achieving the Dream also will pursue opportunities to develop relationships with corporations with the capacity to scale innovations developed with the Achieving the Dream Network. Achieving the Dream intends to approach these corporations as partners with a mutual interest in contributing to student success.

Objectives

- Build partnerships with national community-based organizations with community-level reach to facilitate wrap-around services for Network colleges.
- Identify and build expertise to inform community college-led, Achieving the Dream coach-supported regional partnerships that use local assets to enable community colleges to serve more students with improved outcomes at a lower cost.
- Influence the development of cutting-edge products and services for colleges through corporate investments that provide a diverse and sustainable revenue source for Achieving the Dream.
Achieving the Dream will influence practice and policy through active dissemination of knowledge and thought leadership.

Achieving the Dream will capture, develop and disseminate knowledge on policy and practice using information gathered from its Network and other sources. In particular, Achieving the Dream will work closely with its most experienced colleges to anticipate next-generation challenges, forge innovative and lasting solutions, and share the results.

Achieving the Dream will also create a stronger community college presence in the public policy discourse on postsecondary education. With ten years of intensive, on-the-ground experience in community college reform, Achieving the Dream and its Network can represent a valuable perspective on the challenges and opportunities of community college education today. Participating more actively in the public dialogue stands to bring greater appreciation for the essential role community colleges play in educating almost half of all college students and the urgency of the challenge they face.

**Objectives**

- Serve as a centralized source of knowledge on community colleges and the national reform agenda, making information accessible to the Network and other interested parties.
- Develop new knowledge to enable and promote innovation.
- In collaboration with partners, build and execute a strong policy agenda to inform local, state and national policy discussions to enhance the role of community colleges.
- Become a more forceful voice for community colleges and their role in meeting the urgent national need to increase degree and credential attainment, especially by low-income students and students of color.

**New Areas of Emphasis**

- A model of institutional change that encourages colleges to take on new challenges as soon as they have achieved designated milestones rather than advancing by the calendar.
- Coaching for college leaders that addresses change management and introduces successful leadership practices from disciplines beyond higher education.
- Opportunities for advanced colleges to collaborate in identifying next-generation challenges and exploring solutions.
- Immediate, sustained attention to engaging faculty in improving instruction and redesigning curriculum across the student experience.
- Student outcome measures aligned with changes in states’ higher education data reporting requirements.
- A stronger national voice on behalf of community colleges in state and national higher education conversations.
- Services, resources, and partnerships focused on aligning and integrating Network colleges academic and workforce efforts.

**Improvements that Build on Strengths**

- Increased quantity and quality of resources documenting successful practices and policies.
- Broader dissemination of knowledge.
- More integrated, consistent and customized leadership and data coaching that improve colleges’ performance.
- Sophisticated diagnostic and other tools that will allow colleges to quickly understand strengths and weaknesses.