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This newsletter is published by Jobs for the Future for Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to help more community college students succeed (earn degrees, earn certificates, or transfer to other institutions to continue their studies). The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that have faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. See [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org) for more on the initiative and [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org) for more on Jobs for the Future.



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## In this Issue

Welcome to the October 2008 issue of *Achieving Success*, the quarterly state policy newsletter of Achieving the Dream. In this issue, you'll find:

- An update on how statewide transfer and articulation policies affect student success, including a cross-state analysis of policies in the 15 Achieving the Dream states.
- An interview with Francesca Purcell, Associate Commissioner for Academic and P-16 Policy at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, and Gretchen Schmidt, Director of Educational Policy at the Virginia Community College System. They discuss what their states have done to build consensus for sustainable reforms in transfer and articulation policy, as well as how the reforms to date have improved student success.

- A summary of Achieving the Dream state work plans for 2008-09, with a focus on four priority policy areas: performance incentives that promote completion; system-level data capacity; indicators of student success; and placement and assessment policies as part of a comprehensive developmental education strategy.

- And, as always, links to useful resources on community college success and state higher education policy.

We are always looking for new subscribers. Please send email addresses for anyone you think should receive this newsletter (free, of course) to Jeff Wetherhold, [jwetherhold@jff.org](mailto:jwetherhold@jff.org). We particularly want to reach readers in state offices, two-year institutions, and education research and policy organizations.

## POLICY UPDATE

### Transfer and Articulation Policies in Achieving the Dream States: A Comparative Overview of Policies Critical to Student Success

Most would agree that the ability of students to transfer credits from two-year to four-year institutions is an important step in attaining a Bachelor's degree. Yet the policies that govern the transfer of credits and articulation across the two types of institution are complex and vary greatly from state to state.

When the Achieving the Dream initiative was launched in 2004, clear and simplified transfer policies were identified as an important component of community college student success. Over the last four years, many Achieving the Dream states have strengthened their transfer and articulation policies significantly. The Cross-State Data Work Group has supported this

focus by developing intermediate and final benchmarks that are important indicators of success. Among other things, these measures track student progress and include successful transfers (with or without an Associate’s degree) as positive final outcomes.

JFF recently conducted an analysis of transfer and articulation policies in the initiative’s 15 states to gain greater insight into how these issues are being addressed. At the core of a state’s transfer policies is the framework or set of agreements under which institutions operate to allow

students to transfer. As Table 1 indicates, ten Achieving the Dream states have a single, mandated agreement between community colleges and four-year institutions. Two states have cooperative agreements that, while not state-mandated, extend to multiple four-year institutions and are endorsed by one or more public university systems. The remaining three states rely on individual articulation agreements between institutions. There is significant variation in terms of the types of articulation agreements that exist, and this variation serves as the foundation for other transfer policies.

**TABLE 1. TRANSFER POLICIES IN ACHIEVING THE DREAM STATES**

State	Oversight Organization
<b>State-Mandated Articulation Agreement</b>	
Arkansas	Arkansas Department of Higher Education
Florida	Florida Department of Education
Hawaii	University of Hawaii System
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
New Mexico	New Mexico Higher Education Department
Ohio	Ohio Board of Regents
Oklahoma	Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
South Carolina	South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
Texas	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Washington	Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
<b>Single Cooperative Agreement Among Multiple Institutions</b>	
Michigan	Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
North Carolina	North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (University of North Carolina)
<b>Individual Articulation Agreements with Four-Year Institutions</b>	
Connecticut	Agreements between individual community colleges with the University of Connecticut and Connecticut State University systems, as well as other institutions
Pennsylvania	Academic Passport program with all Pennsylvania State Universities; individual institution articulation agreements with other institutions
Virginia	Twenty-seven agreements between Virginia Community College System and four-year institutions in place using statewide template

Source: Research on state-level transfer policies, conducted by Jobs for the Future, summer 2008

**TABLE 2. GENERAL EDUCATION TRANSFER POLICIES IN ACHIEVING THE DREAM STATES**

Transfer Policy Feature	Yes	No
Statewide core general education curriculum defined and guaranteed to transfer prior to degree	AR, FL, MA, MI, NM, NC, OH, OK, SC, TX, WA	CT, HI, PA, VA
Completed core guaranteed to satisfy all general education requirements with transfer prior to degree	FL, MI, NM, NC, TX, WA	AR, CT, HI, MA, OH, OK, PA, SC, VA
All general education requirements waived for students transferring with degree	AR, FL, HI, MA, MI, NM, NC, OK, PA, TX, VA, WA	CT, OH, SC

Source: Research on state-level transfer policies, conducted by Jobs for the Future, summer 2008

State policies on the transfer of general education credits affect students regardless of whether they have earned an Associate's degree. As Table 2 indicates, eleven Achieving the Dream states have established either a standard general education curriculum or a framework for these curricula at all public two- and four-year institutions. Each of these states guarantees that general education credits will transfer for students who have not earned an Associate's degree. Further, twelve states pledge that students transferring to four-year institutions with a degree in hand will not have to meet any additional general education requirements.

Policies that govern general education credits specifically, and the transfer of credits in general, can have a substantial impact on a student's ability to complete a Bachelor's degree. Writing in Carnegie Foundation's *Change* magazine in May/June 2006, William R. Doyle reports that completion of a Bachelor's degree for students who transfer is greatly influenced by the number of credits that are accepted by the four-year institution to which they transfer.

According to Doyle, "Among those who had all their credits accepted, 82 percent had graduated within six years with a bachelor's degree." Among students who only had some of their credits accepted, 42 percent had graduated in the same period of time, while 36 percent remained enrolled. Doyle suggests that state transfer policies play a crucial role in student success, and he highlights the negative relationship between the amount of time enrolled and degree attainment.

Currently, interest in the transfer and articulation process between two- and four-year institutions is growing. In fact, Congress has weighed in on the issue for the first time. Recent revisions to the Higher Education Act stop short of prescribing specific transfer policies, but the legislation does require institutions to publish their transfer policies. This consumer-focused provision is indicative of a growing sentiment among policy-makers and the general public that unclear, inconsistent transfer and articulation policies are an impediment to the goal of increased educational attainment.

## Q & A

### Francesca Purcell and Gretchen Schmidt on How to Achieve Sustainable Transfer and Articulation Reform Through State Policy

*One of Achieving the Dream's goals is to help states identify the role that policy can play in increasing the number of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and complete Bachelor's degrees. Facilitating transfer can be a powerful incentive for student success in community colleges. As Clifford Adelman, a researcher at the U.S. Department of Education, writes in The Toolbox Revisited, most students who eventually earn a Bachelor's degree attend more than one institution in the process. Moreover, the policies governing credit transfer have a great impact on degree attainment (see "Policy Update" on page 1).*

*While most higher education administrators and policymakers recognize the importance of transfer policy, it is often far more difficult to find a consensus on the types of policies that best serve students. We asked two experts how their states have approached the challenge of enacting sustainable transfer and articulation policy reform.*

**Francesca Purcell**, Associate Commissioner for Academic and P-16 Policy at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, has driven her state's efforts to create a unified statewide transfer policy. She recently chaired the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group, a group of faculty,

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—Francesca Purcell

*administrators, and state-level decision makers charged with analyzing the Massachusetts policy environment. Its final recommendations, published in June 2008, include the MassTransfer Policy, a streamlined, statewide transfer policy that is on track to be implemented in fall 2009. (The report is available online at [www.mass.edu/library/reports.asp](http://www.mass.edu/library/reports.asp).)*

**Gretchen Schmidt**, *Director of Educational Policy at the Virginia Community College System, has overseen dramatic changes in transfer policy since the passage of the Higher Education Restructuring Act in 2005, which required four-year institutions to establish articulation agreements with Virginia’s community colleges. Since then, she has managed the implementation of 27 separate agreements with public, private, and for-profit institutions. Dr. Schmidt has also helped develop and implement Virginia’s statewide transfer grant program for community college students.*

**Why did your state decide it was time to address transfer between two-year and four-year institutions? Who drove that decision, and what were the biggest problems with transfer?**

**Francesca Purcell:** Transfer is a perennial issue that has surfaced at various times in Massachusetts since the early 1970s. Our most recent transfer policy reform efforts came about for two reasons. First, a number of reports, both within the state and nationally, brought attention to increased student mobility, increased difficulty in transferring credits across institutions, and the pressing need for a more educated workforce. Second, a legislator in Massachusetts became very interested in addressing transfer policy, which was helpful in bringing the issues into the spotlight. He spoke with the chair of the Board of Higher Education, who put together a group of faculty, administrators, transfer directors, legislators, and others called the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group to take a hard look at transfer and develop recommendations in a relatively quick turnaround time.

The biggest problems we identified were that information about transfer was confusing and unclear, and that there were inconsistencies in how credit was trans-

ferred across institutions. These issues were creating some very substantive barriers to students.

**Gretchen Schmidt:** In Virginia, transfer was historically a regional and institutional phenomenon until the drafting of the Restructuring Act. Prior to that point, we had a couple of non-dynamic statewide transfer agreements on the books, but we didn’t really publicize them. In 2005 the Commonwealth’s three elite institutions—the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and William & Mary—asked the General Assembly for more institutional autonomy regarding return on tuition interest, purchasing, and capital investments. The General Assembly agreed—on the condition that the four-year institutions give something back to the Commonwealth.

Following the passage of the Restructuring Act, the General Assembly asked the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to put together institutional performance guidelines for all public institutions, including one for system-wide articulation and transfer. These guidelines specified that each four-year institution had to develop “seamless, guaranteed, and uniform articulation agreements” with community colleges. Additionally, to maintain their institutional autonomy, they had to establish and meet targets every year for the number of transfer students they would enroll. That’s when the floodgate opened for transfer agreements in Virginia.

When they designed the state model for transfer agreements, the academic leadership did not get down to course-by-course or programmatic details, because it is an unwieldy task. In retrospect, I think they made a smart decision. They decided that students would be best served if they were given guaranteed admission to a four-year institution with a few other provisos, including junior-level status, satisfaction of all lower-division general education requirements, and access to all the benefits available to native students previously enrolled in the four-year school, including financial aid, scholarships,

“We see the four-year institutions, including some very prestigious ones, marketing to transfer students because they need these students to meet their targets. ...In a short period of time, there has been a dramatic cultural change surrounding transfer in Virginia.”

—Gretchen Schmidt

student services, and housing. All of our articulation agreements—with public, private, and for-profit institutions—are triggered by earning an Associate’s degree and include a GPA requirement. There is also an institutional data-sharing arrangement built into each agreement.

Now, three years later, we have almost 30 guaranteed admissions agreements. We see the four-year institutions, including some very prestigious ones, marketing to transfer students because they need these students to meet their targets. These schools are calling us to see how many students we have in the pipeline and how many students we expect to transfer. In a short period of time, there has been a dramatic cultural change surrounding transfer in Virginia.

**How does your state provide incentives for institutions to simplify and improve transfer?**

**Purcell:** The MassTransfer Policy will simplify and integrate current policies and practices. The situation in Massachusetts is somewhat different from that in Virginia, as we are basing our statewide policy on Associate’s degree-to-baccalaureate program linkages as well as a portable general education transfer block. With the linked programs, if a student completes an Associate’s degree with a 2.0 GPA or better, they do not have to pay an admissions fee or write an essay, and their general education requirements will satisfy the requirements at the institution to which they are transferring. If that student earns a 2.5 or better, they are guaranteed admission. If they earn a 3.0, they also get a partial tuition waiver, which is really the biggest incentive.

We have also added a portable general education transfer block. Through research and analysis, we found that more than half of our students were transferring prior to earning their Associate’s degree, and that a lot of these transfers were lateral and reverse transfers across state and community colleges. We wanted to broaden the scope and benefits of our transfer policy and give students an intermediate goal.

The general education block consists of 34 credits and covers five disciplines. If a student completes the block with a 2.0 GPA, they satisfy the general education requirements of the institution to which they transfer. The only exception is that the receiving institution can add an additional six credits depending upon its own general education requirements.

**Schmidt:** For public institutions, the primary incentive in Virginia is the institutional autonomy that came with the Restructuring Act. We also received an overwhelming response from private and for-profit institutions, largely because of their desire to be marketed in the same way as the publics. The institutions all see this as something valuable. The demographics are shifting, and there is now greater value to recruiting successful community college students into baccalaureate programs.

For students, there is a financial incentive to start at a community college as opposed to a four-year institution. Our transfer grant program, implemented this year, builds on this. Students who complete an Associate’s degree with 3.0 GPA and have an expected family contribution of \$8,000 or less on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) receive a \$1,000 grant to attend any institution in Virginia. If they participate in a high-need area such as science, technology, engineering, math, teacher education, or nursing, they receive an additional \$1,000.

**What are your views on the debate about students getting their Associate’s degree before they transfer, and what policies are in place in your state to guide student decisions?**

**Purcell:** The bottom line is that, as a state, we have a very strong interest in increasing the number of students who complete degrees, be they Associate’s or baccalaureate, no matter what route they take. And we are interested in students completing degrees as efficiently as possible. In the MassTransfer Policy, more benefits are associated with earning an Associate’s degree first and then transferring. However, we recognized that this

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is not necessarily the best route for all students. With the addition of the portable general education block, we provide a focused goal for those students as well.

In some ways, this debate is a false dichotomy. Students earn their degrees in complex ways. Even at the Associate’s level, students are often transferring back and forth between community colleges. We need students who earn credentials and are well educated, so we did not see it as an either/or proposition.

**Schmidt:** In Virginia, our chancellor was adamant that students had to complete an Associate’s degree prior to transfer. Some of that has to do with our completion numbers, and some is the chancellor’s philosophy. He believes it is important for students to have a credential when they leave the community college. Nationally, and here in Virginia, research shows that the more credits a student takes toward the Associate’s degree, the more successful they are after transferring to a four-year institution. In general, students who take fewer than 15 credits tend to be much less successful. At 30 credits, you start to see a tipping point, and above 30 the more credits they earn the more successful they are.

**Describe the consensus-building process that you used to bring key constituencies into the discussion on the need for improvement and on specific policy recommendations.**

**Purcell:** This is a critical point. A lot of people see transfer as an administrative, nuts-and-bolts issue, but it brings up all the core issues in higher education around institutional autonomy, academic freedom, the state’s role in accountability, and pressures from national and professional accreditation associations. They are all in there, and for that reason transfer demands a collaborative process.

In Massachusetts, the product is a result of the process. We realized early on that we wanted the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group to be a diverse group of representatives from all of our sectors—state colleges, community colleges, and

University of Massachusetts campuses. We wanted to ensure that we had faculty, academic officers, transfer directors, representatives from state agencies, legislators, and members of independent and regional groups.

We met monthly at various campuses across the state. We broke into subcommittees to dig into particular areas. We had a lot of difficult and contentious conversations, but we had to get all those tensions out on the table and talk them through. It was also important that we had excellent retention rates within this group; people kept coming back to the meetings.

**Schmidt:** Our process was different because it was driven by external incentives. The four-year institutions approached us to develop agreements because that was in their best interest. Instead of having to bring everybody to the table to hammer out the details, we laid out the groundwork internally regarding what needed to be included in these agreements. We then negotiated with the institutions. We had our non-negotiable points, and some institutions had theirs as well. We met in the middle.

The real consensus-building piece in Virginia is the implementation process that we are going through now. We have to keep everybody engaged and involved and to look at agreements to see where we have to make changes in the best interest of the students. The Virginia Community College System completed the development process in a tidal wave with input from our colleges’ Academic Vice Presidents. Now we have to be very conscious of how we implement and maintain these agreements. The devil is in the details. If these policies are not dynamic—if they don’t actually work for students, and if advisors and other front-line administrators don’t see the benefit—they will sit on the shelf and die a painful, lonely death.

**What have been the biggest challenges you've faced, and how have you dealt with them?**

**Purcell:** Of course, money and funding are always obstacles. Beyond that, there are stakeholders with various interests that sometimes conflict. This is not a bad thing—but we have to figure out where we can meet in the middle, and recognize that we are all looking to increase student success.

It is important to find ways to keep people interested in this topic. Right now, there is a lot of interest, but for some people their eyes glaze over when they start learning about the intricacies and difficulties associated with transfer. I like to quote researcher Jane Wellman (“State Policy and Community College—Baccalaureate Transfer”): “Improving the effectiveness of two- to four-year transfer will be the key to national progress in closing the gap among racial groups in degree attainment and will affect far more students than affirmative action policy.”

**Schmidt:** I agree totally with Francesca. The real work is keeping everyone engaged and keeping them from thinking that the work is all done. We have to look at this down at the student level and not just at the policy level. Good policy is all about the implementation and the revision.

We have to be diligent in keeping track of student behavior and make decisions based on data and student information. We have to stop making policy decisions, or leading policy discussions about best practices, based on anecdote. We have to implement policy that not only works administratively but that also benefits the broadest number of students.

To this end, we are in the process of working with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to develop a biennial transfer study. We are hoping that will be done this year. We are also talking about putting together an issue-tracking database that transfer leaders on two- and four-year campuses can use. This would enable us to track student issues based on their frequency and the institution involved.

**If you were making recommendations to other states about strategies to improve transfer, what would you say regarding the relative importance of the following: statewide articulation agreements; sophisticated, easy-to-use transfer and articulation websites; tracking and reporting transfers to build the will for change; and standardization of curriculum (e.g., general education core, common course numbering, etc.)?**

**Purcell:** When I see that term—“statewide articulation agreements”—I am not exactly sure what that means. There are many ways to define that. For example, there are states that have adopted very general transfer policies where a student graduating from any program in any community college is guaranteed admission to a four-year institution, but not necessarily accepted in to the program in which they want to enroll and not all credits will be applied to the degree. Then there are states like Massachusetts that have decided to design program-to-program policies.

There is not an easy answer. Transfer policies can be set up in a number of different ways. The important thing is to ensure that they are understandable and accessible no matter how they are set up. A lot of students and advisors get turned off because they do not understand what is going on, and because it is very difficult to navigate the system.

Transfer websites are no easy task either. We looked at over a dozen, and even though a lot of us have been in higher education for a long time, it was difficult for us to figure out what was going on in our state and others. There is a lot of language that is particular to a certain state that someone from out of state would not necessarily understand. As a nation, we have a lot of work to do in terms of explaining all of these pieces to students.

Tracking transfer data and using that data to build the will for change are absolutely critical. Massachusetts is very close to approving new community college student success performance measures that include transfer and not just graduation rates. That is very important. The community

“Efforts around standardization need to be approached cautiously, collaboratively, and with plenty of faculty input.”

—Grancesca Purcell

colleges are often criticized for not graduating students at levels that others feel are appropriate, and they would love to see transfer taken into account in any success measure.

I don't agree with the notion of standardization of curricula if it means that faculty lose control of the curriculum or that standards are lowered to some common base. The heart of transfer reform is to get faculty talking together about common student learning outcomes. You can change the names and numbers of courses to make them more “standardized,” but if you don't align the content then the trust between faculty that transfer depends upon breaks down.

The Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group discussed this a lot and one of our guiding principles became: “The development and assessment of program-to-program and course-to-course transfer across institutions is best accomplished by regular and sustainable faculty collaboration focused on the establishment of common student learning outcomes.” Efforts around standardization need to be approached cautiously, collaboratively, and with plenty of faculty input.

**Gretchen, What would you advise other states?**

**Schmidt:** The most important element in successful and sustainable transfer policy is having good institutional relationships. It really is about positive, productive, sustained relationships between participating institutions. The more successful you are at that, the more successful students are at transfer.

You can't force this down anyone's throat. Everybody has to be a willing participant and has to feel like whatever they gave up

is for the greater good. Otherwise, they will go home and do it exactly the same way as before. Everyone has to believe in it and feel like it is important and valuable for students and institutions.

I also think that marketing is critical. In Virginia, we have put a full-court press on the marketing component. We signed all these agreements, put out press releases, and had pictures of the four-year institution presidents and the chancellor in the paper. Six months later we went out and conducted a survey and found that only 10 percent of people in the target markets around our colleges knew anything about guaranteed admissions agreements.

The chancellor sets goals every year that the presidents have to meet as part of their evaluation process. Last year, one goal was for each college to put together a marketing plan for guaranteed admissions agreements. At the same time, we created a centralized marketing plan, with a website and brochures. We have made transfer presentations to every single organization that will let us. Now we are starting to see TV and radio spots on transfer in target markets around colleges. You can't expect students and front-line administrators to know about it unless you actually put the effort into marketing. That is something that often gets left until the end but is really essential.

Finally, I can't say enough about data. We have to move away from anecdote and start looking at data both qualitatively and quantitatively so that we know what is actually working and what we have to tweak to be more successful.

Achieving the Dream states continue to improve their ability to provide data to colleges in formats that can be used to spur and track improvement strategies.

## Summary of Achieving the Dream 2008–09 State Work Plans

As the Achieving the Dream state policy effort enters its fifth year, the initiative's impact is evident in the depth and focus of the policy work plans for 2008-09. Each year, Achieving the Dream states have sharpened their focus on policy changes they believe are critical to helping community colleges improve student success. Recently, the states completed their plans for this program year, and it is instructive to see the commonalities in terms of priorities. A brief summary highlighting the states' plans follows. *(For a more comprehensive description of state policy work plans, see [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).)*

### Performance Indicators and Incentives

Performance indicators and performance funding, particularly incentives for degree completion, are receiving widespread attention from Achieving the Dream states. A number of states have made this one of their top priorities, even as they enter a period of fiscal constraint. States are seeking ways to design and construct effective incentives in this environment, and they are taking the long view on how best to set the stage for performance measurement and incentives in future years. Highlights of performance indicators and incentives priorities in 2008-09 Achieving the Dream work plans include:

**Arkansas:** Implement an incentive funding plan for two-year community and technical colleges to promote institutional work rewarding successful student completion.

**Hawaii:** Establish a source of funding that is allocated to colleges based upon the accomplishment of University of Hawaii Community Colleges student performance goals.

**Massachusetts:** Finalize and incorporate a comprehensive student success measure in the next annual statewide higher education performance measurement report.

**Oklahoma:** Propose a revision of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's Brain Gain performance goals to include Achieving the Dream success measures.

**Washington:** Fully implement a student achievement incentives system that rewards institutions that successfully retain students at critical "achievement points."

### Data Capacity

Achieving the Dream states continue to improve their ability to provide data to colleges in formats that can be used to spur and track improvement strategies. States want to strengthen their own and institutions' data infrastructure so that data on student outcomes can be used more effectively and flexibly at the campus level. They propose to create data warehouses, data marts, dashboards, and interactive tools. Highlights of data capacity priorities in Achieving the Dream 2008-09 work plans include:

**Connecticut:** Continue developing an institutional research data mart to support reliable reporting, inform decision making, and evaluate interventions on behalf of student success.

**Hawaii:** Strengthen the student information and institutional analysis offices. Publish data reports to track specific student cohorts by campus, programs, and selected characteristics.

**Michigan:** Develop a statewide postsecondary database. Convene a data and accountability work group charged with identifying measures, creating data taxonomy, streamlining data and reporting, and identifying data gaps.

**North Carolina:** Use the statewide data warehouse to identify current enrollment and outcome status for underrepresented students. Disseminate research, model

The Achieving the Dream Cross-State Data Work Group has made a strong case for the use of alternative measures of student success, including intermediate benchmarks to measure performance.

programs, and policies with an emphasis on campus-based approaches that can be identified and tracked.

*South Carolina:* Provide greater accessibility to data, using refined, system-level data management and reporting capabilities, including an Achieving the Dream clearinghouse.

*Virginia:* Implement system-level data infrastructure to inform student success policy and practice decisions, including a second-phase data warehouse.

### Alternative Measures of Student Success

The Achieving the Dream Cross-State Data Work Group has made a strong case for the use of alternative measures of student success, including intermediate benchmarks to measure performance. The group began in 2006 with representatives from six Achieving the Dream states: Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia. Initially, they focused on designing an alternative to the federal approach to measuring community college performance. Building on this work, the work group developed a series of intermediate milestones and final measures to be used as markers of student progression and success. JFF recently published this work in the policy brief, *Test Drive: Six States Pilot Better Ways to Measure and Compare Community College Performance*, available online at [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org) and [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).

For fiscal year 2008-09, four more states have joined the Cross-State Data Work Group: Arkansas, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Washington. Its next steps will be decided upon this fall, could include:

- Link institutional and state policy interventions to intermediate benchmarks.
- Tie developmental education interventions to intermediate benchmarks.
- Influence the revision of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

- Develop a communications plan to advocate for the benefits of intermediate benchmarks and alternative measures of success.

### Developmental Education Policies

Improving outcomes for developmental education students continues to be a priority for Achieving the Dream states. To date, states have concentrated their efforts largely on placement assessment policy. This is a first step toward more comprehensive developmental education strategies, including the alignment of developmental education and college credit courses. Highlights of developmental education priorities in Achieving the Dream 2008-09 work plans include:

*Connecticut:* Implement an enhanced student assessment process, including a common placement standard to align developmental education with gateway and college-level courses.

*North Carolina:* Align recommended course levels and competencies and implement a cut-score monitoring process to provide a more uniform and seamless pathway across program areas.

*Oklahoma:* Revise State Regents for Higher Education's mandatory assessment policy to include standardized course placement across institutions.

*South Carolina:* Use the results of a commissioned placement scores validation study to ensure that more students are appropriately placed in developmental and college-level courses.

*Texas:* Investigate the predictive validity of approved placement assessments and provide institutions with research to support cut-score ranges in light of new college-readiness standards.

*Virginia:* Examine developmental education policies at the college and system level, and create an action plan to increase substantially the success rates of developmental education students.

## RESOURCES

### Featured Resource

#### New Survey Reveals “How America Pays for College”

Sallie Mae and Gallup have released the first installment of a new annual report entitled *How America Pays for College*. The report is based on a survey of 1,400 students and parents and offers data on trends among community college students (see charts below).

As a percentage of total cost, community college students borrow less than their peers. They also borrow less often: 65 percent reported not borrowing any funds for the current year, compared with 53 and 39 percent of students at four-year public and private colleges, respectively. However, community college students pay more out of pocket than their peers, both as a percentage of total costs and in terms of total dollars. They also receive less in grant aid and scholarships.

The report also reveals that, among all students, the percentage that fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid declines precipitously with family income. Among families with an annual income of less than \$35,000, 89 percent complete the FAFSA. Among those with annual incomes between \$35,000 and \$50,000, only 76 percent complete the FAFSA.

[www.salliemae.com/about/news\\_info/newsreleases/082008.htm](http://www.salliemae.com/about/news_info/newsreleases/082008.htm)

### NCES Highlights Community Colleges

#### “Condition of Education” Supplement Focuses on Community Colleges

The National Center for Education Statistics has released a supplement to its annual *Condition of Education* report. Focusing on community colleges, it contains an abundance of data and analyses from multiple sources. One section focuses on the characteristics of the nation’s 1,045 community colleges. Another focuses on the characteristics of students and includes three-year persistence and outcomes data for students enrolling in fall 2003. Among the findings:

- 16 percent of students completed a degree or certificate in three years.
- 40 percent of students remained enrolled without an award after three years.
- 45 percent of students had left school without completing a degree or certificate within three years.
- 39 percent of students with an intent to transfer to a four-year institution had left school without completing a degree or certificate within three years.

<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/analysis/>

#### Study Yields Data on Community College Demographics and Success

The *Descriptive Summary of 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Three Years Later*, from the National

Center for Education Statistics, details the demographics, educational preparation, aspirations, and three-year outcomes of 19,000 students. Overall, 48 percent of first-time students began at a community college. The findings for community college students include the following:

- 64 percent planned to earn an Associate’s degree, 10 percent a Bachelor’s degree, and 10 percent a certificate.
- 54 percent were 19 or younger.
- 46 percent had a high school GPA below 3.0.
- 65 percent completed no math above algebra II in high school.
- 58 percent earned a degree, transferred, or remained enrolled after three years.

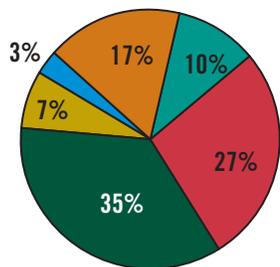
<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008174.pdf>

### Student Success

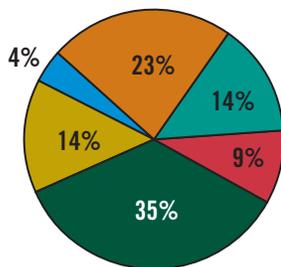
#### Report Advocates for Federal Policies to Promote Student Success

*A Federal Agenda for Promoting Student Success and Degree Completion*, from the Center for American Progress, proposes policies to reduce gaps in degree attainment. The authors, Sara Goldrick-Rab and Josipa Roksa, contend that federal policy must expand beyond its traditional role of facilitating access and reward colleges

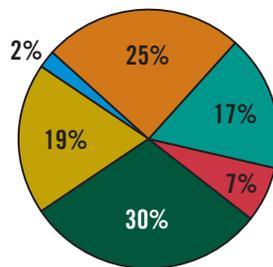
### HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS PAY FOR THEIR EDUCATION



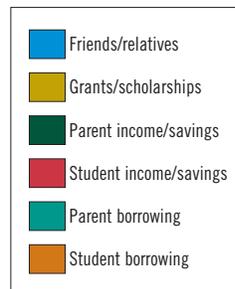
Students at Two-Year Public Colleges



Students at Four-Year Public Colleges



Students at Four-Year Private Colleges



Source: *How America Pays for College*

for helping students reach educational outcomes. They highlight five key strategies for federal policy reform:

- Increase federal investment and accountability to ensure that all colleges and universities have the resources necessary to provide an adequate education.
- Broaden access and reduce time to degree by facilitating smooth transfer of students and credits among institutions.
- Further reduce financial barriers to college completion.
- Facilitate academic success by strengthening high school academic preparation, improving college remedial education, and requiring academic advising.
- Improve and assess learning to ensure that students earn credentials of value.

[www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/degree\\_completion.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/degree_completion.html)

### **Evidence on the Effectiveness of Learning Communities**

In the inaugural issue of the Pell Institute journal, *Opportunity Matters*, Cathy McHugh Engstrom and Vincent Tinto discuss the results of a longitudinal study of learning community programs in 13 community colleges. "Learning Better Together: The Impact of Learning Communities on the Persistence of Low-Income Students" is based on data from surveys, case studies, and interviews and looks at the effect of learning communities on student persistence and engagement. The authors found that participation in a learning community program improved first-to-second-year persistence and reported engagement. They conclude with recommendations for community colleges seeking to adapt the learning community model to their campuses.

[www.pellinstitute.org/journal.html](http://www.pellinstitute.org/journal.html)

### **Virginia Develops Student Success Snapshot**

This summer, the Virginia Community College System unveiled a resource for

policymakers: the Student Success Snapshot. VCCS designed these two-page documents "to expand traditional definitions of student success to be more reflective of the community college mission." Each issue includes methods for defining student success more broadly, updated system-wide analyses of student outcomes, and corresponding outcomes data from each of Virginia's 23 community colleges.

[www.vccs.edu/Academics/StudentSuccess/tabid/622/Default.aspx](http://www.vccs.edu/Academics/StudentSuccess/tabid/622/Default.aspx)

### **Learn and Earn Receives National Recognition**

North Carolina's Learn and Earn Initiative received the 2008 Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The program, selected from a pool of almost 1,000 candidates, was recognized for increasing the number of students prepared for success in college and the workforce. Learn and Earn promotes student success through three channels: early college high schools on public college campuses, where students can work toward their diploma and Associate's degree simultaneously; free online college-level coursework to high school students; and two-year grants to undergraduate students.

[www.nclearnandearn.gov](http://www.nclearnandearn.gov)

[www.governor.state.nc.us/News/PressReleases/Default.asp#](http://www.governor.state.nc.us/News/PressReleases/Default.asp#)

### **Community College of Philadelphia Picks Up the Tab for Returning Students**

In order to improve educational attainment and spur economic growth, Philadelphia and the Community College of Philadelphia are collaborating to help students complete degrees. The My Degree Now program will cover tuition, fees, and a portion of textbook costs for students who have earned at least 30 credits toward an Associate's degree and who have not enrolled in more than two years. In describing the need for the program, school officials noted that 80,000 of the city's 25- to 45-year-olds had earned at least 30 credits but not completed a degree.

[www.philly.com/inquirer/education/20080808\\_New\\_program\\_to\\_help\\_residents\\_finish\\_college\\_degrees.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/education/20080808_New_program_to_help_residents_finish_college_degrees.html)

### **Developmental Education**

#### **Bridges to Opportunity Makes Developmental Education Toolkit Available**

The latest Bridges to Opportunities tool kit for educators and policymakers is designed to help reduce the number of students entering community colleges underprepared and to improve the success rates of those students who enroll needing developmental coursework. The tools and recommendations are grounded in the effective use of statewide data systems that can provide decision makers with longitudinal data on students. The tool kit includes a survey of state-level policy trends in developmental education and highlights Washington's Student Achievement Initiative.

[www.communitycollegecentral.org/](http://www.communitycollegecentral.org/)

#### **Report Highlights Sharp Disconnect Between High School and College Success**

*Diploma to Nowhere*, published by Strong American Schools, analyzes 2004 federal data to assess the cost, scope, impact, and causes of the high need for developmental education on college campuses. The report was prepared with an eye toward bringing these issues into the 2008 Presidential campaigns. Its conclusions are highly critical of role that high schools play in preparing students for postsecondary education. In describing the disconnect between high school and college success, it notes that nearly 80 percent of students in developmental education had a GPA of 3.0 or better in high school; 59 percent of students found their high school classes to be "easy." The task of providing developmental education courses falls disproportionately on community colleges, where 43 percent of students enrolled in at least one such course in 2004.

<http://www.edin08.com/>