In this Issue

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

- Take-aways from the Winter 2008 Achieving the Dream State Policy Meeting;
- An interview on the California Basic Skills Initiative with Bob Gabriner and Barbara Illowsky, two of the architects of this statewide program that is funding experimentation to improve developmental education instruction and outcomes at each of the state’s 109 community colleges;
- A preview of an upcoming JFF policy brief on how Achieving the Dream states are tackling the challenge of developmental education placement and assessment policies;
- Updates on the policy agendas and activities of Achieving the Dream states; and
- Links to useful resources on community college success and state higher education policy.

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

Winter 2008 State Policy Meeting: Take-Aways and Next Steps

In early February, teams from the fifteen Achieving the Dream states met in Atlanta for their semiannual state policy meeting. For two days, the teams discussed their policy priorities, strategies, and progress in a number of areas: state data systems and use; developmental education and college readiness; incentives for improved student outcomes; transfer and articulation; the alignment of adult education with college-credit programming; and more.

Participants identified several policy priorities that they would like to know more about and work to advance back home. These include:

Performance Incentives: Washington State described for other state teams the origins, structure, and strategy of its new Student Achievement Initiative (see Achieving Success, October 2007). State representatives were particularly interested in understanding the structure of Washington’s performance incentives, how the process is being used to deepen campus buy-in, and the way Washington identified and determined the “momentum points” that will be rewarded when students achieve them. Several other Achieving the Dream...
states—including Arkansas and Texas—are exploring or designing performance-funding mechanisms. Many states are interested in understanding more about the Washington approach and assessing other performance measurement and funding mechanisms for emphasizing and rewarding intermediate outcomes, such as tracking the successful completion of developmental education and “gatekeeper” college-level courses.

Institutional Research Capacity: Participants acknowledged the critical importance of institutional and state-level research capacity if the Achieving the Dream emphasis on using data effectively and efficiently for improvement is to take deep root in colleges and states. This meeting featured the first discussion among Achieving the Dream state teams of how states might support stronger IR capacity in their colleges and system offices. Achieving the Dream will follow up on this interest with research on and dissemination of policy strategies states might pursue to strengthen IR capacity.

Cross-State Data Work Group: The results of the initiative’s Cross-State Data Work Group’s tests of intermediate benchmarks will be released and assessed in a forthcoming brief. The work group members are eager to bring their experience and expertise to bear to influence emerging federal debates on revisions to Student Right-to-Know reporting requirements. In particular, they want to help make sure that indicators reported by community colleges are better aligned with Achieving the Dream success indicators and research. Virginia Achieving the Dream team member Tod Massa (from the State Council of Higher Education) is a member of the technical review panel of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, the voluntary partnership that advises the National Center for Education Statistics on IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) data collection and reporting.

Cross-State Policy Collaboration: Several natural groupings of states are emerging among Achieving the Dream states. At February’s meeting, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania expressed interest in a tri-state convening on data systems and adult learner issues. North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia have been planning to convene a joint conference on developmental education best practices. Moving forward, Achieving the Dream will explore additional opportunities for cross-state collaboration, including policy-specific webinars and conference calls that can accelerate learning across states.

Communications: To capitalize on the foundation that they have laid for policy changes in support of increased student success, state lead organizations see a need and an opportunity for coherent communications strategies targeted to decision-making and decision-influencing audiences. They are eager to make progress on two of the original Achieving the Dream policy framework levers: a clear public policy commitment and public support. The communications firm Douglas Gould and Company recently produced a communications toolkit for the Bridges to Opportunity initiative on advancing the community college student success state policy agenda. JFF will work with Achieving the Dream’s communications firm, Lipman Hearne, to develop materials and supports that can help state teams advance their agenda through better messaging, media work, and stakeholder engagement.
In 2005, California Community Colleges embarked on an ambitious initiative to improve the ability of the system’s 109 community colleges to help students attain the basic skills they need to succeed in college-level work. The California Community Colleges Basic Skills Initiative has been a close, unique collaboration among the System Office, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, the associations of Chief Instructional Officers, Chief Student Services Officers, and Chief Executive Officers, and other partners. The initiative has combined research on best practices in developmental education (resulting in a report titled Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in the California Community Colleges), self-assessment at each college of existing practices in basic skills and ESL instruction, and statewide and regional faculty- and administration-led conferences and training workshops on how to perform the assessment and develop an action plan. A legislative campaign secured $33 million to be distributed annually among all the community colleges for development and implementation of an action plan for improving basic skills instruction. These plans are due May 1, 2008. The initiative partners are asking the legislature for additional funds to enable institutions to continue and implement their action plans.

We spoke about the Basic Skills Initiative with Bob Gabriner, Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement at City College of San Francisco and project director for Phase I, and Barbara Illowsky, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics at De Anza Community College in Cupertino and project director for Phases II and III. They have been key leaders in the development and design of the initiative: Bob helped lead the research effort and Barbara led the design of professional development strategies to support effective planning at the colleges. We discussed how the initiative came about, what it took to advance it through the state legislature, and where it is headed.

Information on the California Community Colleges Basic Skills Initiative, including descriptive brochures and research reports, can be found at: www.cccbsi.org.

How did the Basic Skills Initiative get started? How did the partners reach enough agreement to move forward with a statewide campaign?

Bob Gabriner: I like to describe it as a kind of convergence in the state. There has been a concerted effort in recent years to raise graduation requirements for an Associate’s degree. These graduation requirements go into effect in fall 2009. In the process of pushing for higher standards, three groups that had been at odds historically came together: the Academic Senate, the Chief Student Services Officers, and the Chief Instructional Officers. Much of the impetus for this initiative comes from those organizations and their leadership.

They asked a very natural question: if the state is going to raise graduation standards, won’t many underperforming students be left behind? These groups grappled with this question. And as they looked at the data, they saw that too many first-time students enter below college level in either English or math. Between 70 and 80 percent of new, first-time students in California’s community colleges need developmental mathematics and/or English courses, although only a little over one in three who need remediation actually enroll in the courses they need. But even with this lower enrollment, nearly 500,000 students take developmental classes, with additional enrollments in basic skills reading (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Even
with existing graduation requirements, prospects for these students are poor. Something had to be done.

A second factor propelled this convergence. Around the same time, in 2006, the community college system office began to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that would mobilize faculty and administrators to identify the colleges’ most pressing issues. Basic skills was on everyone’s list. Aligning with the strategic plan that emerged was another important departure point.

**Can you describe the evolution of the initiative?**

**Barbara Illowsky:** We knew that we needed to increase requirements for the Associate of Arts degree. At my college, De Anza, in the 1990s, I saw many of our graduates getting hired but then getting stuck in their jobs, not getting promoted. They did not have strong enough critical thinking skills, with just elementary algebra. We learned that large employers were hiring graduates from other states where Associate’s degree graduation requirements were higher and graduates’ skill levels were more dependable. This was crushing.

So I first worked on our campus to raise graduation standards from elementary to intermediate algebra (still high school level but at least higher than high school graduation requirements in the state). Then we took it to the state level. At the same time, California K-12 systems were raising their graduation requirements to include elementary algebra. That gave a strong rationale for the colleges to increase and better align their requirements with those of the K-12 system. The state decided to reconsider our community college math and English graduation requirements, and we pushed those up to college-level freshman composition and intermediate algebra.

The Academic Senate reached the decision to raise graduation requirements in April 2005. And the leadership of the Senate and the administrator organizations began to design the Basic Skills Initiative as a way to make it more likely that students could meet the new requirements. The Board of Governors approved both the graduation requirement change and the Basic Skills Initiative in fall 2006. The new graduation requirements will go into effect statewide in fall 2009, although many colleges already have these requirements. The 2009 start date gives us time to get the initiative going and prepare for the new realities.

**Gabriner:** Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, most of the focus for the three administrators’ groups was on governance and funding. This has changed: increasingly, the focus is on student skills and student success. Historically, these organizations were often at odds with one another. But a generational shift in each of these organizations has allowed them to come together and focus on student success. This means that California’s student success effort started out deeply rooted in the institutions and among those administrators and implementers whose investment and buy-in are critical. In states with more top-down, leadership-driven change efforts, this buy-in is often difficult to secure.

**How did you secure funding from the legislature?**

**Illowsky:** In California, community college budget change proposals are submitted through the systems office, but basically it was the commitment of the leadership of the three groups—the Academic Senate, the Chief Instructional Officers (vice presidents of instruction), and the Chief Student Services Officers (vice presidents of student services)—that pressed the system office to lobby for basic skills improvement appropriations to the colleges.

The argument to the legislature was: what will happen if we don’t do this, if we don’t adequately prepare the next generation of our youth, our students, and our workers? It will only be more difficult and costly if we let students fail. You may find yourself building more prisons in the future, putting the money there. You may not have the tax base to provide the services that residents need.
Gabriner: That said, we have only gone part of the way with convincing the legislature. Compared to a state like Washington, the effort to educate policymakers about college realities has been less deliberate and clear, less strategic in California. And we have secured funding to get started, not to sustain the initiative. We know it will take a long time before we can point to results on the ground. So we need to keep working with and informing the legislature or they will lose interest and move on. There needs to be a concerted effort among key groups—the organizations we already spoke about, occupational education and equity groups—to keep the legislature informed and engaged. In California, in our system of 2.5 million students, that is a big challenge.

What are the main components and goals of the initiative?

Illowsky: The Basic Skills Initiative is designed to help improve success in courses and programs at our community colleges that are below transfer level—that is, courses and programs that are needed to succeed in first-level college courses in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a Second Language. The initiative is targeted to supporting innovation and improvement at all of the state's community colleges.

Gabriner: The initiative has developed in three phases. The first was a research phase. The state community college system office developed a request for proposals from the system’s institutions for a grant to conduct a literature review on best practices in basic skills/developmental education. The grant went to Mt. San Antonio College, which subcontracted with the Research and Planning Group, the organization representing California community college research and planning and learning assessment professionals. A twelve-person working group, including four faculty members, wrote, reviewed, and edited the literature review.

This review—which identified 26 developmental education practices that had data showing promise—became the touchstone for the initiative: based on the experience of programs and institutions nationally that have demonstrated results and documented success, the literature review was the way to create a bar for benchmarking college practice and performance in improving developmental education instruction. We were very clear that we wanted to emphasize not just practices but strategies for integrating rather than separating. We found that the research underscored the importance of practices and approaches that pushed for long-term, multidisciplinary, and integrative efforts—across basic skills and occupational instruction, between academic and student support personnel—and our literature review reflects this.

Two additional tools were created as part of Phase I. One is a self-assessment tool based on the 26 identified practices. Colleges are expected to use this self-assessment in their planning process for the Basic Skills Grants. In addition, the authors developed a cost/revenue tool that enables colleges to estimate both the added cost of a particular innovation and the additional downstream revenue that would accrue from keeping more students longer. This tool has been helpful in making the case for program innovation at the campus level.

Phase II was a request for proposals issued in 2007 to organize the process for training college faculty and leaders on how to conduct a self-assessment of the college’s existing basic skills instructional practices. Barbara has led this effort through Foothill-De Anza CCD and the Academic Senate. The training has helped representatives of each college consider new ways to deliver basic skills and assess the costs and returns from these models. At the same time, we put a steering committee in place that included CIOs, CSSOs, and college presidents to help with the college assessment and training.

More recently, in Phase III, the steering committee has expanded to include an equity specialist, faculty from occupational education, and representatives from the
Research and Policy Group. We have been doing significant outreach to the campuses and to faculty, staff, and administrators. We have been making frequent conference presentations to key constituencies and bringing groups together to present jointly around the state.

**What is the next step for the colleges?**

Illowsky: Official action plans from the colleges are due to the system office May 1. We have long-term goals. Colleges submit five-year plans, but they are only funded for a year, so we have to go back to the state for funds.

Five-year goals might include: to ensure the success of students getting through developmental mathematics; to increase the success rates of certain targeted minority student groups who have not succeeded in the past; or to integrate student services into reading courses. The action plan might be to start or expand a pilot. Almost every college has one or more small pilots or boutique programs underway. We want the colleges to develop new programs based on the best practices assessment, but we also want to strengthen and expand existing innovations. State funds can be used for program and curriculum development in several areas, including ESL tutoring, instructional materials, or other activities for the enhancement of basic skills.

What is really important here is that the state funds are categorical. They do not go into a general pot. They must be used to support expansion and innovation in basic skills instruction—guided by the ‘effective practices’ identified in the literature review and disseminated to the colleges.”

—Barbara Illowsky

**You haven’t said much about college presidents. What has been their role?**

Gabriner: That is an interesting question. Let me give you my personal perspective; Barbara might see it differently. This initiative did not begin with the institutional executives. College presidents focus on funding and autonomy, but a new initiative may not receive enough funding. The level of support for a new initiative from CEOs can be ambivalent.

The roots of this initiative lie with the academic faculty, the Chief Instructional Officers, and the Chief Student Services Officers. In our case, the Academic Senate assumed a key leadership role. College presidents’ support came later, as the initiative was picking up steam. This is a striking difference between Achieving the Dream and the Basic Skills Initiative. In Achieving the Dream, the role of institutional leadership is posited to be transformational, that leadership leads. But this isn’t always the case: in California, the grassroots role of faculty and staff has been critical.

Ilowsky: It is true that it took some time for the Chief Executive Officers to commit to the initiative. But that support is now stronger. We have CEOs regularly presenting in our outreach workshops and panels and taking an active role in building support for the initiative. The same is true for the System Office. System leaders saw the depth of support and energy at the grassroots; their support has been strong and steady.

**How important are data in this initiative?**

Ilowsky: We are pulling together a database of statewide and national effective practices that will be searchable by the 26 practice areas identified in the literature review. There are now 100 programs listed on the Web site; we want to organize that information by the 26 practice areas so it is more useful for colleges. We need to add additional performance metrics, so we can see how these programs perform over time but we don’t have agreement yet on what those metrics should be.
**Gabriner:** We want to go much further on data and its use for improvement and decision making, more like where Achieving the Dream has gone. We want to develop the infrastructure around data indicators, data collection, and data coaching. We’d like to move toward common indicators across the colleges. These are areas where we can learn from Achieving the Dream. We are also impressed with something else we see in Achieving the Dream colleges; it is clear that an increasing number of non-IR people are getting into the data business. Faculty and student services are getting to understand and use data. And that’s all for the good.

Our colleges vary considerably in their IR capacity; some have 1,500 students, others have 100,000. So you can imagine that the IR capacity is very constrained in a number of these institutions. This is a major concern. At one small college, the IR staffer is also the ESL instructor and has two additional responsibilities. The Research and Planning Group has been discussing the concept of a data and IR consortium for the smaller institutions.

**Ilowsky:** Colleges will be reporting data on their efforts, but they are acting fairly independently on data collection and reporting. In the Basic Skills Initiative, we have statewide professional development to spur more commonality across colleges and there are statewide reporting requirements. However, colleges are acting fairly independently, and reporting from colleges is not always consistent.

**Do you have any other advice to states about improving basic skills instruction?**

**Ilowsky:** I’d say this: don’t reinvent the wheel. I was at a national conference on basic skills recently, and I realized that there was a lot of reinventing the wheel going on in the country. Learn from what has been done and what has worked and what hasn’t worked. Learn from our literature review of good practices. And think about scale and institutionalization. There are lots of fabulous boutique programs but no study yet of what it would take to make them sustainable and to offer them to larger groups of students. We have to think beyond targeting a handful of students.

**Gabriner:** If I had to start over again, it would be with one major piece that we left out and are still trying to catch up on: integrating our basic skills initiative with occupational education. This area is critical but we are still grappling with it. It is not that people don’t get it, but the two are more separate than they are together. A lot of occupational students cannot progress without basic skills training, but these two systems remain separate. And for the purposes of policy, it is necessary to get them to integrate. Washington’s I-BEST program goes a long way in addressing this issue of combining basic skill with occupational training and education.

A second key issue that we tackled is the need to bring student services and academic faculty into a coherent plan and program. We had to address the reality that student services folks are too often left out and colleges don’t integrate them into key initiatives. We have found it is critical to address historic gaps within our institutions, including integrating student services with learning strategies.

Ultimately, we want to see colleges look at their practices, identify gaps, and develop coherent and sustainable plans for addressing the gaps. The goal is that colleges will address their practices and—the most important—their institutional culture over time. Moving this agenda is a long-term effort and requires long-term investment of time, research, resources, and commitment. Right now, we are still moving this year to year, largely because of the way our state budgeting and funding works. This has led us to incremental annual strategies rather than a coherent long-term approach. We are struggling to get to this and we need to—for the problem is too serious, and any lasting effort will need long-term support at the college and state levels.
New Issue Brief on Placement Test Policies

Jobs for the Future is finalizing a new issue brief on state placement test policies, with a particular focus on how states are addressing inconsistencies in cut score policies across institutions. Charts in this brief will compare the cut score policies in place across the Achieving the Dream states with specific cut scores in use at colleges in these states. It will also include profiles of three Achieving the Dream states that have addressed placement test/cut score policies in an effort to reduce statewide inconsistencies and better align K-12 and community college expectations. Below is an excerpt from this brief: a look at how the Virginia Community College System has grappled with its policies on placement tests and cut scores. (Achieving Success subscribers will receive a notice when this brief is ready for downloading.)

The Virginia Community College System revisited its placement test cut score policy in the past few years, thinking that a statewide policy might be needed on the range of cut scores that colleges could use to determine placement into remediation. As the system office looked more closely at existing policies and institutional practices, the leadership realized that a different starting point was needed. Testing policies and procedures on the ground varied so greatly from one institution to another that setting a statewide cut score would need to wait until more standardized procedures were agreed to and implemented at the college level.

Background

Prior to the 1990s, when it came to assessing students’ readiness for college-level courses, most Virginia community colleges created their own institution-level policies and procedures. Placement tests and cut-off scores “varied across the board,” according to Vice Chancellor of Academic Services and Research Monty Sullivan. In the early 1990s, though, in collaboration with American College Testing, the Virginia Community College System took steps to align its placement and assessment policies to add consistency and improve predictive value. VCCS instructed its colleges to administer ACT’s COMPASS exam and to use a specific “decision zone,” or cut-off score range, to place students into college-level or developmental courses. Even though no statute or written system-level policy compelled compliance, few colleges strayed from the system’s guidance. In general, the policy was a success.

In the past few years, influenced in part by participation in Achieving the Dream, Sullivan and his colleagues decided to revisit the system’s policy and its impact on student success. Should COMPASS be the only assessment used in the state? Would tightening the decision zone increase student success? These were the questions that motivated the system office. An informal survey of colleges’ placement practices fielded in 2006 raised more questions. According to Sullivan:

We found that institutions with high numbers of dual enrollment students and those with high numbers of ESL students chose to use a variety of instruments in addition to COMPASS. The instrument didn’t provide the flexibility that they felt they needed. And it caused us to ask questions: Why is this? Is it because of the assessment itself? It caused the system to dig a little deeper.

Studies and a Taskforce

In January 2007, VCCS launched a series of research studies designed to better understand the impact of its placement policies on student success. The initial research, funded by National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, focused on pinpointing the academic weaknesses of recent high school graduates and identifying colleges’ strategies to serve students who enroll
needing developmental education. In September 2007, VCCS’ Academic Services and Research department followed up with a related longitudinal study that tracked success outcomes by placement scores. Both studies recommended that the system conduct an internal study to reexamine the COMPASS, the cut-off scores being used, subsequent course placements, and students’ success in these courses.

To get the institutional perspective, VCCS appointed a placement task force and prepared for what the leadership feared would be a protracted debate on the COMPASS assessment and cut-off scores. To their surprise, there was almost instantaneous consensus. While the task force agreed on the need to determine the appropriate assessments and the most accurate cut-score range, its members argued that a more pressing matter needed to be handled first. According to Sullivan:

The colleges’ placement processes and procedures were all over the board. Some institutions required students to take the placement test on campus, while others allowed students to take the test online. Some colleges allowed calculators on math tests; others did not. Some institutions allowed retests within a short amount of time, while others did not allow retests at all. Some institutions required an essay to augment the COMPASS assessment; others did not. And some institutions allowed SAT and ACT scores for placement purposes; others did not.

The system office had initially thought its top priority would be to generate empirical evidence for revisiting and perhaps revising statewide placement policy. However, the task force’s findings have altered the system’s priorities. Sullivan:

The cut-score study itself is somewhat secondary at this point in the process. We began to think about how we had so many differences in the ways our colleges managed the procedures of placement testing: it is very difficult to compare numbers across colleges when there are such huge differences. There is still a lot of work to be done in terms of studying the cut scores, but until we have that solid procedure in place and everyone understands that we’re singing from the same sheet of music, I think our labor in studying cut scores would be for naught.

The Road Ahead

The task of building consensus on the specific assessments that will be approved for use and specific cut-off score ranges that will be set for math and English lies ahead and will have to be negotiated carefully. VCCS also recognizes that the placement test discussion has to extend beyond the community colleges to include the K-12 education sector. Virginia has joined the American Diploma Project and is working to align state high school exit standards with college entrance standards so that the high school diploma can reflect expectations of college and career readiness and be a reliable indicator of a student’s readiness to succeed in college-level work.

VCCS expects to deal with the issue of placement cut scores in the fall of 2008. By then, all the colleges will be using the same processes and procedures to assess students, and the system will be able to use data from the institutions to make “apples-to-apples” comparisons about cut-score outcomes. Sullivan expects that VCCS will have a much better sense of what the cut-score data mean now that they have a fuller understanding of how the placement test scores are derived from campus to campus. He and his colleagues believe they have built a foundation that will ultimately allow the system to set a placement score range with greater accuracy:

In some ways, our vice presidents have been primed for this conversation. Through participating in Achieving the Dream, they understand the importance of common definitions and standards and the importance of being able to make meaningful comparisons across campuses. This will help when we move on updating statewide placement policies.
Arkansas Task Force Preparing Legislative Recommendations on Remediation, Retention

In 2007, the Arkansas legislature established a Task Force on Remediation, Retention, and Graduation Rates, with members from both within and outside the legislature and state government. Ed Franklin, executive director of the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges and a member of the Achieving the Dream state policy team, represents the community colleges. After a number of hearings, the Task Force will deliver findings and recommendations this spring to the governor and the legislature. Recommendations on the funding formula for higher education, which may well advocate for a more performance-based system, will be submitted to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board in July and to the legislature in September after input from the governor, college presidents, and chancellors.

Hawaii Developing Statewide Outcomes for Its Community College System

The community colleges of the University of Hawaii System have developed draft statewide strategic outcomes for 2008-2015 that incorporate Achieving the Dream progress and completion indicators, including numeric outcomes for each of the system’s seven campuses. Legislation is moving forward that will require the state university system, which includes the community colleges, to allocate a portion of its resources to the achievement of the new strategic priority outcomes.

Massachusetts Issues School-to-College Feedback Report

The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education and the Massachusetts Department of Education recently released the revamped Massachusetts School-to-College Report, providing detailed information on how public high school graduates perform in the Commonwealth’s public colleges and universities. Individual high school reports will be released in April and are expected to draw a great deal of attention. Funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the National Governors Association, the reports should make it possible to answer key questions: How do enrollment patterns and college outcomes differ for subgroups of students, such as low-income students? How many public high school graduates enroll in developmental courses in college and in what subjects? The state expects these data reports on enrollment, retention, and first-year success to spur discussion and action—statewide, within regions, and at individual high schools—to improve college readiness preparation at the state’s public high schools. The two departments will hold regional workshops this spring to discuss findings and to develop secondary/postsecondary partnerships committed to improving college readiness.

www.mass.edu/reports

Michigan Moves Forward on Adult Student Strategies

Michigan’s Achieving the Dream priorities align with the state’s efforts to help displaced workers hard hit by economic change, enabling them to secure credentials and skill development that have value in the labor market. A new work group, led by the Department on Labor and Economic Growth and including representatives of key economic and education stakeholders, is looking at policy options to strengthen adult basic education and the transition of ABE students to college programs. Six Achieving the Dream colleges are providing detailed data to the work group. Additionally, two members of the Achieving the Dream state team serve on the work group.

As Michigan’s No Worker Left Behind initiative gets rolling, providing two years’ free community college tuition to displaced workers, the Governor’s Office and DLEG want to make sure that workers
who enroll in college programs are able to succeed and complete them. To this end, the Governor’s Office recommended appropriations of $40 million for NWLB. Five million dollars of this was recommended to be set aside for ABE and remediation services at the state’s colleges, so that students needing remediation would be more likely to benefit from their enrollment.

http://michigan.gov/nwlb

Virginia Data System Build-out Progressing

Virginia Community College System has invested heavily in the design and implementation of a data system that can generate more usable information for the system and its colleges. That investment is beginning to pay off: the enrollment data mart was launched last year, and the system-wide retention data mart was rolled out in March. The system office has been conducting a strategic value assessment to inform the build-out and generate additional demand from college leaders and faculty for the data system and the information it can produce. Through focus groups and surveys, VCCS is asking customers about their data needs and desires, including college presidents, vice presidents of finance, institutional researchers, academic affairs administrators, and student support administrators.

States Help Achieving the Dream Lessons Reach More Colleges

Achieving the Dream’s state policy initiative helps accelerate the spread of experiences and lessons from participating colleges to other institutions in a state. This has been a busy period for such dissemination and diffusion efforts.

In January, participants from the Massachusetts state policy team and from Achieving the Dream campuses delivered presentations on the initiative at the statewide College and Career Readiness Summit.

In Oklahoma, two Achieving the Dream institutions delivered presentations on the “culture of evidence” at a higher education conference on enrollment management that brought together all of the state’s public institutions.

In South Carolina, a successful panel at a recent South Carolina Technical Educators meeting included representatives from four Achieving the Dream colleges. It also led to the drafting of two state policy team members to help design the organization’s convention, which will highlight student success and Achieving the Dream strategies.

When Virginia’s Academic and Student Affairs Council met in March 2008, participants from all the state’s colleges heard Achieving the Dream partners Sue Goldberger (JFF) and Davis Jenkins (CCRC) speak on lessons from Achieving the Dream on state data systems and their use for performance measurement and improvement.

North Carolina is trying to “pepper all professional development with Achieving the Dream information,” according to NCCCS’ Vonna Viglione: a recent session on resource development and fundraising included a session on longitudinal tracking and how it can help with institutional resource development efforts.

Florida’s third annual Connections conference, cosponsored by Achieving the Dream, has become a regular annual event, reaching hundreds of educators and administrators with workshops and panels on student success strategies. This year’s meeting is May 14-16.

New Mexico will hold an adult basic education and developmental education conference on May 12. This event, open to all community colleges in the state, will tap the expertise of the Community College of Denver to highlight how state policy can support more successful programming in adult basic education and developmental education.
Connecticut and Virginia Borrow from One Another

Achieving the Dream states are eager to learn from and adapt policy actions of other states in the initiative. In the past, Virginia has engaged the help of Connecticut Community College officials on how Connecticut’s system raised the take-up rate on federal financial aid by centralizing and upgrading certain administrative functions in the system’s financial aid office. Connecticut recently returned the favor. Legislation introduced in the Connecticut legislature would create a Community-Technical College Transfer Scholarship program modeled on the one enacted last year in Virginia, the goal of which is to guarantee qualified community college graduates tuition rates for their junior and senior years at the same rate they paid for their first two years. Although the bill is unlikely to be acted upon this session, both Connecticut Community College Chancellor Marc Herzog and Chancellor David Carter of the Connecticut State University System testified to the importance for the state of creating a more seamless transfer system for two-year college students.

www.cga.ct.gov

RESOURCES

Data, Performance Measurement, and Accountability

Measuring and Rewarding Community Colleges for Success: An Achieving the Dream Op-ed

Inside Higher Ed recently featured an op-ed article by two leaders of Achieving the Dream partners, George Boggs of the American Association Community Colleges and Marlene Seltzer of Jobs for the Future address the need to shift public funding for community colleges from a system based on enrollments to a system that rewards colleges for students’ achievement of their educational goals. The authors cite the approach taken by Washington State in its Student Achievement Initiative as an example of how states can move toward funding community colleges based on measured student outcomes.

www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/02/25/boggs

Student Success Initiative in Minority-Serving Institutions

The Institute of Higher Education Policy has released a report on the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students initiative, a five-year project intended to foster data-based change and a culture of evidence at minority-serving institutions, including Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Tribal Colleges and Universities. Funded by Lumina Education Foundation, the initiative found that these institutions have weak capacity to collect and analyze data, limited financial resources with which to address this situation, and ineffective mechanisms for linking outcomes to campus change efforts. Successful strategies to improve data capacity and drive institutional change are described.

www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/BEAMS_Increasing_Student_Success_at_MSI.pdf

Case Studies Show How Community Colleges Use Data to Promote Student Success

Lumina Foundation Lessons: Students Aren’t Just Data Points, but Numbers Do Count is part of the foundation’s ongoing series highlighting best practices in inclusive and innovative postsecondary education. This report illustrates the transformative effect that student success data can have on campuses through three case studies, one of which highlights an Achieving the Dream institution—Tallahassee Community College in Florida. TCC has overhauled student advisement and orientation; instituted
“early warning” procedures for students who are struggling academically; established a College Success class that is required for all students enrolled in two or more remedial courses; and created TCC Passport, an online application that allows students and administrators to monitor critical indicators of success, including academic progress, registration and payment history.

www.luminafoundation.org/publications/index.html

Student Success
Final Report Issued on Student Success Policies in California

It Could Happen: Unleashing the Potential of California’s Community Colleges to Help Students Succeed and California Thrive is the final report in a series from Nancy Shulock and colleagues at the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. One conclusion is that significant and lasting gains in student success require critical changes to both the culture within an institutional system and the state policies governing those systems. The authors explain that targeted changes in finance policy, institutional culture, and academic support services are prerequisites to significant gains in student success.

www.csus.edu/ihe/PDFs/R_ItCouldHappen_02-08.pdf

Study of Learning Communities Finds Cause for Optimism

In A Good Start: Two-Year Effects of Freshman Learning Community Program at Kingsborough Community College, MDRC examines the impact of learning communities—a popular first-year experience strategy designed to strengthen students’ connection to college and promote persistence—at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn. Using a rigorous random assignment research design, MDRC found that participation in a learning community improved the college experience and resulted in some outcome gains, including passing more courses in the first semester and progressing more rapidly through remedial English requirements. However, some outcomes lessened over time and evidence is mixed about whether the program increased persistence. Researchers will continue tracking outcomes.

www.mdrc.org/publications/473/overview.html

College Board Commission Calls for Federal Action on Student Success

In February, the College Board’s Center for Innovative Thought released Winning the Skills Race and Strengthening America’s Middle Class: An Action Agenda for Community Colleges, a report by the National Commission on Community Colleges. The commission called for the federal government to enact a Community College Competitiveness Act to help increase the number of students who earn Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees. It also recommended universal access to two years of education beyond high school, better alignment across the three sectors (K-12, two-year, and four-year institutions), and heightened efforts to connect community colleges to emerging technology fields. The goals and approach of Achieving the Dream were highlighted.

www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/prof/community/winning_the_skills_race.pdf

College Readiness

Testing to Help Oregon Assess College Readiness of High Schoolers

Starting in fall 2008, all Oregon high school sophomores must take the PSAT or an alternate exam as part of a broader college readiness strategy. The state will cover the cost of both testing and test preparation. Students will receive customized reports detailing the strengths and weaknesses of their academic preparedness. Schools will receive reports on where students are likely to succeed and where they are not sufficiently prepared, to highlight curriculum improvement needs. Roughly 37,000 Oregon sophomores are expected to take the PSAT in October 2008.
States Progress in Aligning K-12 Standards with College and Career Readiness

2008 Closing the Expectations Gap, by Achieve, Inc., updates a fifty-state progress report on the alignment of high school policies with college readiness standards and the knowledge and skills required for success in the workforce. Since the first report in 2004, states have made progress in aligning high school exit requirements with college-ready and work-ready standards. Nineteen states now report that their high school standards are aligned with college readiness standards, an increase of eight states over the previous year. Six more states now require all students to complete a college- and work-ready high school diploma, bringing the total to eighteen states and the District of Columbia. There also has been progress on development of P-16 data systems and performance accountability systems. The report’s findings have implications for state efforts to align college placement standards with high school exit standards. www.achieve.org/node/990

State Support for Adult Students

Financial Aid Policies for Working Adults

Strengthening State Financial Aid Policies for Low-Income Working Adults, a new policy brief from the Working Poor Families Project, examines how states can strengthen their financial aid policies to better serve the 75 million low-skilled adult workers in need of postsecondary education and training. A few states are leading a wave of innovation in addressing college access for working adults. This policy brief describes their efforts and offers recommendations for states to strengthen financial aid programs to increase the educational attainment of their workforce. www.workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/Policy_Brief-Financial_Aid_Fall2007.pdf

Positive Effects Found for Arkansas Scholarship to Support Single Parents

The University of Arkansas recently released Sustaining the Dream: A Study of Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund Graduates 2003-2006, a study of the post-graduation experience of recipients of the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship, who also received mentoring and other support services. Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the study found that 88 percent of scholarship graduates surveyed were employed full-time with a median income of $33,500. This program demonstrates how state financial aid policies can help engage and reengage adult learners. The program has awarded more than 17,000 two- and four-year scholarships worth almost nine million dollars. www.aspsf.org

Study on Indiana’s Policies to Prepare its Adult Workforce

Indiana’s Adult Education and Workforce Skills Performance Report: Preparing Adults for a Brighter Future, a report from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, details the state’s efforts to create and retain knowledge-based jobs and a skilled workforce. The report highlights the role that Indiana’s higher education system must play in meeting this goal. www.nchems.org/pubs/detail.php?id=108

Individual Development Accounts: A Viable Source of Financial Aid

According to a new study by Abt Associates, Individual Development Account programs are effective in helping low-income individuals attain postsecondary education and accumulate financial assets. Under the Assets for Independence program, community-based nonprofits and government agencies help
families with a net worth of less than $10,000 to save earned income in a special-purpose, matched savings account. Abt researchers found that the biggest gain for individuals with IDAs was in higher education attainment—22.5 points above peers without IDAs. IDAs made it 95 percent more likely that Independence participants would pursue postsecondary instruction than their peers. Three years after account opening, 46 percent of participants were in postsecondary coursework, including evening classes in vocational or technical schools.

**State Budgets and Finance**

*Update on State Financing of Higher Education*

*State Higher Education Finance* FY 2007 *Early Release* is a preliminary update of trends in educational appropriations, net tuition revenues, total education revenues, and full-time equivalent enrollments. According to State Higher Education Executive Officers, state and local governments invested $85 billion in higher education in FY2007, a 7.7 percent increase over FY2006, exceeding both enrollment growth and inflation. SHEEO notes that current indicators suggest trouble for FY2009.

**State Budget Shortfalls Threaten Education Spending**

22 States Face Total Budget Shortfall of at Least $39 Billion in 2009, from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, is a short summary of the weakening economy’s impact on state budgets. According to the center, more than half the states anticipate budget problems in FY2008 and FY2009. [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

**Communications**

*Community College Advocacy Toolkit*

The Community College Bridges to Opportunity recently unveiled a new online toolkit: *Making the Case for Community Colleges: Tools for Communications Advocacy*. The toolkit is designed to help higher education practitioners, researchers, and decision makers advocate for increased support for and public investment in community colleges. It offers a collection of tools to help promote change of policies and practices, including identifying key audiences and constituencies, engaging relevant stakeholders, utilizing optimal messaging techniques, developing effective materials, and using appropriate tools and strategies for media outreach. [www.communitycollegecentral.org/Advocacytoolkit](http://www.communitycollegecentral.org/Advocacytoolkit)