

STATE
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About this Issue

Welcome to the third issue of the *Achieving the Dream State Policy Newsletter*. This newsletter is published by Jobs for the Future in our capacity as organizers of the state policy component of Achieving the Dream, a national initiative funded by Lumina Foundation for Education to increase the success of community college students, particularly those in groups that have been underserved in higher education. (See www.jff.org/jff/approaches/econopp/showcase/Achieving_the_Dream.html for more on JFF and our role in this initiative.)

We are pleased to bring you a report on the recent Listening Tour in Connecticut, which, along with Ohio, has joined Achieving the Dream, bringing the number of states in the initiative to seven and the number of colleges to 35.

We also summarize some of the highlights of the first meeting of Achieving the Dream's national Policy Advisory Group, which met for the first time in late October in Washington, DC.

Also in this issue: an interview with David Armstrong, chancellor of the Florida Community Colleges. A policy-focused interview will be a regular feature of the newsletter.

You'll also find updates on Achieving the Dream state policy efforts, along with information on resources and events you might want to know about. To know more about all of this and what Achieving the Dream teams have been up to, read on.

Connecticut Hosts Achieving the Dream Listening Tour

Three Connecticut community colleges—Capital Community College, Norwalk Community College, and Housatonic Community College—have recently joined Achieving the Dream, thanks to support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. The Office of the Chancellor of Connecticut Community Colleges—a system comprised of 12 colleges—has been chosen as the lead organization for advancing the Achieving the Dream agenda in state policy.

Marc Herzog, chancellor of Connecticut Community Colleges, leads the state-level effort. On November 1, his office hosted a Listening Tour for the initiative in Hartford. About 30 people attended this

meeting, which began with an introduction by Dr. Blenda Wilson, president of Nellie Mae Education Foundation. The meeting was facilitated by Achieving the Dream partners Jobs for the Future and MDC.

The rich discussion engaged representatives of various stakeholders: the Community College Systems Office, presidents of the participating colleges with student representatives, the high school sector, the four-year university system, the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, the Connecticut Department of Education, the Governor's Office at Work Force Development, the Connecticut

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Growing enrollments, changing demographics, and an increasingly competitive environment present both challenges and opportunities for the Connecticut Community Colleges system as it looks to increase the success of its students.

Community Colleges Board of Trustees, the business community, the public workforce development system, and the Norwalk public housing authority—a number of community college students live in public housing.

Like Achieving the Dream Listening Tours in other states, this forum was designed to identify issues, challenges, and opportunities in the state's higher education system and its policy environment, with a particular focus on data systems and student success. The meeting covered key concerns and opportunities, first from the institutional perspective and then through the lens of state policy.

Connecticut community colleges enroll over 90,000 students—about half in certificate and degree programs and half in non-credit courses. This represents half of the state's undergraduates in public education. Traditionally built around providing workforce training to employers, the Connecticut community college system, like many of its counterparts in other states, is seeing record growth in the numbers of younger, full-time students on its campuses. Growing enrollments, changing demographics, and an increasingly competitive environment present both challenges and opportunities for the system as it looks to increase the success of its students.

Issues and Challenges

Several key themes for institutional and policy action emerged from the Listening Tour: developmental education, cross-sector systems alignment (through better articulation and transfer), student support services, and financial aid for developmental education.

Retention was identified as the most important challenge throughout the meeting in several ways:

One college president noted that up to 85 percent of new entering students required at least one *developmental education* course. Poor student preparation was attributed primarily to the lack of articulation between high schools and postsec-

ondary systems. Another participant noted that while high school graduates who entered the community college system were considered “successful outcomes” for the K-12 system, the pervasiveness of remedial education at the college level belied that success, testifying to the need for tracking outcomes across educational sectors. Success in remedial education and in “gatekeeper” courses, the role of assessments and placement tests in developmental education, and students' progression through these programs emerged as high-priority issues for Achieving the Dream.

System alignment—K-16, with special attention regarding “gatekeeper courses” in community colleges—was another top priority. The Connecticut Department of Education is working to develop an articulation process linking the two-year and four-year colleges. In general, however, high school and college curriculum alignment appeared to be more pressing.

Student support services were the third priority identified. Students at the meeting described the importance of student support services to their motivation to stay in college—a key factor in retention. Educators echoed their assessment on the importance of academic counseling, orientation, mentoring, and learning communities for increasing the retention of the growing body of younger students entering college for the first time.

However, increasing the investment in student services is a challenge under the current funding system, where support services compete with academic instruction for funds. This presents a potential policy action point for Achieving the Dream in Connecticut.

Participants raised several concerns about *financial aid* policies. While the community colleges have a very sophisticated financial aid data system, state policymakers may not have enough data around financial aid recipients and their progress, making it difficult to present the case for increasing state resources for aid, even with the surge in enrollments. Connecticut has no major merit-based student aid pro-

gram, and its need-based program for public college students is significantly underfunded based on documented unmet need as reported to the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1984, the community college system has allocated a minimum of 15 percent of its tuition dollars to financial aid, certainly beneficial to improving economic access for thousands of students. However, the source of the funds raises policy issues concerning tuition rates and the priority for using the tuition funds to support student financial aid in lieu of supporting programmatic operations. The availability of funds and the packaging of student financial aid for independent students indirect costs were also raised.

Two related issues: financial aid for developmental education and financial aid for part-time students. Under the current system, students often use a significant portion of their financial aid eligibility to enroll in developmental courses. While a student would have ample eligibility to gain an Associate's degree, future eligibility to complete a Bachelor's degree may be jeopardized. For part-time students, the analysis of financial need and the availability of funding may limit student participation. Minimum time requirements pursuing higher education may also be leading to higher attrition. Future policy discussions must address these issues.

The National Policy Advisory Group members:

David Baime

American Association of Community Colleges

Cheryl Blanco

Western Institute Commission on Higher Education

Noah Brown

Association of Community College Trustees

Patrick M. Callan

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Kristin Conklin

National Governors Association

Amy-Ellen Duke

Center for Law and Social Policy

Peter Ewell

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Jill Kirk

Oregon Business Council

Jorge Ruiz de Velasquez

The James Irvine Foundation

Jane Wellman

Institute for Higher Education Policy

Jan Yoshiwara

Washington Board for Community and Technical Colleges

National Policy Advisory Group Convenes in Washington, DC

The National Policy Advisory Group for Achieving the Dream met for the first time on October 26 in Washington, DC. The group has been convened to advise Jobs for the Future and the initiative as a whole on policy strategies and approaches. Its members will also help Achieving the Dream connect with other national organizations and efforts related to community colleges, state policy, and student success in higher education.

During the meeting, the group reacted to the approach to influencing state policy that has been adopted by Achieving the Dream. (See *Building State Support for Student Success: A Framework for Achieving the Dream's State Policy Work*, which will be available at www.jff.org/ in mid-December.) Much of the discussion focused on two critical challenges:

- How to ensure that the student success agenda is visible and embraced by a state's system heads and political leaders; and
- How to create enough opportunity for institution-level changes and successes to influence state agency and legislative pol-

icy choices about rules, regulations, and resource allocations.

Advice included: reaching out to trustees at the state and local level; developing a "case statement" and set of messages that emphasize the negative economic impacts of the achievement gap; developing a clear understanding of college-level innovations, experiments, and experience; and more.

Advisory Group members provided feedback on several efforts now underway as part of Achieving the Dream's policy work. They provided very helpful advice on the design and implementation of the recently launched effort to assess the potential of using regional accreditation agency procedures and processes to focus more attention on improving student outcomes in community colleges. The joint state data project involving Achieving the Dream states and four other states funded by the Ford Bridges to Opportunity Initiative was discussed. The group sees great potential from this cross-initiative, multi-state effort to improve student data systems.

The advisors also reacted to the design for documenting and evaluating the state policy work over the next four years. They argued for the importance of a deep understanding of how interactions between participating colleges and state policymakers can create openings and change the dynamics of state policymaking.

The group will meet annually, convene by phone occasionally during the year, and provide feedback as requested on such topics as draft publications and specific state strategies.

The expertise, perspective, and networks of the members of this group are important resources for the initiative. We are thrilled to have them involved and engaged.

Q&A: An Interview with David Armstrong, Chancellor, Florida Community Colleges

“Through Achieving the Dream, we continually ask: what models and strategies work for helping these students succeed?”

In this issue, we launch a new feature: interviews with leaders of state community college systems and their efforts to promote student success through state policy. The first Q&A is with David Armstrong, chancellor of Florida’s 28-institution community college system. Four Florida community colleges are part of Achieving the Dream—Broward, Hillsborough, Tallahassee, and Valencia—and the state is one of seven participating in the policy component of the initiative.

How do you think Florida’s community colleges and their students benefit from participating in Achieving the Dream?

Our colleges and their students benefit in a variety of ways. The initiative has caused the colleges to focus on evidence—on using data to identify approaches that can work to support the targeted populations of Achieving the Dream, those who are hardest to serve and most typically underrepresented in our institutions. Through Achieving the Dream, we continually ask: what models and strategies work for helping these students succeed? By using student outcome data generated at the local and state levels, this initiative will enable us to test strategies and to learn which ones work.

How does the state community college system office benefit from participating in Achieving the Dream?

At the state level, we want to provide leadership to support the replication of innovations that can be shown to work. And we want to spread the benefits to all 28 colleges in the system. For that reason, we are committed to replicating across all the colleges in the state the data collection and analysis that the Achieving the Dream colleges have undertaken.

Achieving the Dream provides an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with our institutions and to create opportunities for meaningful conversations on the central questions related to how best to serve our most challenged students. We benefit from strong relationships with our institutions. But we also benefit from the relationships we are forming with peer states in the initiative. Too often, we all get focused too intently on our own system and its ways. But here we have a chance to compare ourselves to and to learn from other states: what works and what doesn’t; what is being tried in another state that we might find helpful. We get a chance to benchmark with other states—and that is a big plus.

“I have a great deal of optimism for the future. We can do better... From where I sit, I see an overwhelming general sense of this as a critical issue for us and a broad, ecumenical desire to act.”

What are the biggest opportunities you see in Achieving the Dream?

We are really interested in the different approaches that participating institutions are taking. We are looking forward to seeing what kind of results the different colleges are going to get. Tallahassee is focusing on improving completion in gatekeeper courses, like first-level algebra. Broward is targeting the most underprepared students and trying to assess whether strategies like very targeted mentoring can help them advance and succeed. We expect that different experiments will yield different results, but we hope all will have some success and that we can help Achieving the Dream institutions and other colleges in the state learn from these important experiments and the careful analysis of their impact on students.

What are the biggest challenges Florida faces in making student success a top policy priority?

Community colleges generally have the challenge of trying to help policymakers gain a better understanding of the obstacles to success that face our students. Most policymakers think of college in terms of the four-year colleges and universities they attended. But we have a very different student body: different ability to navigate higher education for themselves, different aspirations, different levels of preparation. They face many more obstacles and speed bumps than the typical policymaker did in his or her experience. Our job is to communicate these challenges to policymakers so they will understand the need to provide adequate support—financial and otherwise—to students who face multiple barriers to their success.

What are some Florida initiatives that can help promote greater student success?

We are very excited about a targeted research project being led by Achieving the Dream team leader Pat Windham that six years ago began following a cohort of 200,000 Florida ninth graders to see how they progressed through high school and into their postsecondary years. We are able

to analyze the paths of different subgroups and will be able to get some sense of variation by income through use of Free and Reduced Lunch status. We plan to use the results of this analysis to open policy discussions with our K-12 and higher education partners on strategies to close significant achievement gaps.

We are also engaged in a policy audit to identify all legislative and rule policies in Florida that could be either a barrier or provide incentives to student success: pricing, financial aid, and all educational policies are under scrutiny. A draft of this audit will be discussed in the coming months with Achieving the Dream institutions. The effort will inform our priorities in dealing with the legislature on policy changes, funding issues, etc.

We are also taking steps to try to increase the availability of need-based aid in Florida. We have asked the new Task Force on Access to Post-Secondary Education, created by the Department of Education and the University Board of Governors, to take a holistic look at the balance between merit-based aid, which is comprehensive and fully funded, and need-based aid, which has not kept pace. The task force has agreed to look at the combination of federal, state, and institutional aid in Florida and to identify gaps and inefficiencies.

Any final comments?

From the 60,000-foot level, Achieving the Dream has already had an impact. We now have as a high priority in our system the identification and analysis and informing of practice on success for our most challenged and underrepresented students. The initiative has opened up meaningful conversation at all levels: institutional, state, and multi-state. I have a great deal of optimism for the future. We can do better. And now we will be able to identify and communicate ways that we can do better. From where I sit, I see an overwhelming general sense of this as a critical issue for us and a broad, ecumenical desire to act.

State Updates

Florida

Florida's Community College System office held its fall Achieving the Dream meeting on October 18-19 in Tampa with the four participating colleges—Broward Community College, Hillsborough Community College, Tallahassee Community College, and Valencia Community College. The focus was on colleges' successes and challenges in implementing their proposed initiatives. In addition, Andrea Sussman of KSA-Plus Communications spoke about communication services her organization is providing Achieving the Dream colleges and state policy efforts.

New Mexico

The New Mexico Association of Community Colleges, through primary support of its Achieving the Dream and Bridges projects, conducted a two-day Best Practices in Developmental Conference. November 17-18. About 100 practitioners of developmental and adult basic education attended, coming from 15 of community colleges, two tribal colleges, the New Mexico Corrections Department, and the state director of Adult Basic Education. Renowned speakers and experts in developmental education and related topics—such as Hunter Boylen, Byron McClenney, John Strucker, Ed Morante, and staff from the award-winning Developmental Education Department of the Community College of Denver—made presentations and facilitated discussions. Colleges left highly energized and with two to three improvements they will implement at their home campuses. A full report will be available by the end of the year on the NMACC Web site, www.nmacc.org.

North Carolina

In October, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley announced that school districts, community colleges, and universities in 22 North Carolina counties will receive \$1,035,000 in state funds for planning grants to create 23 new "Learn and Earn" high schools across the state. Learn and Earn schools enable students to attend high school for one additional year to earn a diploma and an Associate's degree or two years of college credit. The "Learn and Earn" high school program is administered by the North Carolina New Schools Project, Easley's high school reform initiative announced in 2003. The schools receive support from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina System, and the North Carolina Community College System. In the 2005-06 legislative session, Gov. Easley worked with the General Assembly to secure \$4.1 million to support the 15 existing Learn and Earn high schools and 23 planned sites across the state.

In November, the North Carolina Community College System office held a meeting with key members of the four Achieving the Dream colleges' data teams. The working session centered on colleges' next steps—and how the state system office can support their efforts. Three working

groups were established: data collection, student success measures, and longitudinal tracking/long-term solutions. Follow-up will be expedited through telephone conference calls.

Ohio

Achieving the Dream efforts in Ohio have focused on developing the State Policy Work Plan with key college stakeholders to identify state policies which hinder or support core initiative outcomes. Each of the five colleges in Ohio is collecting data and working with their respective leadership coaches to address critical questions surrounding data outcomes. Jefferson Community College (Steubenville) has joined the cohort working with Public Agenda to work on effective community engagement practices. Each of the five colleges will be attending the National Strategy Institute in Orlando, FL, in January 2006.

Texas

In September, teams from the eight Texas Achieving the Dream colleges met in Austin, where each college presented its goals and activities for the initiative. The meeting also featured a state policy discussion and a presentation by KSA-Plus Communications.

On November 15-16, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board sponsored a developmental education conference, "Ensuring Academic Excellence: Developing Strategies of Success Campus by Campus." It featured leaders in public education and higher education. The goal was to bring together Texas educational leaders to discuss the state of developmental education and identify actions Texas must take to ensure academic success for all college students.

Virginia

Donna M. Jovanovich joined the Academic Services and Research staff at the Virginia Community College System, as Director of Institutional Effectiveness. Her primary responsibilities will be to work closely with the five Achieving the Dream colleges and to conduct studies that enable the VCCS to evaluate student success. Donna has a doctorate in education, research, and evaluation and was an adjunct math and statistics instructor at Virginia Commonwealth University. She worked on student outcomes assessment, planning, and math instruction at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College.

Susan Coffey has been appointed as a part-time policy analyst at the Virginia Community College System, working on Achieving the Dream. Previously, she served as director of professional development at the VCCS.

Jovanovich and Coffey have visited each of the five Achieving the Dream colleges in Virginia and heard personally what the colleges are doing. A committee of college representatives is being formed to help plan a spring meeting of Achieving the Dream colleges.

Resources: Reports, Publications, Articles in the Media

Review of Developmental Education in Florida

The Florida Department of Education recently published and posted a review of developmental education. This review of Florida Community College System developmental education programs demonstrates the benefit of college preparatory courses for students who progress in developmental education. The review was conducted by Patricia Windham, who analyzed a comprehensive student database developed by the Florida State Board of Community Colleges. The report attributes the ongoing need for developmental education to: high numbers of students not college-ready after high school; and students who take a break between high school and college and then decline in readiness. The report highlights the need for more rigorous high school and middle school coursework, which was found to reduce the need for developmental education for students.

To download the report, go to: www.fldoe.org/CC/Vision/accountability.asp

State Policy Reports on Higher Education Inequality

The National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education has released a set of excellent and important policy reports detailing the economic impacts of continued disparities in access and outcomes in higher education. Of particular interest for Achieving the Dream states are the state-level reports on Connecticut, New Mexico, and Texas. The argument focuses on the economics and standard of living implications of current trends in demographics and college access and success. The analysis is based on the recent report, *As America Becomes More Diverse: The Impact of State Higher Education Inequality*, by Patrick J. Kelly of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, with support from Lumina Foundation for Education.

To download the state policy alerts, go to: www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_decline/decline-inserts.shtml

GAO Reports on State Transfer Challenges and Strategies

Students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions in Michigan are making smoother transitions with better academic results than students in some other states. Michigan's community colleges and universities apparently are ahead of the curve in solving transfer problems. Nationally, according to a Government Accountability Office report, transfer students from a community college take, on average, ten more credits and three more months than nontransfer students to complete their degrees. The GAO looked at institutions in California, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Missouri to determine whether the transfer process delays graduation and affects affordability and the extent of such problems.

To download the report, go to: www.gao.gov/new.items/d0622.pdf

Indiana Scholarship Increases College Access, but Success More Elusive

Indiana's Twenty-First Century Scholars Program, which enables low-income students to receive support getting into college, finds that access does not necessarily translate into success. The scholarships more than triple the odds that a poor student will graduate from college—without a scholarship, researchers estimate the rate is 7 percent—but 75 percent of the children who sign up never earn a degree. One possible reason is the lack of support services for students once they have enrolled. 21st Century Scholars face many personal barriers and tend to drop out of their programs in the absence of adequate resources. Ohio has begun to address this issue after tracking outcomes for these students. To improve retention, colleges are pairing new scholars with older counterparts.

To read "Scholarship Plan Helps, to a Degree," go to www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051009/NEWS01/510090536&SearchID=73223134320407

Upcoming Events

Achieving the Dream/Bridges Joint State Data Project Meeting

This joint meeting of the 11 states participating in the Achieving the Dream and Bridges to Opportunity initiatives will be held January 10–12, 2006, at the La Mansion Hotel on the beautiful River Walk in San Antonio, Texas. The purpose will be to present findings from the “data system audit” visits to all 11 states conducted by NCHEMS in recent months—and to assess opportunities for joint, multi-state efforts to improve state student outcome data systems. One goal will be to see if participating states can reach consensus on a commitment to report on a small set of high-priority, common data measures and engage in a benchmarking effort with other states. State teams will also assess other opportunities to work together to strengthen state data systems and to build political support and will for using student data for institutional improvement.

Achieving the Dream State Policy Meeting

Our winter state policy meeting will be held on January 30–February 1 at the Walt Disney Resort in Orlando in conjunction with the Strategy Institute that will be attended by teams from all Achieving the Dream colleges. This meeting is designed to accomplish several goals:

- Discussion of the status of state policy efforts across the states and planning for the remainder of the year;
- Interaction with college personnel, coaches, and data facilitators to understand issues for state policy emerging from their efforts;
- Sharing of strategies on common, high-priority, policy issues; and
- Identification and discussion of high-value joint activities or efforts (e.g., research, meetings, publications, communications campaigns) that can inform and support state-level work.

Teams of three to five representatives from each of the seven Achieving the Dream states will participate.

State Policy Forum

The second annual Achieving the Dream State Policy Forum will take place on Sunday, February 5, in Washington, DC. This one day, no-cost state policy is designed for national, state, and institution-level policymakers, college administrators, and trustees interested in issues of state policy. There will be two session topics: an examination of the role of regional accreditation in helping to ensure improved student outcomes of at-risk student populations; and an exploration of the data indicators project that is seeking to establish a common set of measures that can be used across states to benchmark student performance.