

## STATE POLICY NEWSLETTER

June 2006

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## Introduction

This newsletter is published by Jobs for the Future for Achieving the Dream, a national initiative launched by the Lumina Foundation for Education. (See [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org) for more on Jobs for the Future and our role in this initiative.)

This issue pays special attention to efforts in Achieving the Dream states around college readiness—particularly strategies that address:

- How postsecondary expectations and standards can be better *aligned* with those of the K-12 system; and
- How colleges and schools can *collaborate* more effectively to increase young people's college success.

Alignment and collaboration have surfaced as top concerns for Achieving the Dream states and also in recent national discussions on higher education success and accountability. The widespread placement of high school graduates into developmental education courses

challenges any institution that wants to increase the persistence and completion rates of its students. As the U.S. Education Department's Cliff Adelman and others have shown, the rigor of one's high school curriculum is a critical determinant of success in college.

This issue's interview is with Frank Renz, who reflects on the evolution of Achieving the Dream in New Mexico, its impact, and its future prospects as he retires next month from his position as executive director of the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges.

We also bring you our usual updates from states—policy activities, convenings, publications—and links to a variety of resources and publications that you might find helpful. Best wishes for a good summer.

If you know anyone who might want to receive this newsletter, please email our editor, Radha Roy Biswas: [rrbiswas@jff.org](mailto:rrbiswas@jff.org).

## A Short Guide to Achieving the Dream's Approach to State Policy

Achieving the Dream has engaged state-level lead organizations and teams for over a year in joint and separate efforts to strengthen state policies related to community college student success. Recently, Jobs for the Future prepared a short, "30,000-foot aerial view" of emerging lessons. During this early phase of the initiative, work with states has had several goals:

- Building trust and effective working relationships between the lead organization and the initiative partners,

between the lead group and participating colleges, and among the policy teams from participating states;

- Narrowing the policy areas of primary focus for the initiative; and
- Identifying initial priority activities for states in their efforts to assist Achieving the Dream colleges and shift the policy environment to be more supportive of data-driven decision making focused on student success.

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Jobs for the Future  
88 Broad Street  
Boston, MA 02110  
617.728.4446  
[www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

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## About Achieving the Dream [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org)

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a multi-year national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced significant barriers to success, including students of color and low-income students. Achieving the Dream works on multiple fronts, including efforts at community colleges and in research, public engagement, and public policy. It emphasizes the use of data to drive change.

Colleges in nine states are participating in the initiative: Connecticut, Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

The following notes, prepared for Lumina Foundation for Education staff, introduces the context and the approach of Achieving the Dream's state policy efforts to date.

- The states have identified a set of common areas where they feel policy innovation is critical to helping less-prepared and lower-income students: state data systems that track students into, through, and out of community colleges; developmental education policies; need-based aid; and the alignment between K-12 and college standards.
- States can deal with only a limited number of big issues at any one time. For example, Texas has had to address K-12 school finance during the past year, so higher education issues have moved at a slower, quieter, smaller-bore pace.
- Even as states come back from the deep deficits of a few years ago, few feel flush. They see health care costs as a structural deficit that will not get better in the short run, and that crowds out discussions of most other big-ticket items (although K-12 and early education are an exception in some places). This constrains big spending on higher education. It is not coincidental that New Mexico expanded need-based aid significantly this year: the state is awash with energy revenue. This is atypical.
- States that have centralized community colleges can move policy innovations more quickly than those with decentralized systems. Thus, Florida is much farther along than many states in the quality of its data system, the consistency and reach of policies on developmental education, and alignment with K-12. At the same time, centralized systems are often difficult to move in directions they are not already moving: they have many priorities they are working on. Even a large initiative such as Achieving the Dream can have difficulty getting traction in the midst of other priorities.
- In every state, there are many targets of opportunity that do not require legislative action but can be important in supporting institutional change. Examples: indicators of developmental education progress are being used in the accountability system being implemented in Texas (Achieving the Dream has helped influence the measures being used); data analyses conducted by the Florida community college system are making clear the connection between K-12 preparation and community college success; this year, North Carolina will roll out a statewide common placement test cut score for placement into developmental education.
- States appreciate the Achieving the Dream emphasis on listening to the colleges and working on policy innovations that support the colleges' efforts. They have helped to bring the Achieving the Dream colleges together regularly and to build their collective identity.
- States see value in engaging all their community colleges, not just the Achieving the Dream colleges, in their efforts. They do not want to see a haves/have-nots dynamic established, with a minority of their colleges appearing to be the chosen few. As a result, states have set up ways to disseminate lessons to other colleges, host statewide meetings on particular Achieving the Dream topics, and involve all colleges. For example, Connecticut will generate Achieving the Dream data not just for participating colleges but for all nine colleges in the state system.
- Relationship-building is a critical component of policy initiatives. This facet of the work and its importance are hard to capture in progress reports and seem quite "squishy." But making the connections and knowing who to call when and who needs to be involved to move a particular effort are critical. Policy innovation is often about being ready to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. This is ultimately about trust and relationships.

## Q&A: An Interview with Frank Renz, Director, New Mexico Association of Community Colleges

Frank Renz has been the director of the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges for 15 years. In July, he retires from that position, though he will stay connected to Achieving the Dream as a coach for two of the Washington State colleges joining the initiative this summer.

Previously, Frank was chief academic officer at the University of New Mexico, Valencia, and director of research and planning and associate dean of instruction at San Juan College. He was appointed by Governor Richardson to the Governor's Progress Agenda for Education. He has served on numerous New Mexico state committees and task forces and is a member of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges and the National Council of State Association Chief Executives.

It is with some sadness that we say goodbye to Frank as director of NMACC. He has been a creative, resourceful, and dogged voice for quality and success in New Mexico's community colleges—and for the development of policies that expand transparency and accountability and that promote equity.

### **Why did the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges want to be part of Achieving the Dream?**

We knew that our students were not succeeding at high enough rates, certainly not compared to peers in other states. So we jumped on the accountability bandwagon before there was even a law in New Mexico to promote performance funding. Then, when I heard about the initiative, it was obvious to me that this would fit well with what I was trying to do with the association. Moreover, look at the profile of our enrollments: relatively poor individuals; high rates of Hispanic and Native-American students. Joining a

national project that focused on the success of these students could only be helpful.

### **How is the initiative progressing in New Mexico?**

It took a while for the colleges to get traction. We wanted them to see Achieving the Dream as part of the fabric of what they do. It wasn't until we had a first meeting convening all the colleges in the initiative that we began to feel some excitement about the commonalities that the college teams felt. Now, interest among the colleges is growing: the emphasis on a culture of evidence, the focus on developmental education. We helped organize a conference last year on developmental education and how to improve it. We invited not just the Achieving the Dream colleges but all the community colleges in the state. The Higher Education Department has taken notice and has expanded its efforts in this area, which is great since they have a lot more capacity to act than the association ever has.

We did some research on placement tests and cut scores used for placement into developmental education across the various colleges. We knew that our college's cut scores for determining placement were all across the board. So we documented the policies at each community college. Now we have a published document that demonstrates it. The Higher Education Department has said it will look for ways to improve consistency in the cut scores used across the state—and in the quality and rigor of developmental courses into which students are placed.

We have also gotten the department interested in doing something about the state's data system. We took a cross-agency team to look at how Florida organizes and manages its data warehouse. That led the

legislature to request a study on the issue. The Higher Education Department has set up a Data Sharing Task Force, led by the Higher Education Department and comprised of representatives from K12, Workforce Training and Development, and the State Chief Information Office. As the state pursues initiatives like dual enrollment, which require coordination across educational sectors and their data systems, the need has become more and more clear.

#### **What are you most proud of as you move on?**

I am most proud of the work the association did in leading the state toward a stronger accountability system for student success. We developed meaningful measures two years before the state passed the Accountability in Government Act in 1999. We worked with community college researchers from around the states and developed measures that we felt told an important story—the story of students who have earned nine credits or more (i.e., they are committed to completion). What happens to them and what should be considered a successful outcome? We found that 50 to 55 percent of students with nine or more credits either graduate, transfer, earn an industry credential, are transfer-ready, or are still enrolled. What I am most proud of is that this measure has been adopted by the state as one of the measures to be used in the allocation of performance funding, which will begin this year. The legislature allocated \$5 million to be awarded over the next three years. This will help encourage the colleges to focus on success.

The second accomplishment I am most proud of is getting the College Affordability Act, which provides for need-based aid, funded in a very short time frame after the law was passed.

#### **What are the biggest challenges to continued policy gains in New Mexico?**

With my retirement, there have been changes in the association's membership and leadership. [The independent community colleges have pulled out of the Association, leaving the two-year branch campuses as its members—ed.] These will make it more difficult to pull the many colleges across the state together to discuss and plan for policy priorities. For example, it will be harder to bring the colleges together around the issue of narrowing the variation in placement test cut scores and alignment in developmental education. Being so decentralized in our governance, getting colleges to agree on this will be hard. The Higher Education department is not really in a position to mandate. It can coordinate, but not really say: "You will do this."

A second challenge is that the state needs some clear goals for higher education. We should have some numerical goals for where we want to be on access and success—something to shoot for. We have shown the Data Sharing Task Force the JFF research on state goal-setting around the country. That's been helpful, but it will be hard to move aggressively without some progress on goals.

#### **What will you be doing once you retire?**

Hopefully, I'll relax some, but I keep getting asked to do this, that, and the other thing. I will be an Achieving the Dream coach at two Washington state colleges. I have been asked to keep my hand in as a consultant to the association and to the New Mexico Business Roundtable for Education. But I hope I enjoy myself and do some traveling. And I want to make sure I learn how to surf!

# College Readiness: What Achieving the Dream States Are Doing to Improve K-12 and Postsecondary Alignment

Nationwide, efforts and initiatives around college readiness, particularly strategies that address alignment between the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, are drawing the attention of educators and policymakers. The lack of adequate preparation for college-level work has been identified as a key factor in the growing number of students who fail to achieve a postsecondary credential within six years of exiting high school and entering a postsecondary institution. For institutions, too many students come to college not ready for college success, posing a very real problem for colleges as they struggle with large numbers of students needing remediation, resulting in low persistence and completion rates. For policymakers concerned about productivity and accountability to the public for education investments, the current situation is quite frustrating.

In the past, higher education largely responded to the pressures on K-12 with relief, since they were not being held responsible for poor performance of K-12 systems. Today, though, the terrain is shifting as pressures for accountability mount and public funding for higher education continues to be squeezed. Colleges and universities—and particularly community colleges, where the bulk of remediation takes place—are being expected to, and are finding it in their interest to be engaged more deeply with the K-12 education system in the pursuit of improved achievement and college-readiness.

Moreover, college leaders are coming to understand that some of the greatest obstacles to a more efficient education pipeline occur at the juncture of the two systems. For example, high schools face a genuine problem preparing their students

because few states have clearly defined what constitutes “ready for college-level work.” As Kati Hancock, director of the Education Trust, observes in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 10, 2006), “The difficulty for high schools lies in preparing students for institutions’ different placement standards—that is, what constitutes readiness for those first credit-bearing courses in mathematics and English at the college level. That is especially puzzling because most institutions willingly accept credits for those entry-level courses from other institutions.”

Inadequate college readiness and the resulting problems of low retention and completion are especially pertinent to Achieving the Dream because low-income students and students of color are disproportionately affected. Nearly every Achieving the Dream state is addressing this issue in one form or another.

Some of these efforts, reported by the state lead organizations, are summarized here:

## Florida

On June 5, Florida passed legislation to better prepare middle school and high school students for college. As reported in our last newsletter, Florida had conducted a study showing the link between high school preparation and student scores on the College Placement Test. Another study followed a cohort of students from ninth grade through entry into postsecondary education. Regardless of income, the rigor of a student’s academic preparation was a key determinant of postsecondary success.

House Bill 7087—popularly known as the A++ bill—builds on the same premise. The reform addresses middle and high school academic preparation, early and mandatory career counseling, career readiness, and teacher preparation. To be

promoted to high school, middle school students will be required to complete 12 core academic courses (three each in English, math, science, and social studies), as well as one course in career and education planning. Every middle school will have to offer at least one high school-level math class for high school credit. Ninth graders entering high school in the 2007-08 school year will be required to earn 16 core academic credits and eight elective credits in order to receive a high school diploma. To better engage students in planning and making decisions for their future, both middle and high school students will have to undergo career counseling and take planning courses. Middle school students will complete a personalized academic and career plan during the seventh or eighth grade through the Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students online advising system (FACTS.org). High school students will select an area of interest as part of their personalized education and career plan. Students will earn four credits in a major area of interest in the arts, advanced academic studies, or career preparation.

To improve reading skills, middle and high school students reading at the lowest level will have to enroll in an intensive reading course. Funding for reading will now be a permanent part of the Florida Education Finance Program to ensure that school districts have adequate annual funding to serve students' reading needs.

### **New Mexico**

**New Mexico** recently published *Ready for College: A Report on New Mexico High School Graduates Who Need Remedial Classes in Higher Education*, a first-of-its-kind study that used centralized databases of students from the K-12 system and tracked them as they entered higher education institutions in the state. The study, which included 35,654 students who graduated from New Mexico's public high schools, found that 49 percent of the state's high school graduates took college

developmental courses in math and/or literacy at the institution they attended. Coming after a developmental education conference organized by the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges in 2005, the report gives renewed urgency to the state's efforts to address the college preparedness of its students.

### **North Carolina**

**North Carolina** has launched "Project Insight," a K-16 data warehousing project. The working committee is comprised of two representatives each from the state's Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College System, and the University of North Carolina. The group is fleshing out the details for an effective, comprehensive data warehouse that will facilitate state analysis of trends in college readiness and college success for the state's young people who move into public two- and four-year institutions.

In addition, the Community College System is preparing to announce a policy on common cut scores for placement into developmental education courses at any community college in the state. Colleges have voted their preferences. The placement scores, which have been recommended by the systems office, are based upon the results of a two-year study of student performance in credit-bearing courses correlated to their initial test scores. Colleges will still be able to choose which placement tests they use, but all colleges will use the same range of scores for placing students into developmental education or academic courses. It is anticipated that the new placement scores will be used during the 2007-08 year.

### **Texas**

In **Texas**, in response to Governor Rick Perry's Executive Order directing the higher education and public education communities to define and adopt standards for college readiness, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher

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## State Data Project

Jobs for the Future, the Community College Research Center, and the Community College Leadership Program have developed a plan for Phase II of the joint Achieving the Dream-Bridges to Opportunity state data project. Proposed strategies are: 1) engagement and dissemination—spread the gospel of using data for improvement to more states and other key audiences; 2) research and development—in partnership with the 11 states and their colleges, develop research-based knowledge and tools to help state agencies collect, analyze, and communicate data in ways that inform policy and practice; (3) policy advocacy; (4) capacity building—help participating states and others build their capacity to use data for improvement. The data project, its progress, and its potential will be highlighted at a session in the National Council of State Directors of Community Organizations Summer Meeting, to be held in Santa Fe, August 6-9.

For a copy of the Phase II plan for the state data project, email Mike Collins: [mcollins@jff.org](mailto:mcollins@jff.org).

Education Coordinating Board are collaborating to develop standards by January 2007. Several key strategies have been identified thus far: alignment of high school and freshman-level curricula in general education core courses such as English composition, math, and the natural sciences; increasing the rigor of the senior year in high school; formation and use of local P-16 Councils to cause collaboration across the various types of institutions; and strengthening the Recommended High School Program (RHSP) to a 4x4x4x4 program (four years each of English, math, natural sciences, and language instruction).

In addition, the recent landmark public school finance reform bill (H.B.1; 79th Texas Legislature, 3<sup>rd</sup> Called Session) includes several initiatives regarding high school success and college readiness. It would add a postsecondary success performance indicator for the accountability system required of each school district in the state. Second, the bill requires the establishment of vertical teams of public school teachers and college faculty to recommend standards and expectations of college readiness. Third, the bill requires the P-16 Council to

recommend a college readiness and success strategic plan designed to decrease the number of students enrolling in developmental coursework in college.

### Virginia

Virginia is one of seventeen states (and one of five Achieving the Dream states) to receive an Honors State Grant from the National Governors Association. Thirty high schools will receive grant funds to increase college readiness and high school graduation rates. The grants will help the Honor Schools expand their Algebra Readiness programs, develop and implement transition plans aimed at reducing the number of ninth and tenth grade students retained in grade, access funds to pay for testing, and increase the number of students completing the state's Early College Scholars program requirements and its industry certification program requirements. Honor Schools will also have the opportunity to participate in an expansive college awareness project coordinated by the Virginia Community College System and the State Council of Higher Education.

## Additional Achieving the Dream State Developments

### Pennsylvania and Washington State Join Achieving the Dream

Pennsylvania and Washington are joining the Achieving the Dream policy network this summer. The lead organization for Washington is the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The lead organization in Pennsylvania has not been decided.

### North Carolina

**Financial Aid for Staff and Faculty:** The North Carolina General Assembly is considering several items of importance to

colleges, including the full funding of the enrollment formula, additional student support/financial aid staff on campuses, and funding for additional financial aid for students and for faculty and staff pursuing advanced degrees. The state university and community colleges are exploring the idea of providing tuition waivers for faculty and staff taking courses or programs in either system.

### Texas

**Community College Accountability System Agreement:** In April representatives of the Texas Association of Community

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## Comings and Goings

**Albuquerque TVI Changes Name:** The new name of Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute is Central New Mexico Community College.

### Ohio Regents Chancellor Steps

**Down:** In March, Chancellor Roderick G. W. Chu of the Ohio Board of Regents stepped down to spearhead a special initiative at the Ralph Regula School of Computational Science. The board has appointed Vice Chancellor E. Garrison Walters as Interim Chancellor.

### VCCS Hires New Director of

**Educational Policy:** In April, Dr. Gretchen Schmidt joined the Virginia Community College System as director of educational policy. She spent the last six years as director of the statewide articulation system in Arizona, a joint appointment between the Arizona Board of Regents and the Arizona public community colleges. Her responsibilities centered on the development, implementation, and oversight of statewide transfer policies.

Colleges and Coordinating Board agreed upon definitions of key measures, developed around the goals of *Closing the Gaps*. The developmental education measure focuses on three outcomes: the percent of students who complete developmental education in two or three years; the percent of developmental education students who successfully complete a college-level course; and the percent of developmental students who return the following fall.

**Early Indication of Budget Squeeze in 2007:** The Legislative Budget Board indicated in early June that the initial appropriation request from all state agencies and institutions of higher education for the next biennium must be 90 percent of current funding. While the Texas Legislature does not meet again until January 2007, community colleges are concerned with this initial signal from the Capitol.

## Virginia

**Chancellor Plans to Advocate for Transfer Scholarship Legislation Next Session:** In the last legislative session, five bills were introduced that would have given community college students the ability to transfer to a university upon the completion of the Associate's degree and continue to pay the community college tuition rate for the remainder of the time to the Bachelor's degree. None advanced to the 2006 General Assembly, but this "Transfer Scholarship" proposition will be a legislative priority for the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in the next session.

### Achieving the Dream Mini-Grants

**Awarded:** VCSS awarded mini research grants to Sharon Fisher of Mountain Empire and Curt Aasen of Tidewater to expand upon their Achieving the Dream work and benefit the system as a whole. Dr. Fisher will examine the locally developed, non-test questions that colleges add to COMPASS tests. Mr. Aasen will investigate the influence of current

COMPASS reading and writing cut scores on the success of first-year students enrolled in reading-intensive online courses.

### Transfer and Articulation Advances:

A new dual admissions policy requires all four-year public institutions to develop articulation, transfer, and dual enrollment and admissions agreements. Dual admissions programs will make it possible for qualified students to be simultaneously accepted by a community college and a four-year institution; upon completing an acceptable Associate's degree program from a community college, the student can transfer to a four-year public institution of higher education. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia is developing an implementation plan.

In the last year, the VCCS has signed 10 Guaranteed Admissions Agreements with both public and private universities in the Commonwealth. Most recently, it finalized agreements with the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary. These agreements afford guaranteed access to the university to all VCCS students who meet the agreement's criteria. VCCS is negotiating additional Guaranteed Admissions Agreements and hopes to have them in place with all Commonwealth universities during the next year.



# Resources: College Readiness and K-12/Higher Education Systems Alignment

## **Chronicle of Higher Education *Special Report on Higher Education Roles in K-12 Improvement***

An excellent series of articles on strategies for bringing colleges and K-12 schools and systems into closer collaboration to raise academic performance and teacher quality; advice for state policymakers, colleges and universities, education schools, and the federal government.

Available at: [chronicle.com/indepth/schoolandcollege](http://chronicle.com/indepth/schoolandcollege)

## **Report on Weak Postsecondary Success for Chicago Public School Students Focuses on College Readiness**

*Closing the Aspirations-Attainment Gap*, prepared for MDRC's 2005 high school reform conference, uses data on the college-going and college-completion rates for Chicago Public School students to emphasize the importance of raising academic levels of high school curricula to promote college readiness and supporting students to reach that level of performance. Melissa Roderick, co-director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, contends that the primary goal of high school reform should be to close the gap between the high aspirations of minority and low-income public high school students—most of whom want to go to college—and the low numbers who graduate with the skills they need. Roderick argues that strategies to change this must begin by linking together efforts to improve instruction, increase students' engagement and performance, and provide better guidance for students in college search, planning, and application.

Available at: [www.mdr.org/publications/427/overview.html](http://www.mdr.org/publications/427/overview.html)

## **College Readiness and Workforce Readiness Skills Converge**

*Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?*, a new study from ACT, finds that high school students who plan to enter workforce training programs after they graduate need math and reading skills similar to those needed by students planning to enter college. ACT recommends that all high school students should experience a common academic program, one that prepares them for both college and workforce training, regardless of their post-graduation plans.

Available at: [www.act.org/path/policy/reports/workready.html](http://www.act.org/path/policy/reports/workready.html)

## **Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies**

New publications from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education build on the research initiated several years ago by Michael Kirst and colleagues at Stanford University on obstacles to improving alignment between higher education admissions-related requirements and K-12

curriculum frameworks, standards, and assessments. The research, conducted in California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, and Texas, provided a descriptive analysis of state policies. In March 2006, the National Center released *Claiming Common Ground* and *The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success*, excellent reports on state policies and governance structures that span K-12 and higher education.

Available at: [www.highereducation.org/reports/reports\\_center.shtml](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/reports_center.shtml)

## **The Value of Intensive Intervention for Incoming Students**

At the recent annual meeting of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, which is part of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin (an Achieving the Dream partner), attendees discussed strategies for intervening to promote college readiness and success of incoming community college students. One session focused on a particularly promising program at Pellissippi State Technical and Community College, in Knoxville, Tennessee. The program, which targets African-American high school seniors identified through ACT and other diagnostic tests as needing remediation, saw dramatic improvements from only a two-week intervention. The program includes intense instruction in targeted areas, personal tutoring, instruction in college survival skills, and testing at the beginning and end of the program. Of the participants, 85 percent gained at least one level—avoiding the need to take at least one remedial course they would have otherwise needed—and 28 percent gained two levels. Of the developmental courses the students did take when they enrolled, the passage rate was 66 percent, compared to a passage rate for black students across the college of 55 percent.

Download "The Value of Intervention" from *Inside Higher Ed* at <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/05/30/intervene>

## **New England Board of Higher Education Focuses on College-Readiness**

The Winter 2006 issue of *Connection: The Journal of the New England Board of Higher Education* explores issues in "college readiness," ranging from efforts to align K-12 standards with college admissions requirements to grassroots initiatives aimed at helping urban and rural populations prepare for and succeed in college.

Available at: [www.nebhe.org/content/view/117/128](http://www.nebhe.org/content/view/117/128)

## Additional Resources

### ***Achieving the Dream Testimony for Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education***

In April, Richard Kazis of Jobs for the Future testified before the National Commission on the Future of Higher Education, created at the behest of Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling. Speaking on "Articulation, Alignment and The Challenge of College-Readiness," he presented four policy recommendations from the Achieving the Dream experience: 1) strengthen longitudinal student data systems so that states and institutions can better use data for decision making; 2) encourage adoption of additional indicators of student progress, particularly for underprepared students; (3) remove obstacles to collecting data on transfer students' progress; and (4) provide support for state and institutional research capacity. (Supportive testimony highlighting the Achieving the Dream-Bridges to Opportunity joint state data project was submitted to the Commission by the Community College Leadership Program, Community College Research Center, and Jobs for the Future.)

The testimony is available at: [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).

### ***Report Identifies Policy Disconnect on Community College Accountability***

A new study from the Institute for Higher Education Policy finds that state higher-education goals are not coordinated with accountability criteria and two-year colleges. "Making Accountability Work: Community Colleges and Statewide Higher-Education Accountability Systems" examines eight states with both strong networks of community colleges and a statewide accountability system. IHEP suggests that states may need to tailor accountability measures to allow for the differences between two- and four-year colleges, and incorporate the diverse missions and special challenges of community colleges.

Available at: [www.ihep.com/organizations.php3?action=printContentItem&orgid=104&typeID=906&itemID=18476](http://www.ihep.com/organizations.php3?action=printContentItem&orgid=104&typeID=906&itemID=18476)

### ***AFT Weighs in on Accountability in Higher Education***

The March 2006 issue of *American Academic*, the higher education policy journal of the American Federation of Teachers, is devoted to the issue of accountability in higher education. It covers issues of accreditation, state and federal accountability approaches, and institution-level accountability issues.

Available at: [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_academic/issues/march06/contents06.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_academic/issues/march06/contents06.htm)

### ***Can States Help Advance the Goal of Assessing College Level Learning?***

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's latest *Policy Alert* provides an update on the work of the National Forum on College-Level Learning Project. This five-state project concludes that learning, higher education's most important product, can be assessed in ways that make interstate comparison possible, that these assessments are consistent with other available information about the states, and that the results can be useful to policymakers.

Available at: [www.highereducation.org/reports/pa\\_aclearning/](http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_aclearning/)

### ***Early Results from MDRC Program for Low-Income Parents in Louisiana Community Colleges***

*Paying for Persistence* reports on early findings from a very promising scholarship program in Louisiana that was evaluated as part of MDRC's Opening Doors initiative. The scholarships, \$1,000 a semester for two semesters, were distributed in quarterly installments tied to student progress and success. Counseling was also part of the design.

Available at: [www.mdrc.org/publications/429/overview.html](http://www.mdrc.org/publications/429/overview.html)

## Recent Meetings

### Ohio Colleges Meet to Discuss Policy

On May 9, Ohio's five Achieving the Dream colleges met in Columbus to share their plans for the coming year and to identify policy priorities. The meeting was convened by KnowledgeWorks Foundation to identify ways that it could support college efforts at the state level. Priorities identified at the meeting included: alignment of higher education with K-12 improvement efforts; developmental education policies; and strengthening of data systems and data use. There was discussion of how the state's large TANF surplus might be used for a financial aid experiment like that of Opening Doors in Louisiana. (The legislature did allocate \$30 million for an increase in need-based aid for low-income students, though the final version of the proposal varies in its particulars from that of the Louisiana experiment and the state has not decided to commission an evaluation of the program's impact.)

### Virginia Achieving the Dream Colleges Present at VCCS New Horizons Conference

In early April, 750 Virginia community college professionals heard overviews of several colleges' research on student success and activities to improve the retention of at-risk students, with Susan Coffey of the VCCS System Office facilitating the discussion. Janet Laughlin of Danville Community College presented end-of-course survey results for a student success course (SDV 100) and shared Danville's Personal College Success Plan for use with students. Jason Lachowicz, a member of the core team at Patrick Henry Community College, presented Kevin Shropshire's research on risk calculations for various predictor variables of entering first-time students. Jerry Standahl shared results of Paul D. Camp Community College's use of data from student attendance and grades, course completion rates, tutoring, and early alert findings, as well as the college's CCSSE results.

### Virginia Colleges Meet with System Office on Progress and Policy

The Virginia Achieving the Dream colleges' core teams met with their peers and with system office staff on June 5-6 to review accomplishments of the past academic year, discuss common issues and policy implications, and strategize for the upcoming year. Much of the discussion focused on progress and challenges in the implementation of college improvement plans—and ways that the state system can help advance student success at Virginia community colleges.

### Florida Conference Focuses on Strategies to Serve A Diverse, Underprepared Student Population

With support from Achieving the Dream, the Florida Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education held a conference in May on developmental education strategies that can help a diverse student body advance toward their educational goals. The efforts of Florida's four Achieving the Dream colleges were highlighted, but the event was open to community college administrators, counselors, and developmental education faculty from all 28 community colleges in the state.

### Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Convenes Forum on Transfer to Selective Colleges and Universities

On June 28-29, the North Carolina Community College System office participated in the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's invitational forum on the transfer of community college students to highly selective universities. Jennifer Frazelle, college transfer director at NCCCS, and Vonna Viglione, interim director for Achieving the Dream, participated. UNC-Chapel Hill is one of the universities participating in the foundation's multi-year pilot program.

For information, see: [www.jackkentcookefoundation.org/jkcf\\_web/content.aspx?page=5537536&\\_redir=226](http://www.jackkentcookefoundation.org/jkcf_web/content.aspx?page=5537536&_redir=226)

## Upcoming Meetings

### **How Accreditation Can Be Used to Promote Improved Student Outcomes (July 6, Washington, DC)**

JFF and the American Association of Community Colleges are convening a meeting of CEOs from regional accrediting organizations to explore how the accreditation process can be a more effective lever for strengthening institutional focus on student success. The meeting will include representatives from colleges who have used the accreditation process to strengthen their focus on student success (including Danville, Tallahassee, and North Central community colleges).

### **Achieving the Dream Summer State Policy Meeting (July 18-19, Denver, CO)**

The semiannual meeting of Achieving the Dream state policy teams will be held July 18-19. Topics will include: state data issues; the pros and cons of a national student unit record data system; developmental education policy, including consideration of placement test policies across the states; and how community colleges can work with K-12 to improve students' college readiness. Members of the seven-state data work group will meet on July 17 to discuss preliminary findings from their pilot testing of alternative student success measures for presentation to the full meeting.

### **Virginia Learning Communities Workshop**

On July 11 and 12, Mountain Empire Community College will host a Learning Communities Workshop. Topics will include learning from national best practices, creating interdisciplinary assignments, designing an integrated learning community, using collaborative assessment effectively, recruiting, and marketing.