

Introduction to Achieving the Dream

August 2011



Achieving
the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

Our Nation's Challenge

- For the first time in U.S. history, the current generation of college-age Americans will be less educated than their parents' generation. Yet, our workplaces require higher-level skills than ever before. By 2018, 63% of all jobs in the U.S. are expected to require some level of postsecondary education.
- A healthy economy and democracy depend upon an educated citizenry. However, the U.S. has fallen to “average” in international education rankings: 14th for reading skills, 17th for science, and 25th for mathematics .

**The rankings are from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2010 report released by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)*

Wake-Up Call...

- In one single generation, America went from 1st to 12th in college completion rates for young adults.

**2010 Progress Report from the College Board*

- “This is an absolute wake-up call for America. The results are extraordinarily challenging to us and we have to deal with the brutal truth.” *(U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan)*

Community Colleges – Part of the Larger Solution

- “By 2020, America will once again lead the world in producing college graduates. And I believe community colleges will play a huge part in meeting this goal, by producing an additional 5 million degrees and certificates in the next 10 years.” (President Obama)
- The 1,200 community colleges nationwide serve more than 6.7 million students, representing nearly **half** of all undergraduates in the U.S., and enrollments have increased by 15% from 2008–2010.

Community Colleges – The Challenge Ahead

- Community colleges are a vital component in returning the U.S. to its place as a global leader in higher education degree attainment.
- However, **fewer than half** of all students who enter community college with the goal of earning a degree or certificate have met their goal six years later. And those numbers are much worse for low-income students and students of color. And more than just their hopes and dreams are at stake: the very foundations of our economy depend on increasing student success

Enter Achieving the Dream...

- We need to change the community college equation, turning stories of access into stories of success.
- Achieving the Dream's Goal: Success for more of the nation's 6.7 million community college students, particularly students of color and low-income students.

Three Pillars

Achieving the Dream's work is characterized by:

1. **A student-centered vision.** Helping all students—particularly low-income students and students of color—achieve their educational and career goals is of paramount importance.
2. **Equity and excellence.** Achieving the Dream is dedicated to excellent education for all students.
3. **A culture of inquiry, evidence, and accountability.** A hallmark of Achieving the Dream is our commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

Four Levers

To accomplish our goal of student success Achieving the Dream focuses on these four objectives:

1. Improving results at institutions.
2. Influencing public policy.
3. Generating knowledge.
4. Engaging the public.

Improving Results at Institutions

4 Principles

1. Committed leadership.
2. Use of evidence to improve programs & services.
3. Broad engagement.
4. Systemic institutional improvement.

5 Steps

1. Commit.
2. Use data to prioritize actions.
3. Engage stakeholders.
4. Implement, evaluate, and improve.
5. Establish a culture of continuous improvement

1 Goal: Student Success & Completion

Results – Institutional Change

- Northern Virginia Community College increased its three-year graduation rate by 4 percentage points for first-time, degree-seeking students, from 12% in the 2006-07 academic year to 16% in the 2009-10 academic year.
- The Alamo Colleges increased its success rate in developmental math from 48% in 2005 to 55% in 2009, and in developmental English from 56% in 2005 to 63% in 2009, for first time in college students district-wide.
- Northampton Community College increased its success rates in Elementary Algebra from 56% in 2006 to 63% in fall 2009.
- Valencia Community College increased its success rate in six target courses from an average success rate of 59% for the 2005 academic year to 66% for the 2010 academic year.
- Yakima Valley Community College increased its fall to winter persistence rate from 75% in 2005-06 to 81% in 2008-09.

Influencing Public Policy

Achieving the Dream is showing that once legislators and policymakers understand this dynamic, they become our partners in implementing well-informed, far-reaching policy changes.

- Currently, 16 Achieving the Dream State Policy Teams are working in deep policy change in 16 states

Results – Policy

- In 13 of the 14 states, the governor, legislature, or system head has declared increased community college student completion and success a state priority.
- 12 states have student performance measures in place or in process that are tied to strategic goals.
- 11 state data systems include, or are in the process of including, student characteristics associated with the likelihood of student success.
- 8 states have the ability to share student-level data across the K-12 and higher education sectors; 3 additional states are in the process of upgrading their systems.
- 9 states have implemented a common assessment test cut score for all institutions to use when determining student placement; 2 additional states are moving in this direction.
- 6 states have adopted financial aid policies that incent progression and completion.
- 8 states have a college readiness assessment that is administered in the eleventh or twelfth grade; 3 additional states are working on a similar policy

Generating Knowledge

Achieving the Dream collects meaningful data, researches and evaluates change efforts, leads learning events, and issues publications of findings including:

- Data Notes
- Cutting Edge series
- Regular research, reporting, and analysis from Achieving the Dream institutions and policy states
- National Database

Engaging the Public

Achieving the Dream has mobilized the nation's largest network of community college reformers dedicated to success, including leaders from:

- Higher education
- Philanthropy
- Government
- Business
- Pedagogical research community