



# Connecticut's Challenge:

Preparing Our Workforce...

Strengthening Our Community Colleges

Connecticut Association for Human Services



The Working Poor Families Project was established in 2002 with the assistance from the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and C.S. Mott Foundations to address the increasing challenges faced by America's working families. This national initiative annually examines the conditions of America's working families and supports state nonprofit organizations to strengthen state policies in order to promote economic advancement and success. To learn more, see [www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org).

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# Introduction

**A**s the world of work becomes more specialized and technological, Connecticut employers face a growing need for skilled employees who can keep pace with new ways of doing business. This is particularly true in the global economic downturn, even as small businesses are closing, and employers are laying off workers. An investment in education at every level is required to prepare employees for this workplace transformation.

To date, the majority of Connecticut's workforce development effort has focused on up and coming job entrants—young students who will move from high school through college and into advanced fields like aeronautics, biotechnology, and mechanical engineering. As Connecticut supports students on a traditional academic time line, more effort is needed to help those who are re-entering school yet don't have the skills and knowledge to advance in the world of work.

A large number of our current workers have limited skills and education. In 2007, almost 850,000 adults out of over 2 million Connecticut workers (38 percent—or more than 1 out of three workers), ages 18 to 64, had no college experience.<sup>1</sup> Over one-third of all adults of color lacked a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup> To stay competitive with other states and other countries, Connecticut's academic vision must encompass working adults who need basic education, skills upgrading, or an Associate's degree to improve their ability to meet the demands of middle-skill jobs—those that require a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree.<sup>3</sup>

## Focusing on Adult Working Students

The educational attainment of adult workers is important to the well-being of Connecticut's economy because of significant demographic changes that are happening in the state.

Connecticut's population numbers are stagnant. In the coming years, any significant increase in population will come primarily from immigration. Overall, our residents are aging. The number of Connecticut households with school-age children is about half that of households with no children in that age group. At the same time, young college-educated workers are moving away from Connecticut. In 2005, the state experienced a 25 percent decline in the number of people between 20 and 24 years of age compared to a 0.3 percent decline nationally for that age group. This means that as Connecticut residents age and retire, there will be fewer workers to replace them.<sup>4</sup>

Young adults who remain in the state will make up the labor force of the future. Demographers predict the new workforce will come from Connecticut's inner cities, where the academic achievement gap based on income and race/ethnicity is among the largest in the country.<sup>5</sup> These population shifts, taken together, mean that Connecticut will have difficulty infusing our future economy with new workers who possess adequate skills. In fact, two-thirds of the workforce that will be needed in 2020 are already working today.<sup>6</sup>

**The purpose of *Connecticut's Challenge: Preparing Our Workforce...Strengthening Our Community Colleges* is to:**

- (1) invigorate the conversation about the next level of workforce education and skill development that is needed in our state,
- (2) highlight the important role Connecticut community colleges play in preparing adult workers for the jobs of the future, and
- (3) provide policymakers with models of best practices from other states in order to create a stronger link between community colleges and Connecticut's adult workforce.

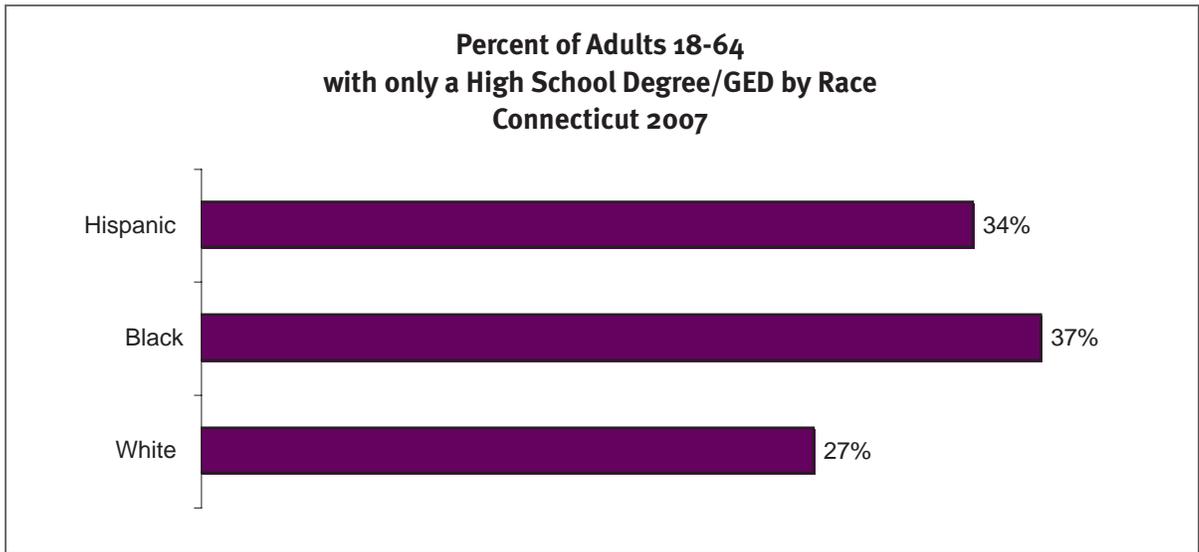


Figure 1. U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey*. Connecticut data provided by Population Reference Bureau. Washington, DC for the Working Poor Families Project.

### Education, Employability, and a Family Wage

Along with concerns about the skill level of Connecticut’s workforce, there is concern for employees’ ability to earn adequate wages. Researchers in several states have compiled data that show the link between educational attainment and income, highlighting the importance of a college degree or at least some college study in obtaining a family-supporting wage.

In 2005, Washington state released data from a longitudinal study of the income, enrollment, and college persistence of low-income students attending the state’s community colleges.<sup>7</sup> The study, conducted by the Washington State Board

of Community Colleges, showed that students who completed adult education or short-term training of the type provided to welfare recipients were able to find employment but *were unable to increase their earnings*.

Analysts found that a minimum of one year of college study and a certificate or credential is the “tipping point” at which student income is substantially increased above an entry-level salary. Low-income students who received financial aid *and* successfully completed remedial courses were more likely to finish the minimal year of college and earn a certificate or credential than those who did not.<sup>8</sup>

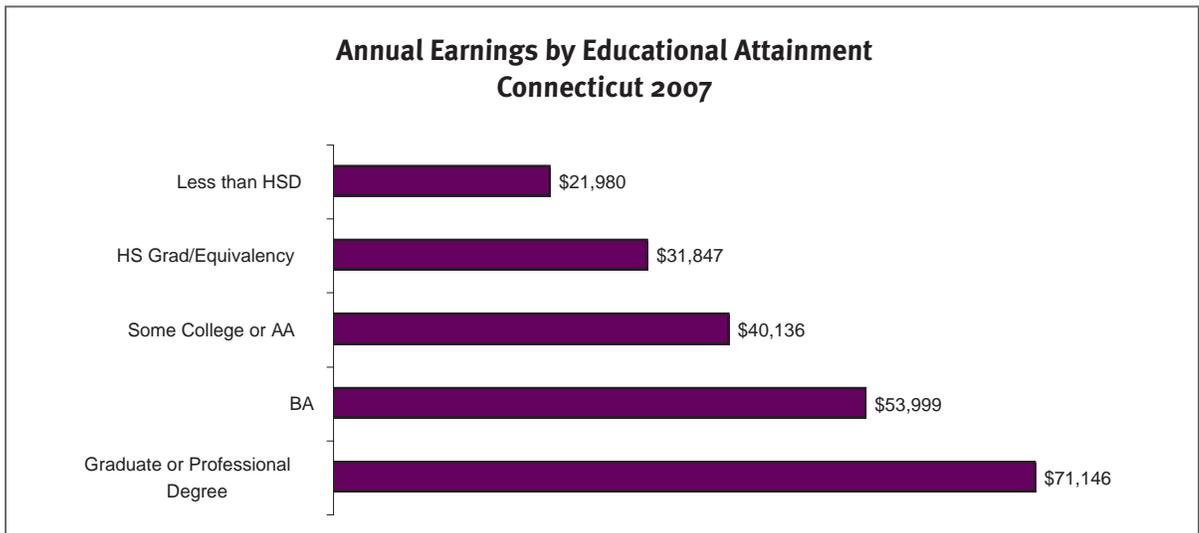


Figure 2. U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Table S2001. Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2007 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars).

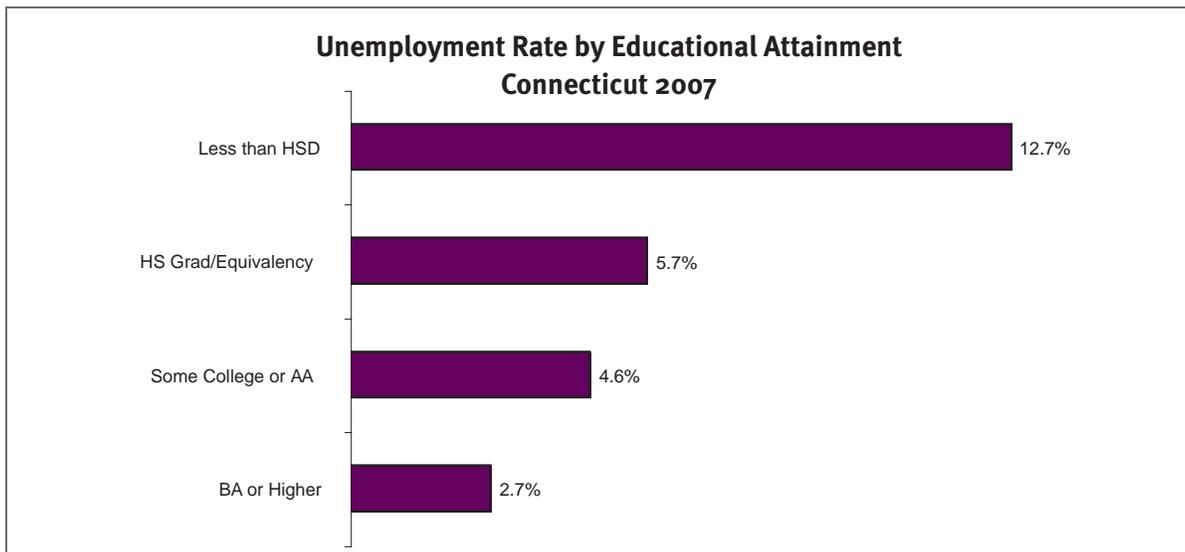


Figure 3. U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Table S2301. Employment Status.

The impact of a limited education on wages is striking, particularly here in Connecticut, a state with one of the highest median incomes and standards of living in the country. Connecticut workers with a graduate or professional degree make more than three times the earnings of those with less than a high school diploma.<sup>9</sup>

National analysts have also looked at employability as a function of education. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2007—the early period of the current economic downturn—9.5 percent of U.S. adults with less than a high school diploma were unemployed, compared to 2.6 percent of those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher. In Connecticut, that same year, 12.7 percent of adults with less than a high school diploma were unemployed compared to 2.7 percent of those with a B.A. or higher.<sup>10</sup>

### An Investment in Postsecondary Education Despite the Recession

As the state contends with the current economic crisis, policymakers must not only balance the state’s budget, they must do so in a manner that maintains Connecticut’s economic flexibility over the long term. Support is growing for counter-cyclical measures—workforce education and skill development—that invest in human capital despite the recession. Those who advocate for maintaining—and when there is less stress on the state’s financial stability, increasing—the state’s postsecondary education funding believe that a skilled workforce is the very thing that will impart new life into the state’s economy.<sup>12</sup>

### Did you know?

- In 2006, among Connecticut working families earning less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (\$40,000 annually for a family of four), 56 percent had no parent who had taken college courses.
- Only 6 percent of Connecticut adults between 25 and 54 were enrolled in postsecondary education.
- Connecticut residents with a high school degree earn \$15.11 an hour compared to \$27.85 for those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>11</sup>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American Community Survey*. Connecticut data provided by Population Reference Bureau. Washington, DC for the Working Poor Families Project.

## Community Colleges—Re-Entry Point for Many in the Workforce

Connecticut's community colleges are in the business of helping adult students build their work-related skills—providing ladders for success—and should be at the forefront of our educational planning for the future. Community colleges are the gateway for many adults, particularly those with limited skills who are looking to increase their economic security. Along with two-year degrees, community colleges offer work-related courses, certification in skilled trades, and technical training in a variety of fields.

When New England's economy began to shift from manufacturing to the service sector and technology became a larger part of the world of work, Connecticut's community colleges joined forces with business to develop career pathways for students to meet local employers' workforce needs (e.g., the Precision Machine Institute at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield was established; a partnership was developed between Capital Community College in Hartford and the Insurance and Financial Services Cluster). Most recently, the colleges have received grants from the U.S. Department of Labor and other sources to develop allied health tracks to meet the needs of the health care industry. Additional competitive grants awarded by the U.S. Department

of Labor have been obtained for training and education in energy and manufacturing.

## The American Graduation Initiative—A Proposal by President Obama

Because our national workforce is fast losing ground compared to that of other countries, President Barack Obama has introduced the **American Graduation Initiative** (AGI) to support the success of community college students. The proposal calls for 5 million additional college graduates by 2020. AGI includes funds for innovative programs designed to increase college completion, competitive grants for a number of strategies that support students' academic success, creation of an on-line skills lab, and reform of the student loan program.

Connecticut community colleges have started to institute many of the ideas articulated in AGI. The federal legislation, if passed, will help Connecticut and other states strengthen their effort to educate adult workers. AGI will present state policymakers with the opportunity to lay the groundwork for future investments in and advancement of our community college system.

## The American Graduation Initiative: Reform of the Community College System

The proposed American Graduation Initiative includes:

- A call for 5 million additional community college graduates by 2020;
- Creation of the Community College Challenge Fund, competitive grants to: support partnerships with business, create of career pathways; improve remedial and adult education programs; integrate remedial and academic classes; and offer comprehensive student support services;
- Funds for innovative strategies to promote college completion;
- Modernized community college facilities;
- Creation of an online skills laboratory;
- Expansion of Pell Grants and College Tax Credits;
- Reform of the student loan program;
- Simplification of the student aid application;
- Help for unemployed workers to attain new job skills;
- Expansion of the Perkins Loan Program; and
- Help for families to save for college.

## A Look at Connecticut Community Colleges

- Approximately 50 percent of all undergraduates in public higher education are at the community colleges.<sup>15</sup>
- Almost two-thirds of minority undergraduates in Connecticut public higher education institutions are enrolled in community colleges compared to less than one half of white undergraduates.<sup>16</sup>
- Full-time enrollment at Connecticut's community colleges grew by 90 percent between 2000 and 2007. Full-time enrollment at the University of Connecticut during the same time period grew by 23 percent and at the Connecticut State University system by only 7 percent.<sup>17</sup>
- The majority of community college students (61.5 percent) were enrolled part-time while working to support themselves and their families.<sup>18</sup>
- 49 percent of community college students are between the ages of 22 and 50.<sup>19</sup>

### The Needs of a Changing Student Population

As workers realize the importance of a college education and as the cost of four-year colleges increases, community college enrollment is growing exponentially. At any time, enrollment consists of a mix of students who are seeking an Associate's degree or employment-related course work, those who are not sure of their long-term academic goals, and those who have limited academic experience. Among these groups is a growing number of students who need remedial education. For these students, the effort to improve their academic standing; the cost of their education; unmet expectations; and the demands of work, family, and school may prove to be too difficult, and so many drop out before obtaining their certificate or degree.<sup>13</sup>

Connecticut's community colleges now find themselves at a crossroads. In addition to maintaining an open-door admissions policy and providing support for remedial students, state policymakers are calling on two-year and four-year colleges to improve their graduation rates in recognition of the gap between employers' need and our under-educated labor force.<sup>14</sup> While the community college system's response to this call has been languishing because of the state's budget situation, the call itself was an acknowledgement that more effort is needed to close that gap. Legislators and the Governor must find a means to support the called-for change; it will not happen on its own.

### A System in Transition

In response to the greater need for remedial support and the new demand for increased numbers of degree- and certificate-earning students, the community college system has begun the process of transformation. In a 2006 report to the Lumina Foundation, evaluators found a number of concerns, at the time, for the community college system to address.

- While significant strides had been made to develop career pathways in employment areas where there was a dearth of workers (i.e., business, early childhood education, teacher preparation, nursing, and engineering), the colleges had not established formal targets for student success in general or for low-income students and those of color in particular.
- At any time, 40 percent of students needed but may not have been enrolled in remedial language art classes and 60 percent in math.
- There was no system-wide cut score for the colleges' entrance test which determines a student's need for remedial course work; each college determined its own threshold.
- While Connecticut community colleges are required to provide student support services as part of their statutory directives, the state did not provide funds specifically for academic counseling and guidance.<sup>20</sup>

*Achieving the Dream* is a community college student success initiative funded by the Lumina Foundation and 20 other funders. Fifteen states have joined the project, the purpose of which is to improve the academic outcomes of community college students, particularly low-income or students of color. Three Connecticut community colleges are part of the program: Capital, Housatonic, and Norwalk. Participating states are focusing on strengthening the community colleges by developing:

- A clear public policy commitment to student success;
- Strong data driven accountability;
- Incentives to improve the success of under-prepared students;
- Alignment of expectations, standards, and assessments across all educational sectors, K-16; and
- Financial aid policies that promote persistence.<sup>22</sup>

- In addition, in 2008, despite the fact that community colleges are the most affordable postsecondary institution among public colleges, across all income groups, Connecticut families paid on average 25 percent of their income for college tuition alone (not counting the costs of books and other expenses) after financial aid awards were accounted for.<sup>21</sup>

Since 2005, three Connecticut community colleges (Capital, Housatonic, and Norwalk) have been participated in the *Achieving the Dream* project, a national initiative to improve the academic outcomes of community college students. System administrators, the Board of Trustees for Connecticut Community Colleges, and the administrators and faculty of the three participating colleges have reported a number of accomplishments. They have:

- Devoted significant time to understanding student demographics, performance data, and potential policies and programs to improve retention, completion, and graduation rates;
- Tested a number of promising practices in the areas of computer-based, self-paced instruction; intensive advising and academic planning; learning communities; accelerated remedial education; and introduced successful strategies to other colleges in the system;

- Developed a data tracking system for the three *Achieving the Dream* colleges that allows administrators to follow students over a six-year period to assess performance, identify intervention points, and evaluate results across treatment and control groups (*see Chapter 3 for more detail*);
- Created a series of reports intended for professional development on best practices in student success generally and remedial education specifically; and
- Implemented a common placement standard for remedial education.

## Connecticut's Skilled Labor Force and Our Community College Investment

*Achieving the Dream* has proved to be a worthy vehicle for testing and implementing innovation at a time when multiple demands are being exerted on the community college system. However, this is just the beginning of the transformation that the colleges must conduct over the next decade. Best practices must continue to be tested, evaluated, and replicated where appropriate.

System administrators, faculty, and support staff have the ability to create the environment and develop the methods that will deliver results, not just pay lip service to the outcomes expected of the institution. But they need help. Access to a college education must be made available to a greater number of adult students. Financial aid opportunities must grow so that affordability does not remain one of the causes of a high dropout rate. Remedial courses must be implemented that sustain student interest and accommodate busy work and family schedules. Funding must be made available for academic counseling and support services. A data system must be developed that tracks demographic characteristics, academic performance in general and within subgroups of students in particular, and the effect of innovation on student outcomes.

In order for Connecticut to meet the workforce needs of business and industry, creativity is needed in developing policies and programs for adult working students. Connecticut policymakers must understand the range of workforce development strategies available to make our state economically competitive. Connecticut's community colleges can play a critical role in building the state's workforce of the future with forward-thinking leadership and sufficient resources.

*Connecticut's Challenge: Preparing Our Workforce ... Strengthening Our Community Colleges* is a report exploring policies and best practices that would improve Connecticut's ability to prepare workers to step into well-paying jobs.

### **Chapter 1. Increasing Access to Community Colleges: What Does it Take?**

For some adult workers, achieving a college education seems beyond their reach. Affordability, state funding, transitional programs, and outreach and public education affect the ability of adult learners to pursue postsecondary education.

### **Chapter 2. Success: What Does it Mean for Adult Working Students?**

Many community college students drop out before earning a certificate or an Associate's degree. Policy areas related to adult student success include: setting the definition of student success, creating career pathways, strengthening academic support, and expanding supplementary financial aid.

### **Chapter 3. Accountability: Data and Planning for the Future**

To determine which strategies increase retention and student success, more data are needed. Planners and program developers need data about student body composition, programs that improve educational outcomes, and the effect of education on wages and career advancement.

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# Chapter 1

## Increasing Access to Community College: What Does It Take?

**A**s we have seen, a significantly large number of Connecticut’s working adults—almost 40 percent—are without any college experience.<sup>1</sup> Their families are the potential beneficiaries of a community college education. In order to increase the number of adults available for middle-skill jobs—those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—one of the first steps is to improve access to postsecondary education.

### Barriers to Community College

Several barriers stand in the way of low-income working adults returning to school through the community college system. Most low-income adult workers have few resources to pay for college courses. Money spent on college might be an investment in the future, but in the short term, more immediate family needs must come first. Some are unaware that financial aid is available. Those who study for their GED (General Education Development) credential may have a difficult time transitioning to community college. Still others have no idea that a year or more of study beyond high school could actually improve their earning power.

To lower these barriers and increase access to higher education for working adults, decision-makers can institute new policies or expand existing policies related to:

- Affordability,
- Transitions between adult education and community college courses, and
- Outreach and public education.

### Affordability—Expanding Financial Aid

In 2008, *Measuring Up: The State Report Card for Higher Education*, the biennial publication produced by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, gave Connecticut and 48 other states an “F” for the affordability of its public colleges. While Connecticut’s investment in need-based financial aid is high compared to other states, the share of family income needed to pay for the cost of attending college also is high, even after accounting for financial aid. Across all income groups, after all financial aid disbursements have been accounted for, Connecticut families paid on average 25 percent of their income for the cost of community college in 2008. Tuition and other costs associated with attending a Connecticut community college are equivalent to approximately 57 percent of family income for those in the lowest quintile (a median income of \$14,087 in 2008).<sup>2</sup> According to national authorities, federally funded Pell grants have not kept pace with the rising cost of college tuition.<sup>3</sup>

In October 2008, Connecticut community college enrollment had passed the 50,000 student mark—increases in both full-time and part time students. That same year, an additional 45,000 students were taking non-credit workforce development classes.<sup>11</sup> Unless their employers contributed to the cost of their tuition and fees, the latter group of students had no access to financial aid. While Connecticut community colleges have increased financial aid distributions for full-time students, more support is needed for those pursuing postsecondary education to improve their work-related skills.

## A Look at Financial Aid for Connecticut Community College Students

- Students must attend community college at least half-time (i.e., six credits or more) to receive financial aid.<sup>4</sup>
- In Spring 2009, approximately 46 percent of all students attending Connecticut community colleges received financial aid.<sup>5</sup>
- 99 percent of financial aid given out at Connecticut community colleges is based on financial need.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2007, 21,342 Connecticut community college students received a total of \$58.6 million in financial aid; 86 percent received grants, 9 percent loans, 1 percent scholarships, and 4 percent work study.<sup>7</sup>
- Between 2000-2001 and 2008-2009, financial aid applications to community colleges had increased by 108 percent.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2007, the typical community college financial aid recipient was a woman, 32 years of age, who was a single mother with 2.4 children, and who had an annual family income of less than \$25,000.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2008, half of the student population at Connecticut community colleges—approximately 45,000 students—were enrolled in non-credit workforce development classes.<sup>10</sup> These students are not eligible for financial aid.

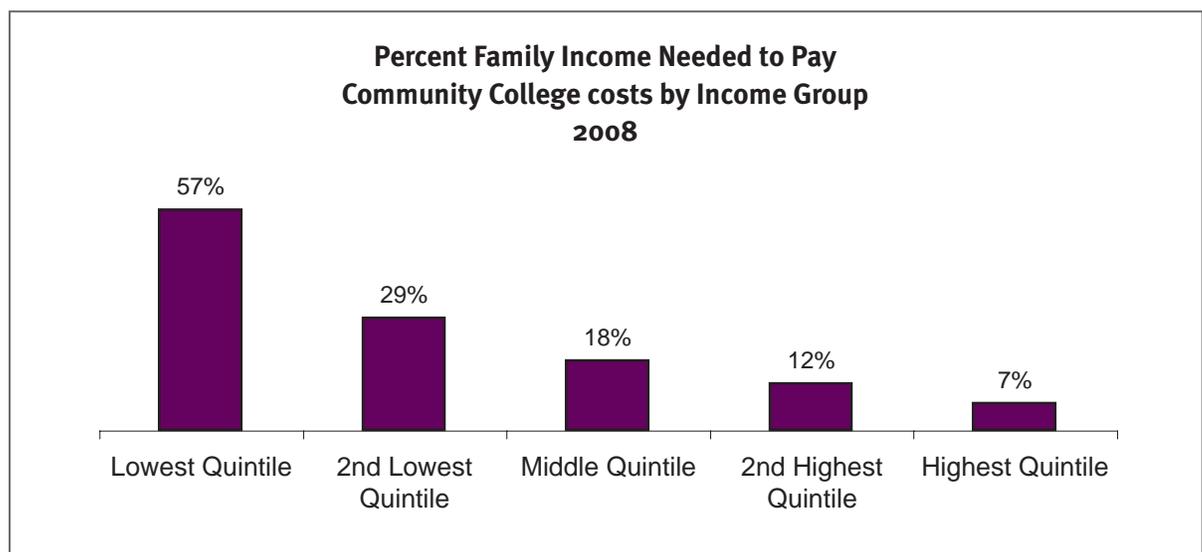
In 2007, Governor Rell and the state legislature injected new funding at an historic level into college financial aid. This investment in the Connecticut Aid to Public College Students (CAPCS) loan program amounted to approximately \$30 million for each year of the 2008-2009 biennial budget, an increase of \$13.7 million compared to the 2007 allocation.

Of this amount, approximately one-third was made available to community colleges for all qualifying students (awarded by financial need and academic progress; students must attend at least half time).<sup>12</sup> No portion of these funds was set aside for any category of student (i.e., adult students, those earning below a certain threshold of income, or those pursuing a work-related degree or certificate).

According to analysts from the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, total unmet need throughout the state's higher education system was reduced to \$10.3 million by this increased allocation, a reduction of 34 percent.<sup>13</sup>

In response to the state deficit, Governor Rell proposed scaling back financial aid under the Connecticut Aid to Public College Students, but the legislature restored the \$30 million for CAPCS in the final budget that became law September 8, 2009. (The state budget for SFY 2010-2011 began July 1, 2009.)

Several states have developed financial aid initiatives specifically for community college students.



**Figure 4.** *Measuring Up 2008: The State Report Card for Higher Education. Connecticut.* Washington, DC: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Connecticut policymakers should consider the examples below to increase access, and ultimately, graduation rates of adult working students.

What states are doing:

- Arkansas established the **Arkansas Workforce Improvement Grant**, a need-based program for adults who earn slightly more than Pell grant income limits. Recently, allocation for this grant was increased from \$500,000 to \$3.7 million annually.<sup>14</sup>
- Georgia established the **Hope Scholarship for Non-Traditional Students** which pays for tuition, fees, and books. The grant program supports students without a Bachelor's degree attending technical schools. Scholarships can be used for remedial courses.<sup>15</sup>
- Michigan established the **No Worker Left Behind** program to provide displaced or low-wage workers with two years of free tuition at any Michigan community college, university, or approved training program.<sup>16</sup>
- Washington established the **Opportunity Grant Program** serving community college students. Funding is available for tuition and fees plus \$1,000 per academic year for books and supplies. Students are matched with mentors from their field of interest. Each community college receives an enhancement grant of \$1,500 used for support services for each full-time student enrolled. Schools that fail to increase student outcomes lose their enhancement grant.<sup>17</sup>

## Bridge Programs: Smoothing the Transition for Adult Education Students

The first step on a career path for an adult learner often is the completion of a high school degree. Students can attend local adult education programs to complete a GED and then move on to a community college.

For many adult students, the transition from adult education to college is not easy, however. In many cases the path between the two systems is not clearly laid out. Community college administrators who understand the importance of this transition for adult learners are creating the institutional agreements and academic pathways that provide assistance in applying for college admission and financial aid, as well as transferring adult education credits.

## Connecticut Community Colleges' On-Line Financial Aid System: A National Model

During the 2000-2001 academic year, Connecticut community colleges introduced new technology solutions to streamline its financial aid system. All student financial aid applications are processed through the system financial aid services office using one data base. This centralized system supports each of the 12 college financial aid offices, freeing up local staff to counsel students and parents, help them navigate a complex system, and provide them with the information needed for federal, state, and school-based aid. Over 90 percent of Connecticut's community college financial aid applications are now completed through this on-line service.

Since beginning the centralized system, financial aid applications have skyrocketed. Even with this demand, colleges have not increased their financial aid staff at each college but rely on the system office's technological expertise to develop and maintain a virtual 24/7 financial aid office for community college students.<sup>18</sup>

Connecticut has established a bridge program for workforce training that supports adult education students transitioning to community colleges. The program is small in scale; 17 adult education providers of the 70 located across the state are receiving \$45,000 grants annually to establish cooperative programs with community colleges. Funding is provided by the federal Program Improvement Projects (PIP) administered by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Under the grant program, partnerships between adult education programs and community colleges provide academic and career-related counseling, student support services, and assistance with admissions and financial aid applications.<sup>19</sup>

Agreements between local adult education and community college programs focus on the particular needs of students. Some programs use the PIP grants for remedial education classes or Accuplacer<sup>20</sup> testing provided by the community colleges at the adult education site. Connecticut State Department of Education staff provide professional development for participating adult education teachers and convene meetings of the grantees to share challenges and successes.

In 2007 and 2008, three local adult education programs also received grants from the Nellie Mae Foundation. The foundation grants funded the alignment of adult education and community college math and language arts curricula. Once the alignments have been completed, the curricula will be made available to other adult education and community college transition programs in Connecticut.<sup>21</sup>

What states are doing:

- The state of Kentucky established a goal to increase the number of GED completers who go on to college by 40 percent by 2020. To do this, the state passed legislation in 2000 linking community colleges and adult education in an effort to improve workforce development. Students attend adult education programs for remedial classes for which they receive community college credits and financial aid.<sup>22</sup>
- Illinois has created an adult education bridge program funded through the Illinois

Community College Board and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.<sup>23</sup> Students who complete ESL course work are able to take transitional courses that combine both language skills and occupational training in nursing assistance or health care translation.<sup>24</sup>

### Outreach and Public Education – Getting the Word Out to Adult Learners

Adult workers out of the educational pipeline for several years or decades may not return to school easily on their own. Many are unsure how to navigate a system that appears intimidating. Outreach and public education to targeted communities of workers can break down barriers to higher education.

What states are doing:

- As part of their effort to increase college attendance, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education began the “**Go Higher Kentucky**” media campaign to encourage Kentuckians of all ages to improve their education, especially older students and those not taking a traditional path from high school to college. Posters and post cards were produced with compelling messages. Radio spots were developed for target audiences.<sup>25</sup> In 2001, enrollment in GED programs rose by over 7,000 adults, a 57 percent increase from the previous year—the sixth largest increase in the country.<sup>26</sup>
- *College for All Texans*, a statewide “awareness and motivational campaign,” seeks to enroll an additional 430,000 individuals in the state’s higher education system by 2015. This number is in addition to the 200,000 students anticipated to enroll based on current trends. The campaign and the state’s higher education plan have won support from a broad list of stakeholders among education, business, and political leadership. Performance measures have been developed, and progress reports are generated annually.<sup>27</sup>

In January 2008 Connecticut joined the national **KnowHow2Go!** multimedia, public education campaign launched the previous year in six other states (California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Ohio) by the Lumina Foundation for Education, the American Council on Education, and the Ad Council. While this is an excellent public education project, its audience is middle school and early high school students who might not see postsecondary opportunities in their future. Connecticut's project should be expanded with particular strategies developed for non-traditional working adults who need work-related education and training.

## Recommendations

To improve adult workers' access to community college course work and to prepare a skilled workforce for the future, policymakers should consider the following recommendations.

- Replicate Michigan's **No Worker Left Behind** project to provide free tuition for a maximum of two courses per year to working students seeking employment-related skills. Eligible students would be those who have no postsecondary degree and, therefore, are not able to find good-paying jobs.
- Provide financial aid to part-time students seeking a work-related education who qualify financially.
- Expand Connecticut's bridge program to all 70 adult education programs so that participating students are provided with adult basic education and community college courses that are aligned, academic and career-related counseling, student support services, and assistance with admissions and financial aid applications.
- Create a *College for All Campaign*, a statewide "awareness and motivational campaign," similar to that of Texas, with a defined enrollment goal by 2020. Actively seek support for the campaign from the Connecticut Business and Industry Association and The Business Council of Fairfield County, as well as policymakers and stakeholders from higher education.

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## Chapter 2

# Success: What Does It Mean for Adult Working Students?

Once a working adult student enters college, the ability to complete an Associate's or a Bachelor's degree depends on a variety of factors. Income and college preparation are the most influential,<sup>1</sup> but access to financial aid, child care and transportation assistance, and academic and personal counseling also impact student longevity.<sup>2</sup> Full-time employment and family responsibilities reduce the number of available hours for classes and homework. Remedial courses needed to improve English and math skills can add a year or more to the college time line. Forgone wages from attending school full time may deplete family resources beyond the breaking point.

Customarily, postsecondary academic success has been defined in terms of graduation rates. The goal for the majority of college students may be graduation. For all students, however, there are short- and medium-term measures of success that should also be supported when we evaluate student performance and how well colleges are fulfilling their institutional objectives.

To improve students' academic success, policymakers can support several strategies, including:

- Setting the definitions of and goals for student success,
- Creating career pathways to meet the needs of employers with alternative delivery methods for adult students,
- Strengthening academic support for students,
- Expanding supplementary financial aid opportunities for non-academic costs,

- Expanding remedial opportunities, and
- Funding non-credit work-related courses.

### A Legislative Directive to Increase Graduation Rates

In 2007, Connecticut lawmakers passed legislation requiring the chancellors of the Connecticut Community College and Connecticut State University systems and the president of the University of Connecticut to develop plans to increase graduation rates at their respective colleges to equal the national norm for peer institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The Community College report included data on students who graduated with an Associate's degree or certificate, those who transferred, and those who continued their studies at the community college beyond three years. Of the total 45,138 students who enrolled during the Fall 2003 semester, 4,401, or approximately 10.9 percent, were first-time, full-time, degree-seekers. An additional 40 percent consisted of a combination of transfer students (22.5 percent) and those continuing their studies beyond the three-year mark (16.6 percent). In total, 2,202 students (50 percent) were accounted for by these three categories; 50 percent were not accounted for in the report.<sup>4</sup>

Among the unaccounted for students were those who enrolled part time (estimated to be approximately 65 percent of community college enrollees<sup>5</sup>), those who took classes for employment purposes, and those who dropped out for financial or other reasons, including poor academic performance.

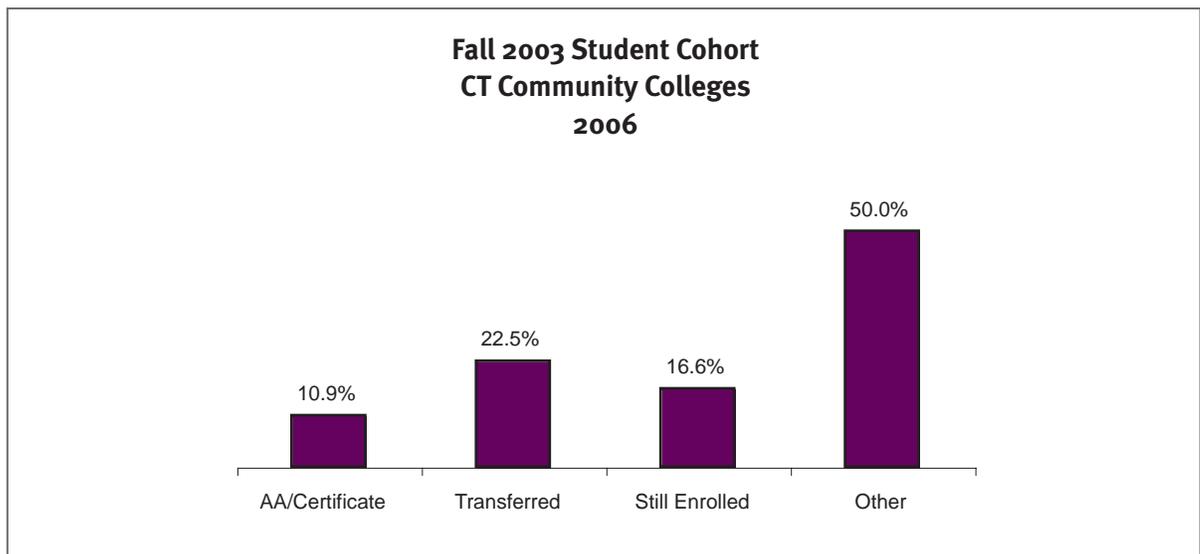


Figure 5. Connecticut Community Colleges. (2008). *Report to the 2008 Connecticut General Assembly on Special Act 07-9*. Hartford, CT.

The Connecticut community college data were corroborated by national research on persistence in community colleges. Connecticut's numbers were slightly lower than the national average. In 2004, 51 percent of first-year Connecticut students in all public colleges returned for their second year compared to 53 percent of students nationally.<sup>6</sup> A lower than average persistence rate can be seen as a problem in a state like Connecticut that has traditionally prided itself on the education level of its workforce.

Specific strategies to increase student's academic success cited in the community college report included the following:

- (1) Increase the number of full-time faculty, expand their advisory role, and provide professional development to teachers about learning strategies, student engagement, and interventions for under-prepared and at-risk students;
- (2) Increase the number of student services personnel and expand student support to include mentoring, learning communities, and innovative remedial courses;
- (3) Implement a new model for student services evaluation;
- (4) Expand financial aid to cover cost-of-living expenses;

- (5) Create transfer scholarships to encourage students who earn an Associate's degree to move on to a Connecticut four-year college;
- (6) Phase in common placement standards at all 12 community colleges; and
- (7) Expand student placement and performance (e.g., student achievement tests) and follow-up studies to determine their effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

### Setting the Definition of and Goals for Student Success

In order to improve the graduation rates of adult workers in Connecticut's community colleges, state leaders and educators must understand the goals of this group and develop a vision and comprehensive plan that will lead to academic success and employment. Such work must be supported by adequate resources. Educators must also develop outcome measures for particular subcategories of students, performance measures for curricula and programs, and cost estimates of cross-system innovation.<sup>8</sup>

Connecticut's three *Achieving the Dream* community colleges have developed five benchmarks with which to measure student success—going beyond the degree completion measurement. These include: (1) successfully completing courses with a C average or higher; (2) advancing from remedial to college-level courses;

## Legislative Action on Special Act 07-9

The Connecticut Community College System responded to the legislature's request for plans to expand community college graduation rates (Special Act 07-9, An Act Concerning Graduation Rates at Institutions of Higher Education) on January 4, 2008.

The report is notable for several reasons. It clarifies that: (1) a broader definition of student success beyond the limited federal definition is needed to better understand student goals and challenges and the educational services needed to meet those goals; (2) data about student demographics and academic progress are needed to better understand the composition of the group who do not attain an Associate's degree or certificate, do not transfer, or do not take longer than three years to complete their studies; (3) individual community colleges have designed strategies to address student success for their student populations; (4) course and program innovations developed by individual colleges showing positive results should be brought to scale across the system; and, (5) in order to increase system-wide graduation rates, investments in faculty, staff, and professional development are necessary.

Since submitting the mandated report, the state and the country have fallen into a deep recession. While it is true that the costs associated with advancing the proposals are more than the state can take on at this time, the legislature, community college administrators, and the Connecticut Department of Higher Education could begin by articulating how change could be rolled out over time.

(3) enrolling in and successfully completing required entry-level credit courses including English and Math—gatekeepers for academic advancement and success; (4) re-enrolling from one semester to the next; and (5) earning a degree or certificate.<sup>9</sup>

What states are doing:

- Washington State established academic goals for the state's community colleges which acknowledge a variety of definitions for success in addition to the attainment of a two-year degree. Washington community colleges' targets for success now include an increase in: (1) the number of academic students who are eligible for transfer to a four-year college; (2) the number of students who are prepared for work; and (3) the number of basic skills students who demonstrate substantive skills gains. Per-year target numbers are established for each category of student.<sup>10</sup>
- In *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board set measurable goals, disaggregated by race, with the short-term objective of improving educational outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and the long-term objective of maintaining the state's standard of living.<sup>11</sup>

- In 2007, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education produced a five-point plan to improve Kentucky's economic prosperity by increasing the number of college graduates in the state.<sup>12</sup> The plan was developed through a series of regional forums which included representatives from education, business, community, and policy.<sup>13</sup>

## Career Pathways: A Better Framework for Educating Adult Working Students

Several states have responded to the need of employers for workers with specific skills by developing strong links between business and industry and local community colleges. With data about specific job skills needed, the colleges create a process by which adult working students can move from remedial classes through entry-level course work and on to certification within a particular industry.

Many programs are focused on the particular skills earned rather than on “seat time,” or the amount of hours spent in the classroom. To accommodate the schedules of adult students, career pathways programs are adapting the traditional three-credit, full-semester class to shorter segments with corresponding reductions in credits earned.

“Chunking” is the term used when degree programs are broken up into short segments. When all segments are combined, the students earn a degree or certificate. Chunking allows students to complete a segment, leave school for a short period of time, if necessary, and start up again without losing their place on the academic continuum. Chunking also supports employers’ need for entry-level employees. Students can take basic course work in a field, find employment, and continue with their studies to advance in their chosen line of work. The ideal “chunking” program provides student counselors who encourage students to continue in school after the initial entry-level skills are earned.

Postsecondary institutions that enroll adult students, even those not employing the career pathways model, can provide course work using a module approach. A semester of material can be offered during weekend classes to accommodate working students.

What states are doing:

- At two community colleges in Oregon, administrators have developed **Career Pathways**, courses that are delivered in clusters designed to reduce the time it takes for students to become employable in high-skill, high-wage positions. Career Pathways courses, were funded for several years by the local Workforce Investment Board. In 2004, Oregon launched a statewide Career Pathways Initiative.<sup>14</sup>
- Washington State has also developed a **Career Pathways** program which operates in conjunction with I-BEST. Career Pathways prepares workers in stages for their career. Once basic courses are completed successfully, students can enter the workforce at the entry level, earn a salary, and continue on with advanced courses to improve their position and their wages.<sup>15</sup>

## Academic Student Support

Research shows that academic advising, peer support, and other forms of assistance are important services that increase student retention and success. Academic assistance can include “college success” classes during which study skills, educational goals, and career possibilities are discussed. Pro-active academic counseling can let students know when they reach critical points in their education, so that momentum is created to get them to the next academic level. In learning communities, students take classes with others as a group and progress together through academic requirements and career pathways.<sup>16</sup> Business leaders can mentor students or provide internships for those who are interested in related careers.

Connecticut’s three *Achieving the Dream* community colleges (Capital, Housatonic, and Norwalk) are experimenting with a number of these strategies.

What states are doing:

- Kentucky has created the **Ready to Work (RtW)** program, which links the state's community colleges and its TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), or welfare, program by: (1) deploying **RtW** counselors to provide intensive case management for low-income parents—those who are eligible for TFA and those who are not; (2) allowing **RtW** parents to earn \$2,500 annually through work study jobs that are related to their field of interest; and (3) providing college readiness classes to cohorts of new students.<sup>17</sup>
- The Foundation for California Community Colleges is the official foundation for the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and Chancellor's Office. Among its many organizational responsibilities, the Foundation works to link community college students interested in mentoring opportunities with employers in their field of interest. To work in the program, students must have completed six semesters and maintain a 2.0 grade point average.<sup>18</sup>

### Student Support: Supplementary Financial Aid for Non-Academic Costs

Several states have invested in programs that provide non-academic funds directly to students, particularly those with low income who are at risk of leaving school before attaining their degree or credential. Some offer short-term loans for students who have a family financial emergency. Others provide discretionary funding to pay for the costs of child care and/or transportation. These financial opportunities are administered separately from college financial aid.

In 2007, Connecticut established the **Workforce Advancement Grants for Education (CT-WAGE)**, which provides non-academic financial assistance to low-income parents for the cost of tuition, books and supplies, transportation, and child care. The program also provides access to lap tops, printers, internet access, on-line courses, and student support from a program coordinator.

While the original proposal to the Connecticut General Assembly would have included both Connecticut Community College and Charter Oak College students, final legislation and funding applied only to students attending Charter Oak College. In 2008, the community colleges sought funding to expand the program to their students, but no new funding was provided due to the state's deficit.

By Spring 2009, Charter Oak College reported that 43 students had been recruited and 35 continued to be enrolled; the program's retention/graduation rate was 79 percent. Nine participants have completed degrees—seven Associate's and two Bachelor's.<sup>19</sup>

What states are doing:

- Minnesota has established **Post-secondary Child Care Grants** for low-income parents who are taking at least six credits per term and who are not receiving TANF. Full-time students are eligible to receive \$2,300 per year per child.<sup>20</sup>
- California has used categorical funding for student support services and non-academic costs associated with education—texts, child care, and transportation. The **Extended Opportunity Program and Services** program helps low-income and educationally at risk students with academic and personal counseling, tutoring, other student services, and the cost of books and other expenses.<sup>21</sup>

## Fairfield County Family Economic Security Program

In Fall 2007, the Fairfield County Community Foundation's Fund for Women and Girls initiated the Family Economic Security (FES) Program through a partnership with Norwalk Community College and the Norwalk Community College Foundation. The Program's objective is to increase the economic security of low-wage students with dependents.

The FES Program helps qualified students attain an Associate's degree or a Bachelor's degree, obtain financial education and coaching (provided by the Women's Business Development Center), receive academic advisement and career development, and find self-sustaining employment. Students enrolled in the Family Economic Security Program also receive financial assistance from a new Opportunity Fund for use in overcoming barriers to student success such as the expenses of child care, books, health care, transportation, or other basic needs.

It is anticipated that at the end of five years, 100 students will have participated in the FES Program and earned their Associate's degrees, and/or been accepted to a four-year college to earn their Bachelor's degree. In addition, over the same period, an additional 1,000 low-wage students will benefit from the FES Program through less intensive program services, including financial education classes, career and academic planning seminars, and life skills classes.<sup>22</sup> The program has not yet been evaluated.

### Remedial Courses

According to the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, at any time approximately 40 percent of Connecticut community college students need, but may not be enrolled in, remedial education in language arts and 60 percent in math.<sup>23</sup> These numbers are not surprising given the fact that Connecticut has one of the largest gaps in academic achievement and in college attendance between minority and majority students in the nation.<sup>24</sup>

To improve student success, state leaders, educators, and administrators must address the socioeconomic disadvantages and lack of adequate academic preparation that stand in the way of academic progress, including the fact that nationally:

- Adult students who take remedial classes are less likely to complete a degree or certification than non-remedial students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2000, 30 to 57 percent of first-time college students who took remedial classes<sup>25</sup> completed a certificate or degree in eight years compared to 69 percent of those not taking remedial classes.<sup>26</sup>

- Students who take more than one remedial class are even less likely to complete a certificate or degree: 25 percent of students who take three remedial classes complete them in five years; 4 percent graduate; and 78 percent leave school without a degree or certificate.<sup>27</sup>
- Many adult workers who enroll in two- or four-year college courses may find that their on-the-job training or work-related certificates are not transferable to a degree program.<sup>28</sup>

Many researchers and educators believe that no one strategy works with every and all students. Rather, faculty and administrators must initiate a menu of course delivery methods that are developed based on information about enrolled students, their academic experience, and their educational expectations. Integration of instructional strategies and student support services are instrumental to successful program implementation.<sup>29</sup>

## Connecticut's Effort

Housatonic Community College (HCC), one of the three *Achieving the Dream* colleges in Connecticut, is identifying several remedial practices that will help more students continue their studies and earn certificates and degrees.

*Open Entry/Open Exit* math was implemented to increase the course success rate in the college's remedial math courses and increase the number of students prepared for college-level courses. This competency-based method of math instruction helps students learn in a computer-based course at their own pace.

*The iMATH Program* was developed to decrease the number of students placed in remedial courses. Targeted refresher programs are offered to accelerate the progress of students with previous academic experience.

When students successfully complete their remedial education sequences, they have at least the same chances of completing a degree or transferring as their peers who began their studies in college-level courses.<sup>30</sup>

## Connecticut Community Colleges Receive Competitive Grant for Replication

In June 2009, Connecticut community colleges received \$1.8 million over three years from MDC, a nonprofit organization working to build the capacity of institutions and communities, with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations. The funding will help the community colleges replicate successful remedial education strategies created by the *Achieving the Dream* colleges. Housatonic and Norwalk community colleges each will receive funding to expand and reinforce their innovations in remedial education, including self-paced English and math classes, intensive review classes to improve placement test results, learning communities, and remedial English and math aligned with college-level classes.

The community college system will receive \$300,000 over three years to phase in common statewide placement standards and align remedial and college course work; \$1.5 million was

contributed for evaluation. Connecticut is one of five states that have been chosen to receive the replication funding. Other participating states include Florida, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia.<sup>31</sup>

What states are doing:

- Washington State has developed the **I-BEST Program** (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) which combines remedial material with academic/certification subjects. The classes are co-taught by academic and technical faculty. The state has already begun to evaluate the effect of this strategy, and data show that the program improves student academic outcomes beyond traditionally delivered basic education coursework.<sup>32</sup>

## Institutional Funding to Guarantee Student Success

Several states have increased their reimbursement formula for remedial and work-related classes, particularly for those courses that are part of a career pathway. Others have developed incentive payments to institutions for increasing their degree completion rates.

What states are doing:

- Oklahoma's State Regents established **Brain Gain 2010**, an effort to increase the number of state residents with a college degree by 40 percent between 1996 and 2010. As part of the effort, Annual Performance Funds are given to institutions that have improved their retention and graduation rates. Improvement Grants have been available since 2004 to support retention and graduation intervention strategies implemented either campus-wide or for targeted populations. In 2005, the Regents developed the Programs of Excellence to award institutions that implement innovative, high-quality academic programs.<sup>33</sup>
- Washington State instituted the **Student Achievement Initiative** as an incentive system for community colleges to improve student attainment. Colleges compete with themselves rather than each other. Incentive funding is available in four areas directly related to the "tipping point": (1) improving

student preparation for college-level studies; (2) increasing the number of students who complete a year of college credit; (3) increasing the number of students who complete college-level math; and (4) increasing the number of students completing certificates, degrees, and apprenticeship programs.<sup>34</sup>

### State Funding: Support for All Courses Delivered

State funding for credit courses comes from Connecticut's general fund. Non-credit community college courses, of which approximately 50 percent are work-related or taken for professional development, are self-supporting. Student fees pay for the cost of the programs. Connecticut business and industry often turn to the community colleges for customized education and training of their employees. According to community college administrators, approximately 45,000 students of a total enrollment of almost 100,000 were enrolled in non-credit programs in 2008.<sup>35</sup>

What states are doing:

- Oregon historically has used state funding to increase access and expand enrollment. For over 40 years, the state has funded community colleges for non-credit courses at the same rate as for-credit courses. As a result, enrollment in work-related and remedial non-credit courses has been strong in the state.<sup>36</sup>
- Maryland and Texas also fund non-credit courses at the same rate as credit courses.<sup>37</sup>
- According to the Community College Research Center of Columbia University, more than half of states provide general funds for non-credit workforce courses.<sup>38</sup>
- California and New Mexico have increased general fund support for non-credit workforce courses in the past few years, reflecting legislators' understanding of the important resource community colleges play in supporting employers' need for workforce education and skill development.<sup>39</sup>

### Recommendations

The key to building an educated workforce is to strengthen existing educational opportunities and to develop new models based on the proven results of initiatives underway in Connecticut and developed in other states. Connecticut leaders—policymakers and representatives from business, labor, and education—must share responsibility for improving the academic success of adult workers. Because of the past educational experience of many workers, this will be no small task. And it will take new money to bring those workers up to the performance levels employers need. To that end, all stakeholders must work together with the community colleges to:

- Establish multiple definitions of success for adult working community college students, including work-related skills and employability, degree and transfer requirements, and opportunities for continuing education for career advancement;
- Set goals and time lines for adult working students, including sub-groups defined by race/ethnicity, income, academically at risk, and adult workers, and assess the amount of effort required to close the academic achievement gap among community college students. With that information, develop a comprehensive plan that will lead to success for working students;
- Establish funding for student advisory staff so that case loads adequately support student success;
- Deliver courses associated with career pathways using flexible scheduling where appropriate;
- Expand CT-WAGE to include community colleges in order to encourage student persistence, completion, and success;
- Continue to test various remedial course delivery methods and implement multiple strategies among the community colleges as appropriate, based on evaluation outcomes; and
- Provide state funding for work-related non-credit courses at rates equivalent to for-credit courses to improve the number of skilled workers in the state labor force.

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# Chapter 3

## Accountability: Data and Planning for the Future

Connecticut's educational and economic stakes are increasing. Community colleges are being called upon to solve workforce shortfalls and repair the failures of the K-12 system. Connecticut has made headway in data collection, but much more needs to be done. Building a community college system in this new climate requires a fully operational data collection system, one that:

- Catalogues key information on the student body as a whole and sub-groups (by race/ethnicity, low-income, academic risk, and adult workers) to better understand its composition and needs, and
- Has the capacity to analyze and evaluate educational strategies and innovation.

While the economy continues to decline, the jobs that will eventually become available will require at least some college education. Community colleges can help Connecticut be prepared for an economic turnaround. To do so, the colleges must understand the make up of their student body and determine which instructional methods and educational supports are most effective in helping students overcome their academic deficiencies, gain skills for the work place, and prosper in Connecticut's knowledge economy.

### Creating a Culture of Inquiry

To guarantee that Connecticut's economy continues to thrive, it is imperative that all stakeholders—leaders in government, business, labor, and education—understand what it will take to produce successful adult students. Within postsecondary institutions and in the policymaking, business, labor, and education arena, all must become part of a culture of inquiry. As a state, we must know to what length investments must be made to create the workforce we need. Data and information are part of the process, but without philosophical buy in from all stakeholders, the job will not get done. Decisions about what data to collect, how to interpret those data, and who to involve with that interpretation are a critical, yet sensitive part of the process.

It will require that all members of our institutions of higher learning participate, with administrators and policymakers, in fostering an atmosphere of learning and improvement. For change to truly become a way of life, findings must be used to inform pedagogical methods and administrative practices.<sup>1</sup>

## A Look at Connecticut Community Colleges

- Connecticut community colleges awarded 3,913 degrees during the 2007-2008 academic year, a 15 percent increase from that of 2004-2005.
- Almost two-thirds (63.5 percent) of Associate degrees were given to students studying in occupational programs (i.e., Business, Health and Life Sciences, Social and Public Services, and Science, Engineering, and Technology).
- Students of color made up 26 percent of those receiving an Associate's degree during the 2007-2008 academic year.
- Two-thirds of graduates were female.
- Connecticut community colleges awarded 925 certificates, an increase of 14.6 percent from 2004.
- Women received 60 percent of the certificates.
- Students of color earned 23.4 percent of the certificates.
- Among the certificates, 226 were awarded in Business, 194 in Health and Life Sciences, 200 in Science, Engineering, and Technology, and 192 in Social and Public Services.<sup>2</sup>

### Accountability and Expanding Data Collection Capacity

Connecticut's community colleges currently collect data on a wide array of student demographics associated with financial aid and completion rates. Not enough is known about the 50 percent or more of the student body who do not receive funding, who enroll part time and work while taking classes, and who move in and out of the system. Also critical are data related to credit accumulation, success or lack thereof in remedial courses, and the numbers of students who are advancing along a career-related trajectory. To assess the long-term effect of community college courses on wages and career advancement, researchers and planners must be able to follow students beyond the classroom and into employment.

### The Data Contribution of *Achieving the Dream*

As part of the *Achieving the Dream* project, Connecticut's community colleges have developed a state data system to collect student data longitudinally, enhance institutional assessment, and improve performance measurement. The system initially has been developed for the three participating community colleges (Capital, Housatonic, and Norwalk) but will ultimately be used with all Connecticut community colleges.<sup>4</sup>

Students are currently tracked over a six-year time line with progress noted at one-, two-, three-, and four-year increments. The colleges identify intervention points and performance changes within and across treatment and control groups. Institutional research staff are trained to use the system for in-depth analysis. Community college researchers are also creating a customized research data mart which eventually will be able to interface with national and state data systems.<sup>5</sup>

## A Legislative Directive to Increase Graduation Rates Special Act 07-9

In their report to the Connecticut General Assembly, Connecticut community colleges provided data on the number of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who graduated within three years of their Fall 2003 enrollment. College graduation rates are the standard statistics used to determine institutional success, at both two- and four-year colleges, and were established by the U.S. Department of Education.

While the use of a graduation rate indicator has been found to work well for four-year institutions, it reports the progress of only a small cohort within two-year institutions. The data do not account for the progress of those who attend college part-time (more than 60 percent at community colleges), take work-related courses, transfer into or out of the community college system, or take longer than three years to complete their degree. It also does not consider the remedial needs of students at the time of enrollment. Many administrators and researchers consider graduation rates as an inadequate measure of student success.<sup>3</sup>

### Accountability and Performance Evaluation

Along with student information, performance data are needed to determine the results of innovations, whether or not they should be replicated, and the characteristics of students for whom the interventions produce positive outcomes—this is the contextualization of evaluation. Institutional analysts must have the ability to evaluate particular courses or delivery strategies as well as compare interventions used at different classrooms or different community colleges. Administrators must understand where policies, programs, and teaching methods fall on a continuum of success and failure.

An effective accountability system:

- Looks at outcomes within subgroups of students as well as the student body as a whole;
- Determines if best practices exist within the institution and encourages replication, where appropriate, via peer-to-peer learning;
- Researches and replicates, where appropriate, best practices from other institutions working with similar populations of students; and

- Translates findings and resulting change efforts into user-friendly reports and disseminates these to key audiences (i.e., policymakers, students, faculty and staff, the public, and stakeholders in other postsecondary communities).<sup>6</sup>

Organizational supports for this accountability system should include:

- A research and analysis team made up of administrators, faculty, and student support services staff;
- Training for faculty and staff on a number of levels, including the development of effective programs, strategies, and implementation methods;
- Administrative leaders who build confidence in the investigative process and buy-in among faculty and staff by encouraging a culture of inquiry; and
- Funding for professional development that supports effective teaching and learning systems.<sup>7</sup>

## Uniform Data Collection and Benchmarking

Our focus in this report has been on the effort of community colleges to support adult workers, but other systems across the state have an investment in this group of students, their performance, and how they will move through the workforce. Data are collected by the Connecticut Department of Labor, the Department of Education, and others. To truly determine the benefit of the state's long-term investments, in all levels of education and work support, the individual data systems within these sectors should be linked, creating a uniform data collection and benchmarking system.

Such an effort would require a number of developments. Among them are:

- A unique student identifier,
- Software compatibility,
- Common data definitions, and
- Administrative structures, access protocols, and technological/software features to protect privacy.

Connecticut State Department of Education has instituted a State Administered Student Identification (SASID) number for all students under 18 years of age who have attended a school in Connecticut at any time. The identification system was launched in 2005.<sup>8</sup> At the time of this writing, it was unclear how fully functioning the system had become. Once the system is able to develop reports on student performance, it should be expanded to include Connecticut's public postsecondary system.

## Best Practices in Data Collection and Performance Evaluation

While many states track retention, transfer, and graduation rates, with some disaggregating data by subgroups of students (i.e., low-income students and those of color), there are few examples of states that provide an in-depth view of their student body.

What states are doing—Data Collection:

- Florida—the gold standard—has one of the oldest (established in the late 1960s) and most comprehensive uniform data collection and benchmarking systems in the country. In 2002, the state established one repository to house all educational data, called the **Florida Education Data Warehouse**. Student data records span a child's kindergarten through high school experience and then continues eight years beyond. Data include demographics, transcripts, and degrees/credentials earned. The warehouse connects these data to job placement and wage data using federal Unemployment Insurance records.<sup>9</sup>
- The Washington State Board of Community Colleges tracks students by their momentum points—the attainment of key thresholds in academic progress—including: (1) the percentage of students who have completed 15 to 30 academic credits, (2) the percentage of students with 15 to 30 credits who have also completed a quantitative reasoning course, and (3) the percentage of students who state a desire to pursue a Bachelor's degree at the time of their enrollment.<sup>10</sup>

- In North Dakota, exit surveys are given to students leaving a state college or university without completing a degree. Students are asked their reasons for leaving from a menu of possibilities, including transfer, health problems, dissatisfaction with grades, full-time employment, and the high cost of tuition and fees.<sup>11</sup>
- Wisconsin tracks its remediation success rates by comparing one-year retention and six-year graduation rates for those who needed remediation and who completed their requirements with students who did not need remediation. Rates are broken out for math and English remediation.<sup>12</sup>

What states are doing—Performance Evaluation:

- Washington is one of the first states to publish evaluation results on the effect of the **I-BEST** and **Student Achievement Initiatives**. Data reveal that **I-BEST** students are more likely to make academic gains in preparation for college-level courses. The gains are larger than those of students who take remedial courses that are not linked to their areas of interest.<sup>13</sup>
- Kentucky’s **Career Pathways** has shown that after one year of academic tutoring, HVAC students raised their college entrance scores so that they were able to bypass remedial coursework.<sup>14</sup>
- Arkansas has shown that in its **Fast Track** program, which compresses remedial courses into one semester, low-skilled students move more quickly into allied health courses. **Fast Track** students are four times more likely to complete remedial education classes than students who take traditional remedial classes.<sup>15</sup>

## Recommendations

Policymakers and the general public need a greater understanding of adult working students’ educational background, learning styles, and the relationship between academic achievement and economic opportunity. In order to increase the number of successful adult students at our community colleges, Connecticut policymakers should support the colleges’ efforts to:

- Collect demographic data on all registering students along with survey responses related to their academic interests, experience, and opinions;
- Track all students who complete one year of study to determine how they are doing academically, what problems they may be encountering, and if they plan on returning the following year;
- Begin to build an education data warehouse similar to that of Florida; and
- Provide professional development to community college faculty and staff in their exploration of assessment data and best practices.

## Investing in All Adult Working Students

Connecticut prides itself as being ahead of other states because of our highly educated workforce. In reality, we may be slipping behind those we once thought could not catch up. As Connecticut faces declining revenues, stagnant job growth, and increasing competition for business and industry, our leaders must actively work for new and far-sighted workforce training programs.

Along with developing educational policies to increase the number of young, traditional college students who study in Connecticut and remain to work in the state, we must acknowledge the important role non-traditional adult learners play in maintaining a strong workforce. In this sense, it is in the best interest of the state's economy to move Connecticut community college and adult workforce education and training policies and practices forward, speeding up rather than slowing down postsecondary innovation.

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# Connecticut's Challenge: Preparing Our Workforce . . . Strengthening Our Community Colleges

## Recommendations

Connecticut prides itself as being ahead of other states because of our highly educated workforce. In reality, we may be slipping behind those we once thought could not catch up. As Connecticut faces declining revenues, stagnant job growth, and increasing competition for business and industry, our leaders must actively work for new and far-sighted workforce training programs.

Along with developing educational policies to increase the number of young, traditional college students who study in Connecticut and remain to work in the state, we must acknowledge the important role non-traditional adult learners play in maintaining a strong workforce. In this sense, it is in the best interest of the state's economy to move Connecticut community college and adult workforce education and training policies and practices forward, speeding up rather than slowing down our postsecondary innovation.

## Access

- Replicate Michigan's **No Worker Left Behind** project to provide free tuition for a maximum of two courses per year to working students seeking employment-related skills. Eligible students would be those who have no postsecondary degree and, therefore, are not able to find good-paying jobs.
- Provide financial aid to part-time students who qualify financially and are pursuing work-related courses.
- Expand Connecticut's bridge program to all 70 adult education programs so that participating students are provided with adult basic education and community college courses that are aligned, academic and career-related counseling, student support services, and assistance with admissions and financial aid applications.
- Create a *College for All Campaign*, a statewide "awareness and motivational campaign," similar to that of Texas, with a defined enrollment goal by 2020. Actively seek support for the campaign from the Connecticut Business and Industry Association and The Business Council of Fairfield County, as well as policymakers and stakeholders from higher education.

## Success

- Establish multiple definitions of success for adult working community college students, including work-related skills and employability, degree and transfer requirements, and opportunities for continuing education for career advancement;
- Set goals and time lines for adult working students, including sub-groups defined by race/ethnicity, income, academic risk, adult workers, and assess the amount of effort required to close the academic achievement gap among community college students. With that information, develop a comprehensive plan that will lead to success for working students;
- Establish funding for student advisory staff so that case loads adequately support student success;
- Deliver courses associated with career pathways using flexible scheduling where appropriate;
- Expand CT-WAGE to include community colleges in order to encourage student persistence, completion, and success;
- Continue to test various remedial course delivery methods and implement multiple strategies among the community colleges as appropriate, based on evaluation outcomes; and
- Provide state funding for work-related non-credit courses at rates equivalent to for-credit courses to improve the number of skilled workers in the state labor force.

## Accountability

- Collect demographic data on all registering students along with survey responses related to their academic interests, experience, and opinions;
- Track all students who complete one year of study to determine how they are doing academically, what problems they may be encountering, and if they plan on returning the following year;
- Begin to build an education data warehouse similar to that of Florida; and
- Provide professional development to community college faculty and staff in their exploration of assessment data and best practices.











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