

Building Support for Student Success:  
A Framework for Achieving the Dream's  
State Policy Work

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ACHIEVING THE DREAM: COMMUNITY COLLEGES COUNT is a national initiative to increase the success of community college students, particularly those in groups that have been underserved in higher education. Achieving the Dream is funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education.

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# Building Support for Student Success: A Framework for Achieving the Dream's State Policy Work

**T**he Achieving the Dream initiative is primarily targeted to spur institutional change among participating community colleges through more careful use of data to pinpoint challenges and successful approaches. However, an important strand of Achieving the Dream activity addresses public policy changes that can promote improved educational outcomes for community college students. If institutional reforms tested by Achieving the Dream colleges are to diffuse broadly, policy supports will need to be secured and policy obstacles overcome. The initiative's approach to improving student outcomes recognizes the need for interaction between institutional practice and public policy.

Initially, the focus of Achieving the Dream policy activity is the state level. Consequently, this framework for the initiative's policy efforts explains and describes the approach that Achieving the Dream is taking to influence state policy in the seven states where initiative colleges are located. The initiative will also tackle high-leverage national policy and the institutional policies of higher education accreditation agencies; however, these efforts are designed to lag behind the institutional and state-level reform efforts. As a result, they will be addressed in later publications.

## **Introduction: The Role of Policy in Achieving the Dream**

Achieving the Dream is primarily about improving educational outcomes for community college students through the promotion and sustaining of institution-level change at participating colleges. The institutional change component of the initiative aims to:

- Build a cadre of institutional leaders at the colleges;
- Build the capacity of demonstration colleges to use data;
- Enhance the capacity of demonstration colleges to engage students and the community;
- Provide learning opportunities, on-site coaching, technical assistance, and grant funding;
- Encourage partnerships with other local institutions/organizations;
- Create a learning community among demonstration colleges; and
- Help colleges identify and adapt promising practices and invent new approaches.

Public policy innovation is integral to the initiative, but it is secondary to, or at least dependent upon, the institutional change agenda. The state policy component of Achieving the Dream is intended to promote changes in state-level priorities, rules, regulations, and resource allocation that can make it easier for participating colleges to improve student outcomes. In addition, the policy work is designed to help move lessons from the participating colleges' attempts to improve student outcomes into state policy, so that proven practices can be more easily implemented and sustained at a wider array of colleges.

From the start, Achieving the Dream anticipated that participating colleges' improvement strategies would face obstacles that were too big to be solved by any individual college or cluster of Achieving the Dream colleges in a state. The initiative's design assumes that the colleges would also be well-positioned to identify opportunities for policy changes—in allocations of

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*For more information on the Achieving the Dream initiative and its policy effort, see [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org). The initiative's Web site is [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).*

resources, in rules and legislative mandates, in the executive offices and the legislative arena—that could improve their ability (and that of other colleges outside the initiative) to improve student outcomes.

## Desired Outcomes for State Policy

The long-term goal of Achieving the Dream state policy efforts is to change community college-related policies—including governance and administration, funding and incentives, and laws and regulation—in each participating state in ways that promote institution-level change strategies that improve student success. By the end of ten years, states in Achieving the Dream will:

- Make success of underprepared community college students an explicit public policy goal;
- Create a policy culture that makes routine the use of evidence from a rich student-outcomes data system to assess state policy needs and influence decisions about resources, rules, accountability, etc.; and
- Identify and implement specific policy changes that promote improved outcomes for underprepared students in Achieving the Dream community colleges and other community colleges in the state. Policy innovations might address issues such as: data and accountability systems, public financing, alignment of community college and other education systems' expectations and standards, and support for institutional improvement that promotes improved student outcomes.

To reach these long-term goals requires intermediate targets, which will be sequenced and elaborated upon over time.

- The first year of activity (2004-05) was geared toward identifying key actors, building trust with lead state players, developing an understanding of college and state-level policy issues and concerns, and helping market Achieving the Dream and its themes to state-level leaders in the executive and legislative branches and in influential organizations outside the government.
- From 2005-2009, state policy activity—managed by a lead organization in each state and supported by Achieving the Dream partners—is shifting to more concerted campaigns to effect particular policy changes, beginning with efforts to improve state stu-

dent data systems. In the coming years, state policy work will entail building awareness and support for action among an increasingly wider set of state-level individuals and stakeholders.

## Background Assumptions/ External Environment

In most states, community college success is still a fairly low priority on the policy radar screen. However, emerging pressures and opportunities make this a good time to launch a campaign to raise the issue of student success in community colleges higher on public policy agendas. The commitment of a significant subset of community colleges in seven states to “getting their house in order” in relation to improved student outcomes provides a powerful platform for promoting change within and across participating states.

*The challenge:* Community colleges compete with other powerful educational systems and institutions in the public area—for attention, understanding, priority, resources, and other policy changes. K-12 education is a high priority in most states, given NCLB implementation demands and the focus on K-12 student achievement, graduation rates, etc. Four-year public institutions typically dominate higher education policy priorities, which for governors and legislatures tend to include issues of rising cost, access, trade-offs between autonomy and accountability, and, to some extent, the alignment between K-12 and higher education in a standards-driven policy environment.

The commitment among policymakers to improving student success in community colleges is still fairly undeveloped. When community colleges go to the state legislature, either singly or collectively, their primary policy concerns are typically around funding allocations, capital projects, faculty salaries, and other requests that, while important to institutional growth and quality, rarely address student success directly. When student success is addressed by state governments, it is typically in a fragmented way: the community college system may have student success among its system goals, (e.g., Virginia), but the issue may have little traction in the legislative arena; or the state may have specific college access and completion goals (Texas) but a laissez-faire approach to implementing specific policies that could help community colleges reach those goals.

**The opportunity:** At the same time, the pressures on higher education for accountability and improved performance are mounting—and this is creating openings for considering policies that can help increase postsecondary student success. The combination of increasing demand for higher education and stagnant (and in some states decreasing) state funding is leading many legislators and other policymakers to ask: Are we getting the best return for our higher education investment? The pressures from a difficult fiscal environment are reinforced by more than a decade of state investment in K-12 accountability and results and a growing realization that K-12 reforms cannot succeed without better alignment with and smoother transitions to postsecondary learning institutions.

Together, these factors are creating openings for consideration of policies that can promote improved outcomes in higher education, including community colleges. The fear that legislatures might institute clumsy and counterproductive accountability systems in higher education is adding urgency to efforts by college leaders, state higher education executive officers, and others to influence policy discussions.

In addition to accountability and efficiency concerns, many state governments are explicitly connecting higher education policies with their economic development interests. Governors and legislators are aware of the need to attract or produce a high-quality workforce if a state's economy is to flourish and grow. Several features that community colleges bring as partners in this effort—because of their relative flexibility and low cost for training technical workers and the good relations with key local employers that many colleges have—increases their perceived value within the mix of a state's public educational institutions.

The framework for Achieving the Dream's state policy work builds from these multiple opportunities and pressures.

## Priority State Policy Levers

Achieving the Dream seeks to effect significant changes in state policies that can drive and support community colleges' attention to improved student outcomes and success. These changes can involve *legislative action*, such as decisions about resource allocation or how state data systems interact and link with one another;

*executive action*, particularly in states where the community colleges are part of a unified system; and *joint agreement by some or all of a state's colleges*, as happens at times in states where governance is decentralized.

The initiative has identified six state policy levers that can have substantial impact on student success:

- A clear public policy commitment;
- A strong data-driven accountability system;
- Aligned expectations, standards, assessments, and transition requirements across educational systems (K-12, community college, higher education, adult education);
- Incentives for improving services to academically underprepared students;
- Financial aid policies and other financial incentives to promote persistence; and
- Public support.

These levers are elaborated upon below.

### *Clear Public Policy Commitment*

In a crowded policy environment, a strong consensus statement on the importance of student success and how to achieve it is critical for building strong alliances, influencing public and policymaker opinion, and effecting changes in policy. This statement should include clear commitment to improving college success rates for all students. It should also specify measurable goals for increases in the absolute number of credentials earned by community college students and in the rates at which different student groups earn degrees and certificates. Finally, it should demonstrate broad stakeholder support.

### *Strong Data-Driven Accountability System*

If student success is the ultimate goal, the first target of opportunity for policy change must be the state system for collecting, analyzing, and using data to spur improvements in institutional performance. Without a strong state data system and infrastructure that helps colleges use data more effectively for institutional change, it will be difficult to identify practices and approaches that demonstrate success with particular population groups. States should strengthen their data systems so that the progress of any student entering a

community college can be followed over time and that essential demographic and prior educational information about them can be linked. This system should be the foundation of an accountability system that drives improved student outcomes across a state's colleges, not just at Achieving the Dream institutions. Activities in a state might include:

- Strengthening an integrated data system—linking K-12, community colleges, higher education, adult education, welfare, and employment systems—for flexible use by institutions, researchers, legislators, and policymakers;
- Designing—or revising—a performance reporting system to be more stable, equitable, and flexible;
- Incentives to strengthen colleges' institutional research capability;
- Performance report cards for colleges on key student outcomes; and
- Incentives to institutions to close identified gaps and reward improved outcomes (while ensuring that improved outcomes do not come at the expense of access for underprepared students).

### ***Aligned Expectations, Standards, Assessments, and Transition Requirements Across Educational Systems***

A key challenge facing most states' community college systems—a challenge that affects student opportunities and odds for success—extends beyond the colleges themselves to their relationships with other segments of the public education and skill development system: K-12; four-year colleges and universities; and the pre-collegiate adult education system. There are important policy issues to address within each of these, including:

- *Alignment with the K-12 System:* P-16 or P-20 governance or collaboration mechanisms, better signaling of college academic expectations to high school students, use of teacher training initiatives to target improvement of poor-performing high schools, strengthening of dual enrollment and other methods of “college in high school” that involve community colleges;
- *Alignment with four-year colleges and universities:* Clear transfer policy goals, simpler and regularized transfer policies (e.g., course requirements and transferability), incentive funding for transfers, financial aid policies that help transfer students; and

- *Alignment with the adult education and workforce systems:* Better alignment of adult education standards and instruction with expectations of developmental education, reassessment of governance of adult education, alignment and simplification of transition from non-credit workforce programs to credit courses and programs within community colleges, promotion of work-based career ladder credential programs.

### ***Incentives for Improving Services to Academically Underprepared Students***

Achieving the Dream colleges are focusing their improvement efforts on ways to improve the instruction, services, supports, and opportunities for learning available to academically underprepared students who enroll in community colleges. State policies that make this easier and that reward colleges for improving the availability of quality learning opportunities and supports for these students can be a powerful spur to persistence and success. Important areas for policy activity include:

- Developmental education (issues such as curriculum, technology, linkage to credit programs and courses, teacher quality, placement policies, financing, accountability);
- Advising and counseling and other student supports;
- Strengthening the first year experience; and
- Curricular and instructional innovation and improvement.

### ***Financial Aid Policies and Other Financial Incentives that Promote Persistence***

There is clear evidence that part-time enrollment related to the need for employment and earnings increases the risk of non-completion. A range of state policies might help address the negative impact of financial need on community college students, both those entering right out of high school and adults who are enrolling from the world of work. Policies to explore might include:

- Financial aid for part-time students;
- Need-based state aid, including support beyond tuition; and
- Strategies to increase take-up of federal financial aid.

## ***Public Support***

Recent surveys have identified a reservoir of good will toward community colleges but also real challenges in competing for policy attention and priority against K-12, four-year institutions and systems, and non-education needs. State policy strategies must be complemented by communications and engagement efforts that raise community college student success higher on the public and policy agendas. States can participate in and encourage efforts to highlight community college roles, their importance to economic development, their commitment to improving student success and the progress they are making, and the ways public policy can support these institutions and their commitment to student success. Priority should be given to: media campaigns; stakeholder engagement; and broad public awareness and engagement.

## **Specific State Priorities to Address the Policy Levers**

Achieving the Dream's state policy work is anchored in two key operational strategies:

*The centrality of a lead organization in each state that is charged with developing and advancing the policy agenda in that state and developing an ever-widening circle of advocates and supporters of specific policy changes.*

In each state, the initiative selected an organization that is trusted by and knowledgeable about community colleges, has access to executive and legislative policymakers, and is committed to improving student outcomes, particularly for underprepared students. In four states, the lead organization is the community college system office, in two states the community college association, and in one a foundation deeply involved in promoting higher education improvement. The lead organization sets the policy agenda for the initiative in the state, develops action plans for addressing policy priorities, and works with peers from other states to develop and share strategies for success.

*The assignment of an active role for Achieving the Dream college leaders in articulating, supporting, and justifying the state agenda, based on lessons from their own institutional change experiments.*

Achieving the Dream brings to the state policy arena a powerful force for change: the leadership, motivation, and experiences of participating colleges. The colleges form a leadership group that can speak with authority and is motivated to promote changes that can raise student success. Because the colleges will also test innovations at the institution level, they can, over time, advocate for innovations that demonstrate results.

Initiative partners believe that investment of staff and other resources in support of these two strategies can drive powerful efforts to influence state policies to advance student success.

Through working with a lead policy organization and the Achieving the Dream colleges in each state, the initiative has begun to make progress in individual states and across the initiative states on many of the six policy levers that Achieving the Dream has identified. The most visible and promising of these efforts provide a sense of where initial gains and policy influence are likely to be seen. From among the six, the two highest priority policy targets, which were identified by the states during the initial planning year and now moving forward, are:

- Improvement in state-level student data systems and, over time, accountability systems; and
- State incentives and supports for college-level innovation to improve outcomes of academically underprepared students.

A brief overview of some of the initial strategies and activities being pursued in the initiative states follows.

## ***Clear Public Policy Commitment***

Some states already have clear policy commitments to improving student success, either statewide or at the community college system level. For example, the Virginia Community College System's *Dateline 2009* is a public commitment to specific, measurable goals in a number of areas, including student retention and completion. Texas' *Closing the Gaps* initiative is a statewide public commitment to student success. Achieving the Dream is providing lead organizations with exemplars of state-level commitments to student success and helping states that are interested to craft their own versions of such a commitment and to develop strategies for their incorporation in policy.

### ***Strong Data-Driven Accountability System***

Achieving the Dream puts the strengthening of data systems at the top of its policy priorities across participating states because this is a key state responsibility if colleges are to become more data-driven in their planning and decision-making. The initiative is supporting state efforts to strengthen their data systems through both capacity building and knowledge-development activities. The primary vehicle is a project involving the seven Achieving the Dream states and four additional states in the Ford Foundation-funded Bridges to Opportunity initiative. Working with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Achieving the Dream and Bridges to Opportunity conducted state data system “audits” in all states in 2005. The audits identified ways for each state to move toward more comprehensive and useful unit record data systems and ways that groups of states might work collectively to promote state commitments to incorporate a few common data elements into their systems. The purpose of such changes would be to help states assess the progress and success of particular groups of low-income and under-prepared students as they enter and move through community college programming.

The effort focuses on ways to link existing databases more effectively, add data that is not currently reported to a state, and define cohorts of students into subpopulations that provide a much better understanding of the educational progress of different groups (e.g., developmental education students, older students, part-time students). One important goal is to launch, across a number of states, a benchmarking project tied to common data measures. This project is likely to grow and evolve over the life of Achieving the Dream, informing individual state strategies and constituting a voice for multi-state and national policy innovation as well.

### ***Aligned Expectations, Standards, Assessments, and Transition Requirements Across Educational Systems***

Although most states have expressed interest in and a need for better alignment across their education systems—K-12 to community colleges; community colleges to four-year schools; adult education and workforce programs to community colleges—these policy issues are likely to be a “second tier” priority for

Achieving the Dream, since the initiative is designed to emphasize how colleges can change their own internal practices to improve student outcomes. Focusing too early on alignment issues can be an easy way to point fingers at other systems before grappling with needed internal changes. However, states have identified a number of clear, common alignment concerns, including: the need to raise the quality of high school education, so students who come to community colleges are better prepared; the promise of dual enrollment programs but the lack of effective data or policy at the state level; varied issues around transfer to four-year institutions, particularly regarding credit, financial aid, transparency of requirements, and data sharing on student outcomes; and similar challenges regarding coordinating of expectations and better signaling among adult education, GED, ESL, and other pre-college programs. Some states are engaging in these issues. New Mexico, for example, is working across state agencies to align high school math and English curricula and standards with the requirements of the state’s public higher education institutions, beginning with math.

### ***Incentives for Improving Services to Academically Underprepared Students***

This is one of the top two priorities for Achieving the Dream, along with the data-related policy efforts. Given the centrality of institutional change to the initiative and the power that the experience of participating colleges can bring to the policy discussions, Achieving the Dream’s policy efforts will be coordinated closely with, learn from, and build upon colleges’ experiences. At least in the coming year, those experiences will focus on experimentation with new approaches to improving developmental education, first-year experiences, gatekeeper courses, advising and tutoring, and other learning and support services for underprepared students.

Achieving the Dream will ask state policymakers to learn from participating colleges’ experiences, to support experiments that prove effective, and to address obstacles to effective institutional practices that are built into funding formulas and state rules and regulations. Designing incentives that reward progress toward Achieving the Dream success goals will be a high priority as the institution- and state-level work evolves.

Support for state efforts has focused initially on preparation of issue briefs, in-state conferences and workshops, and interstate policy meeting meetings on developmental education and first-year experiences: what is known about effective and promising practice; what state policies appear to promote better support for struggling students and better identification of students in need of remediation. A “policy audit” in the Achieving the Dream states has identified policies that support student access and success, including policies on assessment, placement, and instruction in developmental education. States can use this information as a baseline for assessing the efficacy of their current policies and considering actions to propose to policymakers. Because innovation designed to improve developmental education and first-year experiences at the institution level are perhaps the highest priority for Achieving the Dream colleges in their first implementation year, exposing state leaders to the successes of and challenges facing the colleges is an important component of the initiative’s strategy to build momentum for specific changes in rules, resource allocation, state-provided technical assistance, etc.

### ***Financial Aid Policies and Other Financial Incentives that Promote Persistence***

Financial aid policies are not just about access. They are also about success. Financial incentives that enable community college students to spend less time earning a living while in school accelerate their college course-taking and their commitment to completing a degree or other college credential. Providing an appropriate mix of need-based and merit-based aid is a longstanding priority in many Achieving the Dream states, as are strategies for keeping tuition low. Achieving the Dream is also interested in identifying and promoting financial incentives (to middle and high school students as well as to community college students) that can promote persistence.

Achieving the Dream will conduct research on a range of financial incentives that might pay off for states in terms of student success. The initiative will share findings with participating state lead organizations and their allies. In some states, these issues might rise high as a policy priority (as in New Mexico, which passed legislation in 2004 to create a merit-based aid fund but has yet to appropriate any funds). In certain states, Achieving the Dream initially will support efforts to

improve financial aid opportunities, but these issues are likely to be another “second tier” priority to be pursued more aggressively later in the initiative’s life. Because aid is often more explicitly linked to access than to success, this will help keep the initiative’s focus and messaging clear.

### ***Public Support***

Achieving the Dream will provide communications assistance for disseminating Achieving the Dream messages and news to key audiences and key opinion leaders in each participating state and nationally. Particularly in 2006-2007, state lead organizations will be provided with assistance on how to increase public support for policy changes around student success through media and public marketing tool kits, training for staff and key allies, and support for efforts to reach media and other opinion leaders.

### **How Achieving the Dream Supports State Policy Work**

The initiative provides the lead organization and its allies among a state’s colleges and policymakers and opinion leaders with three kinds of assistance and support:

- Guidance and support for capacity-building and strategic action at the state-level;
- Knowledge development and dissemination of products and materials that policymakers can use to set priorities and design interventions; and
- Communications activities to build public awareness and will for policy changes in support of improved student outcomes.

Combining these approaches and activities in each state should deepen opinion leaders’ receptivity to, capacity for, and knowledge of policy interventions that can increase the likelihood of success. These support strategies, woven together, underpin the specific strategies and priorities that the initiative and state lead organizations develop and pursue to advance Achieving the Dream policy priorities (see final section below).

## *Capacity-Building*

The most critical component of Achieving the Dream state policy work is the commitment to building and supporting a vibrant, engaged, state leadership capable of mobilizing for policy changes. This is a long-term process that begins with building trust between the lead organization and the initiative partners and then evolves toward more strategic and substantive mobilization of the lead organization itself, participating colleges, and other key state-level stakeholders (from other education systems, governmental branches, business, the advocacy community, etc.). This work will be greatly aided by the initiative's explicit commitment to build from and work with existing policy efforts and networks in participating states.

An important aspect of this work will be the sequencing of engagement by the Achieving the Dream colleges in advocacy for state policy changes. In the first year or two, the colleges will serve as a strong voice articulating problems they wish to see addressed and priorities they prefer in state policy. As the colleges' own institutional change efforts develop and mature, and clear lessons emerge about effective practices and programs—as well as obstacles to more effective and larger-scale implementation—the successes and limits of colleges' institutional efforts will inform and guide campaigns to change state policies to be more supportive of student success at the institution level.

In the coming years, the lead organization in each state will have to incrementally deepen its own capacity (through internal staffing decisions, the use of consultants, and strategic partnerships) to design and implement campaigns that inform, influence, and mobilize key stakeholders. This will require continued internal capacity building in most of the state agencies, system offices, community college associations, or other entities that have been selected to lead the state work. It will require a mobilization strategy that is both “top-down” (i.e., beginning with state-level actors) and “bottom up” (i.e., engaging participating colleges), and that is also “inside/outside” (i.e., from within the community college sector but also engaging other sectors including higher education, K-12, career and technical centers, the business community, community advocacy groups, and others as appropriate).

Key activities in support of capacity building for the lead organization and its policy allies include:

- Semi-annual strategy meetings with the lead organization in each state;
- Monthly conference calls with all the state lead contacts as a group;
- Support for and participation in regular communication and meetings between initiative colleges and the state lead organization;
- Customized background research for each state on policy issues they are interested in advancing;
- Semi-annual state policy meetings that involve teams from all Achieving the Dream states; and
- Engagement of state teams with participating colleges in part of an annual Strategy Institute for the initiative.

## *Knowledge Development and Dissemination*

State policymakers are frequently influenced by developments and innovations in other states. They can also be influenced by convincing data on “what works” within their own state's institutions. Achieving the Dream has a strong knowledge development component, distilling data and lessons from both institutional change efforts and state policy work within and outside of the colleges and states in the initiative. The initiative's research and dissemination activities play several functions: visibility and credibility for the initiative and its policy priorities; reinforcement of and support for the overall state policy framework and specific priorities for state action; and augmentation of the capacity of state organizations, agencies, and policymakers to make decisions based on data and evidence.

Policy-related knowledge development and dissemination activities will include the following:

- Issue briefs on policy issues across initiative states and other states, with options and recommendations for policy action;
- Public briefings in each state on the initiative, state policy priorities, and specific policy issues;
- Cross-state comparative charts and materials on the policy environment, focusing on policies relevant to increasing student success;

- Ongoing monitoring and reporting on relevant policy developments in Achieving the Dream states, through an electronic newsletter;
- State-specific research memos and briefs that respond to individual state interests and needs in the policy arena;
- A framework for designing a “best practice” state student-outcomes data system; and
- Documentation and analysis of lessons from the state policy component of Achieving the Dream, with the goal of sharing lessons on the initiative’s approach to organizing and moving state policy changes.

### ***Communications***

Achieving the Dream will coordinate communications activities at the state level with the lead organization and its efforts to raise certain policy concerns and solutions higher on the agenda of state leaders.

Communications support will strengthen state-level focus, messaging, and strategy. In the coming years, the initiative will develop communications tool kits for state leaders, help with media relations for state partners, and support strong messaging for state policy work. The initiative will enhance and accelerate communication with and across state teams through semi-annual policy meetings involving all seven states, regu-

lar conference calls that allow for sharing and joint planning among the state lead organizations, the dissemination of briefs and reports on state policy in initiative and other states, and regular postings on the initiative’s Web site. Communications support is also provided by strategic engagement of national research and policy organizations as advisors to and learners from the Achieving the Dream state efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Achieving the Dream is a complex, ambitious initiative. The inclusion of a state policy component to complement and strengthen the drive toward institutional change is an important element of the overall strategy. It is our belief that the initiative’s approach to change at the state level will bear fruit in the form of policy changes that make institutional improvement easier and more permanent—and make student success a clear priority for state policymakers. The resulting policy tools will provide guidelines and incentives that produce better outcomes for each state and its residents. Achieving the Dream’s policy effort is designed to: help accelerate and strengthen state policy initiatives that promote student success; and derive lessons from this work about strategies for influencing the allocation of resources, the transparency of and accountability for results, and the rules that shape how institutions make decisions about priorities and practices.

# Appendix I

## State-level Activities and Strategies

*April 2004-September 2005*

The following activities were undertaken in each Achieving the Dream state between April 2004 and September 2005. These provide the starting point and building blocks for the presentation below of outcomes and workplan for 2005-2009:

- *Listening tour:* 20-30 people; one-day discussion of policy issues around community college success in each state
- *Identification of lead organization:* in three states, the community college system (FL, NC, VA); in two, the community college association (NM, TX)
- *Meetings and negotiations with prospective lead organization:* To secure commitment and work out understanding of roles and responsibilities prior to making first-year grant to lead organization
- *State-level public opinion survey:* Survey of public opinion in the state on community colleges and on messages about them that resonate
- *Three interstate meetings* (alternate years): To promote identity across states, sharing of policy and political experiences, and identification of priorities for action
- *Meeting of participating colleges in each state with leaders of state system or association:* To learn from colleges' experience to date and to jointly identify policy opportunities and challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges
- *Launch of data project:* Effort to define key questions states want to answer about the success of different groups of community college students and to improve state data systems to be able to answer those questions
- *Launch of policy newsletter:* To promote identity and sharing across states
- *Exploration of sources of additional funding for state policy effort:* Strategizing with lead organizations and with outreach to local/regional funders in several states

In addition, the following activities designed to promote knowledge development and dissemination and raise the visibility of the Achieving the Dream policy component were undertaken:

- *Identification of priority policy areas of concern to colleges and states:* Through discussions with and feedback from colleges, states, partners, others
- *Preparation of four issue briefs for distribution internally and externally:* Topics: privacy and data issues; undocumented students and tuition, financial aid; state policies on assessment and placement in developmental education; and performance measurement and accountability systems
- *Preparation of baseline policy analysis for initiative states:* Product prepared by Kevin Dougherty of the Community College Research Center
- *Assessment of policy and political environment in California as potential round two state:* Research memo
- *Washington briefing/forum on state policy issues:* Timed to coincide with AACC/ACCT legislative briefing; covered undocumented student and privacy issues
- *Two AACC sessions:* One on undocumented student issues, the other on financial incentives that can promote persistence
- *Identification of two new states and lead organizations in each:* Ohio and Connecticut have joined the initiative. The lead organization in Connecticut is the Office of the Chancellor of the Connecticut Community Colleges; in Ohio, it is KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

# Appendix II

## State Policy Outcomes Proposed for 2005–2009

*1. Achieving the Dream states will institutionalize community college student success as an explicit policy goal and priority.*

Achieving the Dream will work with state lead organizations and their allies to define and specify this goal for each state and introduce it into public policy.

Round Two states—Ohio and Connecticut—will be integrated into the policy efforts of the initiative, through specification of responsibilities and opportunities, relationship-building between the lead organization and participating colleges, and integration into interstate meetings and activities.

*2. Achieving the Dream states will identify and implement specific policy changes in data and accountability, system alignment, financing, and/or support for institutional improvement that promote student success.*

Jobs for the Future and other partners will identify promising policies in Achieving the Dream and other states that should have a positive impact on student success.

Achieving the Dream will produce policy research documents that provide support for state efforts—including products that address common needs across multiple states but also research requested by individual participating states.

- Achieving the Dream will help the lead organization in each state identify allies, build public and policymaker awareness and support, and manage efforts to implement a few high-priority policy changes through administrative, legislative, or other mechanisms.
- Achieving the Dream will help participating states identify and implement strategies to strengthen and extend state student outcomes data systems and also advance state policy debates and decisions in the areas of: accountability systems in higher education; education and other systems alignment; services to support underprepared students; financial aid and other financial incentives; and public awareness.

*3. Achieving the Dream states will move beyond a general policy statement and a few specific policy changes toward a culture that is based on the use of rich student data to assess policy needs and options that can promote improved outcomes for community college students.*

Jobs for the Future and other partners will identify “best practice” data systems from around the country and assist states to benchmark their systems to a composite ideal state student data system.

Achieving the Dream will identify state-specific priorities for improving the quality, reach, and flexibility of state data systems based on that benchmarking work, and we will encourage states to strengthen their systems and their capacity (and that of colleges) to manage and sustain data collection, analyze data, and use it for improvement.

Achieving the Dream will bring the institutional change experiences of Achieving the Dream colleges to the attention of state leaders and policymakers as evidence for advocacy efforts around particular policy priorities.

Achieving the Dream will support state-level efforts to base funding and other decisions that change institutional and individual behavior on research about the power of particular models, approaches, and policies to spur improved student outcomes.

*4. Achieving the Dream will strategically disseminate knowledge developed and lessons learned from its policy work to other states and to national audiences with the intent of shaping policy discussions and decisions beyond the states directly involved in Achieving the Dream.*

Jobs for the Future and other partners will produce a regular stream of quality research products on specific policy issues related to student success, and these will be used by state policymakers.

Achieving the Dream will document the change process in initiative states and produce a set of rich stories about the process that leads to specific policy “wins.”

Achieving the Dream will help strengthen state-level capacity and effectiveness in building public support for and using communications proactively to advance the initiative's policy goals.

Achieving the Dream will engage and inform key opinion leaders and policy audiences outside the Achieving the Dream states (at the state and national levels) through publications, briefings, conference presentations, conference calls, and other dissemination strategies.

# Appendix III

## Summary: A Framework for Achieving the Dream State Policy Work

BACKGROUND/TRENDS	STATE POLICY LEVERS	POTENTIAL STRATEGIES	HOW THE INITIATIVE SUPPORTS STATE EFFORTS	DESIRED OUTCOMES
<p><i>Concern regarding the costs of higher education</i></p> <p><i>Interest in postsecondary accountability</i></p> <p><i>Awareness of need to align education systems</i></p> <p><i>Association of state economic well-being with postsecondary education</i></p> <p><i>Good will toward community colleges but limited understanding of challenges</i></p>	<p>Clear public policy commitment</p> <hr/> <p>Data-driven accountability system</p> <hr/> <p>Cross-system alignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-12 system</li> <li>• Four-year institutions</li> <li>• Adult education and workforce</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Incentives for improving services to academically under-prepared students</p> <hr/> <p>Financial aid policies and other incentives for persistence</p> <hr/> <p>Public support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear statement of overarching policy goals, objectives</li> <li>• Specification of measurable goals for improved student outcomes</li> <li>• Broad stakeholder buy-in</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening of student outcome data systems</li> <li>• Integration of different state data bases into a single flexible system</li> <li>• Incentives to strengthen institutional research capacity</li> <li>• Report cards on performance for colleges</li> <li>• Incentives to close gaps and reward strong/improved outcomes</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P-16 or P-20 coordination</li> <li>• Better signaling to high schools</li> <li>• Dual enrollment, etc.</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify and regularize transfer to four-year institutions</li> <li>• Reassess financial aid for transfers</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve alignment of adult ed with community colleges</li> <li>• Reassess governance</li> <li>• Promote work-based career ladder programs</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental education</li> <li>• Advising, counseling, student supports</li> <li>• Strengthening the first-year experience</li> <li>• Curricular and instructional improvement</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial aid for part-time students</li> <li>• Need-based state aid, including support beyond tuition</li> <li>• Strategies to increase federal financial aid take-up</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media campaign</li> <li>• Public awareness</li> <li>• Stakeholder campaign</li> <li>• Focus on importance of issues, state commitment, and progress</li> </ul>	<p><b>Capacity Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify lead organizations</li> <li>• Work with lead organizations to develop policy priorities, undertake activities to advance priorities, strengthen policy alliances, and effect policy change</li> <li>• Engage leadership of initiative colleges in states to inform and advocate for policy priorities</li> <li>• Create multi-state leadership team to share experience, set priorities</li> <li>• Through in-state planning meetings and public conferences; conference calls and semi-annual state meetings on strategy and substance; background research support for lead organization's agenda</li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briefs</li> <li>• Briefings</li> <li>• Cross-state comparisons</li> <li>• Monitoring of policy changes</li> <li>• State-specific research</li> <li>• Framework for "best practice" data system</li> <li>• Lessons from state work</li> </ul> <p><b>Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public awareness and engagement</li> <li>• Media coverage</li> <li>• Policymaker influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make success of underprepared community college students an explicit public policy goal</li> <li>• Create a policy culture that makes routine the use of evidence from a rich student outcomes data system to assess state policy needs and influence decisions about resources, rules, accountability, etc.</li> <li>• Identify and implement specific policy changes that promote improved outcomes for under-prepared students in Achieving the Dream community colleges and other community colleges in the state. Policy innovations might address issues such as: data and accountability systems, public financing, alignment of community college and other education systems' expectations and standards, and support for institutional improvement that promotes improved outcomes.</li> </ul>