



Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a bold national effort to help more community college students succeed, with a special focus on students of color and low-income students. The initiative proceeds from the premise that success begets success, using a student-centered model of institutional improvement to create a culture of evidence in which data and inquiry drive broad-based institutional efforts to close achievement gaps and improve student outcomes overall.

Student Outcomes by State

Achieving the Dream operates in 24 states and the District of Columbia, each of which represents a different mix of policies, population, and wealth. These different state attributes may have direct or indirect effects on the success of community college students. While previous Achieving the Dream publications provide details regarding state policies and how they may affect the success of community college students,¹ the goal of this issue of *Data Notes* is not to provide answers as to why these differences exist, but rather to highlight some of the differences that do exist.

In addition to Achieving the Dream data, this report includes data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for the 2008–09 academic year to describe differences among the states in which Achieving the Dream operates. However, several states have too few Achieving the Dream colleges to provide a reliable picture of the state, and were not included in this analysis.² The IPEDS data reported herein reflect all community colleges in the respective state, while the Achieving the Dream data reported represent only the Achieving the Dream community colleges in the state. Achieving the Dream colleges do not represent all community colleges in each of the respective states.

Financial Factors

Differences exist among the Achieving the Dream states in the prices that students pay to attend college. Finances include the price students pay to attend college, along with the public resources available to colleges to support their operations. Tuition is one part of the price equation, and student aid is the other. Average annual tuition for a full-time student varies from \$591 in California to \$4,048 in Ohio (Figure 1, see page 2).

The price of attendance is reduced by the receipt of grant aid. IPEDS reports the award of aid to first-time, full-time students. Federal grant aid is dominated by Pell grants, which are awarded on the basis of financial need. More students in states that historically have larger proportions of low-income residents receive federal aid than

do those students in states with lower proportions of low-income residents. In this case, 65 percent of the first-time, full-time students attending community colleges in Arkansas received federal grants, compared with 26 percent of the full-time students in Hawaii, a high-income state. Hawaii was also at the bottom of the list for state grant awards, with 3 percent of the first-time, full-time students receiving state grants, while South Carolina topped the list with 70 percent of first-time, full-time community college students receiving state grants. The final source of grants explored here is institutional grants; the percentage of first-time, full-time students receiving institutional grant awards varies from 25 percent in Connecticut to 3 percent in California.

“State support per student varied from a high of \$11,314...to a low of \$3,507.”

State and local support of colleges is another factor in providing the resources necessary to educate students. Some states provide general revenue support for certain types of non-credit enrollment; however, non-credit students are not included in the enrollment data available, and the amount of revenue appropriated for non-credit enrollment is not detailed in IPEDS. Thus, in these states, appropriations per FTE may be overstated. That said, state support per student varied from a high of \$11,314 in Oklahoma to a low of \$3,507 in South Carolina, with an average of \$5,946. Both Oklahoma and South Carolina report general funds being allocated to support non-credit enrollment. The revenue estimate does not include other revenue such as tuition, student aid and grants, and contracts that may support the operations of the colleges, but public support from state and local sources is usually the largest revenue stream for community colleges' operating budgets. The assumption is that having more money per enrolled student provides flexibility in how those funds can be spent.

These financial measures suggest a great deal of difference among the Achieving the Dream states on key financial measures, both for

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Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

www.achievingthedream.org

¹ Dougherty, K., Reid, M. and Nienhuser, H.K. *State Policies to Achieve the Dream in Five States: An Audit of State Policies to Aid Student Access to and Success in Community College in the First Five Achieving the Dream States*. Community College Research Center, Teachers College Columbia, February 2006.

² States with fewer than three colleges represented in the initiative were excluded: Kansas, Maryland, Vermont.

What Is a Cohort?

A cohort is a group of people studied during a period of time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor—such as when they started college—in common.

The Achieving the Dream 2002 student cohort, for example, is the group of credential-seeking students that attended Achieving the Dream institutions for the first time in fall 2002.

Tracking a cohort makes it possible to compare progress and outcomes of different groups of students (e.g., groups defined by race, age or other demographic characteristics) and to determine if there are gaps in achievement among groups of interest.

Figure 1. Number and percentage of institutions participating in Achieving the Dream, and institutional financial data, by state

	Number of Achieving the Dream colleges	Total number of community colleges in state	Percentage of community colleges represented by Achieving the Dream	IPEDS Data, 2008–09				
				Average tuition and fees	Percentage of first-time, full-time students receiving federal grants	Percentage of first-time, full-time students receiving state/local grants	Percentage of first-time, full-time students receiving institutional grants	Local & state appropriations per full-time equivalent student
Total	113	649	17	2,465	45	33	14	5,946
State								
Arkansas	4	22	18	2,008	65	21	20	5,479
California ¹	3	134	2	591	37	52	3	6,577
Connecticut	3	12	25	2,983	38	20	25	7,356
Florida ¹	4	51	8	2,151	40	31	13	4,222
Hawaii ²	7	6	117	1,762	26	3	17	7,130
Illinois ¹	5	50	10	2,438	41	30	20	5,521
Indiana ³	13	15	87	2,869	54	21	11	3,648
Massachusetts	4	16	25	3,327	39	38	7	4,867
Michigan ¹	7	31	23	2,480	43	35	16	6,522
New Mexico ¹	5	20	25	1,237	55	50	19	7,770
North Carolina ¹	4	60	7	1,442	48	38	7	8,492
Ohio	5	36	14	4,048	53	33	15	5,544
Oklahoma ¹	3	33	9	2,569	51	26	23	11,314
Pennsylvania ¹	7	21	33	3,690	38	25	11	6,487
South Carolina ¹	5	20	25	3,588	57	70	8	3,507
Texas ¹	23	68	34	1,725	46	25	18	6,928
Virginia ¹	5	24	21	2,579	43	34	13	3,925
Washington	6	30	20	2,889	34	33	8	5,641

¹ State provides general revenue support for certain types of non-credit enrollment; however, non-credit students are not included in the enrollment data available, and the amount of revenue appropriated for non-credit enrollment is not detailed. Thus, appropriations per FTE may be overstated.

² Maui Community College is an Achieving the Dream participant, but did not appear on the U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database in 2008–09.

³ Ivy Tech Community College is 14 campuses of 1 community college, 13 of which participate in Achieving the Dream; each campus reports separately to both IPEDS and Achieving the Dream.

Note: The first two cohorts for Rounds 1 through 4 and Cohort 2009 were included in the analysis (2002 and 2003 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 and 2004 for Round 3; 2004 and 2005 for Round 4; 2006 and 2007 for Cohort 2009). States with fewer than three colleges represented in the initiative were excluded (Kansas, Maryland, Vermont). This analysis includes data through the 2009 cohort, so 18 states are represented. Based on student records with referral data.

Sources: Achieving the Dream database, V201010; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data, 2008–09; Community College Research Center at Columbia University, *The Landscape of Noncredit Workforce Education: State Policies and Community College Practices*. January 2008.

students and institutions. These differences among states would be further complicated by the consideration of policies that are less easily quantified, such as articulation with four-year colleges and universities, governance and coordination practices, and state accountability requirements.³ These policies are not described here, but may influence the operation of community colleges and the chances for student success.

Indicators of Student Success

Figure 2 displays outcomes data for Achieving the Dream colleges, and is based on data from the Achieving the Dream database. On average, 57 percent of entering students were referred to developmental education. Colleges in New

Mexico top the list at 75 percent, while 47 percent of students in Connecticut colleges were referred.⁴ Florida colleges have the highest rate of students completing their developmental education sequence in one year, 32 percent, while colleges in Oklahoma, which led in the amount of state funds provided per student, had the lowest percentage of students completing their recommended developmental sequence in the first year, 2 percent.

Overall, seven percent of students referred to developmental English successfully completed gateway English within two years of enrolling. However, the success rates for students referred to developmental math and completing gateway

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³ For example, in California, it is the responsibility of each department, school, and major in the University of California and California State University systems to develop discipline-specific articulation agreements, while Arkansas has a general education transferable core throughout the state, and Florida has statewide articulation agreements. For a full listing of legislation and agreements, see http://www.aacrao.org/pro_development/transfer.cfm#CO.

⁴ Colleges in Virginia were not able to report all referrals to developmental education, so their referral data should be considered with caution.

Figure 2. Percentage of Achieving the Dream students referred to and completing all developmental education, and completing gateway coursework, by state

	Percentage of students...			
	Referred to developmental education, any subject ¹	Completing all developmental education referred to, year 1	Referred to developmental English and successfully completing gateway English by the end of year 2	Referred to developmental math and successfully completing gateway math by the end of year 2
Total	57	16	7	5
State				
Arkansas	60	9	6	5
California	60	3	5	4
Connecticut	47	16	4	5
Florida	61	32	8	4
Hawaii ²	64	7	6	2
Illinois	54	15	8	3
Indiana ³	63	28	7	4
Massachusetts	69	15	10	5
Michigan	60	18	5	3
New Mexico	75	20	4	3
North Carolina	63	17	10	6
Ohio	69	19	9	5
Oklahoma	61	2	4	4
Pennsylvania	55	22	12	6
South Carolina	68	17	4	5
Texas	55	11	6	5
Virginia ⁴	24	7	26	10
Washington	65	11	8	7

¹ Includes math, English and reading.

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⁴ Thirty-two percent of students do not carry developmental referral data, and thus are excluded from this analysis.

Note: The first two cohorts for Rounds 1 through 4 and Cohort 2009 were included in the analysis (2002 and 2003 for Rounds 1 and 2; 2003 and 2004 for Round 3; 2004 and 2005 for Round 4; 2006 and 2007 for Cohort 2009). States with fewer than three colleges represented in the initiative were excluded (Kansas, Maryland, Vermont). This analysis includes data through the 2009 cohort, so 18 states are represented. Analysis based on student records with referral data.

Source: Achieving the Dream database, V201010.

math is lower, at 5 percent. A range exists among the states on this measure, but none exceed a 12 percent success rate.

“Overall, seven percent of students referred to developmental English successfully completed gateway English within two years of enrolling.”

Persistence from year to year is an early measure of potential student success. Figure 3 (see page 4) displays the percentage of students who persisted to each of the first three academic years. Colleges in Florida consistently led on persistence across all three years, while colleges in Oklahoma trailed the averages, and California colleges were below the average across the three years. Persistence rates within each year varied for colleges in other states.

The final outcome measures—the ultimate success goals—are the receipt of a credential, or transfer.

Transfer data are less reliable than degrees or certificates, because some Achieving the Dream colleges cannot report student transfer data immediately upon transfer. Further, a proportion of transfer students may re-enroll at the original college in later years, or transfer to another community college, suggesting students are not necessarily making progress, but are using several colleges to reach their goal.⁵ Understanding this caveat, transfer is included here as an outcome measure. Further, the Achieving the Dream transfer measure differs from that reported by the U.S. Department of Education, in that Achieving the Dream includes all full- and part-time students entering the college, instead of just first-time, full-time students as reported by the department.

Twenty-three percent of the students in Washington state Achieving the Dream colleges completed a credential within three years, compared with the average three-year graduation rate

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⁵ Clery, S. & Topper, A. “Returning Students,” *Data Notes: Keeping Informed about Achieving the Dream Data*. Vol. 5, No. 3. May/June 2010.

Figure 3. Persistence, completion and transfer rates for Achieving the Dream students, by state

	Percentage of students...					
	Persisted to spring, year 1	Persisted to fall, year 2	Persisted to any term, year 2	Persisted to any term, year 3	Completed credential by end of year 3	Transferred by end of year 3
Total	70	48	54	34	8	7
State						
Arkansas	70	44	49	32	13	4
California	61	45	50	27	4	†
Connecticut	64	44	49	32	5	14
Florida	74	53	60	40	15	16
Hawaii ¹	69	48	52	34	12	22
Illinois	68	52	58	24	14	9
Indiana ²	74	48	53	36	7	†
Massachusetts	73	50	54	35	11	9
Michigan	70	48	53	34	9	14
New Mexico	69	48	54	37	6	2
North Carolina	71	49	54	33	13	5
Ohio	70	47	54	36	8	1
Oklahoma	61	40	45	29	7	8
Pennsylvania	67	46	51	33	9	10
South Carolina	72	48	53	25	7	10
Texas	71	49	55	34	6	5
Virginia ³	62	45	51	35	8	7
Washington	78	47	53	27	23	2

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Source: Achieving the Dream database, V201010.

Data Notes is a bimonthly publication that examines data to illuminate the challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges and to chart their progress over time.

This issue of *Data Notes* was written by John B. Lee, President of JBL Associates, Inc., subcontractor to Achieving the Dream, and edited by Katie Loovis, Achieving the Dream's Director of Strategic Communications & Marketing. Newsletter production by Linda Marcetti, founder of Asterisk & Image, subcontractor to JBL Associates, Inc.

If you have questions regarding this issue, or if there is a topic you would like to see addressed in *Data Notes*, please contact Sue Clery at sclery@jblassoc.com.

Note: This issue of *Data Notes* uses the October 2010 version of the Achieving the Dream database. Institutions are grouped by the year they started work with the initiative.

across all the Achieving the Dream states of 8 percent. Thus, students starting their education in Washington are nearly three times more likely to complete successfully than are students in the average Achieving the Dream state. Comparatively, 4 percent of California Achieving the Dream students completed within three years. The difference in transfer rates varied from 22 percent in Hawaii⁶ to 1 percent in Ohio, with an average of 7 percent.

What Does this Mean?

If all Achieving the Dream colleges achieve the success rates of those residing in the states with the highest outcomes, the number of successful students could increase nearly threefold—for every 100 students starting at Achieving the Dream colleges, 45 instead of 16 would complete or transfer in three years. Further, it is reasonable to assume that the high-achieving colleges would continue to improve the rate at which their students succeed.

These results help identify what is possible; they do not explain what variables account

for the differences. The Achieving the Dream colleges are not a random sample, and do not necessarily represent state averages on these measures. The results do, however, suggest that state context is an important consideration in understanding what contributes to student success. The following questions should be considered in conjunction with analyzing state-specific data.

- How do state policy and financial support help or hinder the ability of community colleges to graduate students?
- Are broad state economic and demographic characteristics important in predicting the success of community college students?
- How does the mission of the community college relative to other sectors of higher education differ among states?

Achieving the Dream colleges can download the companion tables to this issue of *Data Notes*, featuring your college's data, at www.dreamweb submission.org. ■

⁶ Note: Hawaii Community Colleges count movement between island colleges as transfers; thus, this transfer rate may be overstated.