

FACT SHEET

The Achieving the Dream Initiative

ACHIEVING THE DREAMSM

COMMUNITY
COLLEGES
COUNT

National Partner Organizations

American Association of Community Colleges

www.aacc.nche.edu

College Spark Washington

www.collegespark.org

Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin

www.utexas.edu/academic/cclp

Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

ccrc.tc.columbia.edu

The Heinz Endowments

www.heinz.org

Houston Endowment Inc.

www.houstonendowment.org

Institute for Higher Education, University of Florida

www.coe.ufl.edu

Jobs for the Future

www.jff.org

KnowledgeWorks Foundation

www.kwfdn.org

Lumina Foundation for Education

www.luminafoundation.org

MDC

www.mdcinc.org

MDRC

www.mdr.org

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

www.nmefdn.org

Public Agenda

www.publicagenda.org

Achieving the Dream is a multiyear national initiative to help more community college students succeed (earn degrees, earn certificates or transfer to other institutions to continue their studies). The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that have faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color.

Achieving the Dream works on multiple fronts, including efforts at participating colleges; research into effective practices at community colleges; public policy work; and outreach to communities, businesses and the public. The initiative includes 14 national partner organizations, 58 community colleges in nine states and many dedicated individuals.

Using data to drive change

- Achieving the Dream focuses colleges and others on understanding and making better use of data to improve student outcomes.
- Through Achieving the Dream, participating colleges assess what is happening on their campuses in an open, straightforward and rigorous way — and then make lasting changes in their own practices and cultures.
- In the Achieving the Dream model, every decision made at a college — from setting educational strategies and allocating resources to scheduling classes and organizing student services — is grounded in data about student outcomes.
- Central to this work is being open and forthright about current performance; setting measurable goals that consider outcomes of all students; and making lasting, institutional change to achieve them. Because there are disparities in student outcomes at community colleges, this work includes disaggregating

student achievement data — breaking it down by race, age and other demographic characteristics — to better understand and begin to close performance gaps.

- While many colleges look at data at single points in time, Achieving the Dream colleges track cohorts of students over a period of time. The 2003 cohort, for example, includes students who started college in fall 2003. This approach makes it possible to accurately assess students' progress and outcomes and to identify gaps in achievement.
- The initiative also collects this data from the colleges (without any information that identifies individuals) and assembles it in the Achieving the Dream database — the only known database that allows researchers to assess the progress of a group of community college students. Achieving the Dream researchers are analyzing the progress of cohorts of all Achieving the Dream students.

The participating colleges

- The first 27 Achieving the Dream colleges started their work in 2004. They are located in five states — Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia — which were chosen because they have community colleges that enroll large numbers of low-income students and students of color. These states also have demonstrated interest in implementing state policies that promote access to and success in community colleges.
- In 2005, three community colleges in Connecticut and five in Ohio joined the initiative.
- In 2006, seven colleges in Pennsylvania, an additional 10 in Texas (including three open-admission, four-year institutions) and six in Washington state joined the initiative.

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- Each participating college has the support of a coach and a data facilitator. Achieving the Dream coaches, many of whom are former college presidents, have strong track records as organizational leaders. They help the colleges develop strategies, set priorities and implement institutional improvements. The data facilitators, generally trained as institutional researchers, help the colleges analyze data about their students and use data to develop strategies for improvement, monitor progress and evaluate results.

- Achieving the Dream colleges work in partnership with their communities — K–12 education leaders, businesses, social service and civic organizations, and other higher education institutions — as well as with the initiative’s national partner organizations, state policy organizations and other participating community colleges.

- Through a Lumina Foundation for Education grant to Scholarship America, 11 Achieving the Dream colleges are providing emergency aid for students. This assistance addresses needs that arise after other forms of financial aid already have been assigned.

Strategies for improvement

- In addition to evaluating their own student data — overall data as well as data broken down by various student groups — colleges gather input from their students, faculty, staff and communities. They then adopt strategies for improvement based on these findings.

- Many colleges, for example, are putting a sharper focus on developmental education. Close to half of community college students (and in some settings, significantly more) need developmental education. When these students successfully complete their developmental education programs, they have at least the same chances of completing a degree or transferring as their peers who began their studies in college-level courses.

- Other strategies include:

- Instructional techniques, such as collaborative learning, paired classes and learning communities.

- Student success courses, which teach critical skills, such as time management and study skills.
- Advising services to help students set and meet goals.
- Improving outcomes for gatekeeper courses, such as introductory college-level algebra and English.

Research, public policy and public support

- Achieving the Dream participants are conducting research related to improving student outcomes at community colleges.

- Achieving the Dream participants are building public support for community college access and success.

- Achieving the Dream participants are advocating public policies — such as policies to improve states’ capacities for collecting and analyzing student data and to make financial aid more accessible to part-time students — that may lead to higher student achievement.

- The organizations leading the state policy efforts are the Connecticut Community Colleges system office, Florida Department of Education, KnowledgeWorks Foundation (OH), New Mexico Association of Community Colleges, North Carolina Community College System, Texas Association of Community Colleges, Virginia Community College System, and Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.

National partners

- Achieving the Dream has 14 national partner organizations that contribute diverse strengths and expertise to helping community colleges better serve their students.

- Lumina Foundation for Education provided funding for the initiative’s startup, funds the 2004 colleges, and is providing ongoing financial support for other participating colleges as well as other elements of the initiative.

- Additional funding for the 2005 and 2006 colleges is provided by College Spark Washington, The Heinz Endowments (PA), Houston Endowment Inc. (10 Houston-area colleges), KnowledgeWorks Foundation (OH) and Nellie Mae Education Foundation (CT).

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www.achievingthedream.org

