



Achieving the Dream

Community Colleges Count

GOOD DATA.
STRONG COMMITMENT.
BETTER POLICY.
IMPROVED **OUTCOMES.**

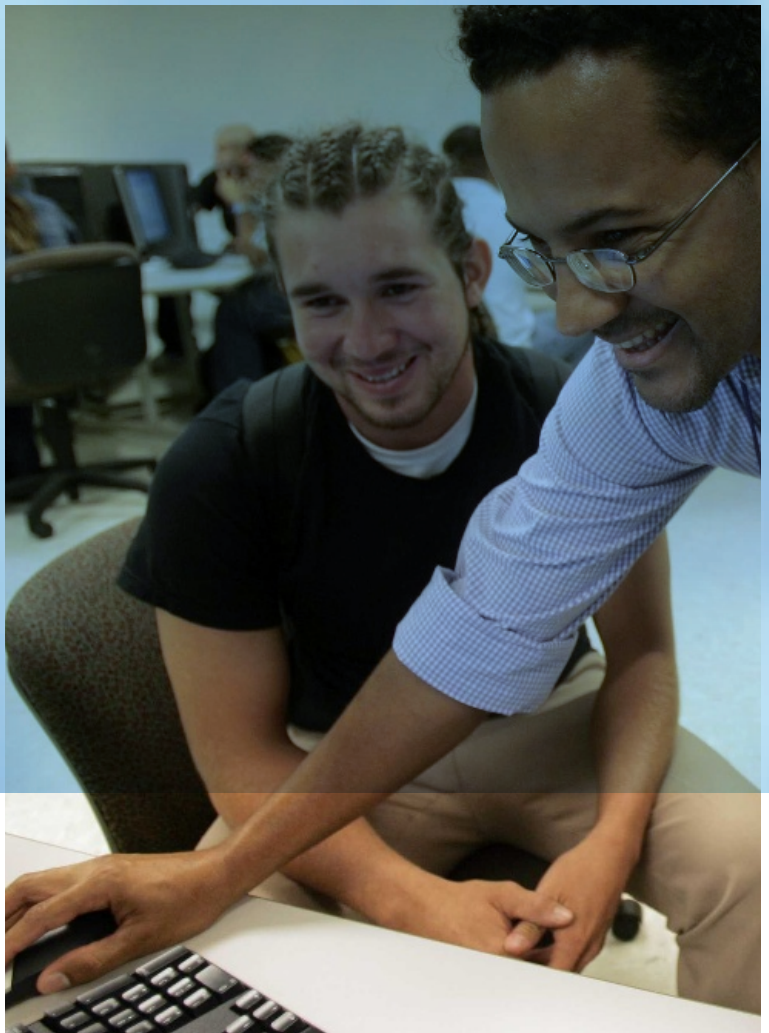


JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 STUDENT SUCCESS:
THE ACHIEVING THE DREAM AGENDA
- 2 THE STATE AGENDA FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
 - 4 A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO
STUDENT SUCCESS
 - 5 USING DATA TO IMPROVE
STUDENT OUTCOMES
 - 6 STREAMLINED STUDENT ASSESSMENT
AND PLACEMENT
 - 7 INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE STUDENT
PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION
 - 8 EASIER STUDENT TRANSITIONS
ACROSS EDUCATION SYSTEMS
- 9 RESULTS:
A MORE SUPPORTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT



STUDENT SUCCESS

THE ACHIEVING THE DREAM AGENDA

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE

When Achieving the Dream was launched in 2004, most states focused on college access as a central policy agenda for community colleges. Since then, this initiative has dramatically changed the policy environment in the 15 states that signed on. In each, community college student success, particularly for low-income and underprepared students, is now a central priority. As one of the first national initiatives focused on better completion rates for community college students, Achieving the Dream partners with states to:

- Improve the collection and use of student outcome data to guide policy and institutional change; and
- Help states implement a coherent policy set that removes obstacles to—and creates incentives for—improved student persistence and completion.

A key component of this effort is structured collaboration among institutional and state-level innovators and leaders. This interaction accelerates local innovation, spreads lessons across institutions efficiently, and drives the strategic use of state resources and capacity to support student success. As pressures on higher education for improved performance and accountability have increased, Achieving the Dream has been an important support for states seeking to demonstrate better results from public investments.

FRAMING THE OPPORTUNITY

As the lead policy partner for Achieving the Dream, Jobs for the Future works with state higher education agencies, community college system offices, community college associations, and other key stakeholders in each state. Together, the states and JFF have identified a *student success policy framework* that guides state planning and decision making. This framework emphasizes:

- 1** A clear public policy commitment to student success;
- 2** A strong performance measurement and data-driven accountability system;
- 3** Assessment and placement policies that accelerate the progress of underprepared students;
- 4** Incentives to promote student persistence and completion; and
- 5** Aligned expectations and transitions across educational sectors.

Using this framework, Achieving the Dream states created detailed action plans to move their priorities. States have assessed their progress annually against their own baseline data and against other states' progress on 57 distinct success policies that cluster under the framework's policy priorities.

Achieving the Dream states and their community colleges have embraced the success agenda. They have made changes in policy and practice that have the potential to dramatically improve persistence and completion for their students.

THE STATE AGENDA FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

ACHIEVING THE DREAM STATES

Fifteen states—and more than 80 colleges in these states—have participated in the demonstration phase of Achieving the Dream. States were funded for five years and joined the initiative in four cohorts:

2004 COHORT

Florida
New Mexico
North Carolina
Texas
Virginia

2005 COHORT

Connecticut
Ohio

2006 COHORT

Pennsylvania
Washington

2007 COHORT

Arkansas
Hawaii
Massachusetts
Michigan
Oklahoma
South Carolina

1

A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

In a crowded policy environment, a clear consensus on the importance of student success—and how to advance it—is critical if state leaders are to build strong alliances, influence the opinions of the public and policymakers, and effect durable changes in policy. This public commitment to improving college completion rates for all students should specify measurable goals for increasing the number of credentials earned and for the rates at which different groups—particularly low-income and underprepared students—earn degrees and certificates.

2

USE OF DATA TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

Without a high-quality, state-level system for collecting, analyzing, and using data to spur improved institutional performance, policymakers are handicapped. They lack adequate feedback on student performance and the effectiveness of new approaches that may work well for particular population groups. State data systems should be able to follow the progress of any student entering a community college and link essential student demographic and prior educational information to a student's performance. This is a prerequisite for a state accountability system capable of driving improved student outcomes.



3

STREAMLINED STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT

Carefully crafted placement and assessment policies are critical to improving outcomes for students who are not ready for college-level work when they enter community college. Appropriate policies can mean the difference between failure and success for many underprepared students. Sending students who can succeed in a “gatekeeper” course to remediation first might reduce their odds of completion. At the same time, allowing unprepared students to enroll in college-level courses is also problematic. State and institutional leaders must address this area of state policy carefully, backed by findings from quality research.

4

INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

Many community colleges are testing new ways to improve instruction, services, supports, and opportunities for learning for academically underprepared students. State policies that promote innovation and reward colleges can be a powerful spur to persistence and completion. State leaders should test and implement financial and non-financial incentives—for both institutions and individuals—that reward persistence and completion.

5

EASIER STUDENT TRANSITIONS ACROSS EDUCATION SYSTEMS

A key priority for community college systems—one that significantly affects student success—is to build and maintain strong relationships with other segments of the public education and skill development systems. State policies should promote better alignment of community colleges with the K-12 sector, four-year colleges and universities, and the pre-collegiate adult education system.



A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

To get attention in a crowded policy environment, state leaders have to promote and publicize a clear consensus on the importance of student success. This consensus should be built around explicit priorities, measurable goals for increasing the number of credentials earned by community college students and the rates at which different groups of students earn degrees and certificates. Achieving the Dream states have made postsecondary credential completion a top priority and taken concrete steps to embed the student success agenda in strategic plans.

THE RESULTS*

In 13 of the 14 states, the governor, legislature, or system head has declared increased community college student completion and success a state priority

9 states have set specific numerical goals for persistence and degree attainment

12 states have student performance measures in place or in process that are tied to strategic goals

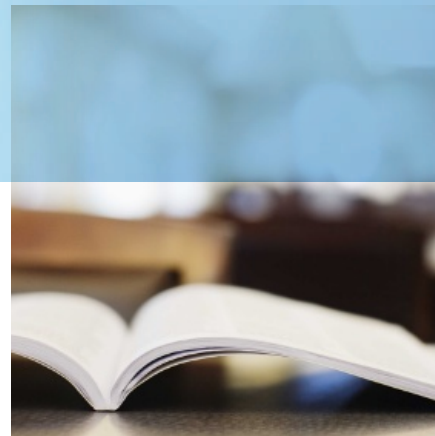
EXAMPLES OF STATE ACTION

VIRGINIA: Ambitious Goals to Improve Student Outcomes Before joining Achieving the Dream, the Virginia Community College System had adopted a five-year strategic plan and made progress on all of the goals except one: to rank in the top 10 percent of the nation's community college systems in student retention, graduation, and job placement rates. VCCS leadership leveraged participation in Achieving the Dream to focus squarely on student success in its next strategic plan. In 2009, the State Board for Community Colleges approved *Achieve 2015*, a five-year plan articulating a strong commitment to improving stu-

dent success. Over the next five years, the system is committed to boosting the number of students who graduate, transfer to four-year institutions, or complete a workforce credential by 50 percent. The plan also pledges to increase the success of students from underserved populations—minority, low-income, and first-generation college students—by 75 percent.

HAWAII: Strategic Plan Holds Colleges Accountable for Improved Outcomes As part of its 2008-15 Strategic Plan, the University of Hawaii Community Colleges has leveraged participation in Achieving the Dream to develop and incorporate specific

and measurable annual student progress and attainment outcomes for each of the system's seven colleges. Outcomes include the percentage of underprepared students who complete developmental classes and continue on to complete certificate or degree programs, as well as the percentage of Native Hawaiian students who complete certificate or degree programs or who transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution. This has prompted the system to help each campus update and complete its own strategic plan that addresses how to meet student outcome targets.



*The data on adoption of student success policies for Achieving the Dream states were derived from annual self-assessments completed by participating states. Only 14 of the 15 Achieving the Dream states are included; one state opted not to complete the annual assessment due to its highly decentralized governance structure.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

A strong state data system and infrastructure is needed to help colleges use student outcome data more effectively for institutional change—and to identify practices and approaches that have success with particular population groups. A longitudinal data system, linked to other educational and employment data, is a prerequisite for effective accountability that can drive improved student outcomes. Of the priority areas for policy innovation to support student success, Achieving the Dream states made the most dramatic progress on data systems and use.

THE RESULTS

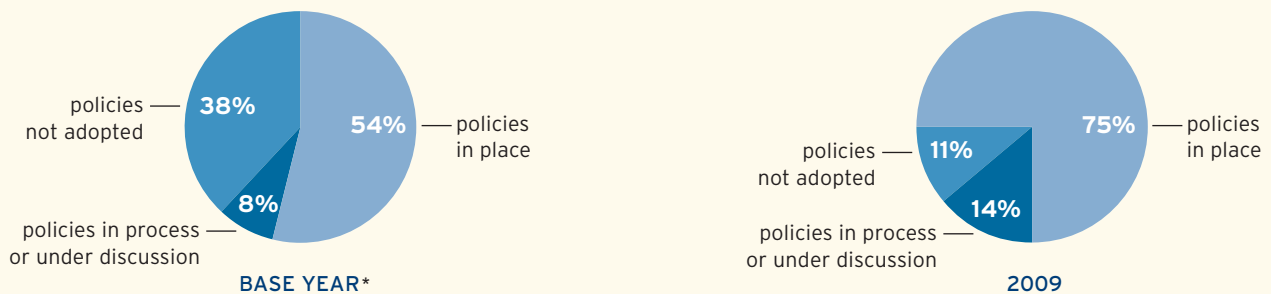
13 of the 14 states have centralized data systems to track the performance of community college students

11 state data systems include, or are in the process of including, student characteristics associated with the likelihood of student success

10 states track and report annually developmental education outcomes; 4 additional states are moving in this direction

8 states have the ability to share student-level data across the K-12 and higher education sectors; 3 additional states are in the process of upgrading their systems

DATA AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS POLICIES ACROSS ALL STATES



EXAMPLES OF STATE ACTION

CROSS-STATE DATA WORK GROUP: A Better Way to Measure, Collect, and Share Community

College Student Data Since 2006, Achieving the Dream teams from six states—Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia—have collaborated to develop, test, and pilot a better way of measuring community college performance. These states, which comprise the Cross-State Data Work Group, concluded that the federal approach to measuring community college outcomes is inadequate. The Group then developed a preferred set of measures, as explained in Jobs for the Future's policy brief, *Test Drive: Six States Pilot Better Ways to Measure and Compare Community College Performance*.

Achieving the Dream states recommend that the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey be changed to include part-time students, that the period of time for tracking students be extended to six years, and that successful transfers to four-year institutions be added as measures of success. Since *Test Drive* was published, six more states have joined the Cross-State Data Work Group, which has developed and tested a set of intermediate milestones that can help states and institutions track student progression toward successful completion.

In addition to developing a more powerful set of measures, several Achieving the Dream states have improved their technical data systems and created

new ways to share student success data with the public as a strategy for influencing state and local conversations about state policy and institutional practice. States have created new publications or enhanced system websites to include data that benchmark the performance of their community colleges. States have made the use of data in decision-making a priority by investing in improved technical and human data capacity. Some states have focused on creating data warehouses and integrating business intelligence tools to more effectively share data with their colleges. Others have emphasized improved coordination of longitudinal state data systems with K-12 and four-year institutions.

*The base year is the year each state joined the initiative. As explained on page 2, states were admitted in four annual cohorts, beginning in 2004.

STREAMLINED STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT

Carefully crafted placement and assessment policies, supported by quality research, are essential to improving outcomes for students who enter community college not ready for college-level work. Many Achieving the Dream states have taken steps to rationalize and improve their policy environments so that institutions can make better decisions about which students must take remedial coursework when they first enroll. States have revised policies to ensure consistent assessment practices. They have made progress on differentiating the provision of student supports and interventions based on assessment results, to maximize students' likelihood of succeeding in their chosen educational program.

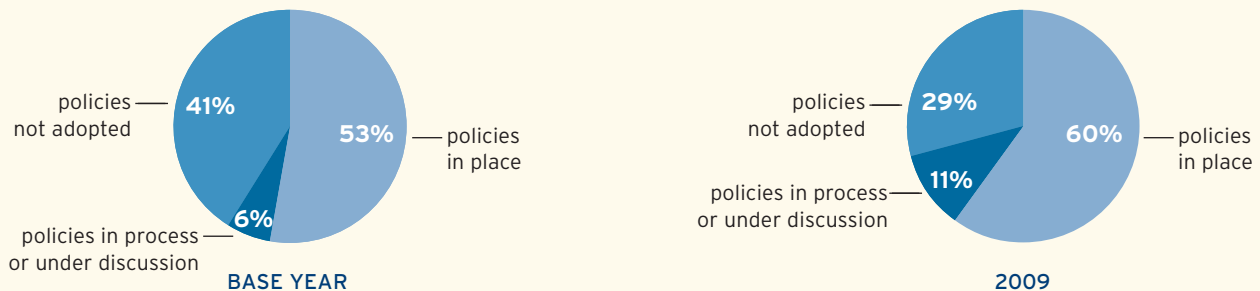
THE RESULTS

13 of the 14 states require new students to take an assessment for placement into developmental education

12 states have integrated, or are in the process of integrating, community college student placement data into their state-level data systems

9 states have implemented a common assessment test cut score for all institutions to use when determining student placement; 2 additional states are moving in this direction

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION POLICIES (INCLUDING ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT) ACROSS ALL STATES



EXAMPLES OF STATE ACTION

CONNECTICUT: A Statewide Approach to Assessing Students' Developmental Education Needs

Spurred by Achieving the Dream, Connecticut higher education officials worked to promote legislation that mandates the community college system to identify common assessment test cut scores. State officials saw the lack of comparable data and consistent placement practices across institutions as a primary challenge to a more comprehensive and coherent policy. Setting common placement cut scores required tackling the alignment of developmental and credit-bearing courses within the two-year sector. It also meant addressing the concerns

of Connecticut's two public four-year systems about the reliability of transferred credits. For the community college system, these actions had major fiscal and staffing implications, but have resulted in increased system and institutional capacity to support higher standards and improved outcomes.

NORTH CAROLINA: Common Policy on Placing Students into Developmental Education

Until 2007, North Carolina's 58 community colleges were largely autonomous in setting placement and assessment policies. That year, 14 years after a mandate from the state legislature to study the issue,

the North Carolina system leveraged Achieving the Dream participation to implement a uniform placement policy for assessing college-readiness proficiency across the state's institutions. North Carolina recognized that improving and tweaking this policy would need to be continuous: the system office incorporated a feedback loop to allow for future changes in response to institutional needs and implementation. The North Carolina Community College System used Achieving the Dream to distill and organize research about other states' policies and as a national sounding board for developing and launching the statewide assessment and placement policy.

INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

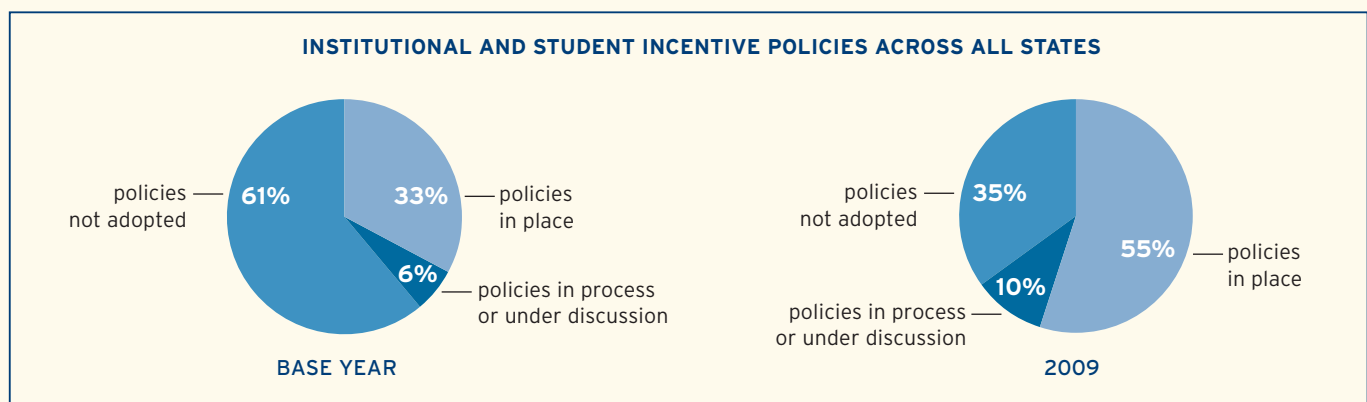
Institutional change is never easy and often quite slow. Yet institutions and individuals both respond to incentives. State policies can change the incentives for individuals (e.g., financial aid rules that reward persistence or completion) and for institutions (e.g., funding formulas that reward success rather than enrollment). A number of Achieving the Dream states are using the finance lever strategically to encourage institutional improvement—and interest from other states is growing, even in this difficult fiscal environment.

THE RESULTS

12 of the 14 states have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, system goals and benchmarks that provide clear incentives for institutions to focus on raising success rates

9 states have adopted, or are considering, performance funding tied to progression and/or completion

6 states have adopted financial aid policies that incent progression and completion



EXAMPLES OF STATE ACTION

WASHINGTON AND OHIO: New Performance Funding Models to Promote Progression and Completion Washington State secured board support and legislative funding for the Student Achievement Initiative, an ambitious statewide performance funding system that rewards two-year colleges for helping students reach key intermediate outcomes associated with a greater likelihood of earning a credential. The state identified and refined these intermediate measures with research assistance from the Community College Research Center. The state system piloted the Initiative in 2007 and began full implementation in 2008.

Ohio learned about the Student Achievement Initiative through Achieving the Dream peer learning opportunities and sought to integrate

elements of Washington's approach into their own performance funding efforts. In 2009, the Ohio General Assembly approved a new community college funding formula that rewards institutions for achieving key student success factors. The Ohio Board of Regents and Ohio Association of Community Colleges developed "student success" points that will, when finalized, allocate 20 percent of public funding for community colleges based on progression and completion by 2015.

TEXAS: State Funding to Promote Innovation Texas's 2006 education reform law required the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop incentives for institutions that implement innovative, research-based initiatives in developmental education. Acknowledging the limited knowledge on effective strategies, the state set

aside roughly \$3 million to support a research and innovation agenda to redesign developmental education, improve performance outcomes, and strengthen effective practices. The Coordinating Board made awards to 13 institutions, including the pairing of developmental education with college-credit and cost-effective, technology-rich courses (with the National Center for Academic Transformation). The state also funded high school and summer bridge programs to reduce the need for developmental education in college. Texas is now assessing the impact of these programs. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board received \$5 million from the legislature for 2009-2011 to fund performance incentives that encourage institutions to improve developmental education outcomes.

EASIER STUDENT TRANSITIONS ACROSS EDUCATION SYSTEMS

A huge barrier to student success is the misalignment of community colleges with other segments of the public education and skill development system (i.e., the K-12 sector, four-year colleges and universities, and the pre-collegiate adult education system). Achieving the Dream states undertook significant policy actions to help students enter college better prepared and transfer more easily and efficiently to four-year schools with all the credits they earned.

THE RESULTS

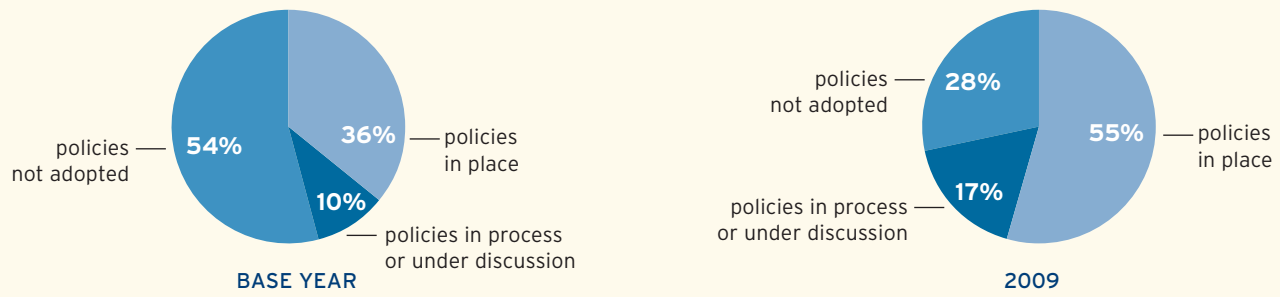
13 states provide, or are in the process of creating, feedback reports to high schools and/or districts about the performance of their graduates

11 states report transfer data publicly and share it with colleges

9 states have incentives for students or institutions to encourage transfer; 2 states are moving in this direction

8 states have a college readiness assessment that is administered in the eleventh or twelfth grade; 3 additional states are working on a similar policy

STUDENT ALIGNMENT AND TRANSITION POLICIES ACROSS ALL STATES



EXAMPLES OF STATE ACTION

FLORIDA: Policies to Reduce the Need for Remediation Florida has used its participation in Achieving the Dream to implement policy reforms aimed at reducing the need for remediation. The state's Department of Education advocated for and secured legislation that provides for early testing of the college readiness of high school students. The goals are to simultaneously improve student preparation and reduce the developmental education burden on community colleges.

High school juniors who express an interest in pursuing postsecondary education take Florida's College

Placement Test, which colleges use to assess student readiness in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students who demonstrate college-level skills are guaranteed a bypass of developmental education for two years after graduation. Students whose assessments indicate a need for extra preparation can enroll in developmental coursework while in high school. The curriculum for these courses has been developed collaboratively by community college and high school faculty.

MASSACHUSETTS: Streamlined Transfer and Articulation Massachusetts identified the facilitation of student transfer as a critical element

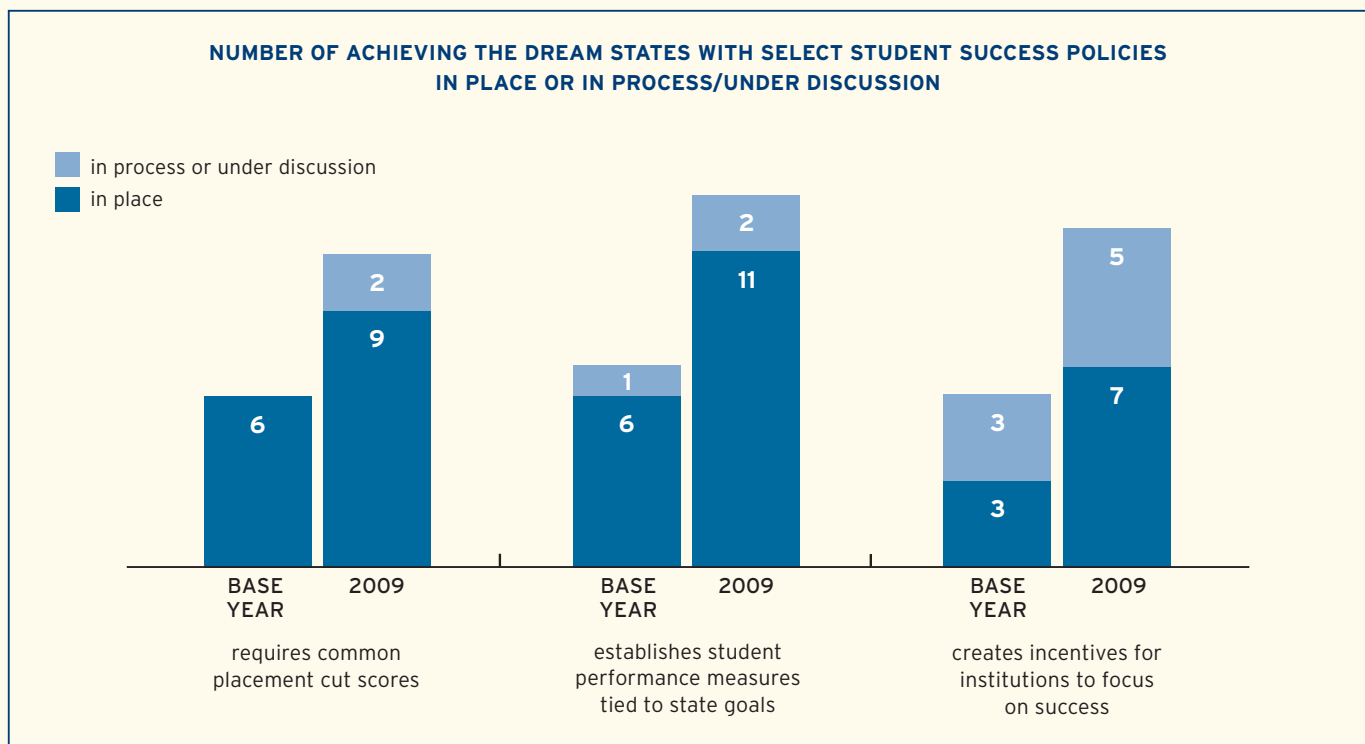
in improving retention and graduation rates statewide. The Department of Higher Education made transfer policy a priority and used the state's participation in Achieving the Dream to inform and gain traction for its first statewide transfer agreement, which was implemented in 2009. MassTransfer guarantees that community college students who meet a GPA threshold can gain admission to a four-year institution and receive credit transfers and financial aid. The department also launched the MassTransfer Web site, a comprehensive tool to help students and their families, faculty, and advisors navigate the transfer process.

RESULTS A MORE SUPPORTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The Achieving the Dream policy framework, developed jointly by the participating states, identified 57 distinct policies that, if adopted, would create a more conducive environment for improved student success—and accelerate institutional progress toward that end. These specific policies drill down in each of the framework’s broad priority areas. Each year, Achieving the Dream states complete a self-assessment of their progress in adopting the agreed-upon policy set. States report if the policies are in place, in process or under discussion, or have not been adopted.

States have made significant policy progress since signing on to the initiative between 2004 and 2007 (see the list of states on page 2). When states joined Achieving the Dream, they had implemented or were actively considering only about 50 percent of the initiative-identified student success policies. By 2009, however, states had made great strides toward implementing the initiative’s framework and policy set: they had implemented or were actively considering over 75 percent of the Achieving the Dream success policies. Given that eight states joined the initiative in 2006 and 2007, that percentage is likely to climb by the time all states complete their five-year commitment.

States have made the greatest progress in strengthening their data systems for use in driving improvement (i.e., creating robust data warehouses, increased capacity for collecting and using data, and performance measures that align with improvement goals). A second area of significant policy change has been developmental education assessment and placement policies (including more consistent statewide policies, such as common assessments and placement cut scores and consistent test-taking policies).



Adoption of new policies does not guarantee institutional change—nor improved student outcomes. In the end, improved outcomes depend on what happens day-to-day in institutions and between students, faculty, and staff. However, Achieving the Dream has made a determined effort to strengthen collaboration among committed states and their colleges around a coherent change strategy that drives toward improvement. This is no small shift for states and institutions. But it is the key to lasting and deep transformation. As that kind of close collaboration between states and institutions becomes more routine and mutually beneficial, it is more likely that large numbers of students will move faster and more successfully into and through college programs that have economic value.

For an account of how one state system—Virginia Community College System—took advantage of Achieving the Dream support and resources to drive a student success agenda, visit www.jff.org/publications.



Achieving the Dream

Community Colleges Count

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a national initiative to help more community college students succeed, particularly students of color and low-income students. The initiative works on multiple fronts—including efforts on campuses and in research, public engagement, and public policy—and emphasizes the use of data to drive change. Achieving the Dream was launched in 2004, with funding provided by Lumina Foundation for Education. Seven national partner organizations work with Lumina to guide the initiative and provide technical and other support to the colleges and states.

www.achievingthedream.org



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In nearly 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers. JFF coordinates the effort to improve policies in the states that are participating in Achieving the Dream.

www.jff.org

www.twitter.com/jfftweets

88 Broad Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02110

85 Prescott Street, Suite 405, Worcester, MA 01605

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 5300, Washington, DC 20006