Achieving the Dream
Community Colleges Count

MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
An Initiative of the Michigan Community College Association

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AUTONOMY AND INNOVATION

SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN A DECENTRALIZED STATE

BY TOM HILLIARD

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Achieving the Dream

Community Colleges Count

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The **Michigan Center for Student Success**, which operates under the umbrella of the Michigan Community College Association and is funded by The Kresge Foundation, provides state-level support to Michigan's 28 community colleges by serving as a hub connecting leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff in their emerging and ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes by emphasizing linkages between practice, research, and policy.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Hilliard is a New York-based consultant on higher education and other pathways to developing America's human capital potential. Mr. Hilliard has written more than two dozen studies on postsecondary education, adult literacy, youth development, workforce development, early care and education, social services, health care policy and other subjects, as well as articles and op-eds in publications ranging from *The Village Voice* to *Newsday* to *Canoe & Paddle*. He also serves as Senior Fellow at the Center for an Urban Future.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the student success movement has come of age at America's community colleges, much effort has gone into state-level reforms coupled with college-level efforts, on the theory that relying on individual institutions alone to bring change at scale across states and the nation will take too long and cost too much. But if centralized authority is essential, the student success agenda is in peril. Most states exercise little direct control over their community colleges, instead delegating authority to local and county government. That is why Michigan—the quintessential "non-system" state—is of such great interest. Its 28 community colleges enjoy complete administrative independence, lacking even a state higher education executive officer to whom reports would be formally submitted.

Yet Michigan is far from a straggler in the student success movement. Many of its community colleges are implementing aggressive and creative strategies to strengthen student success at their institutions. Indeed, an outside observer would find few differences in the scale and effectiveness of student success innovation in Michigan and a typical state with centralized authority. Governance structures matter, but they do not destine some states to succeed and others to fall short.

Perhaps the most important driver of Michigan's commitment to student success has been Achieving the Dream, a national nonprofit leading the nation's most comprehensive nongovernmental reform network for student success in higher education history. This is the story of how seven Michigan colleges that joined Achieving the Dream in its early years sought to realize the promise of student success in their classrooms, and how their hard-won lessons influenced peers and gelled into strategic statewide actions with support from the Michigan Community College Association.

PUTTING STUDENT SUCCESS INTO PRACTICE

Each first-round Michigan college implemented three to five student success interventions under the auspices of Achieving the Dream. Though no particular approach or single intervention was favored consistently by all seven institutions, key groupings of interventions included reform of developmental education; support for the first-year experience, such as student success courses, learning communities, and supplemental instruction; and capacity building to support change, such as professional development of faculty and institutional research and effectiveness.

In focus groups and interviews with administrators and faculty, three key themes echoed across all of the first-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan:

- **The centrality of building a culture of evidence:** The planning stage for an Achieving the Dream College begins with a deep dive into its outcomes data, so each college can tailor interventions to the needs of its particular populations.
- **The importance of faculty participation:** First-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan solicited faculty input, gave faculty leadership roles in crafting the initiatives, and addressed concerns about the potential for punitive use of data and concessions that might affect collective bargaining.
- **The importance of learning and refining as you go:** Respondents consistently noted that strengthening student success requires an institutional commitment to a process of learning from reform efforts and refining interventions over time.

AUTONOMY AND INNOVATION

The lack of a system leader to drive common interventions has not prevented the colleges from forging ahead and making gains. The respondents see value in their autonomy—not only because they can adapt interventions to their institutional context and regional labor market needs, but because they can count on a degree of buy-in that would take much longer to develop were interventions imposed from above.

However, the interviews revealed shortcomings of the non-system approach. Michigan has lacked mechanisms for student success functions that require collaboration or collective action, such as spreading innovation through peer learning, building consensus around the most effective interventions, consistently collecting and reporting outcomes data, and holding institutions accountable for student success outcomes.

Participation in Achieving the Dream compensated for these shortcomings by providing an impetus and structure for campus-specific and cross-college experimentation and learning. Community college leaders, private funders, and state policymakers are now collaborating on long-term strategies to build capacity for collective action at the state level. While other promising opportunities appear to be on the horizon, two stand out:

- **The establishment of the Michigan Center for Student Success:** With several grant-funded, time-limited initiatives underway, the Michigan Community College Association wanted to play a more proactive, strategic role in helping colleges weave their initiatives into a cohesive whole, sustaining gains and spreading the lessons learned to other institutions. The solution was to establish an organization, the Michigan Center for Student Success, that would support colleges by connecting practice, research, and policy development around student success.
- **The development of the Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Data System:** Michigan is using federal funding to extend its PK-12 database to include the public higher education sector. The fully operational system will enable higher education institutions to track their own performance on key indicators relative to their peers, as well as the movement of high school graduates and GED attainers into college. These data hold the potential to drive student success to the top of the priority list across the state.

THE FUTURE OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN MICHIGAN

Respondents were uniformly confident that they will maintain momentum after concluding their formal participation in the five-year demonstration phase of Achieving the Dream. A number of steps could support their efforts:

- **Utilize the Michigan Center for Student Success to build capacity for collaborative action:** the MCSS should play a pivotal role in supporting peer learning, delivering professional development, and shaping data use.
- **Support K-12 partnerships:** support partnering efforts and make a greater investment in proven college readiness models.
- **Review pathways to degree completion framework:** carry out a systematic review of opportunities to better support student success, such as improved advising.
- **Create clear articulation and transfer policy:** improve articulation of credits, structure a transfer core and support reverse transfer.
- **Connect P-20 databases:** encourage system linkages and better data use.
- **Inform and engage key stakeholders:** push against natural inward-facing tendencies.

Seven very different community colleges integrated Achieving the Dream principles into their institutional cultures, and the lessons learned are now spreading to other colleges. Michigan's experience demonstrates that non-system states can build a culture of student success by leveraging the advantages of autonomy, while at the same time acknowledging its disadvantages and developing concrete strategies to overcome them.

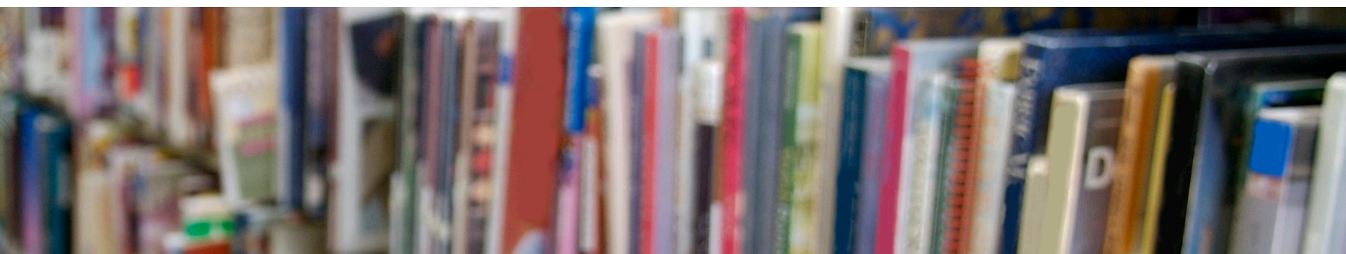
INTRODUCTION

AS THE STUDENT SUCCESS MOVEMENT HAS COME OF AGE AT AMERICA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES, MUCH EFFORT HAS GONE INTO STATE-LEVEL REFORMS COUPLED WITH COLLEGE-LEVEL EFFORTS, ON THE THEORY THAT RELYING ON INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS ALONE TO BRING CHANGE AT SCALE ACROSS STATES AND THE NATION WILL TAKE TOO LONG AND COST TOO MUCH. AS A RESULT, CERTAIN STATES HAVE ATTAINED A HIGH PROFILE FOR THEIR IMPRESSIVE, SYSTEM-WIDE REFORMS AIMED AT IMPROVING COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES.

Frequently, states build community college systems with centralized lines of administrative and financial authority: the Virginia Community College System, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and several others. A more centralized governance structure might seem like an obvious precondition for transformation. How else could all or most community colleges in a state bring about disruptive change?

If centralized authority really were essential, the student success agenda would be in peril. Few states exercise much direct control over their community colleges, emphasizing the "community" role of these colleges by delegating authority to local and county government. While governance structures vary from state to state, the lack of clear levers to bring about widespread change might seem to pose an immense obstacle.

That is why Michigan—the quintessential "non-system" state—is of such great interest. Its 28 community colleges enjoy complete administrative independence, lacking even a state higher education executive officer to whom reports would be formally submitted. "Historically, there has been no state involvement in community colleges," said Michael Hansen, president of the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA). "There's no law that governs community colleges. They can hire and fire; their boards are locally elected. They basically can do almost anything, and there is little, if any, state regulatory involvement at all."



Yet Michigan is far from a straggler in the student success movement. Many of the Great Lakes State's community colleges are forging ahead, implementing aggressive and creative strategies to strengthen student success at their institutions. The decentralized nature of Michigan's public higher education community has not kept its institutions from supporting and engaging in statewide approaches to improving student outcomes. Indeed, an outside observer would find few differences in the scale and effectiveness of student success innovation in Michigan and a typical state with centralized authority. Governance structures matter, but they do not destine some states to succeed and others to fall short.

Perhaps the most important driver of Michigan's commitment to student success has been Achieving the Dream, a national nonprofit leading the nation's most comprehensive non-governmental reform network for student success in higher education history. Today 17 out of Michigan's 28 community colleges participate in Achieving the Dream's National Reform Network. Only Texas has a higher level of participation.

Interested in learning more about the lessons stemming from Michigan's unique involvement in Achieving the Dream, Jobs for the Future—the national nonprofit that leads the state policy and capacity building efforts for Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, and Completion by Design—set out to tell the story of how the first seven Michigan colleges to join Achieving the Dream, along with the MCCA, leveraged Achieving the Dream, and how experiences at one college also led to collective actions. Six of these colleges—Bay de Noc, Lake Michigan, Henry Ford, Jackson, North Central, and Wayne County—joined Achieving the Dream in 2007, and the five-year grants from the Kellogg Foundation that funded their participation expired in June 2012; the seventh, Macomb, joined in 2009 (*see Table 1 for information on the seven colleges*). All seven have participated in Achieving the Dream long enough to pass from planning into implementation. While we did not seek to evaluate the results of the completion efforts at the seven institutions, we wanted to understand their individual experiences on the front lines of the student success movement. (In 2010, another 10 Michigan colleges joined the initiative, with two-year grants, later extended to three years.)

TABLE 1.
ENROLLMENT AT MICHIGAN'S FIRST-ROUND ACHIEVING THE DREAM COMMUNITY COLLEGES, 2010-11

INSTITUTION	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	% WOMEN	% FIRST-TIME COLLEGE GOERS	% MINORITY	% PART-TIME
Bay de Noc	2,742	61%	16%	36%	46%
Henry Ford	17,650	58%	22%	61%	61%
Jackson	6,988	61%	20%	22%	55%
Lake Michigan	4,654	61%	17%	34%	66%
Macomb	23,969	52%	6%	27%	65%
North Central	2,959	64%	21%	21%	65%
Wayne County	20,440	68%	18%	82%	79%

Source: Michigan Community College NETwork

Further, we wanted to understand the implications of gains at individual institutions for collective state-level action. It is not possible for philanthropies to underwrite student success initiatives at every community college in a large state. To achieve success at the state level, innovative colleges must influence their peers: either directly, by modeling best practices and supporting peer-to-peer learning; or indirectly, by facilitating a statewide environment conducive to innovation. Michigan took a unique approach: It established the Michigan Center for Student Success to align and maximize the various student success initiatives underway across the state.

The structure of this report reflects the progression of student success innovation in Michigan. The first section recaps the genesis of Achieving the Dream in Michigan. Next, we distill the experience of Michigan's first-round Achieving the Dream Colleges into a few key themes and discuss the key interventions at each institution. We then assess strategies underway to build student success momentum at the state level, including the founding of the Center for Student Success. Finally, we propose a few steps that might support the remarkable efforts being made by community college leaders in Michigan.

WHAT IS STUDENT SUCCESS?

Bill Law, president of St. Petersburg College, has defined student success as "finishing what you started." In a similar vein, Peter Ewell and Jane Wellman, two of the most respected national experts on postsecondary education, have described student success "in its simplest form as getting students into and through college to a degree or certificate" (Ewell & Wellman 2007).[1] But Ewell and Wellman also argue that this seemingly simple term has many dimensions, "ranging from student flow across the entire educational pipeline . . . to the quality and content of learning and skills achieved as a result of college, to positive educational experiences."

In this report, student success refers primarily to credential completion but also to intermediate markers along the way that demonstrate student progress toward completion. These markers typically include completing any required developmental education courses, semester-to-semester retention, persistence over time, passing gateway courses, and maintaining an acceptable GPA, although individual institutions differ on the set of outcomes they view as important.

GETTING TO STUDENT SUCCESS IN MICHIGAN

A number of factors came together to accelerate the student success agenda in Michigan. Perhaps the most critical was the deteriorating industrial economy, which eliminated thousands of stable jobs.

Gail Mee, president of Henry Ford Community College, recalls the flood of dislocated workers and anxious high school graduates who entered her college as yet another round of factory closings began in the late 1990s, especially in the automobile industry:

> Given the dramatic downturn in the economy in Michigan, we began to see large numbers of students who might not have otherwise even considered college because they were out of work, or were graduating from high school. In past years, one could have gone to work for one of the Big Three on the line, right out of high school, but those jobs weren't available anymore and people were coming to us. A lot of those students never expected to attend college.

Then-Governor Jennifer Granholm responded by establishing a commission to explore opportunities to expand postsecondary access and success. The commission, chaired by Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, reported in December 2004 that the economic trends facing Michigan were inexorable. "The work involved in mass-producing cars and other products provided decent wages to workers who had relatively little formal education. Today that world is gone. In its place is an economy that demands significant educational achievement in all but the lowest-paying sector" (Cherry Commission 2004).

The Cherry Commission proposed that Michigan double the number of college graduates by the year 2020, an ambitious goal that foreshadowed national goals that would be set by, among others, Lumina Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and President Barack Obama. The public resources to transform this goal into reality seemed lacking at the time, but private philanthropies based in Michigan were interested in getting involved. The Governor's Office asked Jim Jacobs, then-associate director of the Community College Research Center and an advisor to the Cherry Commission, to draft a grant application to Achieving the Dream. With support from the Kellogg and Kresge Foundations, Achieving the Dream was able to support the participation of seven Michigan community colleges. (Jacobs is now president of Macomb Community College, one of the case study institutions discussed in this report.)

In other states, Achieving the Dream leaders selected colleges with the largest numbers of low-income and minority students. In Michigan, that would have meant investing most of the initiative resources in the greater Detroit area. But Jacobs had a different idea. In a decentralized state, the only way to bring about broad-based change was for every region to have a stake in student success. Jacobs divided the state in four and reached out to representative colleges in each quadrant. "We would never have been invited into Achieving the Dream if Jim had not suggested we apply," said Cameron Brunet-Koch, president of North Central Michigan College, a small community college located at the northern end of Lake Michigan.

Several years have passed since Michigan's community colleges began their participation in Achieving the Dream and in the key concepts associated with that reform network: student success as an institutional mission; building a culture of evidence; and developing interventions to bring meaningful opportunities to community college students. We reached out to each of the seven first-round Michigan colleges to find out their experiences with Achieving the Dream, how they expect to sustain their momentum beyond grants from the initiative, and how the innovations they have implemented can be scaled up and spread beyond their institutional walls.

PUTTING STUDENT SUCCESS INTO PRACTICE

Focus groups and interviews with administrators and faculty of first-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan drive the storyline of this report. The respondents were universally positive about their experience in Achieving the Dream, and in some cases viewed it as transformative.

"Achieving the Dream was a device that helped us focus," said Dan Phelan, president of Jackson Community College in southern Michigan. "We were working on quality metrics, but it allowed us to have a universal language and get real about the data, and discover and talk with colleagues."

Some colleges, such as Jackson, were already working on strategies to improve student success. Others started from a more basic stage. After joining Achieving the Dream, said Brunet-Koch, "we hired an institutional researcher. We didn't have a research office before that."

Respondents also felt that their participation in Achieving the Dream inspired a new sense of momentum. "It galvanized the entire college and allowed us to really focus intensely on the kinds of things we could do for students who were enrolled in our developmental education programs," said Brian Singleton, district vice chancellor of student services at Wayne County Community College District. "Because we were under time constraints and we had a coach and a data person, it gave us impetus to move faster."

Three key themes echoed across the first-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan:

- The centrality of building a culture of evidence;
- The importance of faculty participation; and
- The importance of learning and refining as you go.

THE CULTURE OF EVIDENCE

The planning stage for an Achieving the Dream College begins with a deep dive into its outcomes data. Graduation rates are important but not the most useful indicator, because so many different factors go into determining whether students graduate, stay on, or leave, especially at community colleges. Achieving the Dream Colleges analyze the determinants as well as the facts of success, such as performance on placement tests, completion of developmental courses, persistence after the first semester and first year, and grade point average. Next, they break out overall performance by subgroups. In this way, they can tailor interventions to the needs of particular populations, such as low-income, minority, and first-generation students.

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Following the evidence led in surprisingly painful directions. "For us to get better, we had to embrace the horror of the data and teach others how to deal with bad news," recalled Phelan. "That was the first major step." Phelan and his Achieving the Dream Core Team found that certain practices intended to help marginal students were actually hurting them. For example, the data showed that 75 percent of students who started classes late failed those classes. Jackson's advisors often interceded to help late enrollers get in. Phelan directed counselors to put an end to late enrollments.

The evidence gathered through Achieving the Dream showed faculty the pass rates for their classes, sometimes with eye-opening results. At Bay de Noc College, the instructor of a gateway psychology course learned that the pass rate for his class was 55 percent. "He changed the way he was teaching," said Bay's president, Laura Coleman. The instructor adopted several

instructional interventions introduced by Achieving the Dream peer learning forums. "He now has a 77 percent pass rate, simply by changing his testing and the way he delivered the information."

Some respondents believe that instituting what many in higher education call "a culture of evidence" has changed the nature of decision making at their schools. At Henry Ford Community College, vice president for arts and sciences Reginald Gerlica said that people now routinely support their requests for staff or resources with three years of data. "That was never done before," said Gerlica. "I didn't expect it to so dramatically change operations of the college, but it did."

An underlying message of the interviews is that college leaders value Achieving the Dream for driving them to change the way they make decisions and set priorities. An outside observer looking at outcomes may not see a decisive shift, but internal actors see their institution changing. Jenny Schanker, formerly the Chair of Transitional Studies at Lake Michigan College and now associate director of the Michigan Center for Student Success, noted that conversations about college priorities provide important information:

> The conversations swung from asking questions like "How can we get more students to enroll?" or "How is our penetration in the high school market?" to "What's their experience when they enroll?" or "How are we touching them at various points of their progression through the college?" You want the college to begin to care more about keeping the students they have and what kinds of experiences those students have than about just getting them in the door.

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

First-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan made faculty engagement a top priority. In general, Core Teams solicited faculty input, gave faculty leadership roles in crafting the initiatives, and addressed concerns about the potential for punitive use of data and concessions that might affect collective bargaining.[2] For the most part, these colleges met with success, but not without improvisation and the occasional setback.

The experience of Macomb Community College is instructive. President Jim Jacobs, who helped launch Achieving the Dream in Michigan, understood how vital the faculty role could be. "Up to now, most of the efforts of getting faculty together were basically top down, done by presidents or deans, and they weren't as entrenched in the base."

Yet Achieving the Dream also took some time to hit its stride at Macomb. The original committee included only one faculty member, which inadvertently sent the wrong message to other faculty. According to James Sawyer, Macomb's provost, the initial faculty response was rocky. "As we were having the broader conversation with faculty introducing [Achieving the Dream], it was clear that people weren't buying the concept. They were thinking in terms of, here's just another program from the administration."

Macomb's Core Team wisely pulled back and revamped their approach. While Achieving the Dream teams typically devote a year to planning before beginning implementation, Macomb insisted on a second planning year, and used the time to add more faculty to the Core Team. By balancing the representation of administration and faculty, they changed the tenor of the student success discussion. "We had to overcome the perception of 'administrative program du jour,'" said Sawyer. "Once we were able to get faculty into the conversation, we did that."

The most effective interventions are typically planned and carried out by faculty, and ordering them to implement an intervention yields predictably poor results. The Core Teams had to make their case to faculty members and address their concerns. At Lake Michigan College, many of those concerns sprang from a fear of adverse consequences. "There was that initial fear factor: if we make a change and it doesn't work like we expected, is it going to be punitive? What are the repercussions?" recalled Paige Eagan, a chemistry professor. "Through time some trust has been built. There aren't repercussions for your career. We really have to create a culture of trust."

The Core Team at Jackson Community College took an important step forward by reaching out to adjunct instructors. "We have a huge number of adjuncts, four times the number of tenure-track teachers, and getting buy-in from them is critical," reported Steven Tuckey, a professor of mathematics at Jackson. "Last summer we ran a workshop for all math faculty, but mainly for adjuncts to come and hear all the changes coming down the pike, give them a chance to communicate and add to the conversation." The response was tremendous, and the Core Team members now have even stronger connections to instructors teaching relevant courses at its campus locations.

LEARNING AND REFINING AS YOU GO

Respondents at the seven colleges consistently noted that strengthening student success at their institutions would take time. They acknowledged the importance of bringing successful interventions to scale and increasing overall graduation rates. However, achieving student success requires building a culture of evidence, and a key aspect of that culture is an institutional commitment to a process of learning from reform efforts and refining interventions over time. Such a process brings real and lasting change—though not always quickly.

Our respondents had a message for other colleges seeking to make reforms: be strategic in your evaluation and planning stages, test your interventions before you scale them up, and engage faculty, administrators, and students campus-wide. Beyond this, the experiences of Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan suggest a number of key lessons. As noted earlier, Macomb's Core Team began moving forward without adequate faculty engagement, heard the voices of dissent, and wisely decided to be more inclusive in their work. Macomb president Jacobs argued:

> You cannot drive change by telling people what they have to do; they have to understand it. [Our provost] may say that we're going to do 50 sections [of College Success]. But the faculty don't understand what's going on, so you will actually drive that change in the other direction. They're feeling like I'm doing this because someone told me, rather than doing this because I understand it and buy into it.

Other Michigan Core Team leaders and college presidents emphasized the need for time and space to make mistakes, learn from them, and correct course, as Macomb and other colleges did.

These conversations take on particular significance in light of a January 2011 interim evaluation of Achieving the Dream, *Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges* (Rutschow 2011). The interim evaluation identified areas for improvement, including: improving the engagement of full-time and adjunct faculty; taking interventions to scale; and bolstering institutional research and informational technology capacity. Achieving the Dream has recognized the importance of these lessons learned, while simultaneously applauding the institutions for their ongoing commitment to the daunting challenge of improving student outcomes and acknowledging that significant change takes time.[3] Representatives of the Michigan Center for Student Success noted that the findings of *Turning the Tide* have helped them shape their priorities around how to support the Achieving the Dream Colleges, such as focusing on faculty engagement and sharing best practices about reform and scale across the colleges.

Finally, the leaders of the case study colleges expressed frustration over declining net state and local funding, a trend that undermines action to advance student success and ensure that students complete their education. For example, several college leaders suggested that they would like to hire more academic advisors, who can be decisive in helping students overcome obstacles, make use of campus resources, and adopt programs of study. But the absence of funding to support staffing for advisors makes such an investment difficult.

Some obstacles can best be addressed from inside the institution, such as the logistical complexity of scaling up a student success initiative. Respondents maintained a powerful focus on reform within their organizational cultures and institutional budgets. Yet statewide strategies can support the efforts of institutional leaders—for example, building a coalition to win new public funding for academic advisors or developing comparative data that demonstrate the value of focusing on student success. Changes in policy can reinforce the work of a Core Team and strengthen the incentive structure for change.

INTERVENTIONS IN ACHIEVING THE DREAM FIRST-ROUND COLLEGES IN MICHIGAN

The Achieving the Dream methodology begins with a rigorous process of collecting and analyzing data, after which the Core Team proposes interventions responding directly to their institution's perceived needs. As a result, interventions can vary greatly from one institution to the next. Respondents valued the freedom to address institution-specific needs they identified in the data analysis stage.

Each first-round Michigan college implemented three to five student success interventions under the auspices of Achieving the Dream.[4] Though no particular approach or single intervention was favored consistently by all seven institutions, key groupings of interventions include:

> **Developmental education:** All seven colleges undertook interventions related to developmental education, suggesting that this area was viewed universally as critical to student success.

> **First-year experience:** Most interventions pursued by the first-round colleges in Michigan clustered around the transition to postsecondary enrollment. Outside of developmental education, the colleges tended to focus on student success courses, gateway courses, learning communities, and supplemental instruction.

> **Capacity building:** Several colleges tackled key areas around their capacity to support change, such as professional development of faculty and institutional research and effectiveness.

We identified promising interventions at each college, examples of which are presented here. The colleges have collected outcome measures that demonstrate their interventions' effectiveness. Even though evidence that these interventions are also meeting the broader goal of improving degree completion rates overall remains elusive, the interventions are noteworthy for their creativity, sophistication, and careful tailoring to each college's own perceived needs. The Core Teams are committed to tracking and analyzing outcomes data so that, in the long term, much more can be learned.

SUPPLEMENTING INSTRUCTION AT BAY DE NOC COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In Supplemental Instruction, a faculty member is assisted by students who have successfully completed the course or, in some cases, adjunct faculty or professionals in the field. The SI leader becomes a peer educator for fellow students—attending class, taking notes, completing homework assignments, and modeling effective in-class behavior. Most important, SI leaders conduct weekly sessions that assist students in discussing, exploring, and understanding the course material.

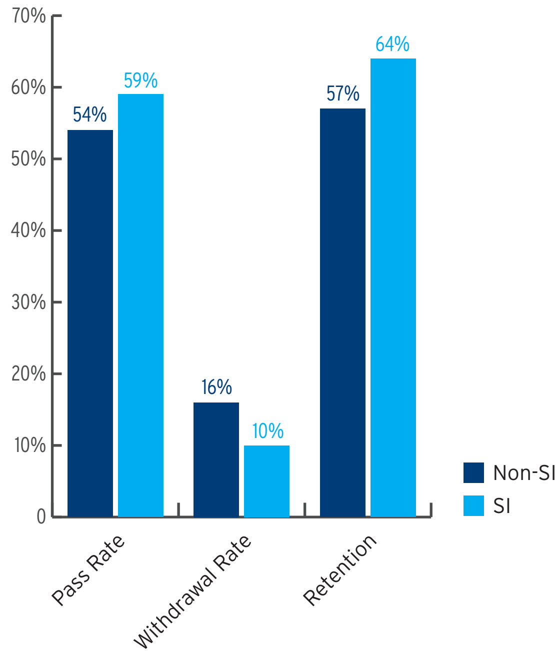
The Core Team leveraged its data analysis to design and implement SI at Bay College, looking for the courses with the lowest pass rates and the highest enrollments. "This effectively targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students, allowing students at all levels of academic ability to attend," said Matthew Baron, coordinator of Bay College's Supplemental Instruction Program. As of fall 2011, Bay College had expanded SI to 16 courses, ranging from algebra and chemistry to psychology.

Results collected since the launch of SI show strong results (*see Figure 1 on page 9*). Notably, pass rates for students who have taken an SI course are 5 percentage points higher than for students who did not, withdrawal rates are 6 percentage points lower, and retention rates to the second year are 7 percentage points higher. However, course GPA was not affected.

Beyond the hard data, Bay College Core Team members see values in SI that will persist beyond graduation into the workforce. SI classes promote personal growth among students and SI leaders, encouraging them to build social and teamwork skills. Students become invested in the relationships they build during the course and develop a sense of community that enhances their motivation to stay in school.

FIGURE 1.

COURSE PERFORMANCE AND RETENTION IN SI AND NON-SI COURSES, BAY DE NOC COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER 2009-WINTER 2011



The SI approach is most effective when the instructor supports its use. "We have classes where it works well and where it doesn't," said Bay College president Laura Coleman. "Where SI doesn't work well, it usually has to do with a faculty member not being excited about having another semi-instructor in the room. But if a faculty member gets excited about co-teaching, great things happen."

Coleman has a larger concern, however: finding ways to pay for scaling up SI and other interventions during these tough economic times.

LAUNCHING A NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION AT HENRY FORD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

While many community colleges run orientations for incoming students, Henry Ford's leaders had not viewed the college's past attempts as successful. In 2009, administrators and faculty launched a new orientation program designed through an intense collaborative process that included the departments of enrollment development, counseling, financial aid, records and registration, and the cashier's office, as well as the retention coordinator and the cabinet and faculty from several disciplines. Notably, the orientation includes "Inside Track," a mentor-mentee program providing a semester-long follow-up for students in which the mentor contacts the mentee once per week during the semester. The continued contact helps establish a relationship and enables the mentor to help solve problems or facilitate referrals. In addition, group interventions are conducted at specific times during the semester.

The new orientation program has proven much more successful than the old one. The orientation is still optional, but enrollment is growing and the Core Team is building an evidence base that could justify making it mandatory. The college has already found a jump in retention associated with the new student orientation: Students placing into two developmental classes who attended orientation in fall 2010 passed 71 percent of developmental English classes compared with 55 percent of those who did not.

IMPROVING DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION AT JACKSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Core Team at Jackson developed several creative strategies to assist new students. A key decision was to restructure developmental education, establishing a Foundational Studies Department so that instructors could focus on students with developmental needs while maintaining an appointment in their home department. "Foundational Studies is a space and a place for faculty to think and be agents of change before heading back out," said Steve Tuckey, a math professor and Achieving the Dream Core Team member.

The Core Team created a student success course—First-Year Seminar—and it is required for developmental students and elective for others. It helps students develop study strategies, teamwork, and problem solving. The FYS for developmental education students, called "Life Maps," assists students in developing a learning portfolio and an educational plan.

FIGURE 2.
STUDENT SUCCESS IN BLENDED ENGLISH COURSE, JACKSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER 2012

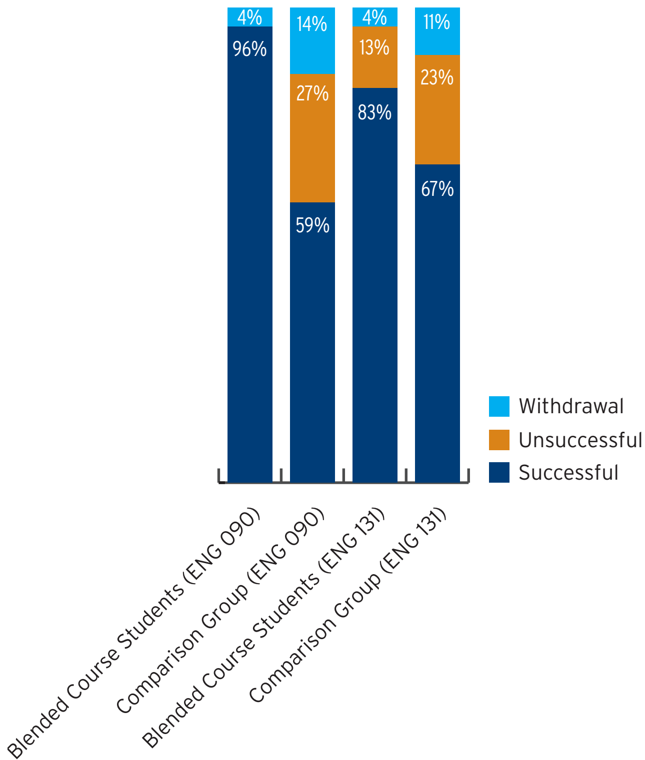
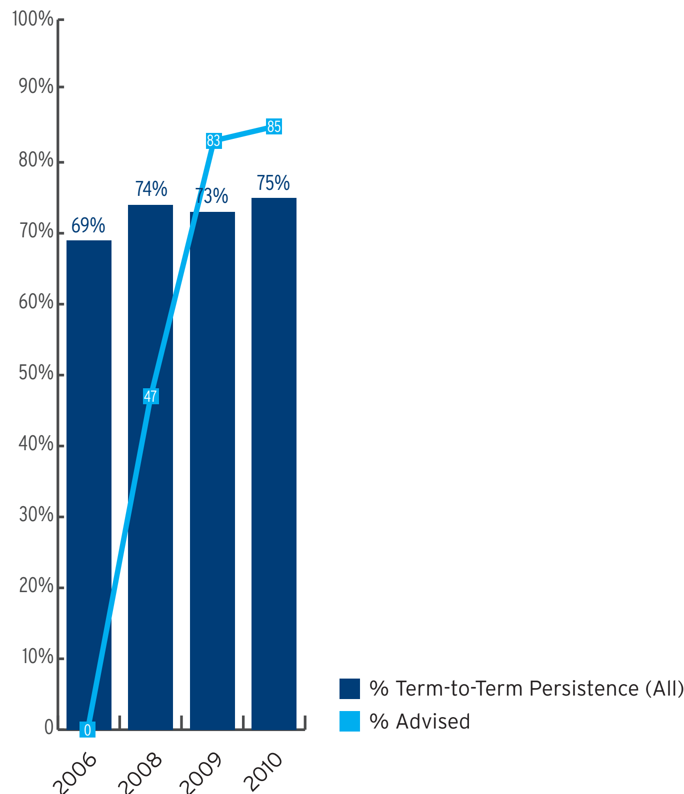


FIGURE 3.
FALL-TO-SPRING PERSISTENCE FOR ALL ACHIEVING THE DREAM COHORT STUDENTS, LAKE MICHIGAN COLLEGE



Respondents at Jackson considered their most effective intervention to be a blended English course based on the Accelerated Learning Program at the Community College of Baltimore County that serves both college-ready and developmental students (*see box, "Accelerated Learning Program" on page 11*). The blended course provides a gateway course (ENG 131) open to both college-ready and developmental students. After a half-hour break, developmental students then reconvene for a two-hour course (ENG 090) that offers a smaller class size and opportunities for one-on-one conferences. The material in ENG 090 is designed to help developmental students succeed in ENG 131, saving the students an extra semester and reducing dropout risk.

Developmental English students succeed at a much higher rate in the blended course: 96 percent pass the developmental class (ENG 090), compared with 59 percent of the comparison group; 83 percent pass the gateway class, compared with 67 percent of the comparison group (*see Figure 2*).

BUILDING ADVISING CAPACITY AT LAKE MICHIGAN COLLEGE

The Core Team at Lake Michigan put a priority on overhauling the college's advising system. Advisors at Lake Michigan help students identify their goals and work through external factors that affect success, such as transportation and family issues. The advisors and faculty now use a centralized database to track student attendance based on the same type of customer relationship management (CRM) databases used in the private sector.

"When we go to work with the student, we can see up front whether they have been in class over the last two weeks," said Nancy Johnson, formerly director of advising and retention and now director of TRIO student support services. The CRM database connects to an early warning system, which provides alerts that advising staff and faculty can follow up on. "That's a tremendous empowerment to the advising staff who are working with the students, to see what's happening in the classroom," Johnson added.

Although the college had an advising process during the baseline years of 2006-07 and 2007-08, advising contacts were not tracked using the new system until the 2008 cohort of first-time students. In that year, 47 percent of the cohort was recorded as receiving advising, and students who were advised persisted at a rate that was 7 points higher than the overall cohort rate (*see Figure 3*). By 2010, the advising

ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM:
A DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM BACKED BY EVIDENCE

The Community College of Baltimore County has achieved something rare in community college innovation: an ambitious developmental education reform backed by solid evidence of effectiveness and cost savings. The college had found that large proportions of students in developmental English were failing, and many of those who passed did not continue on to take and pass ENG 101, the gateway English course. In response, CCBC faculty mainstreamed some developmental English students into ENG 101 but required them to take a companion course that met immediately after each college-level English class. A new Accelerated Learning Program companion course provided the opportunity for students to ask questions, practice writing short papers, work on grammar and punctuation, "or engage in any other activities needed to maximize ALP students' likelihood of success" (Jenkins 2010).

The goal was to eliminate barriers that discouraged developmental students from succeeding in college-level English. Continuing evaluations by the Community College Research Center have found remarkably successful outcomes:

- Accelerated Learning Program students were more likely to complete ENG 101 than other developmental English students by 31 percentage points.
- ALP students were more likely to complete ENG 102, the next course in the English sequence, by 19 percentage points.
- ALP students were more likely to persist to the next year by 11 percentage points (Cho 2012).

The evaluators found ALP to be cost effective, despite costing almost twice as much per year as the traditional developmental model, because ALP's cost per successful student is 14 percent less than the traditional model. In addition, the evaluators performed a rough cost-benefit analysis and determined that the benefits of ALP are more than double its costs (Jenkins 2010). The ALP approach could yield great benefits if replicated at scale by other community colleges. With generous support from The Kresge Foundation announced in fall 2012, several Michigan community colleges will begin implementing the model.

transformation was almost fully scaled up. Nine part-time advisors were hard at work, and more than 80 percent of first-time students received at least one advising contact. Average persistence for the full student cohort rose 6 percentage points between 2006 and 2010, from 69 percent to 75 percent.

DEVELOPING STUDENT SUCCESS SKILLS AT MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Spurred by the Core Team's data analysis and literature review, a team of faculty designed a student success course targeted to at-risk students. "They designed this course based on best practices," said Edie Woods, a faculty member and co-chair of Macomb's Core Team. "They talked to other colleges about what was working and went through a thorough literature review."

The College Success Course (CSSK 1200) covers essential college skills such as time management, test taking, note taking, thinking and reasoning, managing stress, and work-life balance, as well as effective ways of accessing information from various campus resources. About 200 students have taken the course annually, 4 percent of Macomb's first-time student population.

Results are promising: 80 percent of at-risk students who took CSSK 1200 in fall 2011 persisted to the next semester, 10 percentage points higher than at-risk students who did not. For African-American students, the College Success Course provided an 18 percentage-point advantage in persistence.

SUPPORTING READING IN FIRST-YEAR COURSES AT NORTH CENTRAL MICHIGAN COLLEGE

WestEd, a nonprofit organization in California, has developed "Reading Apprenticeship," a strategy in which students keep reading logs that force them to reflect on the subject matter of their classes. At North Central Michigan, the Core Team implemented Reading Apprenticeship and found it so successful that they are expanding it throughout the college.

North Central's enthusiasm for Reading Apprenticeship reflects a growing belief that community colleges need to give students more structure and fewer options, commonly referred to colloquially as "students don't do optional," a phrase often attributed to Dr. Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas, Austin. Nationally, many student success efforts focus on minimizing students' ability to meander through a community college and pushing them into academic and supportive experiences proven to increase student success.

Though students report not loving the reading logs, they also report that the logs are helpful, and initial performance data supports that conclusion. "I ran into students and talked to them about the reading logs," recalled president Cameron Brunet-Koch. "They hated the logs. I asked if they had seen any changes in their performance in the classroom. 'Oh, absolutely!' I said to them, 'So it's helping you be successful?' They agreed 100 percent."

North Central is moving Reading Apprenticeship into the mainstream of the student experience. In 2009, seven sections integrated reading logs into their classrooms; in 2011, 37 did, affecting over 900 students. "Our students wanted to know if it was a conspiracy, because at first they were doing it in one class, and then it was two and then three," said Brunet-Koch. "Pretty soon Reading Apprenticeship will be standard in every class."

The Core Team does not have overall performance data on Reading Apprenticeship, but it has performed a controlled experiment in which a single professor taught four sections of Introduction to Sociology, two with reading journals and two without. Student performance in the Reading Apprenticeship sections was superior and withdrawal rates lower (*see Table 2*).

Other sections show a marked improvement in student grade point averages. The college believes that Reading Apprenticeship is one of the factors that accounts for a significant rise in the percentage of students advancing from remedial to credit-bearing English courses: from 12.7 percent in 2007-08 to nearly 50 percent in 2010-11.

TABLE 2.
STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN FOUR SECTIONS OF ONE COURSE, BY READING APPRENTICESHIP/NON-READING APPRENTICESHIP STATUS, NORTH CENTRAL MICHIGAN COLLEGE, WINTER 2011

STATUS	GPA	WITHDRAWAL
Reading Apprenticeship	2.53	10.2%
Non-Reading Apprenticeship	1.87	16.4%

UTILIZING AN EARLY ALERT-BASED ADVISING SYSTEM AT WAYNE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Wayne County is one of Michigan's largest community colleges, with 21,000 mostly part-time students spread out over 5 campuses. A key strategy for reaching those students has been the development of the Early Alert System, an intrusive advising intervention that uses technology and faculty participation to cost-effectively leverage the college's student success assets.

Faculty members evaluate student performance within the first four weeks of the semester and use the college's database to alert advisors about any students facing issues that may inhibit successful completion in their courses. Student Services deploys a questionnaire to those students to better understand any challenges that impede their success. Advisors then reach out to each student with such issues and refer him or her to student success resources and programs that encourage students to use support services.

The Early Alert System has grown from 591 students in fall 2008 to 5,500 students in fall 2011, more than a quarter of the college's total enrollment. Wayne County's Institutional Effectiveness Division tracks outcomes, which demonstrate promising results. Between 2009, when the Early Alert System was fully implemented, and 2011, the number of students withdrawing from their courses decreased by 22 percent and the number of students completing their courses with a C or better increased by 30 percent. Overall first-year persistence at Wayne County climbed by 8 percentage points, to 70 percent, between the 2006-07 baseline year and 2011.

AUTONOMY AND INNOVATION

A key question in reviewing the experience of the seven first-round Achieving the Dream Colleges in Michigan is how their path might have changed in a state with a strong, centralized community college system. Participation in Achieving the Dream appears to have provided an impetus and structure for campus-specific and cross-college experimentation and learning. The lack of a system leader to drive common interventions has not prevented them from forging ahead and making gains.

Michael Hansen, president of the Michigan Community College Association, views autonomy as an almost unqualified asset for his members. "A non-system state allows for the flexibility and creativity to customize programs to the college. College leaders are completely free to explore, experiment, beg, borrow, and steal from others, and to get rid of things that don't work, without any mandate or oversight."

The respondents also see value in their autonomy—not only because they can adapt interventions to their institutional context and regional labor market needs, but because they can count on a degree of buy-in that would take much longer to develop were interventions imposed from above. Each college applies to participate in the Achieving the Dream Reform Network, and the drive for student success must be generated from within. "I can't imagine a state system telling us to focus on these things," said Dan Phelan, president of Jackson Community College. "That's why it's a strength for us to be decentralized, not a weakness."

However, the interviews also revealed shortcomings to the non-system approach. No state agency has built expertise on higher education policy over time. As a result, Michigan's policymaking in regard to higher education revolves almost entirely around the state budget, increasing the risk of rash, uninformed policy decisions.

Furthermore, Michigan has historically lacked mechanisms for student success functions that require collaboration or collective action, such as spreading innovation through peer learning, building consensus around the most effective interventions, consistently collecting and reporting outcomes data, and holding institutions accountable for student success outcomes. "What you lack is 100 percent compliance," said Hansen. "If a school doesn't want to participate, there's nothing we can do to make them."

The result is near-complete reliance on action at the level of the individual institution. While community colleges, in Michigan as in other states, have primary responsibility for driving a student success agenda, it is all too easy to imagine momentum-breakers: a president or other top official committed to student success leaves; a department chair or union leader digs in against new ideas; budget cuts force the institution into a reactive mode. In addition, respondents identified steps they could not take alone, such as peer-to-peer learning between institutions; aligning transfer and articulation standards; and obtaining public or philanthropic funding for evidence-based innovation. Tackling some of the biggest obstacles to change requires concerted efforts both within and outside community colleges.

Interestingly, community college leaders, private funders, and state policymakers are now collaborating to address these shortcomings. The excitement around Achieving the Dream and other student success initiatives in Michigan has helped to drive meaningful collective action at the state level: first, through the establishment of the Michigan Center for Student Success; and second, through the development of the Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Data System. Other promising opportunities appear to be on the horizon as well.

A CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The mid-2000s saw the launch of several initiatives related to boosting postsecondary success in Michigan: not only Achieving the Dream but also Breaking Through, Shifting Gears, and others.[5] This confluence of new, externally funded initiatives created an unusual problem. With several grant-funded, time-limited initiatives

underway to strengthen postsecondary student success, the Michigan Community College Association wanted to play a more proactive, strategic role in helping colleges make the most of their opportunities. MCCA's leaders envisioned an entity that could weave these initiatives together into a cohesive whole, sustaining gains beyond the life of each grant and spreading the lessons learned throughout the state.

This vision drove the creation of the Michigan Center for Student Success. With funding from the Kresge Foundation, the MCSS opened in 2011 with a fourfold mission:

- Enhance existing and establish new student success communities of practice through professional development opportunities and the regular exchange of information at convenings.
- Promote innovation and continuous improvement through the appropriate collection and use of data and performance metrics.
- Develop a sustained student success research agenda based on the needs of Michigan community colleges and key issues correlated with improved student outcomes.
- Identify areas where collective, state-level policy action is warranted to enhance collaborative college efforts to innovate toward improved student outcomes.

No single approach defines the MCSS. Rather, what adds value for the colleges and their student success agenda is its role in connecting practice, research, and policy.

Since its establishment, the MCSS has launched a high-energy series of stakeholder convening sessions and research conferences. Adriana Phelan, vice president at MCCA and a key proponent of the MCSS, recalled:

> Before the Center for Student Success, we convened communities of practice and tried to get the colleges to share, but we didn't have the capacity to really do it well. That was one of the driving forces for establishing the center. In its absence, we wouldn't be having as much state-level conversation about Achieving the Dream—it would be treated very much as an institutional issue.

The MCSS provides venues and builds capacity for college faculty, administrators, and board trustees to interact with one another on neutral ground. This is particularly important for faculty, who may want elbow room away from the institutional agendas of their administrators. "Faculty can go to the Center for Student Success independent of whatever I think because it's their initiative, not my initiative," said Macomb President Jim Jacobs.

A key MCSS project is the Faculty Leadership Initiative, a vehicle to identify, develop, and promote faculty members as leaders within a broader student success agenda. Over the past year, the initiative has established a steering committee with representatives of nine colleges, piloted campus Faculty Inquiry Groups, and convened a series of regional symposia to foster cross-college sharing of pedagogy, practice, and action research techniques as well as a faculty retreat focused on the first-year experience. In addition, MCSS Steering Committee members have served on statewide committees, including a working group on college readiness benchmarks and the MCSS Advisory Council. In all, nearly 200 full-time and adjunct faculty members from 22 out of Michigan's 28 community colleges have been involved with the Faculty Leadership Initiative in its first year.

THE MCSS PROVIDES VENUES AND BUILDS CAPACITY FOR COLLEGE FACULTY, ADMINISTRATORS, AND BOARD TRUSTEES TO INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER ON NEUTRAL GROUND.

Working closely with state policymakers is another part of the center's mandate. When Governor Rick Snyder undertook to build a Web-based state government "dashboard," the administration turned to the MCSS for assistance in shaping its postsecondary metrics. Chris Baldwin, the newly appointed executive director of the MCSS, turned to metrics community colleges were already

reporting through Achieving the Dream, the Voluntary Framework of Accountability, and the Community College Benchmarking Project. As a result, the Michigan Education Dashboard provides information reflective of what colleges themselves deem important, such as the retention rate, graduation/transfer rate, and overall educational attainment. "The metrics aren't perfect, but they got us started on a conversation about measuring student success that we had never had before," said Baldwin.

DATA FOR CHANGE

The other major boost to the state's student success infrastructure is the development of the Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Database System. Michigan is one of a number of states using federal funding to extend its existing PK-12 database to include the public higher education sector. Achieving the Dream and participating institutions have played an important role in shaping the MSLDS.

Higher education institutions have not always welcomed independent clearinghouses of information on their performance, but Achieving the Dream demonstrated the importance of reliable, cross-institution data, and the colleges that joined the reform network early on made data collection, analysis, and use a priority at both the state and college levels. The initiative's 2010 expansion provided a crash course on data management for the 10 new Michigan college presidents and their top staff. "Adding the 10 additional colleges in 2010 really blew the doors off and built support for the state longitudinal database," said MCSS executive director Chris Baldwin.

The state is phasing in MSLDS over several years. When it is fully operational, higher education institutions will be able to track their own performance on key indicators relative to their peers, as well as the movement of high school graduates and GED attainers into college. These data hold the potential to drive student success to the top of the priority list across the state.

A key issue for any longitudinal data system is the nature of the questions it seeks to answer. To shape those questions, Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, which is responsible for developing the system, turned to the MCCA and Michigan's early-round Achieving the Dream Colleges. As a result, the data collection template created by CEPI's adult learning workgroup draws heavily on the data requirements of Achieving the Dream and related initiatives. As CEPI moves forward with the MSLDS, MCSS will continue to review progress and make recommendations on the collection and reporting of data that postsecondary institutions need.

SO YOU WANT TO LAUNCH A STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

The hardened veterans of student success initiatives at Michigan community colleges have some advice for faculty and administrators starting out on the student success road.

"Be patient but deliberate, and start with your easy successes. Start with small, willing groups and build on that. Build the success, build the trust, one step at a time, and continue to widen that circle as you build success, so that people want to join in. Not everybody has to sign up on day one."

—*Paige Eagan, Professor of Chemistry, Lake Michigan College*

"Don't start and then back away. Lose your faith and you lose your credibility."

—*Robert Harrison, President, Lake Michigan College*

"Gather the faculty on board and have the discussion about how painful it will be. If it doesn't work, let's move on to something else and not have a crucifixion."

—*Jim Jacobs, President, Macomb Community College*

"Hire more Institutional Research staff. Student success could easily be one IR person's full-time job."

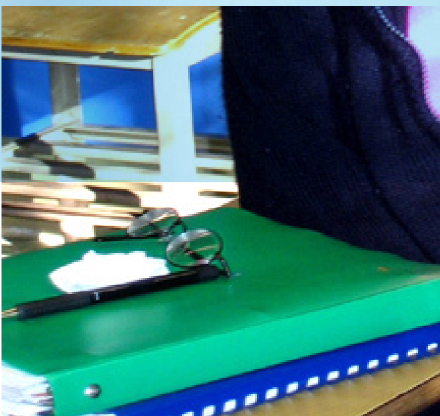
—*Jeff Noel, Director of Institutional Research, Lake Michigan College*

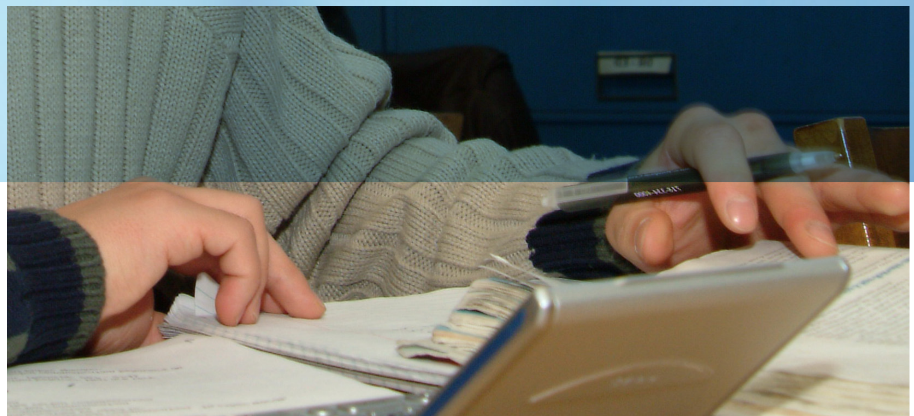
"Make certain that someone in the top leadership group—preferably the president, but it could be someone else—has really bought in, and is intentionally supporting it, not just saying my people want to do it and that's okay. The work bubbling up from the bottom really can't be sustained without continuing support from the top."

—*Jenny Schanker, Associate Director, Michigan Center for Student Success*

"Be patient and be committed and be a good listener. Early on, you may start with preconceptions about what your initiative is. But listen carefully, because this is a real opportunity to grow."

—*Curtis Ivery, Chancellor, Wayne County Community College District*





LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN MICHIGAN

Seven very different community colleges integrated Achieving the Dream principles into their institutional cultures. Through statewide efforts such as the Michigan Center for Student Success, important lessons learned are now spreading to other colleges. Michigan's experience demonstrates that governance structure does not determine destiny. Community colleges of all stripes can embrace an aggressive student success agenda and develop mechanisms for cross-college collaboration, learning, and change—and they can do so even in the absence of a centralized system, though they may need external funding and pressure from participation in initiatives involving colleges and state leaders with other histories, structures, and experiences. That is a highly important achievement and lesson, given fairly decentralized systems in most states.

The most profound question for the individual institutions we interviewed is whether they will continue to make gains after concluding their formal participation in the five-year demonstration phase of Achieving the Dream. It is difficult enough to prioritize student success and commit to a culture of evidence while embedded in a national effort, guided by regular contact with an external coach, stimulated by regular peer involvement through state and national conferences, and funded for some expenses. It must be still more difficult to sustain in the absence of those supports.

One first-round Michigan college, Wayne County Community College District, will continue its close involvement with Achieving the Dream as a result of being chosen as a "Leader College." To be eligible for this status, a college must show three or more years of improvement on key measures such as course completion, completion of college-level math and English courses, term-to-term and year-to-year retention, and completion of certificates or degrees. Wayne County looks forward to complementing its achievements in term-to-term retention by focusing on continuous improvement of student support services to promote completion of degrees and certificates. As a Leader College, it will serve as a mentor to other colleges seeking to adopt the principles of Achieving the Dream.

Respondents at the other six institutions were uniformly confident in their ability to maintain their momentum. "It's part of who we are now at the college, and that will continue," said Nancy Johnson, director of TRIO student support services at Lake Michigan College. "It's what people expect and assume their job to be now. It's no longer, 'You have to do this.' People are asking to be involved."

Board enthusiasm appears to be a key driver of sustainability. When boards of trustees come into direct contact with a student success initiative, they become its most enthusiastic torchbearers. In 2011, the Michigan Center for Student Success, in association with Achieving the Dream and the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin, sponsored a Trustee Institute to provide professional development and foster peer learning among community college trustees. A key component was to promote an understanding and appreciation among trustees of the power of transparent student outcomes data. In future years, MCSS will provide training on how trustees can support and advocate for a student success agenda at the annual MCCA summer conference and other events.

THROUGH STATEWIDE EFFORTS SUCH AS THE MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED ARE NOW SPREADING TO OTHER COLLEGES.

In interviews, respondents judged five years a long enough transition to embed student success in the institutional culture of these particular colleges. For the same reason, some respondents expressed concern that

the Michigan colleges that joined Achieving the Dream in 2010 might need more than the allotted two (now three) years of participation to sustain their own gains.[6]

Questions were also raised about maintaining outreach to local high schools, a key focus for Achieving the Dream and similar student success efforts. "I am concerned about the sustainability of the conversation with the high schools," said Johnson of Lake Michigan College. "We need to solidify that for another year or two so that people do it intrinsically."

Perhaps the hardest stretch in a state like Michigan is spreading innovation from individual colleges statewide. Michigan foundations and community college leaders have made important strides by establishing the Center for Student Success, and this has been reinforced by policymakers through development of the Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Database System. But it will take time to determine whether these strategies fulfill their promise. In the meantime, respondents believe that their colleges are setting the pace for other community colleges in their regions, encouraging board trustees at other colleges to focus more tightly on the student success mission.

Another key factor is the gathering pressure exerted by rising state and federal expectations. The first-round Michigan colleges elected to join Achieving the Dream and embrace the student success agenda based on internal factors. As the federal government and the state of Michigan refine and intensify their focus on boosting the rate of college completion, they will exert pressure on institutions to make visible progress. Indeed, the 2012 Michigan budget included performance funding that gives colleges incentives to redouble their student success efforts.

While the first-round colleges in Michigan are making great gains that are important statewide, all of these gains were hard won. Perhaps most noteworthy among the barriers was the feeling among college presidents and some other staff that they were being judged against rapid (and perhaps unrealistic) timelines while starved of the resources to meet them. Dan Phelan, president of Jackson Community College, was more colorful but no more emphatic than his peers in likening student success to visiting a distant grandmother:

> I want more! I feel like my grandmother is ill, she's 200 miles away and I've only got enough gas to go 50 miles and I can't find a gas station. I don't have any money in my pocket. But I know what I need to do, I'm just trying to figure out how to get more gas in the tank so I can go see grandma. How do I find more money to help more students become successful at a time when my board is sensitive about tuition increases and you've got local legislators and the governor talking about tuition restraint?

Michigan's community colleges have gotten closer to "grandma" than could have been expected five years ago. But more can be done. What follows are recommendations for strengthening Michigan's momentum for student success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to help expand the capacity of Michigan's community colleges to collaborate, pursue successful reform agendas, and improve college readiness and completion. While these recommendations stem from the research and interviews conducted for this study, their direction and goals will be of interest to reformers in other states seeking to weave together various student success initiatives and maximize impact across institutions.

UTILIZE THE MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION.

Significantly improving college completion across the state of Michigan will require a nearly unprecedented level of coordination and collaboration among the state's 28 community colleges as well as other entities within the state. The MCSS should play a pivotal role in supporting peer learning, delivering professional development, shaping the collection and analysis of student-level data, and conceptualizing a statewide policy agenda that respects Michigan's decentralized model of public higher education.

SUPPORT K-12 PARTNERSHIPS.

Close partnerships between community colleges and school systems bridge the gaps between those sectors, enhancing both the college-going rate and college readiness among high school graduates. Such partnerships will become even more essential as Michigan implements the Common Core State Standards. However, the respondents who sought to build K-12 partnerships encountered varying levels of interest and support, and they reported concerns about the sustainability of these partnerships. It is imperative for policymakers to support partnering efforts using the emerging longitudinal database and to make a greater investment in proven college readiness models such as early college high schools or dual enrollment.

REVIEW PATHWAYS TO DEGREE COMPLETION FRAMEWORK.

The colleges, in collaboration with the Michigan Center for Student Success, should carry out a systematic review of opportunities to support postsecondary student success. A growing body of research points to the need to create structured, intentional routes through college that keep students engaged at crucial momentum points and progressing until they complete a chosen program of study (Davis & Cho 2012; Moore & Shulock 2009). Such a review could systematically identify areas in which resources can be allocated to build the capacity of community colleges to improve student success, such as better advising and structured programs of study aligned with requirements for transfer and the labor market.

CREATE CLEAR ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER POLICY.

Students in the 21st century are highly mobile, and Michigan's postsecondary institutions need to collaborate on strategies to ensure that the hard work students do is not wasted when they transfer from one institution to another. Between each level of secondary and postsecondary education, articulation of credits and transfer policy should be standardized. Such a transfer and articulation policy at the "front end" would structure a transfer core of general education courses for students entering from high school, adult education, or noncredit continuing education; and at the "back end" facilitate student transfer to baccalaureate institutions. Creative strategies to support lateral and reverse transfer also make sense in an age when matriculation, like the course of love, never runs straight.

CONNECT P-20 STUDENT-LEVEL DATABASES WITH OTHER KEY SYSTEMS, NOTABLY THE WAGE-REPORTING DATABASE, AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS TO USE THE DATA THEY GET.

The Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Data System represents a potential turning point for hardwiring the principles behind Achieving the Dream into community colleges throughout Michigan. It is imperative that the development of this database remains on schedule, and it should provide the ability to follow college students into the workforce. Ultimately, the definition of student success should include obtaining stable employment in an occupation related to a student's program of study after graduation.

INFORM AND ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS.

To sustain and bring student success initiatives to scale, community college leaders need to inform and engage the whole continuum of stakeholders who can enhance or obstruct their efforts. This may seem obvious, but it requires pushing against the natural inward-facing tendencies of a student success initiative. If the Core Team achieves successes, they need to let trustees at the institution know. At a broader level, it is important to alert business leaders, legislators, and the governor's staff that positive change is occurring. Policymakers want to see community colleges serve their students and local employers more effectively, and if they do not know that they have willing partners, they are more likely to take unilateral actions that miss the mark.

ENDNOTES

[1] Ewell is vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Wellman is executive director of the National Association of System Heads and founding director of the Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity and Accountability.

[2] Each Achieving the Dream College has a Core Team and a Data Team, and they work together to lead the process of analyzing data and guiding institutional change. Core Teams identify and implement strategies to address the student achievement gaps identified through data analysis by the Data Team. The Core Team is also responsible for engaging the wider campus community in discussions about the goals and strategies of the effort to improve student success.

[3] "Statement by the Achieving the Dream President and CEO William E. Trueheart on the Interim Report from MDRC and the Community College Research Center," Press Release, Achieving the Dream, February 8, 2011.

[4] Other student success interventions may be underway that are not reported as such.

[5] For information on these initiatives, see www.breakingthroughcc.org and http://www.shifting-gears.org.

[6] Earlier in 2012, the grants for the colleges joining Achieving the Dream in 2010 were extended for a third year.

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

TEL 617.728.4446 FAX 617.728.4857 info@jff.org

88 Broad Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02110
122 C Street, NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20001

WWW.JFF.ORG