



# STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

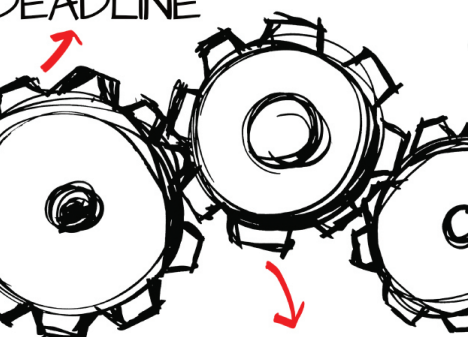
## Leading the Charge for Change at Community Colleges

By Caroline Altman Smith, Christopher Baldwin,  
and Gretchen Schmidt

*Formerly a program officer at Lumina Foundation, Caroline Altman Smith ([cbasmith@kresge.org](mailto:cbasmith@kresge.org), on twitter @kresgedu) is currently a senior program officer at The Kresge Foundation, which focuses its education work on improving access to and success in higher education for underserved students. Christopher Baldwin ([cbaldwin@mcca.org](mailto:cbaldwin@mcca.org)) is the executive director of the Michigan Center for Student Success, housed in the Michigan Community College Association. He is formerly a program director at Jobs for the Future (JFF) and has a forthcoming book focused on the completion agenda and community colleges. Gretchen Schmidt ([gschmidt@jff.org](mailto:gschmidt@jff.org)) is program director for JFF's postsecondary state policy team, which helps states implement policies to ensure that more students enter into and complete credentials with labor-market value. Before coming to JFF, Schmidt served as assistant vice chancellor for academic and student services in the Virginia Community College System.*

This is an Open Access article. Non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way, is permitted. The moral rights of the named author(s) have been asserted.

DEADLINE



SERVICE

Ten years ago, community college presidents' most valued datum was the number of students enrolled, which drove the colleges' funding. Providing access to higher education for the millions of students without the time, money, or academic preparation to attend a traditional four-year college was (as it always had been) their top priority.

Today, a growing number of community college leaders are laser-focused on a different number: how many entering students complete their coursework and earn a credential or degree. Finding ways to help students overcome the academic and life challenges that have kept graduation rates appallingly low at most of the nation's 1,000 two-year public colleges is now their prime concern.

It has been no small feat to change the national conversation about the role of community colleges in our society from providing access to also promoting success. Now, a decade into the college completion movement, what do we have to show for it?

The good news first: Hundreds of colleges have adopted innovative approaches to helping more people finish more quickly degrees that matter in the marketplace. Some institutions have also increased completion rates for certain groups of marginalized students.

Major national reform strategies, such as Achieving the Dream (ATD), which launched the college completion movement in 2004, and the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) have helped refocus college cultures and concerns from buildings and budgets to student success. Other significant initiatives include Accelerating Opportunity (AO), Breaking Through (BT), and Completion by Design (CBD).

The bad news? Few colleges have significantly improved overall outcomes. And attainment gaps between low-income and higher-income students remain unacceptably wide.

The reasons for the slow rate of progress so far are not yet fully understood. But clearly, one unintended consequence of the shift in community college priorities has been an alphabet soup of student-success initiatives created across the country.

Although the completion movement is generally seen as worthwhile, in many states, the sheer number of efforts has also caused confusion—and, frankly, fatigue. Michigan, for example, has in recent years participated in over 20 simultaneous initiatives, each with different funding streams, leadership teams, and data requirements (see Figure 1).

In some states, some colleges have participated in multiple initiatives, while others have not joined any. No one entity has been responsible for coordinating the colleges' activities, aggregating their voices in policy debates, or making sure that all of a state's institutions benefit from the lessons learned about how to help students succeed.

That is, no one until recently. Over the past several years, a new type of grant-funded intermediary, whose mission is to organize a state's community colleges around a unified agenda to improve student persistence and completion, has generated unusual enthusiasm in the field. Student Success Centers—funded by The Kresge Foundation and coordinated by Jobs for the Future (JFF)—are beginning to tackle the completion challenges in seven states by working at the intersections of state and college reform efforts.

Practitioners and policymakers have come to realize that raising student completion to dramatically higher levels requires many integrated, holistic changes at both the state and college level. To achieve that degree of change, Arkansas, Connecticut, California, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas now each host a small but nimble student-success organization that provides a vision; a shared venue; and practical support for research, collaboration, policy development, and program design and implementation.

## In Short

- One unintended consequence of the shift in community college priorities from access to success has been a myriad of student-success initiatives implemented across the country. In many states, the sheer number of efforts has caused confusion and fatigue.
- Student success centers organize community colleges around a unified agenda to improve student persistence and completion in Arkansas, Connecticut, California, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas
- These centers provide a vision for increasing student success; a shared venue; and practical support for research, collaboration, policy development, program design and implementation, and fundraising.
- Challenges ahead include funding, state government, scaling up, and initiative fatigue.

**FIGURE 1. MICHIGAN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, CURRENT INITIATIVES BASED ON THE STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORK, FALL 2014**

	ACCESS & ALIGNMENT	ENTRY & INTAKE	TEACHING & LEARNING	ACCELERATION & PROGRESS	COMPLETION & SUCCESS
CURRENT/ACTIVE		Accelerated Learning Program (G, COP)			
	Achieving the Dream (G, COP, PI)				
				Adult Completion Policy Project (G, PI)	
	Alternative Credit (PI)				
		Benefits Access for Community Colleges (G)			
	Career and College Readiness Partnership (G, PI)				
	College Readiness Benchmarks (PI)				
				Committee on the Transferability of Core College Courses (PI)	
	Consortium for Michigan Veteran Educators (COP)				
			Credentials That Work (G, COP)		
					Credit When It's Due (G, COP, PI)
	Degree Qualifications Profile/Liberal Education and America's Promise (G, COP)				
		Faculty Leadership Initiative (COP)			
	Guided Pathways Project (G, COP)				
	Michigan Pathways to Credentials (G, COP)				
	Michigan Student Success Network (COP)				
	Postsecondary State Policy Network (PI)				
				Project Win-Win (G, COP)	
Voluntary Framework of Accountability (COP, PI)					
COP: Community of Practice      G: Grant      PI: Policy Initiative					

In a clear sign of the need for this type of work, community-college-focused organizations in 24 states submitted letters of interest in late 2013 for funding from The Kresge Foundation to start their own Student Success Centers. Proposed centers in California, Connecticut, and New Jersey each received a two-year, \$500,000 award, along with technical assistance from JFF. All have hired executive directors and opened their doors.

The American Association of Community Colleges deemed the centers to be an important strategy to help accomplish the first priority of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges: to increase completion rates by 50 percent by 2020.

### **SMALL STAFF, MAJOR MISSION**

Though there are only seven Student Success Centers today, they reflect the great diversity in the community college

sector. States range in size from small (Connecticut) to large (California) and are located in different regions of the country.

The early centers were housed in states that had decentralized governance structures (Arkansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas), where colleges have a relatively high degree of institutional autonomy. But the proposals for the second round of funding came from states with a wide variety of governance structures. This diversity provides a unique opportunity to establish a cross-state policy agenda that can be tested in many environments—a “national laboratory” for completion innovation.

Each center has a small staff; many have just one or two employees. JFF helps extend the centers’ capacity by creating connections across the states and delivering technical assistance.

Most are housed in their states’ associations of community college presidents and/or trustees, although they remain

separate entities. To establish the centers' independence and maintain credibility, The Kresge Foundation requires each of them to have its own budget, dedicated staff, and an advisory board distinct from the host's governing board.

With many states juggling the demands of more than 20 student-success initiatives, building a coherent state strategy to improve outcomes is the first focus for each center. Making sense of all of the individual college reform efforts and identifying successes in multiple institutions, the centers spread best practices to maximize the efforts of all of the state's colleges (see Figure 2).

The centers also have been helpful in bringing their colleges together around common goals and securing funding for them to work on shared priorities. The Arkansas Student Success Center, for example, was instrumental in the state's winning a \$15 million federal grant for community colleges and career training (see text box). The center used funding from the grant to spur colleges to participate in coordinated efforts to overhaul developmental education throughout the state. It identified the interventions it would fund and offered technical assistance to support their implementation.

Every community college in Arkansas participated at some level, and an external evaluator is now examining the successes and areas for improvement. When the results are in, the center will distribute the information to each college and help them refine the reforms they have underway.

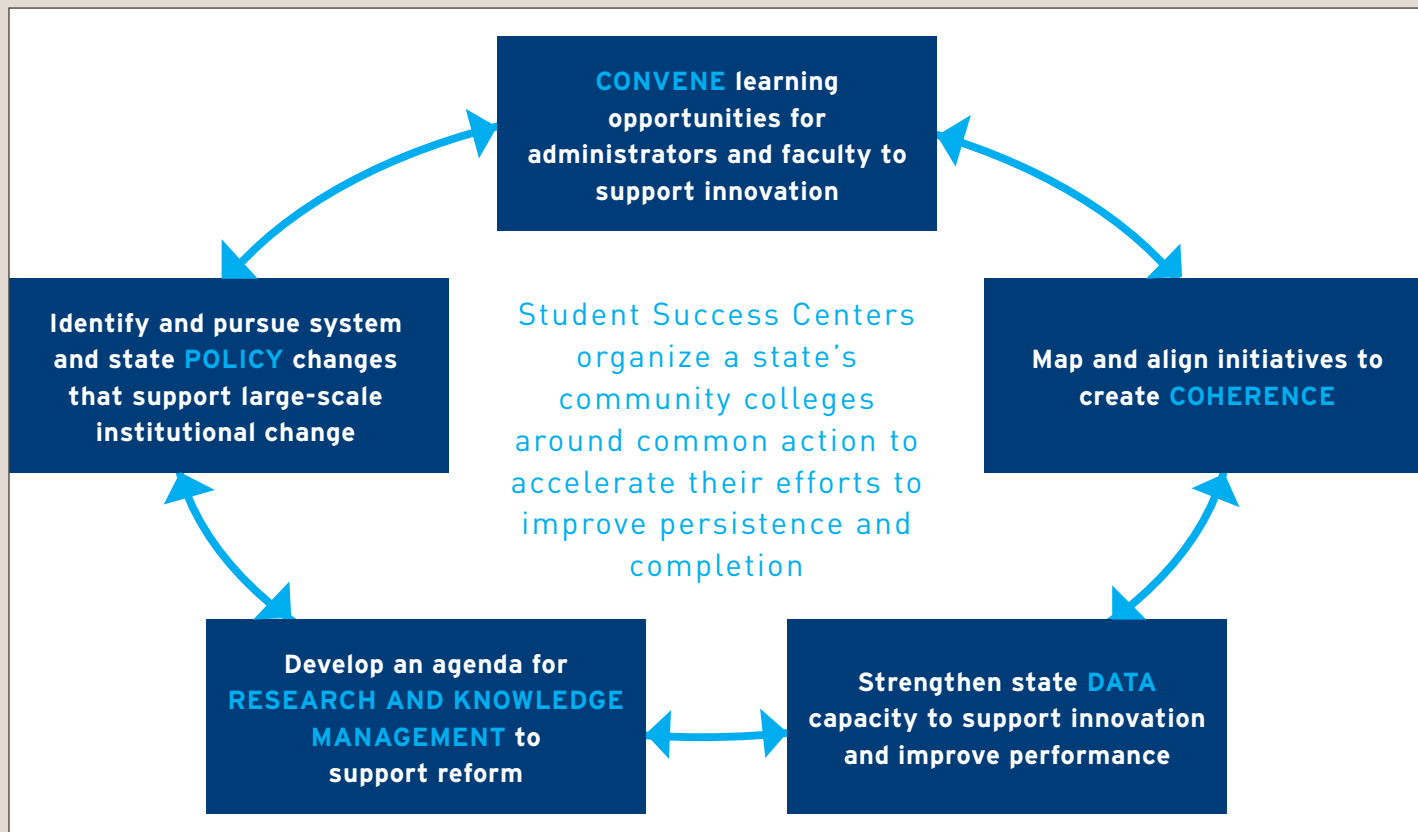
## ARKANSAS TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND CAREER TRAINING (TAACCCT) GRANT

### PATH TO ACCELERATED COMPLETION AND EMPLOYMENT (PACE)

The goal of PACE is to increase program completions by 15 percent by restructuring 104 certificate and 42 associate's degree programs. In partnership with the Arkansas Center for Student Success and the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges, all of the state's 22 two-year colleges are collaborating to implement the following core strategies:

- Transform developmental education to accelerate student advancement,
- Restructure certificate and degree programs to reduce the time to, and credits required for, completion,
- Enhance student-support technology and systems, and
- Transform student advising to reduce time to completion and unnecessary credit accumulation and to improve job placement.

**FIGURE 2. STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK**





Other key functions of statewide Student Success Centers include:

*Convening college leaders.* The centers bring together college leaders within a state to discuss existing reforms and potential improvements, develop faculty leadership, create statewide networks of various stakeholders and communities of practice, and align work and encourage collaboration across sectors.

*Using data to guide priorities.* The centers promote innovation and continuous improvement through the use of shared metrics and increased institutional capacity for data collection and analysis.

*Research and knowledge management.* The centers identify and disseminate evidence-based interventions, map institutional strategies and their outcomes, and develop a sustained research agenda.

*Policy development and advocacy.* The centers help colleges assess needed policy changes at the institution, system, and state levels, and they coordinate K12, universities, and workforce policy and advocacy initiatives.

Because each center is separate from the state's higher education governance structure, directors do not have the authority to compel institutions to participate in the services they provide. An important part of their work, therefore, is developing a "coalition of the willing" among college leaders, faculty, and staff, thereby creating a critical mass of institutions to collaborate on any particular innovation. This requires constant communication between center directors and colleges around their states, plus hundreds of miles of cross-state travel to network in person.

The rewards are many. Colleges interested in adopting a reform that is already underway have a head start from the lessons that their colleagues have learned. The centers' autonomy can also prove advantageous, as their staff members are well positioned to play the role of friendly outside agitators. This distance from the bureaucracy enables them to push colleges and other stakeholder groups more willingly along a policy path than a governing or membership organization typically can.

The need for the centers has been reinforced by the evaluations of student-success initiatives thus far. In the first evaluation of the efforts of the Achieving the Dream colleges, for example, the social-policy research organization MDRC concluded that institutional change can occur, but improving institution-wide outcomes was much more difficult and took much longer than reformers had hoped.

This is especially true in institutions that piloted small interventions and never scaled them up. Outcomes for student participants may have shown improvement, but the numbers were too small to impact the overall college. On the positive side, the evaluations were helpful in identifying priority areas for additional work—notably faculty engagement, pedagogical reform (especially at the developmental-education level), and designing for scale from the beginning in order to reach more students more quickly.

One of the MDRC evaluation's major lessons is that "reforms must be coherent, cohesive and aligned so that they

work toward the common goal and reinforce, rather than detract, from each other." That lesson is true at the state level as well and provides a blueprint for the centers.

## MICHIGAN: A CASE STUDY

For better or worse, Michigan has arguably the most decentralized higher education governance structure in the country—it has no coordinating agency or system office for higher education. The state's 28 community colleges are each governed by locally elected trustees; their autonomy is even protected in the state constitution.

Designed to maximize local control and make institutions more attuned to the needs of their communities, this structure also has unintentionally had the effect of isolating individual campuses and limiting the spread of promising innovations. To remedy this problem, in 2011 the Michigan Community College Association and The Kresge Foundation established the Michigan Center for Student Success (MCSS).

### KRESGE FOUNDATION

The 90-year-old Kresge Foundation, which is based in Detroit, has dedicated its education funding over the past seven years to increasing opportunities for low-income youth and students of color to enter and succeed in undergraduate education. Kresge first funded two Detroit-area community colleges to participate in Achieving the Dream in 2007, and it has since awarded \$7 million in grants to support Achieving the Dream nationwide.

Kresge is the primary funder of Student Success Centers nationally. The Foundation staff members use the insights the centers have generated to inform the field and the Foundation's own grant making. The first centers have proven to be invaluable partners, enabling the Foundation staff to hear state policy and institutional conversations that help them understand what's needed and how the Foundation can be most useful.

The centers can also help Kresge leverage other resources by encouraging other funders to support their work, getting colleges to demonstrate that they have "skin in the game" by committing institutional dollars, and advocating for state appropriations.

Kresge welcomes the involvement of other foundations in supporting the existing centers, helping launch new centers in other states, or partnering on grant programs.

The original idea for a Student Success Center came from Michigan college leaders and the Michigan Community College Association leadership. The Kresge Foundation seized on this vision as mutually beneficial: The colleges were eager to bring some measure of coordination to an increasingly crowded field of student-success initiatives, and Kresge needed a partner to help design its higher education grant-making in Michigan. By launching the Michigan Student

Success Center (MSSC), Kresge was creating the partner it sought and increasing the capacity of the state's policy and program infrastructure.

Like the Center for Student Success in Arkansas that had opened the previous year (and in which Kresge subsequently invested), MCSS was designed to serve as an intermediary, providing opportunities for community colleges to collaborate and learn from one another about how to improve completion rates. It is a hub for leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff in their efforts to improve student outcomes by connecting practice, research, and policy.

MCSS demonstrated its value to the state's community colleges during its first three years in operation. The colleges voted unanimously in 2014 to contribute to the center's operating expenses moving forward.

The colleges now fund half of the MCSS core operating budget of approximately \$400,000. The colleges pay a standard base amount, plus a graduated amount that is proportional to their enrollment size, as an annual fee. The center will continue to raise external funds to cover remaining budget needs.

What do the colleges get for their investment?

MCSS has facilitated the colleges' involvement in over 20 initiatives aimed at improving student progression and completion, covering both policy and institutional practice. The center provides colleges with some combination of technical assistance at little or no cost, grant funding to seed their local efforts, and opportunities to network with their peers and national experts.

Through frequent meetings, MCSS brings together faculty, researchers, policymakers, and representatives of philanthropic organizations to discuss promising practices. Implementing programs and policies that show evidence of effectiveness is vital to raising the bar at all institutions. By documenting and disseminating established and burgeoning campus-based interventions, MCSS helps shorten the time frame for colleges as they implement and scale promising practices identified by peer institutions.

For example, a group of 19 Michigan colleges are implementing the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), pioneered by the Community College of Baltimore County, to redesign developmental education. The Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, has evaluated the ALP and found that it substantially improved course completion for both developmental and

college-level courses and increased persistence.

Examples of convenings that support colleges in implementing programs such as the ALP include:

*The Student Success Summit.* Held each September, this is the premier MCSS event. Colleges are encouraged to send to this two-day meeting a large cross-functional team that includes college leaders, faculty, student-services staff, institutional researchers, workforce development staff, and academic administrators. The 400+ people attending include partners from K-12, universities, the business community, philanthropic organizations, and state government. The summit features presentations from national experts, as well as discussion sessions highlighting promising work at Michigan colleges.

*The Michigan Student Success Network (MSSN).* In early 2013, MCSS launched the MSSN with a quarterly set of one-day meetings on crosscutting topics related to student success. Colleges are encouraged to send teams of two to four members representing different divisions and functional areas. Topics have included the assessment of readiness for college-level work, student mobility among postsecondary institutions, the "right math at the right time," and strategies for using financial aid to promote student success.

Data use is another important component of MCSS's work. Michigan's decentralized governance left colleges hungry for comparable data so that they could evaluate their progress. So MCSS has worked to establish indicators of student progression and success that can inform conversations among the colleges.

Shortly after MCSS was created in 2011, the governor's office asked the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) to work with the colleges to develop a handful of metrics for graduation, transfer, and career readiness. MCCA turned to the center staff to lead this effort.

The metrics were incorporated into Governor Snyder's education dashboard, part of his broader education-reform efforts. These also included a new initiative, Degrees Matter, that emphasizes increased educational attainment and improved alignment between the education sectors (see Figure 3).

### FIGURE 3. MICHIGAN EDUCATION DASHBOARD

The Education Dashboard includes metrics covering both K12 and postsecondary performance. The Michigan Center for Student Success worked with the state's 28 community colleges to agree on a set of measures to be included:

- Tuition and fees as a percent of median family income,
- The proportion of community college students who require developmental courses,
- Community college completion/graduation/transfer rates, and
- The proportion of the population with an associate's degree or higher.

**Implementing programs and policies that show evidence of effectiveness is vital to raising the bar at all institutions.**

MICHIGAN.GOV

# OPEN MICHIGAN

Mi Dashboard

MICHIGAN.GOV

Michigan's Official Web Site

Michigan.gov Home
Open Michigan
MI Dashboards
Performance
Spending

Search

GO

**Education Dashboard**

Student Outcomes

School Accountability

Culture of Learning

Value for Money

Post-secondary Education

**Michigan Dashboard**

Health & Wellness Dashboard

Infrastructure Dashboard

Talent Dashboard

Public Safety Dashboard

Energy & Environment Dashboard

Financial Health Dashboard

Seniors Dashboard

print friendly [Like](#) [Tweet](#)

## Michigan Education Dashboard

**Performance Key:**

- 👍 Performance improving
- = Performance staying about the same
- 👎 Performance declining


Click on the links in the table below for more detail.

Student Outcomes			
	Prior	Current	Progress
Third grade reading proficiency	68.1% (2012-13)	70.0% (2013-14)	👍
Student academic growth, grades 3-8	14.4% (2012-13)	14.3% (2013-14)	👎
ACT college readiness benchmarks	18.1% (2012-13)	20.0% (2013-14)	👍

School Accountability			
	Prior	Current	Progress
Schools meeting federal adequate yearly progress (AYP)	79.3% (2010-11)	81.9% (2011-12)	👍

Culture of Learning			
	Prior	Current	Progress
Self-reported bullying on school property	22.7% (2011)	25.3% (2013)	👎
Free/reduced lunch participation by eligible students	69.9% (2011-12)	68.7% (2012-13)	👎

Value for Money			
	Prior	Current	Progress
Number of districts with ongoing deficits for three consecutive years	28 (2011-12)	29 (2012-13)	👎



Post-secondary Education			
	Prior	Current	Progress
Tuition and fees as a percent of median family income:			
Universities	17.1% (2010-11)	17.8% (2011-12)	👎
Community colleges	4.3% (2010-11)	4.4% (2011-12)	👎
Community college students who require developmental courses*	62% (2011-12)	60% (2012-13)	👍
Community college retention rate*	72% (2011-12)	71% (2012-13)	👎
University first-year retention rate	82.2% (2010-11)	81.8% (2011-12)	👎
Community college completion/graduation/transfer rate*	52% (2011-12)	52% (2012-13)	=
University six-year graduation rate	60.8% (2011)	60.5% (2012)	👎
Population with Associate Degree or higher	34.7% (2012)	35.8% (2013)	👍

\*At this time data is not available for all 28 community colleges. As the data becomes available the appropriate metrics will be updated.

[Download Spreadsheet Version of the Education Dashboard](#)

Building on the dashboard effort, MCSS has also facilitated the participation of a majority of Michigan's community colleges in the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). Given the Michigan colleges' historical autonomy, agreement on a public set of metrics is remarkable.

The VFA, launched by the American Association of Community Colleges in fall 2013, is a set of performance measures for individual institutions. The VFA allows colleges to establish performance indicators locally and then to benchmark their performance against others nationally.

The VFA also provides Michigan colleges with a common set of metrics that will help them tell the community-college story to policymakers and the public and streamline compliance reporting. Examples of the VFA metrics now used by the vast majority of Michigan colleges include:

- Percent of credit hours successfully completed by a cohort in the first term;
- Percent of students who reach key credit thresholds by end of year two;
- Percent of students who were retained from fall (term one) to their next academic term or who completed a formal award;
- Percent of credit hours successfully completed by the cohort by the end of their second year; and
- Two- and six-year metrics for both full- and part-time students who have received a credential, transferred, or are still enrolled.

Aggregating the colleges' policy concerns is another priority. The center's close relationship with college faculty and leadership and its access to state policymakers uniquely



**“States of all stripes can benefit from a non-state agency focused on aligning and leveraging the multitude of student-success initiatives that are underway.”**

positions it to bridge practice and policy. The center has, for example, partnered with the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan (PCSUM) to make it easier to transfer a core of 30 general education credits from community colleges to universities.

The idea—a priority for legislators as well as for the colleges—was to improve the transition between the two sectors and revise the existing transfer agreement, which was riddled with exceptions and inconsistencies. Working with a committee of college and university representatives, MCSS and PCSUM developed the new Michigan Transfer Agreement, which was put in place in fall 2014.

Given the limited data that has been available historically in Michigan, it is difficult to assess the collective impact of the Michigan colleges and the MCSS on student success. That said, data submitted to the Michigan Governor’s Education Dashboard suggest a positive trend in student outcomes.

Forty-four percent of the 2002 cohort at the two-year institutions had graduated with a degree or transferred to a four-year institution by 2007. For the 2007 cohort, this figure rose to 52 percent of students earning a degree or transferring by 2012.

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

The centers have made impressive progress in their first few years, but they have much important work left to do. As their directors plan for the next few years, they face a similar set of challenges. These include:

*Funding.* The centers currently rely almost exclusively on grant funding. The long-term plan is for them to become at least partly self-sustaining, typically within about two or three years, as was the case in Michigan. Center directors are considering many funding possibilities, such as soliciting state funding, generating fee-for-service options, and charging dues to participating colleges. Ultimately, most center budgets will likely combine several of these sources.

*State governance.* A healthy debate is brewing over the appropriate role for Student Success Centers in states with various types of higher education governance. Though the model is not limited to decentralized states, the need for a sustainable vehicle for collective action and collaboration is most evident in states that lack a community college system office or coordinating agency.

Many state actors believe, however, that states of all stripes can benefit from a non-state agency focused on aligning and leveraging the multitude of student-success initiatives that are underway. California and Connecticut, both recently funded, have a more centralized structure than the states that first created the centers. By expanding the model to states with a central office that already provides coordination among community colleges, over time the field will be able to discern whether the impact of the centers is correlated with the state’s governance structure.

*Scaling up.* The centers are trying to determine what it means to “scale up.” While there are pockets of innovation everywhere, few community college reforms have spread across colleges. Until now, there has not been an entity working at the intersections of state and college reform efforts. Will the centers’ positioning—close to the colleges but able to aggregate statewide concerns and solutions—help push reforms faster and further? These questions will be at the heart of discussions over the next several years, as the centers work out the details of their role in each state.

*Political environment.* The centers also have to contend with declining enrollments and shrinking state resources. While colleges are working hard to stabilize their funding, will they become more insular and less likely to collaborate and innovate? Will they continue to invest the financial and human resources it takes to build a state-level learning community led by a Student Success Center?

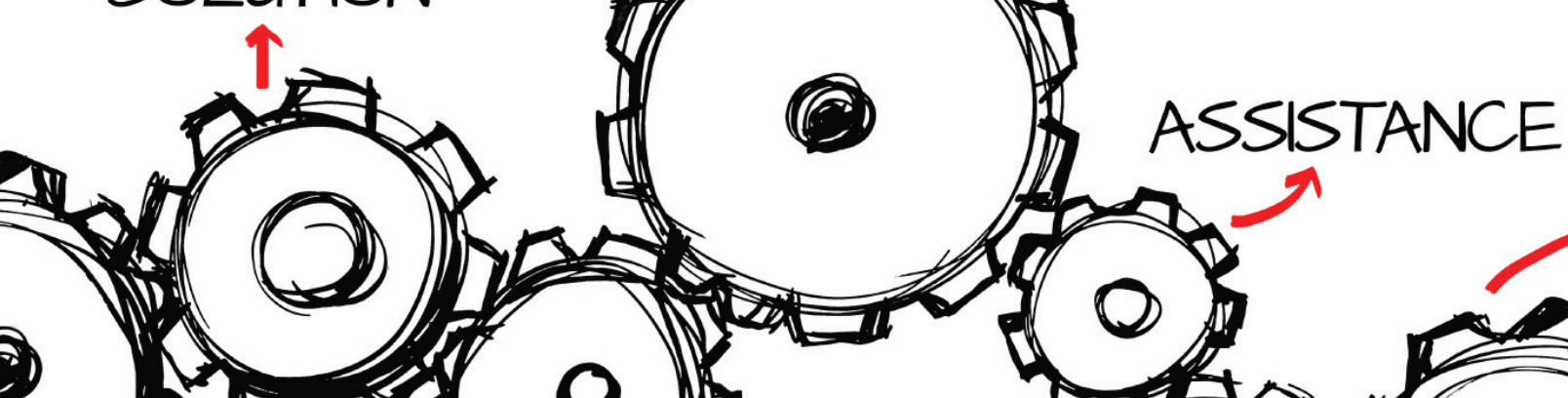
*Initiative fatigue.* Much effort and institutional capital has been spent on boutique reform programs over the past decade. As a result, there is a growing resistance to take on any new initiatives, especially those that require collaboration and coordination outside of institutions. Center directors and their partners must be strategic about engaging colleges in the work. Colleges must see reform as central to their future viability and not merely as participating in the next new thing.

### NEXT STEPS

Since the first Student Success Center opened in 2010 in Arkansas, the community college completion movement has emphasized providing more transparency and structure for students—a strategy that is often referred to as building “structured” or “guided” pathways to completion. Existing paths into and through programs at community colleges are frequently unmarked, and too many programs are poorly

**“While there are pockets of innovation everywhere, few community college reforms have spread across colleges.”**





aligned with student goals: to complete degrees and advance to further education and/or careers.

Confused, students often make poor decisions. Many become frustrated and drop out, thinking they are not “college material,” even though many of the barriers they

#### FIGURE 4: THE IMPACT OF STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

The seven Student Success Centers are still young. But they are nimble and hard-working, and there are signs that they are delivering useful services to their colleges.

Some examples:

- The Arkansas Center has raised nearly \$20 million in grant funding for its colleges.
- In September 2014, the Texas Success Center brought together over 450 participants from across the state for its first-ever Pathways to Progress Institute. College teams representing 73 colleges—including seven from Arkansas—planned for initiatives such as the New Mathways Project, Texas Completes, and the Texas Success Initiative.
- With the leadership of a new executive director and now in its second year of operation, New Jersey’s center is working with campus administrators and faculty on statewide reforms, such as collaborating with high schools to improve college readiness and strengthening core student learning outcomes in high-enrollment general education courses.
- Ohio’s center organized a team of reading educators to design and deliver the workshop From Text to Success: Building Content Area Comprehension in Gateway Courses. The workshop was presented to faculty teaching in health careers and sciences, social sciences, business, and engineering to encourage student success in these disciplines.
- Michigan’s community colleges have voted to increase their association dues to support their center. While it is difficult to attribute changes in student outcomes to the center’s activities, there are promising indicators of progress (e.g., 52 percent of a 2007 student cohort graduated with a degree or transferred to a four-year institution in six years, up from 44 percent of a 2002 cohort).

**The field needs to maximize resources and scale up what works in order to maintain access and quality while increasing success.**

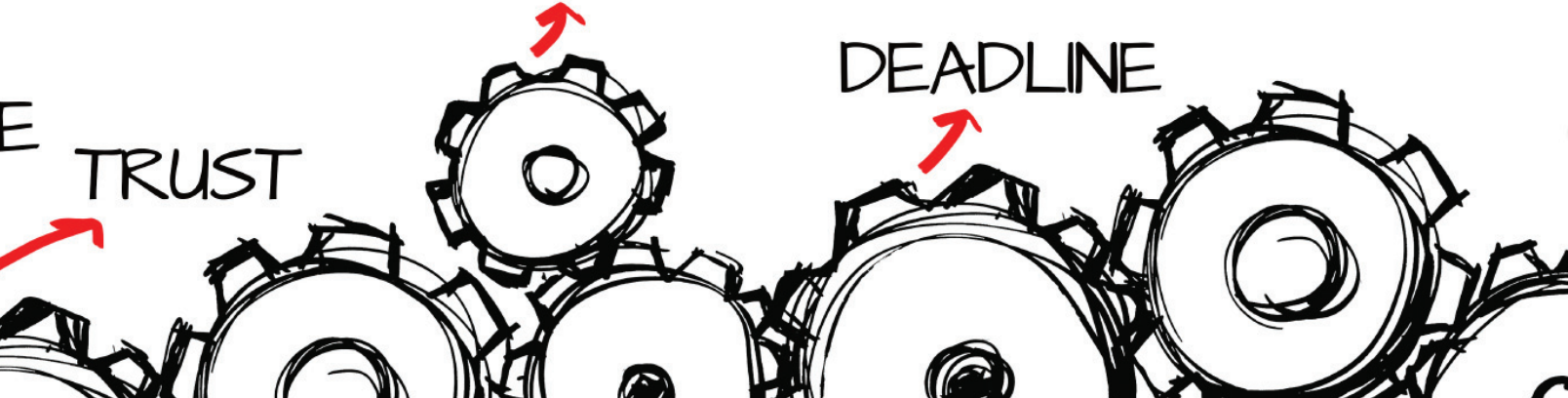
face result from the organization of college programs and services.

As more colleges create pathways, the centers will be well positioned to support institutions as they address the problems of poorly structured programs and insufficient guidance for students. To that end, and with funding from The Kresge Foundation, in September 2014 Jobs for the Future hosted a Student Success Center Pathways Summit for teams that included center staff and college leaders from each of the seven states.

The centers will support the colleges with student outcomes data, strategies for increasing faculty engagement, a roster of best practices, and technical assistance—and at the same time connect the colleges and create a broader statewide agenda. JFF will provide continued technical support for this work.

The Center for Student Success in Arkansas, for example, has launched the Arkansas Guided Pathways initiative at six colleges. Meanwhile, seven colleges are creating differentiated math pathways in partnership with the New Mathways Project at The University of Texas at Austin’s Dana Center.

Public disinvestment in higher education has been so severe in recent years that the field needs to maximize resources and scale up what works in order to maintain access and quality while increasing success. While not every state necessarily needs a Student Success Center, the diversity of the 24 states that applied to establish one with regard to geography, state governance, and engagement in national initiatives was startling. This intense interest reveals that there is an appetite for this type of structure to reinvigorate and guide the completion movement for the next decade. □



## RESOURCES

- Achieving the Dream. (2014). *Continuous improvement for college completion: Arkansas builds a system-level strategy for community college student success*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2012). *Reclaiming the American dream: Report from the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2014). *Voluntary framework of accountability*. Retrieved from <http://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/Pages/default.aspx>
- Couturier, L.K. (2013). *Joining forces: How student success centers are accelerating statewide community college improvement efforts*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
- Hilliard, T. (2012). *Autonomy and innovation: Systemic change in a decentralized state*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
- Jobs for the Future. (2014). *Student Success Center Network*. Available at: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/postsecondary-state-policy/student-success-center-network>
- Mayer, A.K., Cerna, O., Cullinan, D., Fong, K., Rutschow, E.Z., & Jenkins, D. (2014). *Moving ahead with institutional change: Lessons from the first round of Achieving the Dream community colleges*. New York, NY: MDRC.
- Michigan Center for Student Success. (2014). *Current initiatives based on the student success framework—Fall 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcca.org/uploads/ckeditor/files/Initiative%20Matrix%20091614.pdf>
- Rutschow, E.Z., Richburg-Hayes, L., Brock, T., Orr, G., Cerna, O., Cullinan, D., Kerrigan, M.R., Jenkins, D., Gooden, S. & Martin, K. (2011). *Turning the tide: Five years of Achieving the Dream in community colleges*. New York, NY: MDRC.

## WEBSITES

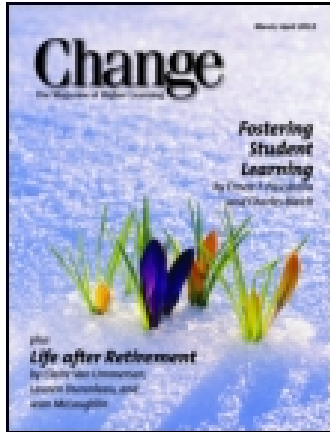
- [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org)
- [www.mdcinc.org/projects/developmental-education-initiative](http://www.mdcinc.org/projects/developmental-education-initiative)
- [www.completionbydesign.org](http://www.completionbydesign.org)
- [www.jff.org/initiatives/accelerating-opportunity](http://www.jff.org/initiatives/accelerating-opportunity)
- [www.jff.org/initiatives/breaking-through](http://www.jff.org/initiatives/breaking-through)

This article was downloaded by: [50.78.2.241]

On: 24 April 2015, At: 06:47

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vchn20>

### Student Success Centers: Leading the Charge for Change at Community Colleges

Caroline Altman Smith<sup>a</sup>, Christopher Baldwin<sup>b</sup> & Gretchen Schmidt<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Kresge Foundation

<sup>b</sup> Michigan Center for Student Success

<sup>c</sup> Jobs for the Future

Published online: 01 Apr 2015.



[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Caroline Altman Smith, Christopher Baldwin & Gretchen Schmidt (2015) Student Success Centers: Leading the Charge for Change at Community Colleges, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 47:2, 30-39, DOI:

[10.1080/00091383.2015.1018087](https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2015.1018087)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2015.1018087>

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Versions of published Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open articles and Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open Select articles posted to institutional or subject repositories or any other third-party website are without warranty from Taylor & Francis of any kind, either expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. Any opinions and views expressed in this article are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor & Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.