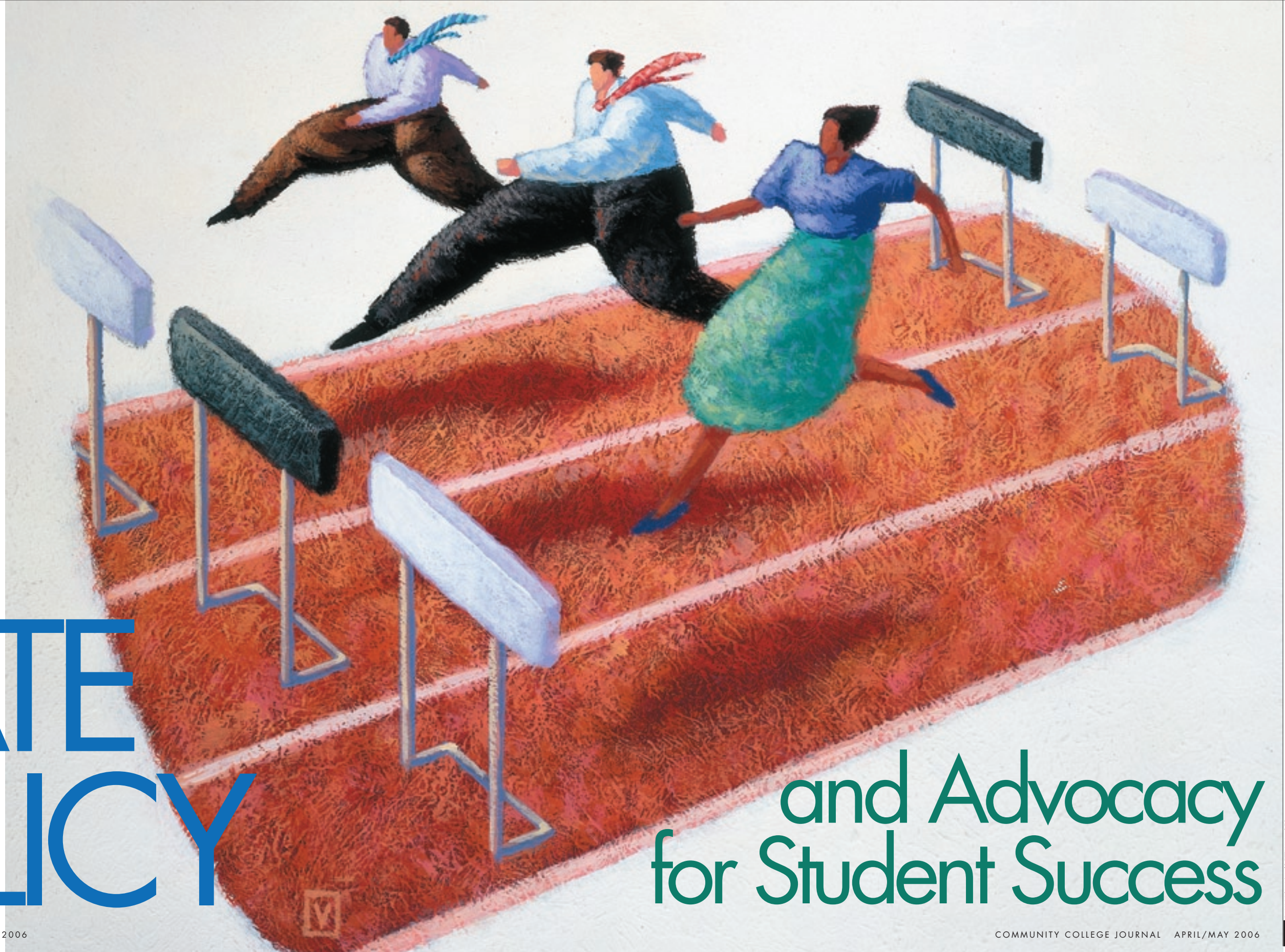


BY RICHARD KAZIS

Although the patterns of funding for community colleges vary greatly from state to state, colleges in most states derive somewhere near half of their institutional funding from state budgets. Not surprisingly, then, what transpires in the halls of state government is of great interest to community college leaders. Ask any system head and most college presidents about their lives during the height of legislative sessions, and they'll tell you they are ready to head to the capitol at a moment's notice.

# STATE POLICY

## and Advocacy for Student Success



Please visit our sessions at the 86<sup>th</sup> Annual AACC Convention

**Breaking Through Adult Basic Education**

Presenters: James Jacobs, CCRC; Elaine Baker, Community College of Denver; Nan Poppe, Portland Community College; Jerry Rubin, Jobs for the Future

Monday, April 24, 2006, 8:45 AM - 9:45 AM  
 Long Beach Convention Center, Room 104C

**Promoting Student Success Through Institutional Transformation at Community Colleges**

Presenters: Thomas Bailey, CCRC; Davis Jenkins, CCRC; Edwin Massey, Indian River Community College

Monday, April 24, 2006, 11:00 AM - 11:00 AM  
 Long Beach Convention Center, Room 103B

**Leading the Way in Institutional Research**

Presenters: Thomas Bailey, CCRC; Diane Troyer, Cy-Fair College; Karen Stone, Montgomery County Community College

Monday, April 24, 2006, 1:15 PM - 2:15 PM  
 Long Beach Convention Center, Room 202B

**Improving Student Transitions and College Readiness**

Presenters: Katherine Hughes, CCRC; James McKenney, American Association of Community Colleges; Larry Wanford, College and Career Transitions Initiative; Gene Bottoms, Southern Regional Education Board

Monday, April 24, 2006, 1:15 PM - 2:15 PM  
 Long Beach Convention Center, Room 101A

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Bread and butter concerns typically dominate community college lobbying: the funding formula, salary increases, new buildings and new campuses, tuition policies, and financial aid. As Don Hudson, vice president of the Texas Association of Community Colleges puts it, "We will always be going up to the legislature on issues of funding. We can't afford not to."

However, the impact of state policies on community colleges goes far beyond how the fiscal pie gets divvied up. State legislatures and regulatory agencies shape who gains access to community colleges and what programs are available to them, which components of a college expand and which contract, who teaches and the quality of instruction, the ease and speed with which students can move into and through college programs, and the kinds of support available to students. State policy sets the framework within which colleges make day-to-day decisions and long-term plans.

**Changing Political Environment**

With mounting and competing claims on state resources, the tone of policy deliberations around higher education is changing. Increasingly, state leaders and policy makers are asking hard questions of community colleges, as they are of all sectors of the education system.

Even though they see the connection between a better-educated citizenry and a more productive and well-off state, policy makers no longer take for granted that public investments are generating adequate benefits. They want to know what economic value the state will reap from allocating scarce dollars to community colleges. How will employers and the economy benefit? And what do students stand to gain? How many will meet their educational goals? How many will move up the economic ladder or become more engaged citizens?

This new reality affects the messages that community college systems deliver to policy makers. As Glenn DuBois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, notes, "I don't go in talking about what our system needs. Rather, I tell them about what we provide for the

state and its citizens. I talk to them about the value we add for the state."

To strengthen the case for their "value added," community colleges and state systems or associations are finding it necessary to both collect and present better data on what happens to their students—and to pursue new strategies for promoting student success. Both these efforts will make it easier to respond to decision makers' concerns. Ironically, though, colleges and their advocates are finding that to deliver on the student success agenda will itself require changes in state policy.

**Emerging Emphasis: Supporting Student Success**

As part of Jobs for the Future's work with Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a student success initiative involving 35 community colleges in seven states (see box), we are helping state-level, community college advocates identify ways that policy makers can support their institutions' improvement efforts. During the past year, teams from Achieving the Dream states have found broad and strong agreement on three priorities where state action can have a big payoff—and simultaneously respond to the growing demand for results, accountability, and alignment across educational sectors.

**Student data systems:** As states demand improved results and stronger accountability, interest grows in better measures of success than existing Student Right to Know data on graduation rates for first-time, full-time students. According to Frank Renz, executive director of the New Mexico Community College Association, that data leaves out over 90 percent of the students in his state's community colleges. Community college teams from Achieving the Dream states (along with teams from states in the Ford Foundation's Bridges to Opportunity Initiative) are exploring the potential for establishing realistic, intermediate benchmarks showing their effectiveness at preparing students entering with different levels of preparation and aspiration. These teams also see the need for state data systems that connect K-12, commu-

**Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count**

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a multi-year national initiative to help more community college students succeed. Funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, and Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Achieving the Dream is particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced significant barriers to success, including students of color and low-income students.

For more information, go to [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org). To receive the quarterly Achieving the Dream state policy e-newsletter, contact Deborah Sutherland at Jobs for the Future, [dsutherland@jff.org](mailto:dsutherland@jff.org).



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nity college, higher education, workforce development, and labor market outcome information for individuals over time.

**Developmental education and the college-readiness of incoming students:** A key challenge facing community colleges is moving non-college-ready students quickly and efficiently into and through college programs. This means improving and even rethinking developmental education. Achieving the Dream state teams see the need, for example, for consistent, state-level policies for assessing students and placing them in developmental courses.

Equally important are state policies that can align the expectations of high school exiting with college entry and provide clear and efficient ways for colleges to signal to high school students what it takes to succeed in college. More students would come to community colleges equipped to succeed if states encouraged colleges to collaborate with high schools in helping students improve their math and English skills. This would go a long way toward reducing the pressure on community college developmental programs.

**Need-based financial aid:** The balance between need-based and merit-based financial aid has swung dramatically toward the latter in most states, driven by popular lottery scholarships. This has left fewer resources available for community college students, most of whom encounter the costs of college as a significant obstacle to both access and success. Across the Achieving the Dream states, colleges and their advocates want the balance to swing back toward need-based aid. New Mexico made this a high priority. With the help of a broad-based coalition of business, community, and education interests, advocates recently won a new \$49 million need-based financial aid trust fund.

### Toward Stronger State-Level Partnerships

Community colleges and their advocates would be wise to build on Glenn DuBois' insight in Virginia that he must "tell a different story now about what we do." In the end, this means creating a different kind of relationship with state policy makers—a partnership built upon mutual

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Sometimes, the most effective first step is to eliminate policies that get in the way of better practice.

expectations and responsibilities. State resources will come with expectations of better results; college and system requests will be framed and justified in terms of what it will take to achieve those results.

This partnership should involve state leaders and agencies in considering how to promote what works and can work at the institutional level. In Achieving the Dream states, policy makers are learning about the careful experiments and innovations being undertaken by participating colleges, with the understanding that proven innovations should be supported, diffused, and expanded across the state. The new partnership also implies expanded capacity for collecting data and communicating information back to colleges. In Oregon, for example, it took the legislature until this year to approve funding for the Community College and Workforce Development Department to hire a policy analyst to work on student data reporting.

Not all the things colleges and their advocates would like to see from state government will come easily. Nor will a reciprocal partnership with state leaders and legislators always be enough. In New Mexico, winning funding of the College Affordability Act required help from a broad coalition of stakeholders as well, and they helped convince the governor and the legislature to approve the funds.

At the same time, not every policy

change requires new resources or a new rule. Sometimes, the most effective first step is to eliminate policies that get in the way of better practice. As Dennis Jones, president of the National Center on Higher Education Management Systems, notes, "Rather than add on a new layer of requirements sometimes you need to start by scraping the barnacles off the bottom of the boat."

*Richard Kazis is senior vice president of Jobs for the Future in Boston.*

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