



## HIGHER EDUCATION UPDATE

### Promoting Student Success at Community Colleges

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#### Overview

Unveiled on January 9, 2015, [America's College Promise](#) proposed to make two years of community college free for responsible students, letting students earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and gain skills needed in the workforce at no cost. The proposal calls on community colleges to strengthen their programs and increase the number of students who graduate; states to invest more in higher education and training; and students to take responsibility for their education, earn good grades, and stay on track to graduate.

Adult learners, military veterans, non-English speakers, and "nontraditional" students make up the majority of the 12.4 million students enrolled in 1,123 community colleges nationwide, according to the [American Association of Community Colleges](#). Nearly half of all undergraduates attend community colleges, which are open access institutions serving a diverse student population with a diverse set of needs, offering flexibility and affordability. Community colleges have traditionally had a threefold mission that includes preparing students for transfer to four-year colleges, offering developmental education, and preparing students for the workforce.

Yet, all too many community college students never graduate. The most recent [Beginning Postsecondary Students Survey](#), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, found that only 35 percent of students who began their studies at a two-year institution had received any degree or certificate within six years, compared to 64 percent of students who started at four-year institutions. Several studies have pointed to academic preparation and the need for remediation as one barrier to success. According to [Complete College America](#), roughly 50 percent of students who enroll in community colleges need at least one developmental course. Among those students, rates of success are low, with fewer than one in four ever receiving a degree or credential.

Created in 2012, the \$8 billion [Community College to Career Fund](#), co-administered by the Departments of Labor and Education, helps "forge new partnerships between community colleges and businesses to train two million workers for good-paying jobs in high-growth and high-demand industries."

Community colleges are going through transformations aimed at improving retention and student success. [California](#) is piloting a program allowing 12 community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in fields such as respiratory therapy, dental hygiene and aerospace manufacturing technology.

#### Evidence-based Strategies

Thomas R. Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College and co-author of [Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success](#), maintains that community colleges need to fundamentally overhaul the way they offer courses by giving students fewer choices, a more structured curriculum, and better guidance from registration

through graduation. Creating a simpler, streamlined pathway may be more effective than the piecemeal approaches two-year colleges have used in trying to bolster sagging graduation rates.

“The basic idea for guided pathways is that we’d like to have simpler, more coherent programs of study. We need to do a better job of helping students decide which path they want to be on. There’s a huge difference between a student who knows what he wants and one who doesn’t,” said Bailey in an interview with [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#).

The [American Association of Community Colleges](#) (AACC) report [Employing Community Colleges to Build the Nation’s Future—An Implementation Guide](#) provides a “blueprint for colleges and others to implement the seven recommendations—to redesign students’ educational experiences, reinvent institutional roles, and reset the system so it better promotes student success.” The guide calls for colleges to rethink and reshape every aspect of their work—policy frameworks, programs of study, student support, and relationships with those around them—with one goal in mind: giving community college students the tools, motivation, and support to finish what they start.

## What Colleges and Universities Are Doing

In February 2014, Tennessee became the nation’s first state to provide free community college to all state residents, regardless of merit or need. The new [Tennessee Promise](#) scholarships are part of the state’s recently-launched [Drive to 55](#) initiative, which aims to increase the share of Tennesseans who are college graduates to 55 percent. The scholarship is coupled with college counseling, mentorship, and community service that early evidence suggests supports greater enrollment, persistence, and college completion.

Florida’s [Miami Dade College \(MDC\)](#) is counting on structure, engagement, and relevance to increase student success. Responding to a charge from college leadership in 2011, MDC academic and student services deans developed a conceptual framework that focused on three core values to improve student outcomes: commitment, community, and completion. That framework later evolved into the college’s Student Achievement Initiatives (SAI), which has become a national model.

Northern Virginia Community College promotes student success with its [Start Strong](#) program aimed at first year students. The program includes a website that features collections of resources based on the student’s unique characteristics, such as Pathway to the Baccalaureate Students; Students 17-24 Years Old; Students 25 and Older; and Online Students.

At [Zane State College](#) in Ohio, 90 percent of students who complete the first year—including students in remedial classes—go on to earn a degree or certificate. Its [Success Center](#) helps students build academic plans and schedules, and helps when any problems arise concerning academic difficulty. The Student Success Center serves as the “answer spot” for students.

## Related Resources

- [The Quest for Student Success at Community Colleges](#)—explores a range of strategies being used at community colleges.
- [The Center for Community College Student Engagement](#)—provides information about effective educational practices in community colleges.
- [Survey of Community College Presidents](#)—aims to understand how community college presidents perceive and address challenges.

- [Community College Research Center \(CCRC\)](#)—independent authority on two-year colleges in the United States.
- [What We Know about Nonacademic Student Supports](#)—summarizes CCRC and other research on nonacademic student supports.
- [Pathways through Colleges: Strategies for Improving Community College Student Success](#)—discusses the barriers to community college completion.

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