



Essential Elements of Engagement



2008 Findings

Acknowledgments

CCSSE dedicates this report to the faculty members and student services professionals who seek through their daily efforts to make good on the dual promise of community college education: Opportunity *with* excellence. Access *and* student success. In colleges across the country, these educators are putting into practice two essential elements of student engagement — consistent, rigorous, and explicit high expectations (both for students and for institutions) coupled with timely, effective, inescapable student support. As illustrated by a growing body of research and the data presented in this report, both are necessary. And as demonstrated by a growing number of colleges, both are possible. Thus, we salute those teachers, advisors, counselors, tutors, and numerous others who are committed to *making the possible real* in the lives of students.

Kay McClenney, Director

Community College Survey of Student Engagement

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“We know that students have potential. What they need are skills to be able to be successful, and they have to learn those skills. It’s as simple as that. It’s not that they can’t do it. Of course they can. They just need the tools to be able to do it.”

— **Community college advisor**

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Foreword

Inextricably Intertwined: High Expectations and High Support

High expectations are an essential condition for student success. Simply put, no one rises to low expectations. But establishing high expectations is no simple matter. It requires more than just words, more than telling students that the community college holds high expectations for them. It also requires the establishment of policies and practices — and in turn, patterns of faculty, staff, and student actions — that reinforce those words in everyday practice. High expectations have to be experienced, not simply heard.

Equally important, experiencing high expectations is not the same as attaining them. Attaining high expectations requires high support, both academic and social. This is especially true for the many students who enter college academically underprepared for the demands of college work. Without support, high expectations are but a hollow promise.

The question for institutions is not merely whether they should promote high expectations. They should. The question is not whether they should provide academic and social support. They must. Rather, the question is how they can make sure high expectations and support services are present — visible, accessible, unavoidable — where students are. After all, these efforts will only promote student success if students engage in them.

Lest we forget, most community college students work and/or attend part-time. For many, going to college is but one of a number of obligations. The time they spend on campus often is limited to attending class. When class is over, they typically leave to attend to family and work. As a result, the classroom may be the only place students interact with one another and with faculty, the only place

where they can be effectively engaged in learning. If high expectations and high support are not experienced in the classroom, they are not likely to be experienced elsewhere.

At the same time, though researchers often talk of the first-year experience, most community college students describe success as a cumulative experience — one that is built *one course at a time*. They seek to succeed in their first course, then move on to the next, and then the next. Given this student perspective, it follows that the classroom must be the focus of institutional action for student success and faculty, working with support staff, its primary advocates. And support must be in some fashion connected to the classroom in ways that promote the attainment of high expectations — one course at a time.

Fortunately, an increasing number of community colleges are now seeking to reshape classroom practice in ways that hold students to high expectations and provide the support they need to succeed. There is no one right way to do so. There are many forms of practice that incorporate these principles — ranging from the use of pedagogies of engagement such as cooperative or collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and learning communities, to the integration of academic support into the classroom. Other forms of support, including financial assistance, are critical as well.

However they do so — and this report describes a number of promising strategies — community colleges are acting on the recognition that both high expectations and high support are essential. Together, they generate among students the greater effort and engagement that are so powerfully connected to student success.

Vincent Tinto

Distinguished Professor of Higher Education,
Syracuse University

Member, CCSSE National Advisory Board

Expectations and Support: You Can't Have One without the Other

Imagine you have started a new job in a brand new place. You have a title and job description, but how these broad outlines translate into day-to-day responsibilities is a mystery. You find your desk and computer, but you don't have the password to log in. Days and weeks pass. You figure out the basics, but still you are idling — and your potential is largely untapped.

No one would expect an employee, particularly one in his or her first job, to excel in these conditions. Not without training, resources, and support from a supervisor and colleagues.

And we shouldn't expect community college students put in a similar position to succeed. In addition to outfitting them with the title "student," community colleges have to help students engage in their college experience. Two essential tools for doing so are high expectations and high support.

This year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) zeroes in on high expectations and high support as it presents the results of its 2008 survey. Both are critical to student success: Students do best when expectations are high *and* they receive support that helps them achieve at high levels. Lower the standard, and quality suffers. Eliminate the support, and students flounder. But colleges that demonstrate both high expectations and high support give their students essential tools to succeed.

The value of high expectations and high support is well documented. Most students do their best when the bar is high but within reach. Colleges must set the standard and do so deliberately, clearly, and consistently. They also must provide the support — financial aid, advising, academic support, and so on — that makes the high standard accessible to all students.

Of course, there is no magic wand: Helping a student develop an academic plan in and of itself will not lead to success. Simply telling students that tutoring services are available may or may not help them. Students, like most busy people, do not necessarily make time for optional activities.

But community colleges that are determined to help students succeed recognize these realities and work with them. With the help of CCSSE and other data sources, these colleges continuously assess strengths and weaknesses in their educational practices. They then make improvements that actively engage students — all students, not just some — in learning.

If, for example, colleges determine that faculty members should spend more time advising students, they can offer training and guidelines, require a certain number of advising hours from faculty members, and incorporate these hours into workload policies. If they conclude that more students would benefit from tutoring services, they can integrate these services into the classroom, offer them at times convenient to students, or make them mandatory.

"Showing new students what they can and must do to succeed in college is necessary but not sufficient to ensure success."

— **George Kuh**, Director, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University Bloomington

These types of programs typically start as pilots, but ideally, when programs have strong results, colleges focus on scaling up so that both high expectations and high results become the norm for all students.

Colleges profiled throughout this report have attained measurable results by changing their approach to engaging students. The strategies differ, but they share key attributes: They are grounded in research, driven by college data, and implemented with a lot of hard work. As Vincent Tinto notes, "There is no great secret to successful retention programs, no mystery which requires unraveling. Though successful retention programming does require some skill and not an inconsiderable amount of effort, it does not require sophisticated machinery."⁶*

*Tinto, V. (n.d.). *Student Success and the Building of Involving Educational Communities*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, School of Education.

The Whole Is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts

Colleges with high expectations and high support purposefully build a student-centered culture in which every aspect of college life reflects these attributes. Faculty and staff, moreover, take collective responsibility for maintaining the standard and for helping more students succeed.

Consider **Prairie State College (IL)**, where faculty and deans put the focus on student effort and academic rigor — the cornerstones of high expectations — when they revised the college’s student evaluation survey. The survey reinforces the expectation that college courses are meant to be challenging, and students evaluate their own effort in the class, including their attendance, completion of assignments, preparation, and participation. They also rate their professors’ actions on items such as demanding high-level thinking, maintaining high grading standards, and being available to help students outside of class.

“There is no programmatic substitute for this sort of commitment, no easy way to measure its occurrence. . . . The presence of a strong commitment to students results in an identifiable ethos of caring.”

— **Vincent Tinto**, Distinguished Professor, Syracuse University

In an indication of the college’s commitment to maintaining high standards, these factors are presented to new faculty members. The college’s faculty development program also emphasizes inquiry-based teaching and learning, which stretches students’ reasoning skills and teaches them to solve problems with high-level thinking.

Tallahassee Community College (FL) sets its tone by defining student success — “Students finish what they start” — and reminding staff that those who do not teach share the responsibility to help students get to class in the best condition for learning. TCC supports its students with an advising model based on shared responsibility between students and the college. Expectations and responsibilities for both students and faculty members are clearly defined. New faculty participate in advising training before working

with advisees, and all faculty members participate in a yearly advising refresher course. TCC’s focus on advising grew out of its 2004 CCSSE results, in which only 21% of students said they used academic planning and advising *often* or *very often*. This year, the college plans to evaluate the current program and discuss continuing improvements.

“I appreciate it when teachers or advisors are flexible — for example, rescheduling an exam when my child was sick. But I do not appreciate people who have low expectations for me. Work with me, but don’t be my social worker!”

— **Female student**

Intentional Engagement

Engaging Students

Literature shows that use of certain key services is significantly related to student success. But many community college students spend limited time on campus and therefore have limited opportunities to make use of these services.

Colleges can address this challenge by making engagement strategies and support services inescapable, either by integrating them into the classroom experience, making them mandatory, or otherwise bringing them to students.

Data consistently show that students are more engaged in the classroom than anywhere else. For example, 46% of students *often* or *very often* work with other students on projects during class, but fewer than half that number — just 21% — *often* or *very often* work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.

Given these data, colleges can ask themselves whether students who need support services should be sent across campus, to an unfamiliar building, at a time that meets the scheduling needs of an unknown staff member — or whether the services should be provided at times and places convenient to students, including those enrolled part-time.

Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FL) recently revised its Student Life Skills (SLS) course so that, in

addition to teaching study skills and time management, it emphasizes the importance of using services that support student learning. Faculty members must become certified to teach the course, and the mandatory training focuses on group projects, service learning, and other active learning strategies. The SLS course was so successful that the college began requiring it for all students who needed developmental education in at least two areas.

In the fall 2007 cohort, students who took the SLS course had a 77% pass rate (a grade of C or better) in their college prep (developmental) classes and a 78% pass rate in non-prep classes. Students who did not comply with the SLS policy and did not take the SLS course had a 62% pass rate in their prep classes and a 58% pass rate in their non-prep classes. The fall-to-spring retention rate was almost 20% higher for students who took the SLS class. The college plans to begin requiring the course for students who need developmental education in only one area, with an ultimate goal of reaching out to all first-time-in-college, degree-seeking students.

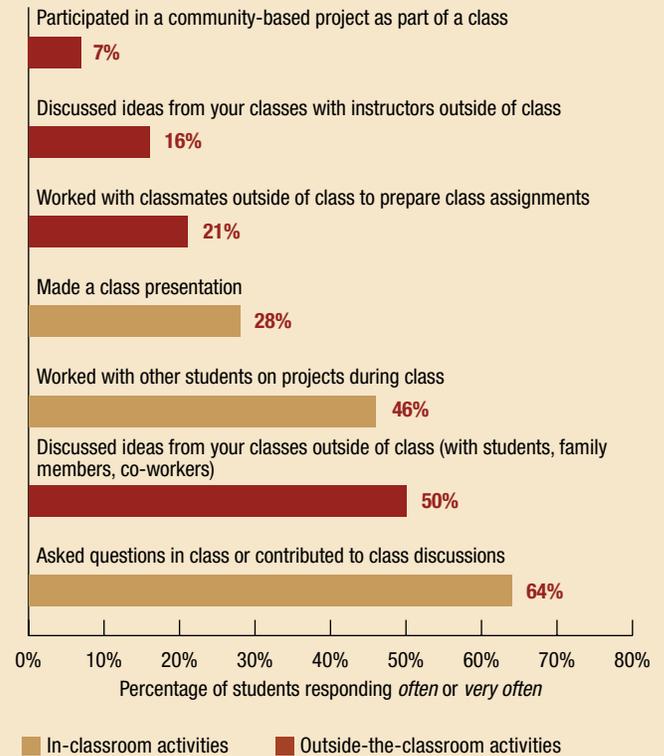
Skagit Valley College (WA) brought student support into the classroom by creating counseling-enhanced developmental learning communities. In this pilot project, a faculty counselor joined the team teaching the developmental learning communities, so time management, educational planning, test prep, and other skills were taught as part of the coursework. Students who were part of the counseling-enhanced learning community had an 82% fall-to-winter-quarter retention rate, compared with a 76% retention rate for students in developmental education learning communities without counselors and a 74% retention rate for students in stand-alone developmental courses.

"[My instructor] knew that some of us were not as ahead as others. She offered a class on Friday in addition to regular class times. Anyone who wanted to catch up was more than welcome to come."

— Male student

Engagement In and Out of the Classroom

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

When **Richland College (TX)** created the Science Corner, it brought faculty interaction and tutoring directly to its students. As a physical space, the Science Corner is an open hallway area where students typically congregate. Close to labs and faculty offices, it formerly housed eight study carrels. Today it has tables, chairs, a room divider, a periodic table, and marker boards. As a concept, the Science Corner is a community of learners and a magnet for student engagement. It is a center for drop-in tutoring, informal conversations between students and faculty members, study groups, faculty office hours, and help sessions. Students who are intimidated by faculty offices find it easier to walk to the table, sit down, and talk. Adjunct faculty meet students, faculty and tutors work with students one on one or in groups, and students learn from one another.

Engaging Faculty

Colleges' focus on high expectations and high support should extend to faculty, including both full-time and part-time instructors. Faculty should be expected to maintain high standards for students, engage students in learning with active teaching strategies, and provide support to help students succeed. To do this work, faculty need professional development, peer support, and other opportunities to develop their skills and share their results.

Colleges can use their Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) results to target areas for professional development. For example, CCFSSE results indicate that there are opportunities for professional development in the area of active teaching and learning strategies.

- ★ Nearly a third (31%) of the 2008 CCFSSE Cohort (faculty respondents) say that they spend 50–100% of their class time lecturing.
- ★ More than half (53%) of faculty members allocate less than 10% of their class time to small group activities.
- ★ 89% of faculty members report spending less than 20% of their class time on in-class writing.
- ★ 50% of faculty respondents spend no class time on student computer use.

Two years ago, **Patrick Henry Community College (VA)** decided to adopt cooperative learning as its major classroom strategy. Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which students work in groups to accomplish shared goals. When implemented correctly, the instructor becomes a facilitator, and the students become a cooperative team. PHCC administered the CCSSE survey in 2005, and the results were a major factor in the decision to focus on cooperative learning. PHCC students identified memorization as their major learning mode, and scores on academic challenge, student effort, and active and collaborative learning benchmarks were low.

Because PHCC wanted to employ cooperative learning throughout the institution, the college made faculty development a priority. To date, 100% of full-time faculty and 85% of part-time faculty members have been introduced to cooperative learning through required in-service activities and orientations. In addition, 82% of full-time and 48% of part-time faculty members have participated in annual cooperative learning institutes or workshops.

PHCC data show that the teaching strategy is having positive effects. Fall to fall, the college saw a 26% attrition rate among students who were enrolled in no courses using cooperative learning, a 19% attrition rate among those who were enrolled in one cooperative learning course, and a 5% attrition rate among students enrolled in two or more courses using the strategy.

To maintain the commitment to the strategy, job descriptions and evaluation plans for full-time faculty were changed to require the use of cooperative learning. Adjunct faculty who attend workshops will be eligible for pay in addition to their per-credit-hour rate.

"I hate it at the moment, but my favorite teachers are always the ass-kickers ... I like to be challenged."

— **Male student**

Full- and part-time faculty members at **Frederick Community College (MD)** participate in Lunch Bunches, a program in which faculty and academic administrators share their expertise and knowledge. In 2007, FCC used seven of these forums to share CCSSE findings and identify areas for improvement. At each session, faculty and staff members presented information related to a CCSSE benchmark or an area of student engagement, and participants were asked to help determine next steps to improve student performance. During these interactive sessions, participants suggested a number of inescapable engagement strategies, such as incorporating campus events in coursework, establishing an amount of writing that should be required by classes, and encouraging faculty to engage with students outside the classroom, where they will seem more approachable.

Kapi'olani Community College (HI) engages part-time and full-time faculty through its institution-wide commitment to service learning. Every two years, the college conducts a three- to four-day Faculty Service Learning Institute to help both seasoned and new faculty members better understand and use service-learning pedagogy. As a result, faculty members are invested in using service learning as a teaching strategy.

Student Engagement and *CCSSE*

Community colleges use *CCSSE* to collect data about student engagement on their campuses and then use those data to improve student learning and persistence. Once colleges have data about students' experiences, they can begin making decisions based on evidence. And students are more likely to be successful when colleges base decisions — about everything from course scheduling and teaching strategies to student services and resource allocation — on evidence.

All *CCSSE* work is grounded in a large body of research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study — the more likely they are to learn, to stick with their studies, and to attain their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is a valuable yardstick for assessing the quality of colleges' educational practices and identifying ways they can produce more successful results — across all subgroups of students.

The *CCSSE* instrument focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. *CCSSE* works with participating colleges to administer the survey, which measures students' levels of engagement in a variety of areas. The colleges then receive their survey results, along with guidance and analysis they can use to improve their programs and services for students.

CCSSE data analyses include a three-year cohort of participating colleges. Using a three-year cohort increases the number of institutions and students in the national data set, optimizes representation of institutions by size and location, and therefore increases the stability of the overall results.

This year's three-year cohort — called the 2008 *CCSSE* Cohort — includes all colleges that participated in *CCSSE* from 2006 through 2008. If a college participated more than one time in the three-year period, the cohort includes data only from its most recent year of participation. The 2008 *CCSSE* Cohort includes more than 343,000 students from 585 institutions in 48 states as well as British Columbia, the Marshall Islands, and Nova Scotia.

A Word about Financial Aid

Financial aid advising and funding are central to student support. After all, students cannot be engaged unless they are enrolled in college, and for many students, this is not possible without financial aid.

Asked what factors are likely to make them withdraw from class or from college, 45% of *CCSSE* respondents cite lack of finances as a *likely* or *very likely* cause. In addition, *CCSSE* respondents consistently rate financial aid advising as one of the most important support services, with 78% of the 2008 *CCSSE* Cohort calling it *somewhat* or *very important*. At the same time, in student focus groups, participants consistently voice significant frustration with the financial aid services on their campuses. Indeed, when asked to describe an unsatisfactory experience at their college, students are most likely to discuss financial aid services.

Making sure that students complete college also is important to local, state, and national economies. More and more jobs require an education beyond high school, and economic prosperity depends on making sure that everyone has skills and training that will allow them to contribute. Yet up to 75% of low-income students who start a community college degree or certificate program either drop out or fail to complete the program within five years.*

For these reasons, this year's *CCSSE* special focus survey items, developed in collaboration with the congressionally appointed Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, explore issues related to financial assistance. A complete discussion begins on page 17.

Beyond Federal Financial Aid

Although this year's special focus survey items focus on financial aid, students also can explore other avenues of support. In several areas, communities are rallying around students — providing financial support and incentives — to make sure they have access to education and the opportunity to be successful.

*MDRC. (2008, May). *Opening Doors Update*. Available at: www.mdrc.org/project_31_2.html

The Denver Scholarship Foundation (CO) works to increase college access and success among Denver Public Schools (DPS) students in several ways: (1) placing advisors in high schools to assist students and their families with college and career planning as well as college and financial aid applications, (2) providing need-based scholarships of up to \$6,000 per year for five years to DPS graduates, and (3) partnering with Colorado postsecondary institutions to maximize student services for DSF scholars. Students can use these first-dollar scholarships at 39 Colorado colleges and universities as long as they maintain their academic standing.

The Galveston College Foundation (TX) built the Universal Access (UA) endowment with contributions from local individuals, businesses, churches, and foundations. The UA program qualifies local high school, GED, and home school graduates for Pell Grants, Texas grants, or grants from the UA endowment. In the last eight years, the UA program has funded 2,065 students with more than \$3.4 million in UA and Pell Grants.

The Hopkinsville Rotary Club (KY) offers eligible local students last-dollar-paid scholarships up to the full amount required to pay their tuition at **Hopkinsville Community College (HCC)**. (Pell Grants and other scholarships are applied before the Rotary Scholars Program award.) The program reaches out to students beginning in 8th grade, and incentives begin in 9th grade to build students' commitment to attending college at an early age. Scholarship recipients must successfully complete HCC's Orientation to College course and maintain specified academic standards.

The Pittsburgh Promise (PA), part of the Pittsburgh Foundation, was launched with a \$100 million commitment from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The Promise offers students of the Pittsburgh public schools scholarships of up to \$5,000 per year for four years if they maintain

academic standards and meet residency and enrollment criteria. One thousand Promise applicants from the Pittsburgh high school class of 2008 met Promise eligibility requirements. More than a third of those students (350 students) said they planned to attend a two-year school, and 182 received scholarships to the **Community College of Allegheny County**.

"I've been applying and they never answer me. I'm constantly going there. If they don't want to approve it, just tell me. They want us to wait for next year, next semester. No, we need the money now to start school now. Please help us."

— **Female student**



Characteristics of Community College Students

Community colleges provide access to higher education through open admissions. As a result, they serve a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals, including earning a degree, transferring to a four-year institution, and receiving on-the-job training. Some students are degree holders returning for new skills. Many are first-generation college students who have never been to a college campus.

The characteristics of community college students shown here provide context for the data provided throughout this report. Most community college students are individuals who attend college part-time, juggling class and study time with work and family responsibilities. Many are students who were not well served by their previous schooling and, therefore, are likely to have academic challenges. Many are low-income students. Many care for and support dependents while they attend school. Many are Americans, learning English as their second (or third) language.

These characteristics are not excuses for low performance on the part of colleges or their students. They simply reflect a reality of community colleges: For many community college students, succeeding in college and returning semester after semester requires a heroic effort. Those who want to help more students succeed do not pretend that these challenges do not exist. And they do not use these facts to rationalize poor performance. Instead, they use the data to develop educational practices that help community college students succeed.

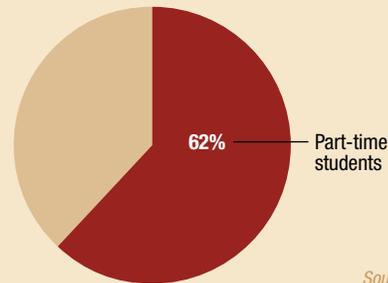
“The old saying is, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ Here, it goes from deans to the president, down to career services, people in Student Life. I think they do a phenomenal job of making you feel that you want to be a part of this.”

— Male student

Community College Students Contend with Competing Priorities

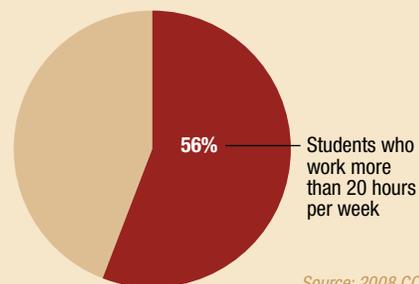
Students’ commitments to work and family mean that they spend limited time on campus and most of their time on campus is spent in the classroom. Engaging students, therefore, often means engaging them in the classroom.

Most students are enrolled part-time



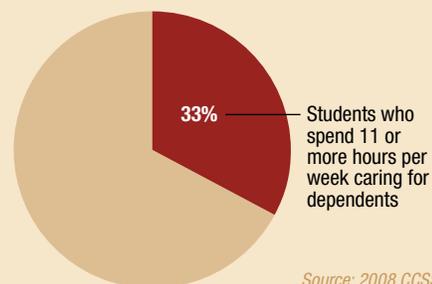
Source: IPEDS, fall 2006.

Most students work



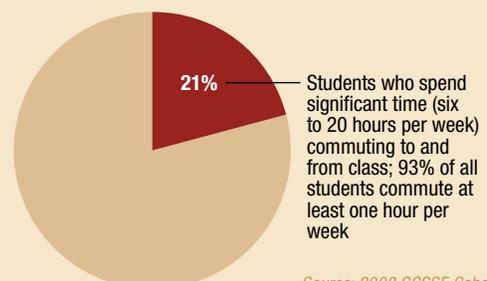
Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Many students care for dependents



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Most students commute, and many spend significant time commuting



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Students' Goals

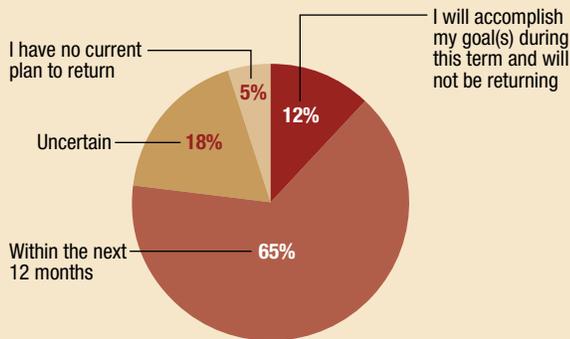
Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college.

| | Primary goal | Secondary goal | Not a goal |
|---|--------------|----------------|------------|
| Complete a certificate program | 29% | 19% | 52% |
| Obtain an associate degree | 59% | 21% | 20% |
| Transfer to a four-year college or university | 52% | 21% | 27% |
| Obtain or update job-related skills | 41% | 27% | 32% |
| Self-improvement/personal enjoyment | 39% | 35% | 26% |
| Change careers | 29% | 16% | 55% |

Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Students' Plans after the Current Semester

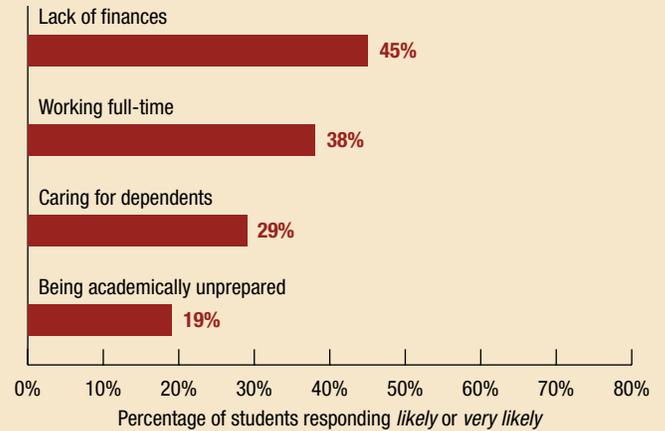
Asked when they plan to take classes at this college again, 23% had no plan to return or were uncertain about their future plans.



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Barriers to Returning to College

How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?

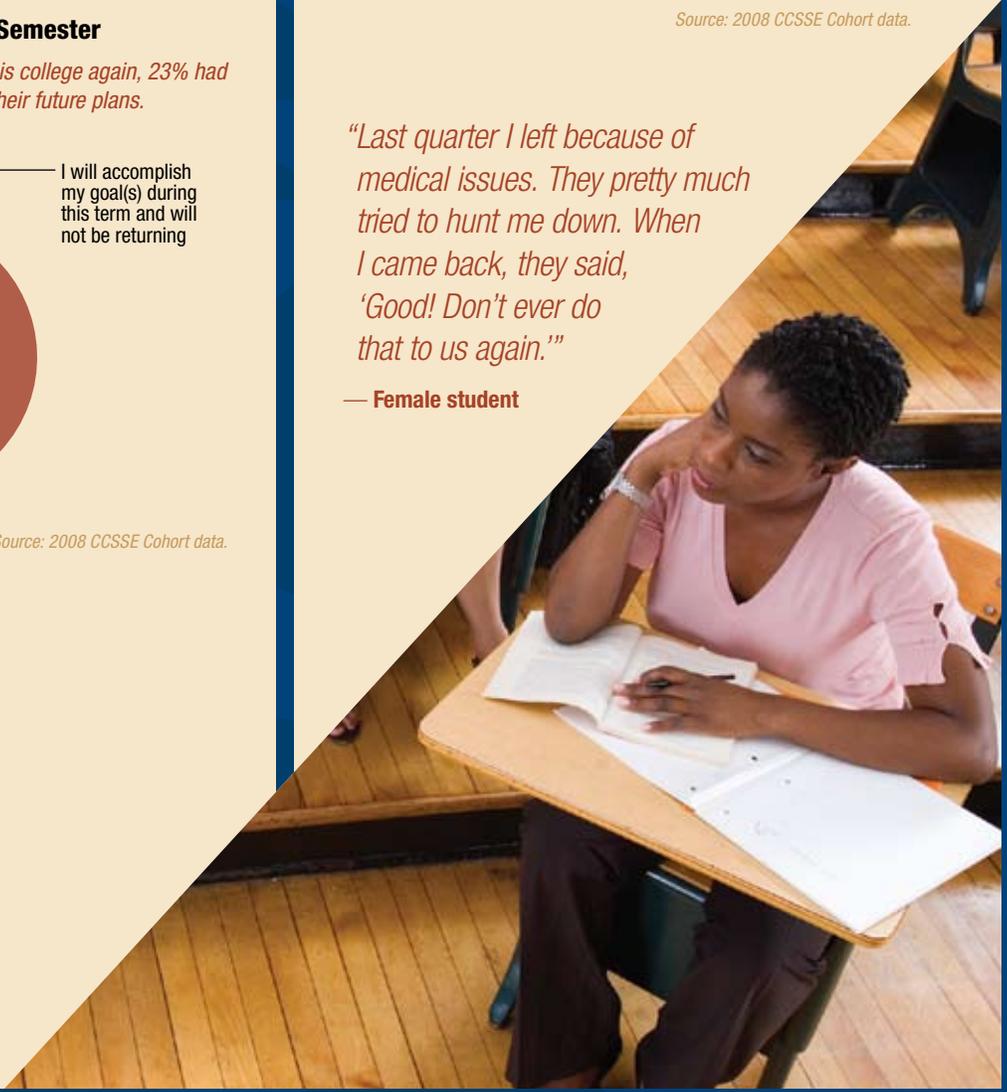


In addition, 49% of respondents say that transfer to a four-year college or university is a likely or very likely reason they would not return to this college.

Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

"Last quarter I left because of medical issues. They pretty much tried to hunt me down. When I came back, they said, 'Good! Don't ever do that to us again.'"

— Female student



Most and Least Engaged Community College Students*

Most Engaged

- ★ Full-time students
- ★ Nontraditional-age students (those over age 24)
- ★ Students seeking credentials
- ★ Students who have completed 30 or more credits
- ★ Female students
- ★ Black students
- ★ International students
- ★ Financially dependent students (those using funds other than their own income or savings as the major source to pay the tuition)
- ★ Students who work fewer than 30 hours per week
- ★ Students who have taken developmental courses
- ★ Students who have taken study skill courses
- ★ Students who have participated in orientation
- ★ Students who have participated in learning communities

Least Engaged

- ★ Part-time students
- ★ Traditional-age students (those 24 and younger)
- ★ Students not seeking credentials
- ★ Students who have not completed 30 or more credits
- ★ Male students
- ★ Students who are not black
- ★ U.S. students
- ★ Financially independent students (those using their own income or savings as the major source to pay the tuition while not using their parents' or spouse's money)
- ★ Students who work more than 30 hours per week
- ★ Students who have not taken developmental courses
- ★ Students who have not taken study skill courses
- ★ Students who have not participated in orientation
- ★ Students who have not participated in learning communities

**This analysis does not include students who hold degrees.
Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.*

Most and Least Engaged Community College Students

An analysis of the most and least engaged students in the 2008 CCSSE Cohort reveals useful information about student behaviors and institutions' capacity to influence those behaviors.

CCSSE data consistently show that high-risk students, such as those who take developmental courses, typically are more engaged than their lower-risk peers. (For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see CCSSE's 2005 report, *Engaging Students, Challenging the Odds*.)

A notable exception is part-time students (a sizable group of high-risk students), who consistently are less engaged than their full-time peers.

But consider the case of part-time students who participate in developmental education. On four of five CCSSE benchmarks, these students are less engaged than full-time students but more engaged than their part-time peers who did not take developmental courses.

On the fifth benchmark, support for learners, part-time students who participate in developmental education are more engaged than even full-time students: They are 15% of the 2008 CCSSE Cohort, but they represent 16% of the most engaged students on this benchmark.

Thus, even though part-time students are consistently less engaged than full-time students, taking developmental courses is a mitigating factor that affects their engagement levels in all areas. The analysis shows similar outcomes for students in other less engaged groups — male students, traditional-age students, and students who work more than 30 hours per week — when those students take developmental courses.

This effect, moreover, is not limited to students taking developmental courses. Students from typically less engaged groups are more engaged than their peers when they participate in college orientation, study skill courses, and learning communities.

These data indicate that colleges should identify — and require students to participate in — interventions that increase the engagement of their least engaged students.

Data Show the Way: 2008 *CCSSE* Benchmarks and *CCFSSE* Results

Three of the five *CCSSE* benchmarks — **student effort**, **academic challenge**, and **support for learners** — can help colleges assess whether they are setting high expectations and providing high support. Therefore, this report of the 2008 findings focuses on these three benchmarks. To learn more about findings for all benchmarks as well as individual survey items, visit www.ccsse.org.

Student Effort

Survey items that are part of this benchmark indicate to what extent students are applying themselves in the learning process and engaging in activities important to their learning and success. These survey items ask about student behaviors such as preparing multiple drafts of papers, using tutoring services and skill labs, and preparing for class.

Among full-time students:

- ★ 55% *often* or *very often* prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.
- ★ 69% *often* or *very often* worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.
- ★ 67% spent 10 or fewer hours per week preparing for class.
- ★ 13% spent at least 21 hours per week preparing for class.

If a college is setting high expectations — demanding that its students demonstrate high-level understanding and skills — it should be reflected in these survey items. There is ample evidence, moreover, that colleges' actions can increase student effort and thereby improve student success.

“They lecture over what they wanted you to read the night before. So reading often seems pointless. You sit there and think, ‘Why am I even here?’”

— Male student

The *CCSSE* Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. *CCSSE*'s five benchmarks comprise 38 engagement items that reflect many of the most important aspects of the student experience. The benchmarks measure behaviors that educational research has shown to be powerful contributors to effective teaching, learning, and student retention.

The *CCSSE* benchmarks are active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners.

Every college has a score for each benchmark. These individual benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the mean — the average of all participating students — always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25.

The standardized scores provide an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark. They also make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges.

Visit www.ccsse.org to see descriptions of the benchmarks, specific survey items associated with each benchmark, and key findings organized by benchmark.

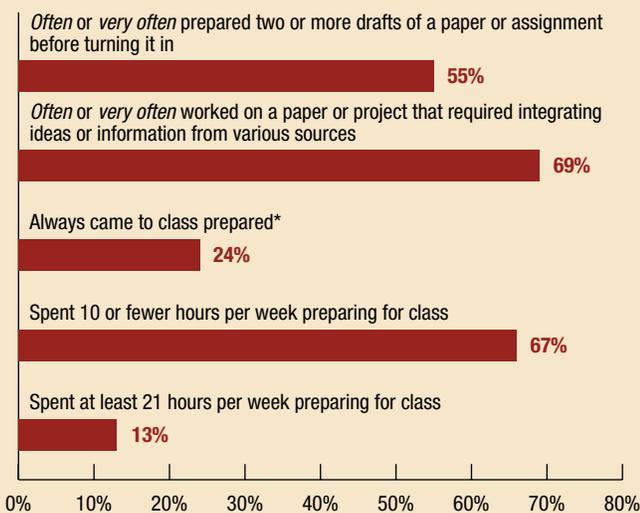
The Writing Support Services (WSS) program at **Bossier Parish Community College (LA)** encourages greater student effort on writing assignments by providing students with intensive support at all stages of the writing process. The program began as a pilot in 2007, but *CCSSE* and *CCFSSE* data indicated the need to serve students more directly: 79% of faculty said they referred students to skill labs *sometimes* or *often*, but only 40% of students used skill labs *sometimes* or *often*. The college now aims to increase students' use of the WSS by building it into the curriculum. For example, WSS staff will visit classes to facilitate group discussions and address students' concerns about major writing assignments. In addition, faculty members will require students to receive feedback from a writing support specialist (in person, online, or as part of the classroom workshop) for a specified number of drafts each semester.

To increase students' use of tutoring and skill labs, **Highline Community College (WA)** placed a writing center, tutoring center, and math resource center in a single location that is close to the library and the campus center. Faculty members are present in this "commons" area, and they recruit, train, and evaluate peer tutors. HCC tracks use of the commons services, and data indicate that students who take advantage of tutoring have higher grade point averages than students who do not use these services.

After seeing results from its 2006 CCSSE administration, **Itawamba Community College (MS)** established three writing centers to increase student effort with regard to writing. The centers also helped the college address its concerns about certain academic challenge benchmark items, including students' frequency of writing papers that require integrating ideas or information from various sources. In an effort that dovetails with the writing centers' goals, the college also increased the amount of writing required and set more rigorous writing standards. Results of ICC's 2008 CCSSE administration show improvements for both student effort and academic challenge. Students more frequently write multiple drafts of papers and they more often write papers that require the integration of material.

Student Effort: Preparing for Class and Assignments

Full-time students who ...



*This survey item asks students how often they come to class without completing readings or assignments. Never responses are reverse coded here.

Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Academic Challenge

Survey items included in this benchmark address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance.

- ★ About half (49%) of CCSSE respondents report that they *often* or *very often* worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations; 11% of students say they *never* did so.
- ★ 71% of respondents say their college *quite a bit* or *very much* encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying; 4% say their college does so *very little*.
- ★ 58% of 2008 CCSSE Cohort respondents say that their coursework emphasizes synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways *quite a bit* or *very much*, and 55% report that their college emphasizes applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations *quite a bit* or *very much*. These are examples of higher-level cognition, or greater academic challenge. By contrast, 64% of students say that their coursework emphasizes memorizing facts and ideas *quite a bit* or *very much*.

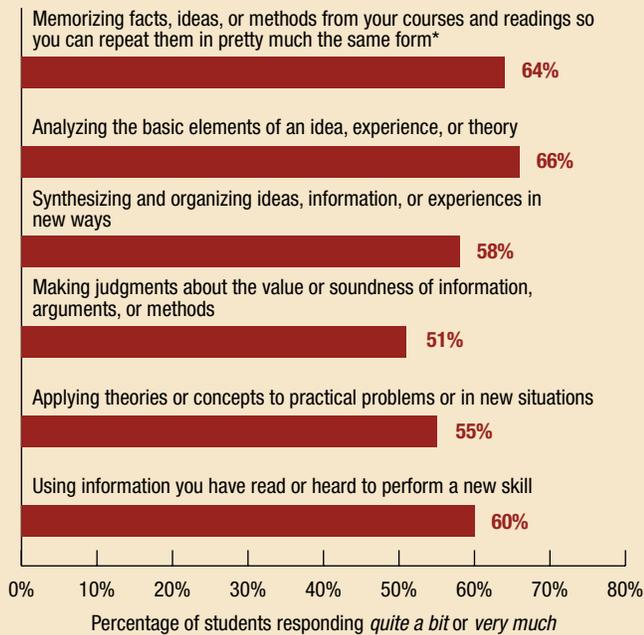
LaGuardia Community College (NY) has boosted academic rigor for its students by offering capstone courses, which are final-semester courses that tie together the key learning objectives of a student's major. These courses, a mainstay of many baccalaureate programs, are not often seen at community colleges. LaGuardia's capstone courses are integrated with the ePortfolio, an online tool students use to collect, organize, and reflect on their academic work.

"My biology teacher's classes were really tough. It was a lot of work. But it was five credits, and it's what you signed up for. And the base of knowledge I have after making it through her class ... it's indispensable."

— Female student

Academic Challenge: Critical Thinking

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?



*This survey item is not part of the academic challenge benchmark but is included here for purposes of comparison.

Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

Support for Learners

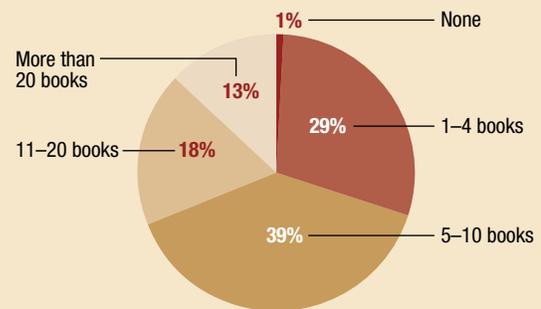
Survey items associated with this benchmark indicate the extent to which students use key academic and student support services as well as how important they consider these services to be. The survey items address advising, academic and career planning, academic skill development, financial aid, and other services that can affect learning and retention.

More than seven in 10 students (71%) say that their college provides the support they need to succeed in college *quite a bit or very much*. At the same time:

- ★ Fewer than half of students (45%) report that their college provides the financial support they need to afford their education *quite a bit or very much*; more than a quarter (28%) say their colleges provide this support *very little*.

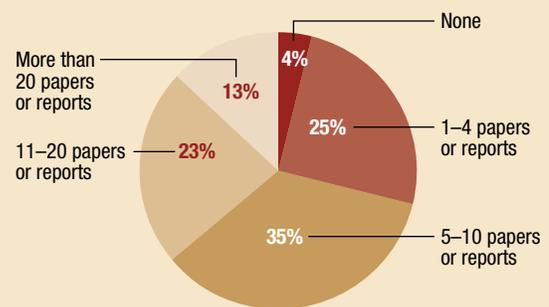
Academic Challenge: Books Read and Papers Written

Full-time students: Number of assigned books during the year*



*Assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings

Full-time students: Number of written papers or reports of any length during the year



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

- ★ One-quarter (25%) of students say that their college helps them cope with their nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) *quite a bit or very much*; 41% say their colleges provide this support *very little*.

Although students say they value many services highly, they do not use these services often. To provide better support to students, colleges can close the gap between perceived importance of student services and regular use of these services. Colleges can increase the use of services by making them mandatory, integrating them into coursework, and providing them at times and in places that are convenient to both full-time and part-time students. Colleges also can conduct further research (surveys or focus groups) to determine whether most students on their campuses are aware of these resources — what services are offered as well as how to access them — and to identify factors that might discourage students from using services.

Some colleges may find that they need to expand efforts to build awareness of student services and encourage students to use them.

Century College (MN) based its GPS LifePlan on the LifeMap advising system created at **Valencia Community College (FL)**. GPS LifePlan is a comprehensive, interactive planning tool that students use through attending campus events, developing an eFolio, using the extensive Web site, and working with faculty. A recent study revealed that 86% of faculty members were aware or very aware of GPS LifePlan and 92% of students were aware of it and intended to use it. Faculty members, who are increasingly integrating GPS LifePlan into their courses, note that students

are talking more about practical steps they are taking to accomplish their goals.

In fall 2005, 23% of students at **Northwest Vista College (TX)** had undeclared majors. Because research shows that having a plan plays a critical role in persistence, the college launched Explore Your Possibilities, a concerted effort to decrease the number of undeclared students. Explore Your Possibilities focused on first-time-in-college students, and it involved advising, campus events, a purposeful career assessment administered in the Student Development Seminar, and other activities. Undeclared majors at the college dropped to 11% in fall 2007 and 9% in spring 2008.

Gainesville State College (GA) uses supplemental instruction (SI) to support students in traditionally difficult courses (those with DFW grade rates of more than 30%). In classes with SI, a student leader attends class with the students and holds regularly scheduled review sessions. Among students participating in SI, the college found increases of 26% to 67% in ABC grade rates, depending on the number of SI sessions the students attended.

Support for Learners: Use and Value of Student Services

How often do you use the following services?

| | Often | Rarely/never |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Academic advising/planning | 13% | 35% |
| Career counseling | 6% | 51% |
| Job placement assistance | 3% | 47% |
| Peer or other tutoring | 7% | 46% |
| Skill labs (writing, math, etc.) | 15% | 37% |
| Child care | 2% | 37% |
| Financial aid advising | 17% | 33% |
| Computer lab | 32% | 24% |
| Student organizations | 5% | 45% |
| Transfer credit assistance | 7% | 36% |

How important are the following services?

| | Very | Not at all |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Academic advising/planning | 62% | 10% |
| Career counseling | 50% | 21% |
| Job placement assistance | 37% | 35% |
| Peer or other tutoring | 39% | 29% |
| Skill labs (writing, math, etc.) | 44% | 25% |
| Child care | 28% | 54% |
| Financial aid advising | 60% | 22% |
| Computer lab | 60% | 15% |
| Student organizations | 24% | 41% |
| Transfer credit assistance | 51% | 27% |

Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data.

CCFSSE: Data Inform Personal Experience

CCSSE encourages colleges to compare faculty perceptions with student responses and share those data with faculty members. The comparison is not perfect because students report their experiences throughout the current academic year, but faculty members are asked to describe their practices in a specific, randomly selected course and also to indicate their perceptions of student experiences in the college more generally. Nonetheless, the comparison can inspire powerful conversations because faculty and students typically have different perceptions of the degree of student engagement.

Overall, faculty members consistently report higher levels of student engagement than students do. This difference in perception likely stems, at least in part, from the difference between personal data (what each individual personally observes and experiences) and systematically collected data, which show what typically is happening to students on campus.

Survey items related to student-faculty interaction reveal the greatest difference in student and faculty perceptions. For example, 30% of faculty members report that they *often* or *very often* discuss ideas from readings or class work with students outside of class; 15% of students report having these conversations *often* or *very often*. This difference makes sense in the context of an instructor who talks with a half dozen students after every class. If the group of students changes each day, then the instructor would engage with everyone in the class over time. But if the faculty member interacts with the same students repeatedly, then the instructor is experiencing daily student-faculty interaction, but most of his or her students are not.

“Just being honest and genuine with students, you can make a connection . . . and hopefully, as they wander around, they see somebody they can mesh with and see that person as a mentor or [someone to give] advice.”

— Male instructor

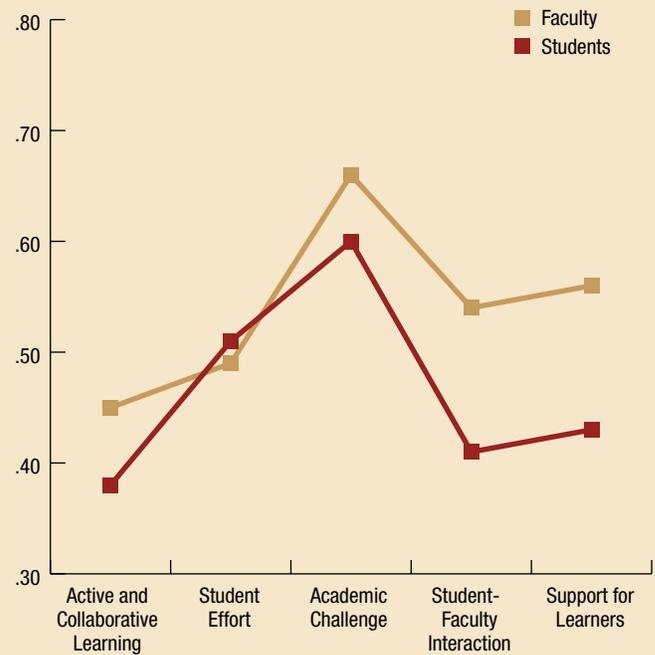
CCFSSE: The Faculty Perspective

The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE), which is aligned with CCSSE, elicits information from faculty about their teaching practices, the ways they spend time both in and out of class, and their perceptions regarding students' educational experiences.

All CCFSSSE analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. The 2008 CCFSSSE Cohort includes all colleges that participated in CCFSSSE in 2006, 2007, and 2008 (each college's most recent year of participation).

All institutions that participated in the 2008 administration of the CCSSE survey were invited to participate in CCFSSSE, which was administered online. At colleges that chose to participate, every faculty member teaching credit classes in the spring term was eligible to respond to the survey, and faculty respondents generally mirror the national two-year college faculty population. The notable exception is employment status: Nationally, 33% of two-year college faculty members are employed full-time, and 59% of 2008 CCFSSSE Cohort respondents are employed full-time. For more information about CCFSSSE, visit www.ccsse.org.

Student Engagement: Student and Faculty Views



Source: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data and 2008 CCFSSSE Cohort data.

CCFSSE data are based on results from all colleges in the 2008 CCFSSSE Cohort. When student (CCSSE) and faculty (CCFSSE) views are presented side by side in this report, the student responses include data only from colleges that participated in the faculty survey. Also, although CCSSE results are presented in terms of benchmarks, which are created through complex statistical analysis and expert judgment, there are no benchmarks for CCFSSSE. For this report, CCFSSSE results are presented in groupings of survey items that correspond to the CCSSE benchmarks.

To create this chart of student and faculty views, responses to CCSSE and CCFSSSE items were rescaled. All scores were converted to proportions of their totals so that the low end of the scale always was zero and the high end always was one. For example, a four on a seven-point scale and a three on a five-point scale both equal 0.5. Don't know/not applicable responses on items measuring frequency of use were not included in the computation of these scores.

Three items were excluded from these data. A CCSSE survey item about the number of books students read on their own cannot be asked on the faculty survey. Items about the number of books read and papers assigned for classes were omitted because students report on those activities for the full year, but faculty members report on those activities for their particular classes.

Special Focus: Financial Assistance

CCSSE's 2008 special focus survey items highlight financial aid. Each year, five special focus survey items examine an area of student experience and institutional performance that is critical for student success. These five items, which address a different topic each year, are separate from the core survey, which does not change.

For many students, financial aid is the first and most important element of student engagement. If they miss this step — if they do not get financial aid — nothing else the college does will matter because the students will not be able to enroll and stay in school.

The relationship between financial aid and student success is well documented. **Delgado Community College** and **Louisiana Technical College-West Jefferson (LA)** illustrated the value of financial support through their participation in MDRC's Opening Doors Demonstration. At these two colleges, low-income students were offered a \$1,000 scholarship for each of two semesters (\$2,000 total) if they met two conditions: staying enrolled at least half-time and maintaining at least a 2.0 (C) grade average. Program counselors monitored students' performance and paid students who met these conditions in three increments: \$250 upon enrollment, \$250 at mid-term, and \$500 at the completion of the semester. The Opening Doors scholarships were paid on top of Pell Grants and other financial aid for which students qualified.

Students who received the scholarship were more likely to enroll in college full-time, exhibited higher rates of semester-to-semester retention, passed more courses, and earned more college credits. These positive impacts notably persisted into the third and fourth semesters, when students no longer were eligible for the scholarship.

Similarly, data from Achieving the Dream, a national community college initiative, indicate that students who receive Pell Grants are more likely to persist. The data show a relationship between aid and persistence even for students who received small financial awards, and it holds for students of all races and ethnicities.*

Securing federal financial aid begins with a complex, often intimidating application form called the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). According to the American Council on Education (ACE), more than half (55%) of community college students did not complete a FAFSA in 2003–04, as compared with 37% of students at public four-year institutions. Nearly one-third of the lowest-income community college students did not file a FAFSA.**

The congressionally appointed Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (ACSFA) collaborated on the development of the 2008 special focus survey items, in part to learn whether large numbers of eligible public two-year college students are not applying for financial aid and if they are not, why.

ACSFA will use CCSSE findings to inform its study of the impact of financial aid at public two-year colleges, noting, "Data indicate that a high number of low- and moderate-income students start at a public two-year college with the expectation of attaining a bachelor's degree, but only a modest percentage of those students actually attain the degree. Determining why students do not apply for aid will enable those involved to better assist students in doing so and positively affect the number of public two-year college students who enroll, persist, transfer, and receive a bachelor's degree."

Special Focus Survey Items

Completing the FAFSA

The special focus survey items show that slightly more than half (56%) of CCSSE respondents completed the FAFSA. Most students who did not complete it say they did not think they would qualify for financial aid (38%), say they did not need financial aid (37%), or cite another unspecified reason (18%).

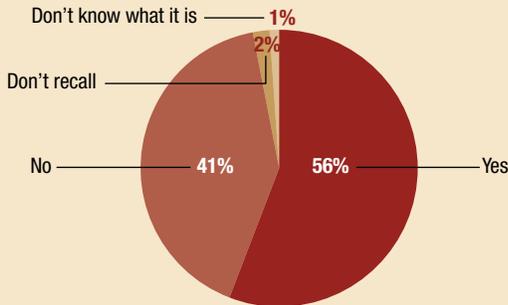
In its evaluation of these findings, ACSFA noted that having information on students' family income, family size, and dependency status would be helpful for further analysis. Such analysis, for example, might explore whether the 56% of students who applied for financial aid are the students who are most in need of it.

*Achieving the Dream. (2007, May/June). *Achieving the Dream Students and Financial Aid. Data Notes*, 2(2). Available at: www.achievingthedream.org

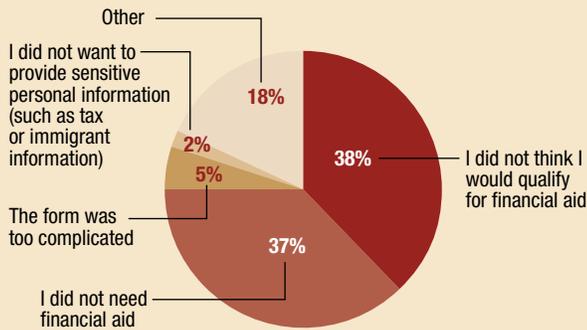
**American Council on Education (ACE). (2006). *Missed Opportunities Revisited: New Information on Students Who Do Not Apply for Financial Aid*. Washington, DC: ACE Center for Policy Analysis.

FAFSA Completion

Have you submitted the FAFSA to pay for your expenses at this college?



If you did not complete the FAFSA, what was the main reason you did not?*



*Responses from students who indicated that they did not submit the FAFSA.

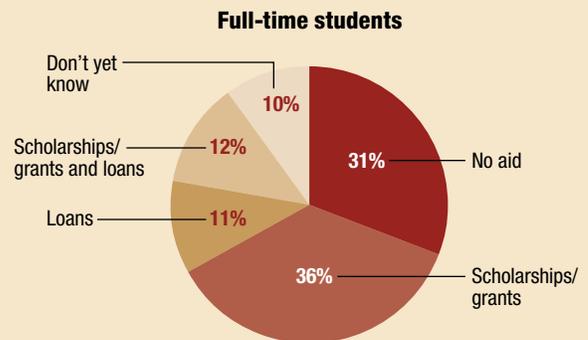
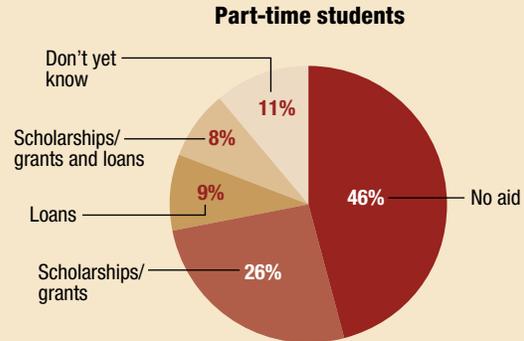
Source: 2008 CCSSE data.

CCSSE also recognizes that its survey is completed only by students who are enrolled in college. Thus, although the complexity of the FAFSA is seen as a significant barrier to applying for financial aid, only 5% of respondents who did not complete the FAFSA attribute their inaction to the form's complexity. It is likely that this percentage would increase if the survey included students who did not enroll in college.

Among students who did not complete the FAFSA because they believed they would not qualify for financial aid, just more than half (53%) say they thought they and/or their families had incomes too high to qualify, while 12% report that they believed they were not taking sufficient credit hours to qualify. Nearly a quarter (24%) cite another unspecified reason.

Percentage of Students Awarded Aid

Did you receive (or have you been notified that you will receive) any type of financial aid to help pay for college?



Source: 2008 CCSSE data.

Awarding of Financial Aid

Among students who did complete the FAFSA, 39% report that they did not receive any type of financial aid, 30% report receiving scholarships and/or grants (money that does not have to be repaid), 10% say they received loans (money that must be repaid), 10% report a combination of scholarships/grants and loans, and 11% did not yet know if they would receive aid. Full-time students are more likely to receive financial aid than are part-time students. Both full- and part-time students are more likely to receive grants and scholarships than loans.

Learning about Aid

One-quarter of all students (25%) first learned about applying for financial aid from parents or other family members, and this figure rises to 30% among those who completed the FAFSA. These data indicate the importance of educating students' families about their financial aid options. One in five students (20%) say college employees

or staff members were their first source of information about financial aid, and this figure rises to 25% among those who completed the FAFSA. Nearly a quarter of students (23%) name high school counselors and teachers as their original source of financial aid information. Respondents who are not first-generation students say that parents and family members were their first source of information about the financial aid process, and first-generation students report that their primary sources were high school teachers, counselors, and college personnel.

Sixteen percent of students did not learn about the financial aid process, and as would be expected, these students were significantly less likely to submit the application. It is likely that this percentage would increase if the survey included students who did not enroll in college.

When the financial aid department at **Southeastern Technical College (GA)** renewed its emphasis on customer service, it found that a few relatively simple actions helped reduce long lines on registration and orientation days. The college noticed that students were waiting too long to start the FAFSA application process. They also discovered that students found the online FAFSA easier to use than the paper application. The college immediately focused on getting students to complete the online FAFSA. They walked students to the library (a few steps from the financial aid office) and sat with them at computers to get them

Students' First Sources for Financial Aid Information

Which one of the following best describes the sources from which you originally learned about the process for applying for financial aid?

| | All students | Students who completed FAFSA | Students who did not complete FAFSA |
|---|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Parents or other family members | 25% | 30% | 19% |
| High school counselor or teacher | 23% | 26% | 21% |
| College employee/staff member | 20% | 25% | 14% |
| Friend or other student | 15% | 17% | 11% |
| Did not learn about the financial aid process | 16% | 3% | 34% |

Source: 2008 CCSSE data.

started on the application. The college also reminded all pre-admission counselors to bring students to the financial aid office at the end of their counseling session so the students could begin the online FAFSA. The result: Lines at the financial aid office are shorter, students receive financial awards more quickly, and the financial aid office spends less time on paperwork.

At **Ellsworth Community College (IA)**, the financial aid office is determined to build relationships with students and help them negotiate the financial aid process. The college begins educating prospective students and applicants about financial aid long before the students complete their applications, and it emphasizes the importance of seeking all forms of aid. For example, Ellsworth awards its scholarships, which do not require the FAFSA, in February — and includes a reminder to complete the FAFSA in the scholarship award letter. Also, a meeting with the college's financial aid director is a routine part of a student's campus visit. The number of FAFSA and scholarship applications has increased over the last five years, and in spring 2007, Ellsworth students recognized the financial aid director with an outstanding staff award.

ACSFA Guidelines to Increase Financial Assistance

ACSFA recommends early intervention and an ongoing focus on financial aid to educate students and their families about financial aid. If more students understand their financial aid options and complete the FAFSA, it seems likely that more students will attend and complete college.

ACSFA guidelines suggest that students could benefit from early outreach and greater interaction between community colleges and K–12 schools. Its guidelines include the following:

- ★ Intervening by 6th grade and continuing through high school.
- ★ Involving parents and families.
- ★ Mentoring each student so students have a trusted source of information and support.
- ★ Helping every student complete the FAFSA.
- ★ Accommodating language and cultural differences.
- ★ Partnering with community organizations.
- ★ Addressing financial literacy (budgeting, saving, credit and debt management) along with financial aid.

Policy Matters

A culture of high expectations and high support requires action on multiple levels. As many college stories in this report illustrate, individual actions can have a profound effect on student success.

Some steps must be taken at the institutional level. Institutional policy can affect student and faculty behaviors in powerful ways. For example, institutions can mandate student attendance at orientation or part-time faculty participation in professional development. Institution-level decisions set the tone of a college's campus, establish its priorities, and determine its resource allocation. These decisions can inspire faculty and staff, encourage students, and build a culture of success.

CCSSE Opposes Ranking

CCSSE opposes using its data to rank colleges for a number of reasons.

- ★ There is no single number that can adequately — or accurately — describe a college's performance; most colleges will perform relatively well on some benchmarks and need improvement on others.
- ★ Each community college's performance should be considered in terms of its mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics.
- ★ Because of differences in these areas — and variations in college resources — comparing survey results between individual institutions serves little constructive purpose and likely will be misleading.
- ★ CCSSE member colleges are a self-selected group. Their choice to participate in the survey demonstrates their interest in assessing and improving their educational practices, and it distinguishes them. Ranking within this group of colleges — those willing to step up to serious self-assessment and public reporting — might discourage participation and certainly would paint an incomplete picture.
- ★ Ranking does not serve a purpose related to improving student outcomes. Improvement over time — where a particular college is now compared with where it wants to be — likely is the best gauge of a college's efforts to enhance student learning and persistence.

For example, **Brevard Community College (FL)** established a four-day work week and schedule that, combined with turning down the air conditioning and heating, saved the institution an estimated \$267,000 in energy costs. The college used the savings to help fund 10 full-time faculty positions.

State-level actions — such as decisions about financial aid for part-time students, emergency aid programs, and last-dollar-paid programs — create the conditions within which institutions are encouraged, empowered, or required to act.

State policy also drives how funds are allocated to community colleges and, therefore, the financial incentives that fuel the colleges' actions. Today, community colleges have one fiscal incentive: enrollment rates. It is the single measure that determines most state funding to community colleges. This arrangement does not provide incentives for retaining students as long as the influx of new students continues.

A focus on outcomes — retention, academic progress, and graduation rates — would not only support student success, it also would make financial sense. In fact, recent research indicates that programs that produce demonstrable increases in retention very likely are worth the financial investment.

The Colorado Community College System (CO) created a cost-benefit analysis model to evaluate new programs in a more strategic way. Traditional evaluations of new programs focus on short-term cost analysis (e.g., startup and ongoing costs), but the new model is a more strategic analysis of productivity. The cost-benefit analysis showed that student success requires additional resources, but over time, the additional investment will result in increased revenue because of increased retention. For example, an ESL learning community strategy was shown to yield a financial benefit after just a few terms.

The Student Achievement Initiative (WA) gives Washington community and technical colleges financial rewards for increasing the number of students who achieve particular milestones in their educational progress. The milestones, all associated with increased earning potential,

focus on four key areas: building college-level skills, accumulating college credits (e.g., the first 15 credits, which is a tipping point in terms of earning potential, is a milestone), earning college-level math credits, and earning certificates and degrees.

Kentucky implemented a number of education reforms as part of an effort to double the number of residents who hold a bachelor's degree or higher. For example, to increase college readiness and the performance of underprepared students, the state introduced funding incentives for adult education, raised high school graduation requirements, and began assessing high school students' college readiness before their senior year. To improve developmental education outcomes, the state introduced an integrated accountability system that would tie performance to rewards. The proposal stipulates that K-12, postsecondary, and adult education providers in a given geographic area be held collectively responsible for reducing the number of students entering college underprepared and that funding be tied to student outcomes.

There also is notable progress on state-level efforts to support using assessment for improvement of educational practices

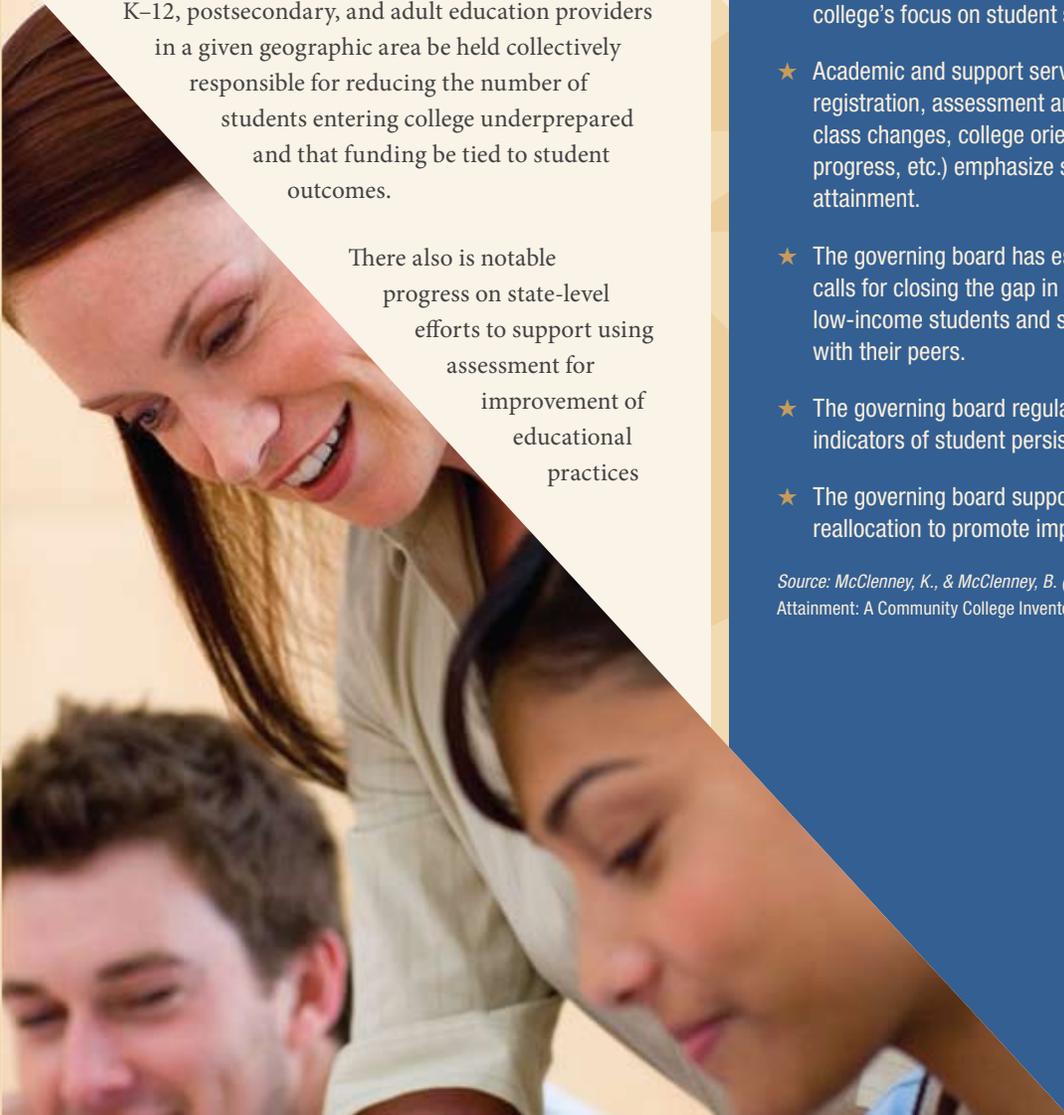
associated with higher levels of student success. To date, 26 states have committed to statewide administration of *CCSSE*. A growing number of those states, including **Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, New York, and North Dakota**, include *CCSSE* data in state-level programs for assessment, performance reporting, and/or quality improvement.

Institutional Policy and Student Success

A student success agenda gains strength when key institutional policies — and policy leaders — promote accountability for student persistence, learning, and attainment. Policy conditions that promote student success include the following:

- ★ Key institutional documents (e.g., mission and vision statements, college catalogue, program descriptions) reflect the college's focus on student success.
- ★ Academic and support services policies (e.g., provisions for registration, assessment and course placement upon entry, class changes, college orientation, feedback on academic progress, etc.) emphasize student persistence, learning, and attainment.
- ★ The governing board has established an explicit policy that calls for closing the gap in educational attainment between low-income students and students of color in comparison with their peers.
- ★ The governing board regularly examines key performance indicators of student persistence, learning, and attainment.
- ★ The governing board supports resource allocation and reallocation to promote improvement in student success.

Source: McClenney, K., & McClenney, B. (2003). Student Learning, Persistence and Attainment: A Community College Inventory.



Challenges and Opportunities

Current research and data about student engagement at community colleges indicate that community colleges face a number of challenges and opportunities. These include the following:

- ★ **The facts.** Every program is designed to get exactly the results it achieves. Colleges that want to improve must recognize this reality, examine without flinching the data depicting student progress and success, and act on what they have learned. True improvement requires an institution-wide commitment to focusing relentlessly on data-driven improvement.
- ★ **Scale.** Engaging all community college students, not just some students, requires scaling up. Creating a successful pilot program is one challenge. Maintaining its focus — particularly when it relies on personal contact — is another. Students are well served when colleges determine what attributes of a program make it successful and then keep those elements intact as the program expands.
- ★ **Resources.** The importance of scaling up raises questions about paying for successful strategies as they expand to reach large portions of the student population. Colleges may find help in new models for calculating the financial benefits of investing in student retention and achievement. (See page 20.)
- ★ **Culture.** Students are more likely to succeed at colleges where faculty and staff believe that all students belong there and that all students can learn. Students' perceptions of faculty members in particular — instructors' concern for student development and teaching, as well as their availability to students — have positive and statistically significant effects on persistence.* CCSSE data indicate that faculty believe they are providing more support than students believe they are getting. This gap points to an opportunity to better engage both faculty and students.

*Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: Volume 2, A Third Decade of Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- ★ **The possibility of success.** If community colleges accomplish the goal of helping more students succeed, they will provide great value to students, their families, their communities, and the national economy. That success also will create a new set of questions and challenges for colleges. For example, colleges may have to rethink course offerings if more students complete developmental education and move on to entry-level and then advanced college work. Colleges also would have to address a range of policies, reallocate resources, and explore the possibilities of educating a student population that is, on the whole, succeeding. These ideas will be further discussed in the upcoming *SENSE* report, *Imagine Success: Engaging Entering Students*, to be published in spring 2009.

Transforming Financial Assistance

Demand for workers with advanced education is rising, as is college tuition. To have a prepared workforce, we must make college financially accessible to more students. According to the Rethinking Student Aid study group, that means rethinking the fundamentals of the student aid system.

The study group recently put forward comprehensive proposals that would create a simpler, more predictable, more efficient, and better-targeted financial aid system. It recommends that the federal government take significant steps in four key areas:

1. **Simplify the federal student aid system.** For example, eliminate the FAFSA and obtain financial information from the IRS.
2. **Improve the federal loan process** by making the loan award system more flexible and better oriented to student needs and economic realities.
3. **Develop a federal savings program for low- and moderate-income families.** For example, create accounts for children who would be eligible for Pell Grants if they were of college age, and make account deposits proportional to the Pell Grants for which the children would be eligible. Permit the funds to earn tax-free interest analogous to the tax treatment of existing federal 529 programs.
4. **Reward states and institutions that support student success.** For example, create incentives for institutions that encourage retention and completion for low- and moderate-income students.

The study group is an independent team of policy experts, researchers, and higher education professionals convened by the College Board.

Source: College Board. (2008). Fulfilling the Commitment: Recommendations for Reforming Federal Student Aid. New York, NY: Author.

Overview of the 2008 CCSSE Cohort

Each year, the CCSSE survey is administered in the spring during class sessions at CCSSE member colleges. All CCSSE data analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. This year's three-year cohort — called the 2008 CCSSE Cohort — includes data from all colleges that participated in CCSSE from 2006 through 2008.

An overview of the 2008 cohort's participating colleges and their students follows. Details are available at www.ccsse.org.

- ★ More than 343,000 students from 585 institutions in 48 states as well as British Columbia, the Marshall Islands, and Nova Scotia are included in the 2008 CCSSE Cohort.
- ★ 2008 CCSSE Cohort member colleges enroll a total of 3,753,575 credit students, or about 58% of the total credit-student population in the nation's community colleges.
- ★ Of the 585 participating colleges, 50% are classified as small (up to 4,499 students), 25% as medium (4,500–7,999 students), 17% as large (8,000–14,999 students), and 8% as extra large (15,000 or more students). Nationally, 54% of community colleges are small, 22% are medium, 15% are large, and 9% are extra large.
- ★ According to the Carnegie classifications, the 2008 CCSSE Cohort includes 114 (19%) urban-serving colleges, 129 (22%) suburban-serving colleges, and 342 (59%) rural-serving colleges. Fall 2006 data indicate that among all U.S. community colleges, 18% are urban-serving, 21% are suburban-serving, and 61% are rural-serving.
- ★ 2008 CCSSE Cohort respondents generally reflect the underlying student population of the participating colleges in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Part-time students, however, were underrepresented in the CCSSE sample because classes are sampled rather than individual students. (About 30% of CCSSE respondents are enrolled part-time, and 70% are enrolled full-time.

*CCSSE uses the Carnegie classifications (from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) to identify colleges as urban-serving, suburban-serving, and rural-serving.

IPEDS shows that the national figures are 62% part-time and 38% full-time.) To address this discrepancy, CCSSE results are weighted by part-time and full-time status to reflect the institutions' actual proportions of part-time and full-time students.

- ★ 2008 CCSSE Cohort respondents are 59% female and 41% male. These figures are similar to the full population of CCSSE Cohort community college students, which is 58% female and 42% male.
- ★ 2008 CCSSE Cohort respondents range in age from 18 to 65 and older.
- ★ With respect to race/ethnicity, 2008 CCSSE Cohort respondents and the national community college population may be compared as follows:

| Race/ethnicity | CCSSE respondents | National percentages |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| White | 64% | 57% |
| Latino/Hispanic | 12% | 15% |
| Black | 12% | 13% |
| International* | 6% | 2% |
| Asian | 6% | 6% |
| Native American | 2% | 1% |
| Other | 4% | 6% |

*International students are not citizens or nationals of the United States and are in the country on a visa or temporary basis.

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Sources: 2008 CCSSE Cohort data; IPEDS, fall 2006.

Noteworthy Facts

- ★ The 2008 CCSSE membership (colleges that administered the survey in 2008) includes statewide participation in Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, New Hampshire, Virginia, and West Virginia. Other state-based consortia include groups of colleges in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, and South Carolina.
- ★ 2008 was the fourth year of participation for the Achieving the Dream Consortium, the fifth year of participation for the Hispanic-Serving Institutions/Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Consortium, and the fifth year of participation for the Texas Small Colleges Consortium.

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For a list of CCSSE member colleges, visit www.ccsse.org.



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