

SuccessNC Listening Tours Update

State Board Strategic Planning Committee, NC Community College System

August 19, 2010

Listening Tours have been held at 29 colleges, putting us at the midpoint. Below is a representative, but not exhaustive, summary of the best practices and policy barriers heard during the Tours held since the last State Board meeting in April. This is a 'living' document, and additions since the July update are highlighted for easier reference.

There is a separate document that aggregates the policy barriers/concerns presented below and classifies them by sphere of influence to address them: System Office policies, State Board/Administrative Code, General Assembly, and Federal government.

Increasing Access

- ***Improving developmental and basic skills education to propel more students more quickly forward in their education.*** Colleges are adopting many innovations and are not always moving in the same direction.

Developmental Education:

- Guilford Tech is working to ensure developmental education is seen as a service that cuts across the college's entire programs, not a stand-alone department.
- At the same time, other colleges are re-instituting a developmental education department (Fayetteville Tech, Brunswick CC) to renew attention on it.
- Some colleges are working to ensure students understand the negative impact of not doing well on their college placement test and helping students refresh their skills prior to taking the test. (Johnston CC, Guilford Tech, Surry CC)
- Some are partnering with high schools not only to offer college placement exams to high schools students but also to implement interventions for those students who do not do well. (Johnston CC, Sampson CC, Edgecombe).
- For recent high school graduates who place into developmental classes, some colleges are creating cohort-based summer bridge academies to accelerate their progress in developmental classes prior to their first semester of college. (Central Piedmont CC, Sampson CC, Martin CC).
- Central Piedmont CC is creating more flexibility and enhancing the relevance of developmental education through 'career pathways' that embed vocational/technical content into them, allowing students to concurrently take career skills courses.

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- Martin CC has focused on supplemental instruction for Math 070 through peer assisted tutoring. It chose this course because analysis showed it trips many students up and blocked them from progressing.
- Sampson CC enables students to accelerate developmental math through self-paced formats and mid-semester testing so that some students are completing two levels in one semester.
- Rockingham CC is concurrently scheduling developmental classes so that if a student moves up a level mid-semester, he or she can easily switch to the higher level. It also offers 'late start' developmental classes, beginning 3 weeks into the semester, so that students who quickly pass through a level can jump to the next level of a developmental ed.
- Colleges are providing more training for developmental education faculty, creating common syllabi to ensure consistent quality, and re-designing developmental classes based on better, proven pedagogies. (Rockingham CC, Robeson CC, Wayne CC, Fayetteville Tech)
- Some colleges are adopting online tools for students such as My Math Lab and My Skills Lab, and at least one is moving to a hybrid delivery for higher-level developmental education courses. (Surry CC, Rockingham CC)
- Nash CC has a Curriculum Skills Lab to assist students and all math faculty spend at least one hour a week there.
- Mitchell CC's Contextual Teaching and Learning initiative is working to build project-based learning cases across their curriculum. They started in developmental education but are expanding to other program areas in the whole college.

Basic Skills:

- Colleges are searching for better ways to serve the lowest performing students seeking to enroll in credit programs. Some are dropping the lowest level developmental classes (Math 050, Reading 050, English 050) and instead referring students to federally-supported Adult Basics Skills classes. Colleges see advantages to this approach because Adult Basic Skills classes are free to students so they don't have to use up finite financial aid funds. Yet colleges also recognize that the basic skills programs are 1) not a good fit for many younger students because they often carry a stigma, 2) their self-paced nature is unstructured, and 3) basic skills classes have not been a particularly successful pathway for adults or youth – they have been 'black holes' from which students rarely emerged to enroll in other college programs. In response:
 - Some colleges are encouraging or requiring students who place at the lowest levels on placement exams to enroll in revamped, cohort-based basic skills classes. (Johnston CC, Mayland CC, Guilford Tech).

- Some are making clearer pathways into curriculum and continuing education programs for basic skills and GED students. This primarily consists of better advising and mentoring these students and more 'hand holding' to keep them on track. (Sandhills CC, Sampson CC, Bladen CC, Southeastern CC).

Policy barriers or concerns:

- Career-focused skills courses in 'career pathways' programs such as Central Piedmont's are typically continuing education and therefore are not covered by financial aid, hindering access.
- Developmental courses do qualify for financial aid; however, students frequently 'use up' much of their aid (e.g., Pell grants) before getting to curriculum level coursework.
- The high number of adjuncts used to teach developmental courses may affect quality of the courses because, for example, they are not paid for preparation time.
- Adult Basic Skills funds provided by the federal government have limitations regarding how they can be linked to curriculum courses, impeding integration with vocational/technical content.
- Students use their federal Workforce Investment Act vouchers on developmental courses but then community colleges are criticized for students having not adequately progressed toward a job.
- Some colleges would like to allow students who score just below 'cut scores' on placement tests to enroll in the higher-level developmental course and compare how they do to those just above the cut score.
- There appears to be confusion among colleges about constraints on modularizing developmental classes. Quite a few have cited the inflexibility of the Common Course Library as preventing modularization; however, at least two are accelerating courses (see Sampson and Rockingham above) under the current system. CPCC is also now fast tracking developmental education through a newly adopted policy change.
- Colleges are pointing out that modularization impacts registration, financial aid, tuition and other administrative matters. They are looking for guidance from the System Office on how to manage those aspects so they can move forward with modularization.
- Colleges that are implementing summer bridge programs for recent high school students must fund them in a piecemeal, ad hoc fashion; summer funding would be very helpful in supporting and expanding these efforts.
- One college suggested advocating that high school students be required to take a math course their last semester because they would be better prepared for college and do better on placement exams.
- Nash CC implemented a small GED Plus program that focused on carpentry, through support from Golden LEAF, but there is some concern it may have a perverse incentive and encourage students to drop out of high school. The college is considering limiting enrollment to students at least 18 or requiring a waiting period of at least 90 days after not being in high school.

- ***Colleges are creating stronger connections with K-12 systems to serve and recruit students, and with four-year colleges to encourage further education.*** Some colleges are tracking K-12 program participants to see how many matriculate after high school. Examples include:
 - Transporting high school seniors to campus after school for credit certificates in technical areas such as trades. (Fayetteville Tech, Edgecombe CC)
 - Setting up scholarships for local students, including sometimes using Foundation funds for continuing education classes. (Catawba Valley CC, Southwestern CC, Sandhills CC, Vance-Granville CC, Rockingham CC)
 - Bringing middle and high school students on campus during the summer for academic enrichment activities. (Johnston CC, Tri-County CC, among many)
 - Pitt CC highlighted its Career Development and Scholarship Program that started in 2004. Mid-performing students from local high schools are chosen for the program. All have financial aid need and receive \$1000 in scholarship when they enroll at Pitt. The college works with students on career development activities their senior year in HS and the summer before they enroll. The coordinator develops esprit de corps among the students and is a support person for them on campus, connecting them to tutoring and other supports if necessary. More than 250 students have gone through the program so far, through support from private foundations.
 - Placing college staff at the high schools as liaisons and recruiters (Central Piedmont CC, Wilkes CC, Johnston CC)
 - Running a performing arts program on campus that provides affordable school programs for all ages and makes young students familiar and comfortable with the campus throughout their K-12 years. (Wilkes CC).
 - While dual enrollment is common at many colleges, there are some that have developed particularly symbiotic relationships with high schools, working closely to avoid duplicating costly technical programs and arranging schedules to facilitate students' abilities to access college classes. (Piedmont CC, Wilkes CC, Caldwell Tech)
 - Halifax CC's dental hygiene program serves K-12 students through a healthy smiles program.
 - **Developing partnerships with four-year colleges to offer in-person classes on campus that allow student to finish a bachelor's degree without leaving the county. (Rockingham CC, Randolph CC)**
 - Edgecombe CC is registering students earlier through rolling admissions and using all college staff to telephone students to encourage them to re-enroll. An electronic tracking system allows the college to know how registration

numbers are looking and which program areas may need additional courses/sections.

- Through a regional initiative, Wayne CC is heavily invested in promoting the NC Career Readiness Certificate in its service area. All high school students take the test, as well as all Adult High School and GED students. Though the credential is tied to workplace readiness skills, as opposed to college readiness skills associated with college placement exams, the college and its community partners believe this initiative allows students to finish high school with a credential they can use, especially with employers. Edgecombe CC is also offering the CRC to high school students through tech prep funds and developing interventions for students not on track to get at least a Bronze level certificate. Montgomery CC has also started to offer the CRC in its high schools and is beginning interventions for those students who do not do well.

Policy barriers and concerns:

- Several colleges report frustration with the Legislature's changing policies regarding what courses are allowed for dual enrollment, Huskin's and Learn and Earn. They point out that they work with school systems every year to set up dual enrollment courses. When the Legislature changes the rules in ways that require colleges to cancel courses, this hurts relationships and trust with the school systems at the local level.
- One college raised a concern about colleges having to accept high school diplomas from students from non-accredited high schools. The implication is that these students may be less prepared than students from accredited high schools; however, the System Office does not have data confirming this.
- High school testing is currently a moving target, and there are both 'top down' and 'bottom up' reform efforts going on at the same time. The state Department of Public Instruction currently requires standardized 'end of course' tests for high school students. DPI is also seeking federal funds to be part of a national consortium that would create new grade 3-12 tests (to replace current 'end of grade' and 'end of course' tests) linked to the new national core standards, for which NC is an early adopter. DPI has reached out to the NCCCS to be at the table in the new test development process, if it moves forward, and the intent is that the new test would indicate a student's readiness for college. At the local level, meanwhile, community colleges are increasingly working with local school systems to either administer the college's current placement exam or, less frequently it appears, the NC Career Readiness Certificate, in high schools. The former assesses college (academic) readiness skills while the second assesses workplace readiness skills. The relationship between scores is not known. Some community colleges and school districts are also developing interventions for those students who do not score well on placement or the CRC. This is a fluid environment and some local efforts may end up running counter to state level reforms.

- ***Colleges are creating clearer educational pathways with multiple success points through stronger links between continuing education and curriculum programs, short-term credentials, or industry certifications.***
 - Many college leaders report that Early College High Schools are popular and students are experiencing strong retention and educational outcomes. Vance-Granville reported it is the only CC in the country that runs four Early College High Schools.

Policy barrier or concern: A couple of colleges expressed concerns about finding replacement funds to pay for a liaison staff position when it expires after five years of ECHS operation.
 - Surry CC recently began conducting 'College and High School Summits' to better understand each other's programs and begin discussion on how to better align curriculum and testing. Guilford Tech also recently sponsored a regional college readiness summit to begin similar discussions.
 - Forsyth Tech's continuing education and curriculum faculty have worked closely together to provide credit for JobsNOW classes and create easy pathways for further education in credit programs after completing a JobsNOW program. They are tracking students to see how many do continue their education. The college has taught about 25% of the state's JobsNOW students so this is being carried out on a large-scale basis. The effort is receiving national attention as a federal Recovery Act model program.
 - Edgecombe CC also emphasized how it is using JobsNOW programs as an active recruiting avenue for students to enter into curriculum programs. It is also creating multiple exit points for all programs and is working on crosswalking credit and noncredit programs.
 - Forsyth Tech is working with National Association of Manufacturers, foundation and college partners to align their curriculum with various certifications that are recognized as nationally, portable credentials. They are starting with four industrial areas: welding, machining, industrial systems, and mechanical engineering technology. The certifications that Forsyth is aligning to are the National Career Readiness Certificate, American Welding Association's certificate, National Institute for Metal Working certificates, and the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council certifications. The effort is incorporating industry standards and clearly delineated education and career pathways.
 - Southeastern CC has laid out building blocks in each program area that use continuing education courses as starting points, followed by entrance into curriculum programs for those students who want to move on. They are better sequencing their courses and ensuring that students have access to all the classes they need at non-conflicting times to encourage quick progression through programs.

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- Some colleges are using degree audit software to identify additional completers who may not have applied for their credential (Wake Tech)
- Durham Tech highlighted its C-Step program to work with transfer students to ensure they understand their pathway to nearby universities.
- Martin CC has a Dreamkeeper grant program that provides emergency funds to help retain students facing hardships. It often covers repairs for cars, childcare, medical, housing and health care costs. The college received \$100,000 over three years from the Lumina Foundation and matched it with \$70,000 of college funds. They have found a 22% higher retention rate among Dreamkeeper recipients.

Policy barriers or concerns:

- A couple colleges expressed a desire to award more credit for noncredit courses, especially since JobsNOW has proven popular, but are unsure of how to do so in ways that will pass muster with SACs, the System Office, and accrediting organizations.
 - One college cited that it is limited in being able to create short-term credentials within curriculum programs because it can only create certificates by pooling courses already within the same program area. Allowing colleges to offer certificates based on courses in the Combined Course Library—but not necessarily within the same program area—would expand flexibility.
 - There is no statewide agreement to have AAS degrees articulate at the four-year level. Doing so would save a lot of effort by colleges and universities having to do this on their own. Another college pointed out it would be helpful to have a centralized information point to learn about what AAS articulations are already in place.
 - One college states that Learn and Earn Online is not particularly successful for many high school students because if it's truly a distance education class high school students often need the discipline of in person contact.
 - One college suggests that high school students could benefit from continuing education courses but, unlike allowed dual enrollment curriculum courses, continuing education courses are not free to high school students.
 - A couple of colleges also point out the need for more scholarships or reduced tuition for continuing education classes in general since tuition is significantly higher than it used to be and is a barrier for some students.
- ***Brunswick Community College highlighted its training center specifically for Latino workers that focuses on literacy, safety, communication, and other workplace skills.*** A grant from the Mexican government supports the center.

- ***Many colleges have highlighted their specific efforts engage African American males improve their low persistence rates through Minority Male Mentoring Programs (3M).*** (Durham Technical CC, Central Piedmont CC, Bladen CC, Robeson CC, Halifax CC)

Policy Barrier: State Minority Male Mentoring funds had been eliminated by the General Assembly for the 2009-11 biennium budget; however, funds to support 38 existing 3M programs—and add 2 new ones—were included in the budget passed in July 2010. One college suggests the System Office could play more of a resource role for programs across the state to help them be successful.

- ***Colleges are using distance learning to expand access to students.*** Colleges report large increases in their online course offerings in particular, partly because their physical facilities are tapped out and partly because online courses are often taught by less expensive adjunct instructors, an advantage during tight budget times. Best practices include:
 - Adopting quality standards and developing tools and procedures to hold online courses to the same standards as traditional courses (Fayetteville Tech, Sandhills CC, Piedmont CC, Stanly CC, Surry CC)
 - Offering professional development for faculty to ensure they are creating high quality online courses (Caldwell Tech, Johnston CC)
 - Providing better student support services such as advising, financial aid, and academic tutoring to online students (Caldwell Tech, Mayland CC)

Policy barriers or concerns:

- Some colleges are highly vested in their specific online learning platforms and emphasized their desire for continued state level support. Several have expressed concern about any plans to move away from Blackboard, in particular. Some small colleges are particularly concerned that they do not have the programming expertise on staff to manage Moodle; however, others report they are paying external vendors to manage and host their online Moodle classes at reasonable cost.
- Colleges are concerned that because online courses are on the rise and they frequently use adjuncts to teach them, full-time vs. part-time faculty ratios will be flagged during SACS reaccreditation reviews as too tilted toward part-time.
- Fayetteville Tech mentioned it registers its courses on a military 'portal' to enable enrollment by members of the military. The military deadline to do so is prior to when the General Assembly usually decides tuition rates for the upcoming year. The college loses money if tuition increases are announced after courses have been registered because, once done, rates can't be changed.

Improving Student Success

- ***Colleges are adopting student engagement strategies as an effective means to improve student retention.***

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- Assigning students a mentor on campus. Everyone can play this role – from custodians to the president. (Guilford Tech, Sandhills CC)
- Developing early alert systems and 'intrusive engagement' strategies for at-risk first-year students (Catawba Valley CC, Durham Technical CC, Gaston CC, Rockingham CC, Mayland CC, Nash CC)
- Requiring and revamping student orientation (Southwestern CC, Rockingham CC, Edgecombe CC, Martin CC)
- Encouraging or requiring ACA (college success) courses (Guilford Tech, Mayland CC, Brunswick CC, Forsyth Tech, Rockingham CC, Martin CC, Nash CC) by all students, preferably in the first semester.
- Requiring all ACA courses to be taught by full-time faculty who have gone through a 32-hour faculty training for the course (James Sprunt CC).
- Creating common experiences among students, such as a movie night followed by small group discussions (Mayland CC)
- Creating learning communities and cohort-based programs to improve retention by increasing connections with fellow students and faculty (Central Piedmont CC, Cape Fear CC).
- Using an online platform to create a 'one login' space where students and faculty connect with each other for learning and campus information (Mayland CC, Robeson CC, Forsyth Tech)
- Emphasizing academic help labs and centers, particularly for math and writing (Mayland CC, Caldwell Tech, Cape Fear CC, Rockingham CC) and migrating them toward online as well as in-person assistance.
- Developing a college wide retention plan (Sampson CC, Edgecombe CC)
- Requiring full rank faculty to go through a 'master adviser' professional development program so they can better assist students. (Sandhills CC)
- Adding student engagement as a General Education Competency so that faculty build campus and community activities into their courses. (Southeastern CC)
- Setting up Student Success Centers as a one-stop shop for student academic support that identifies students' needs and coordinates their access to various support services. Emphasis in on personalized attention and follow-up with students to ensure they don't fall between the cracks. (Rockingham CC, Gaston, Forsyth Tech)

Policy barriers and concerns:

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- One college pointed out that requiring ACA courses in the first semester could be very difficult because so many students register on the final day, and it may be hard to have sufficient sections at the right times.
 - ACA is not uniformly transferable to UNC institutions so it's difficult for colleges to make it a requirement.
 - Colleges say they need more student support staff (tutors, advisors, financial aid staff, counselors) to adequately carry out the intrusive engagement strategies they would like to have.
- ***Colleges are revamping their student services to make them more student friendly and efficient:***
 - Establishing call centers to answer students' questions (Davidson CC, Guilford Tech). These can free professional staff from answering 'easy' questions.
 - Reorganizing financial aid and counseling offices so that waiting spaces and processes are more consumer-oriented. (Davidson CC, Guilford Tech, Rockingham CC)
 - Sandhills CC has added helpfulness as a core value and hiring criterion.
 - Establishing one-stop student services and using all college faculty and staff (and retired faculty) to staff them during busy days. (Edgecombe CC)
 - Setting up kiosk and training library staff to help students access electronic financial aid services. (Edgecombe CC)
- ***Colleges are using data to drive decisions that improve student success.***
 - Guilford Tech has been recognized by the national Achieving the Dream initiative for its shift in institutional culture toward making data-driven decisions. The college's institutional effectiveness division reports large increases in data run requests from within the college, and the Board and leadership report there's an expectation now to implement changes only after pilots are carried out and assessed based on their outcomes on student success.
 - To address poor retention in its nursing program, Southeastern CC examined data and discovered that passing the pharmacology calculations course, an applied math course, was a good predictor of successful nursing completion. It recently moved the pharmacology course into the first semester of nursing as a gateway course—students must successfully complete it to move on in nursing.
 - By analyzing its own data, Edgecombe CC has identified risk factors that indicate how likely a student is to drop out of a program. It is using those data to target advising and mentoring resources on those students most at risk of non-completion. The college has set specific retention goals and is now developing strategies to achieve them.

- As part of a campus culture change through its participation in Achieving the Dream, Martin CC has implemented Informer software programs that work with Query Builder to create easy tools for faculty to view outcome data for their courses.

Policy barriers and concerns:

- College express a need to revise Critical Success Factors to have them better reflect what success for colleges really looks like and ensure that colleges across the System are consistent in how they collect and report data.
- The 2% limit on moving instructional funds into non-instruction areas is a barrier because student services are so stressed right now. It appears to be especially difficult for the larger colleges with more campuses on which they need to provide student services. The workload is particularly high for financial services and advising functions. Some colleges warn, however, this is 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' because instructional resources are also thin.
- There are too few advisers overall, and there is no advising for continuing education students.
- There's also no federal or state financial aid for continuing education students.
- Two colleges mentioned the fact that they are held accountable for the success of transfer students to UNC campuses, regardless of what courses the students took at the community college. The community colleges believe they should only be held accountable for students in the college transfer program.
- Several colleges suggest allowing 2nd time test performance on licensing exams to count as a program's performance measure, rather than 1st, because they believe it is a more accurate reflection of student success since some students do not take the exam seriously the first time.
- One reason student services are increasingly burdened is that colleges are seeing more students with identified learning disabilities and accommodations. Several colleges expressed concern that the trend is toward having more students with learning disabilities (Individual Education Plans) and high needs on their campus. The resources these students need are very expensive, and it's impossible to predict in advance how many will arrive on campus each semester. An example of an unpredictable cost given by two colleges is the need to hire interpreters to translate classes for deaf students. A college also said that unless we have clear policies about students with high needs and help them set goals, success rates will not look good.
- Another college suggests that NC community colleges not accept students completing high school with an occupational diploma because community colleges are not equipped to serve them.

Ensuring Program Quality

- ***Developing and maintaining world-class programs for key current and emerging NC industry clusters.*** Some highlighted during the Listening Tours:

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- Cape Fear's Marine Trades program that draws students from the entire East Coast
 - Sampson Community College's sophisticated animal science program that support's the region's pork industry and share ties with NC State University
 - Vance-Granville's Global Logistics program being created with UNC-Chapel Hill
 - Surry CC's viticulture program which is moving to online and hybrid delivery
 - Forsyth Tech's role as a national biotechnology workforce center and Rowan-Cabarrus CC's efforts to support new NC Research Campus in Kannapolis.
 - James Sprunt's new incubator kitchen for artisan food products
 - Rockingham CC and Wilson CC's sustainability programs
 - Building Construction programs at Pitt CC
 - Gunsmithing, forest management, and taxidermy at Montgomery CC
- ***Improving students' core critical thinking and academic skills across curricula.***
 - Implementing Quality Enhancement Plans (long-term institutional initiatives required as part of community colleges' SACs accreditation process) that focus on core academics such as writing (Caldwell Tech) and reading across the curriculum. (Robeson CC)
 - Wake Tech's ACE Critical Thinking Initiative to promote 21st century skills throughout all programs.
 - Infusing high-level applied math across technical programs to increase rigor. (Wilkes CC)
 - Through its Achieving the Dream initiative, Martin CC created a Center for Teaching and Learning that is working with faculty to improve reading across the curriculum at the college. All faculty members go through a professional development process that introduces evidence-based best practices in reading pedagogy and how it applies to multiple disciplines. The faculty training also focuses on increasing student engagement in order to improve retention.
 - For its SACs QEP, Randolph CC is implementing *Write Now*, an initiative to implement writing across the curriculum. The college has hired a writing resource instructor to work with faculty in all program areas on how to building contextual writing into courses. Another key component is an expanded and more accessible writing assistance center for students.
- ***Conducting comprehensive reviews of all programs that focus on quality, outcomes, and future directions.***
 - Sandhills Community College's new Intensive Program Review combines qualitative and quantitative data to help guide strategic investments and changes in programs. Each program is reviewed every three-year cycle, and the president cites better and more useful information upon which to make decisions about programs' directions.

- Wayne CC cited its rigorous program reviews every year that involve wide-ranging data measures focused on student performance and future trends in each program area.
- Edgecombe CC emphasized its rigorous preparation for SACs accreditation review and the recognition it received from SACs for its process.
- Rowan-Cabarrus CC is implementing a Strategic Conversations initiative through which the college invites key community stakeholders such as school board members, economic developers, and others to college board meetings to have open dialogue about issues of mutual interest. The college also has a Vision 20/20 committee comprising faculty and staff that focuses on key issues (such as becoming a Tobacco Free Campus) for the college and reports back to college leadership with recommendations.

Policy barriers and concerns:

- One college suggests funding a research assistant position at colleges responsible for collecting and monitor data
 - More funds for professional development for faculty.
 - High cost of belonging to various accrediting agencies—about \$20,000 a year one college cited—is a challenge.
- ***Colleges are increasingly turning to non-state dollars to support program expansion, innovation, and students.***
 - Numerous colleges highlighted their success in securing grant funds, as well as the roles of their active Foundations in supporting student scholarships and student enrichment activities. (Surry CC, Stanly CC, Davidson CC, Robeson CC, Blue Ridge CC, Vance-Granville CC)
 - Some colleges shared successes in growing their college foundations to support students through scholarships. (Rockingham CC, Vance-Granville CC, Montgomery CC)

Policy barriers and concerns:

- Several colleges have expressed an interest in more collaboration on grant opportunities. They are concerned they are not aware of all opportunities and are not plugged into opportunities for partnering on grant applications with other colleges in the state. Smaller colleges in particular view the ability to pursue grants as an uneven playing field.
- ***Emphasizing global education and competencies to prepare students for the global economy.***
 - Some colleges have highlighted study abroad trips and exchanges with diverse countries all over the world. In some cases students use technology to jointly work on projects with students in other countries. (Davidson CC, Rockingham CC, Stanly CC)

- James Sprunt CC is examining how to build more global awareness and competencies into its programs.

Policy barriers and concerns:

- Rockingham CC pointed out that it successfully ensured that NCCCS students are eligible for the same out-of-country health insurance program and rate that UNC students can access; however, few other colleges are taking advantage.
 - Forsyth Tech cites that it is not possible for NC community colleges to apply for international exchange grants through the US Dept. of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education because they are not allowed to have reciprocal tuition agreements that allow students to pay tuition at home schools while studying abroad. The System Office has informed the college this requires a legislative change.
- ***Establishing 'real world' learning environments and curricula, with up-to-date equipment, that promote cross-skills training and rigorous workplace preparation.***

- Many colleges report that patient simulators and simulated health clinics offer significant educational benefits for students and decrease likelihood of medical mistakes during students' clinical experiences. They also promote cross-specialty training opportunities. (Catawba Valley CC, Forsyth Tech, among others)

Policy barriers: Colleges note the high cost of purchasing the simulators and the need to have highly qualified staff to program them. It is also difficult for some rural colleges to locate clinical sites for their allied health students. They are often competing for placements with colleges in larger areas. Also, One rural college reports that its health employers are expecting more cross-training across allied health professions so that employees can play more roles (e.g., radiology technicians trained to conduct CT scans). This has implications on curricula and accreditation organizations may need to weigh in.

- Embedding project-based capstone experiences into programs provides students 'real world' application of their skills before completion. (Wilkes CC, Catawba Valley CC, Mitchell CC)
- Enabling student participation in state and national competitions encourages students to develop high quality hands-on, problem-solving skills, and gives students the opportunity to travel and gain confidence in their abilities. At Wilkes, almost every health sciences and industrial program in the college participates in Skills USA competitions and they have had individuals and teams place at the national level. Under the leadership of a highly dedicated faculty member, Mitchell CC's rocket program placed 4th nationally in NASA's University Student Launch Initiative in early 2010, ranking ahead of universities such as Georgia Tech. They designed and successfully launch a

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rocket that travelled one mile in the air and that collected data for a scientific experiment. (Wilkes CC, Robeson CC, Mitchell CC).

Policy barrier and concern: It is difficult to find funding to support student travel and registration fees for student teams. Showing its level of institutional support, Wilkes CC has invested \$50,000 of Foundation funds to pay for competition at state and national levels, citing the impact on students' skills, confidence and broadened horizons as the payoff for the college. The System Office could consider establishing an Achiever's Fund, giving students and teams the opportunity to apply for support to compete, especially if they advance to the national level.

- Using technology to effectively teach and creatively engage students while also equipping them with marketable workplace skills. This is particularly valuable to returning older students who often lack these skills. (Catawba Valley CC's *Hands On History* and *Digital Storytelling* courses, Tri-County's basic skills transition program, Nash CC.)

Broader Policy Barriers and Concerns

At each Listening Tour, a member of the System Office senior leadership team facilitates a discussion of policy barriers and concerns that limit colleges' abilities to be successful. Many policy barriers directly relate to the guiding goals and best practices of SuccessNC and those have been summarized in the sections above. Others, however, are broader in scope and more oriented toward core operational issues and procedures. They are summarized below.

Funding:

- Many colleges frequently report that lack of equipment funding is a barrier to program quality. A rural college pointed out that the equipment funding formula favors larger colleges because some items, such as IT servers, are often fixed cost regardless of campus size (bigger campuses just need more RAM). It suggested funding base equipment levels, just like base personnel positions.
- Being funded based on the previous year's enrollment and lack of program start-up funds makes it difficult for colleges to respond to new needs.
- Decreasing levels of support from County governments has been a large concern for some colleges. They suggest a role for the System and State Board in advocating for or incentivizing better local support. One college suggests college trustees and presidents are best suited to advocate to the General Assembly inequities between UNC and Community College funding structures such as the fact that UNC buildings are maintained through state funds while community college buildings are not. In particular, several colleges from low-wealth counties state the current funding model for community colleges is broken because the local counties do not have the means to build and maintain college facilities. Some colleges are getting zero to minimal capital funds each year. One college reports using vending machine funds to help pay utilities. Another states that two buildings may be condemned within the next two years if repairs are not made (portions of the buildings are already closed off).
- A college suggests the Legislature should match professorships at community colleges like they do for UNC campuses.
- Due to funding cuts, faculty workloads are very high and colleges expressed concern about high burnout, as well as potential negative findings from SACs accreditation processes.
- The recent federal Pell Grant changes will likely increase demand for classes over the summer, yet colleges have reduced summer course offerings because of budget limits. Even when summer classes are offered as 'self-supporting' one college points out that really they aren't because not all costs, particularly fixed, are factored in. This may send the wrong message to the Legislature on what it costs to run a class. Colleges point out it's a disservice to their students not to have more summer classes available.
- Many colleges express concern about the cost of complying with the new General Assembly mandate to offer student loans as well as concerns that student will unwisely get into debt and colleges are not capable of sufficiently advising them.
- Two colleges assert that community colleges pay sales tax while universities and schools do not and this is unfair.

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- One college suggests that colleges experiencing the greatest enrollment growth should be able to keep their tuition funds in the year they are received rather than sending them to the state in order to help alleviate the difficulties of funding in arrears.
- One college requested being able to carry forward up to 5% of funds for future years.
- One college expressed a desire to see a policy change in how FTEs are awarded for classes paid for by outside grants. Programs started with outside funding might be more long term sustainable if they can generate FTEs while under initial grant funding.
- Reducing prison education will highly impact some colleges and one suggested a transitional period during which colleges most impacted receive temporary funds to lessen the budgetary loss.
- Colleges report difficulty participating in partnerships and collaborating when travel funds are scarce.
- Wilson CC pointed out the tremendous energy savings that colleges could benefit from through adopting energy efficiency measures. It states it has saved a total at least \$300,000 in energy costs over the past five years through energy efficiency. Montgomery CC has also been aggressive in implementing energy savings measures, resulting in a 20% reduction of energy costs in recent years.

Communication:

- Several colleges expressed a desire for more assistance from the System Office on SACs reaccreditation issues. In particular, they would like more communication about trends related to SACs points of emphasis and help with standardizing measures that capture program outcomes.
- Similarly, some colleges expressed an interest in having the System Office monitor and share Quality Enhancement Plan products from across the state to disseminate quality improvements.
- One college cited a need for 'one person to call' on economic development matters in the System Office, saying the current structure is more fragmented than in previous years.
- One college expressed a desire to see a System Office policy on how to use social networking sites for college purposes.
- A college president said that the System Office and the Board should do place more emphasis on promoting high quality programs and high achievers at community colleges.
- A college suggests always adding a cc: to public information officers on important messages from the System Office to the college presidents so they are aware of them and not caught off guard.

Administrative:

- Switching to electronic data collection for System audits would be greener and easier for colleges.
- Reducing the required longevity and amount of paper-based records keeping colleges would reduce colleges' storage and space costs.

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- One college said that allowing colleges to bypass e-Procurement in certain cases could save money.
- IT procurement is difficult and more costly than it should be because of state requirements. Sometimes leasing makes more sense but colleges are not allowed to do so by ITS. Greater flexibility in purchasing higher value IT solutions would also be helpful.
- The State Construction Office is too slow in approving new buildings.
- Obtaining clearer communication from the System Office on what is proper and adequate audit documentation would be helpful because sometimes there is inconsistency from one auditor to another.
- Several colleges asked for clarity on policies related to how they can count Open Lab FTEs, especially whether they are responsible for checking to see if students are supposed to be in class while at an Open Lab. These have come up as audit exceptions for some colleges.
- Increasing the number of joint purchasing agreements for things like books, computers, electronic magazine subscriptions and career training materials could save money, especially for smaller colleges.
- One college asked for expanded ways to allocate book store revenues – particularly to support Early College High School liaison positions for which funding will soon end, and student services.
- The complicated coding structure for the various types of high school students (dual enrollment, Learn and Earn, etc.) is burdensome. Colleges would like a single code for any high school student.
- One college brought up the fact that criminal background checks for nursing students prior to their clinical experiences create inequities in how students are treated because hospitals use different standards, preventing some students from moving forward even though at other hospitals they'd be allowed to do their clinical experience. Another college said given the difficulty of placing allied health students with criminal backgrounds into clinical sites colleges should be allowed to check their backgrounds before they take a spot in a high demand program.
- A couple of colleges report that under the new Customized Training Program it takes longer for projects to be approved.

Datatel:

- Datatel needs to support college practices, not drive them, and could be better optimized, according to some colleges. Some colleges express the need for more advanced Datatel training to be able to run the analytics packages that will provide them with better data on student success. Another need is to make running queries easier and more standardized. One college suggests the formation of user groups to identify and prioritize Datatel needs. One college also expressed an interest in using Datatel analytics to benchmark their performance on key metrics against other colleges.
- More condensed and accessible communications from the System Office about Datatel issues would help college system administrators. One college said that lists of issues are available from the System Office, but reading it is like going over a list of 1000 obituaries when you only know one person.

- Datatel should automatically put onto transcripts when a student has completed their General Education Core Diploma to ease students' transferability.
- Several smaller colleges state they cannot afford some of the Datatel software packages (such as scheduling) and that they do not have programmers on staff that would allow them to fully utilize Datatel's capabilities. Similarly, it would be helpful if small colleges had access to automations that larger college script out, and if the System Office were to standardize work flows for many tasks and share those with colleges so that each college doesn't have to create its own.
- One college expressed a concern that the pendulum has swung too far toward System Office decision making on IT decisions. It would like more input from colleges on platforms and other key decisions.

Review Process for Program Approval:

- Showing adequate job demand data for program approval can be difficult when setting up programs for emerging sectors and for fields where self-employment is a likely option. Smaller colleges cite it as a barrier because many of their residents work in nearby counties outside of their service areas, especially if the college is on the border of another state.
- High cost programs are especially difficult to start because there's not initial funding.
- Colleges also don't understand why colleges on the other side of the state must be notified regarding a new proposed program.
- One college expressed the idea of replacing the current proliferation of approved programs in the state with a much smaller number of 'core curriculum' programs and completion points. These could be augmented with specialized tracks and certificates that branch off from the core programs. The intent would be to focus on crosscutting and foundational skills as entry pathways for students, moving on to more specialized and contextual skills. The result could be improved clarity and efficiency for students and employers. Contextualized developmental education courses could also be integrated into the core programs, making them more relevant to students.

Economic & Community:

- Small rural colleges cite the difficulty of hiring qualified faculty, especially in nursing.
- In rural areas, limited broadband access and too few computers in students' homes limits potential students' ability to participate in distance education. This is a concern as more colleges move to online courses, in part because they are less costly than expanding college facilities.
- A couple colleges suggest that the state should support unique, niche programs in rural counties as economic development catalysts. Montgomery CC expressed that its array of niche programs (gunsmithing, taxidermy, pottery, forestry) help make it a community resource that attracts students and investment in the county. The college has taken a deliberate approach to recognizing that the model of only serving county employers doesn't work because so many employers are gone.