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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is concluding the initial phase of SuccessNC, a multi-year strategic thinking and planning process. SuccessNC was launched in October 2009 when system leaders—State Board members, college presidents, local trustees and others—committed to a system-wide strategic focus to increase student success, access and program excellence.

System-wide SuccessNC efforts began in February 2010 when NCCCS leaders—State Board members and System Office staff—embarked on a 58-college Listening Tour to hear from faculty and staff about the most effective student success practices at each of North Carolina’s community colleges and identify barriers to student success.

The Listening Tour concluded at Blue Ridge Community College in October 2010, timed to coincide with a State Board of Community Colleges planning retreat at Blue Ridge. During the tour, barriers to student success and innovations to facilitate student success were identified. Later in the retreat, board members and community college executives heard presentations on the state of community colleges in North Carolina and the nation. Dr. Scott Ralls, NCCCS president, told board members that he and his staff saw student success as their most critical issue, and this focus would guide all their decision making and planning processes in the coming years.

SuccessNC grew into a body of initiatives designed to address student needs from first college contact through program completion. Today, the over-arching goal of SuccessNC is to increase graduation rates at community colleges across the state to help more of the state’s citizens earn family-supporting incomes.

SUCCESSNC GUIDING GOALS

SuccessNC is a focused set of initiatives developed to bring more college-ready students into high-quality educational and workforce training programs to prepare them for the post-recession economy as either an employee or an entrepreneur. The initiatives provide structured plans for achieving three guiding goals:

1) Improve Access: Develop policies and practices that provide more opportunities for students to enter post-secondary education and training programs and successfully complete their program of study.

2) Enhance Quality: Examine and continually improve rigor, relevance and quality in all academic and training opportunities to ensure that successful completion equates to a competitive position in the workforce or successful completion of higher education goals.

3) Increase Success: Increase the number of students leaving with a job-ready credential that can lead to becoming a successful employee or employer in a global economy and provide for stronger skills, better jobs, better pay and continued educational attainment.

THE FRAMEWORK OF SUCCESSNC

As the Listening Tour was nearing its conclusion, President Ralls appointed the Innovative Ideas Committee to examine innovations and barriers to success that had been discovered during the tour. The group was asked to determine what innovations could and should be utilized at colleges across the state. They were also tasked with recommending what barriers might be removed through System Office action facilitating processes and policies. The Innovative Ideas Committee developed a basic structure for SuccessNC that incorporated three guiding goals and sorted identified needs into four categories—Connection, Entry, Progress and Completion.

The SuccessNC model was based on one developed by the the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their Completion by Design initiative. North Carolina became a Completion by Design state in 2011, when Melinda Gates made the announcement during the first White House Summit on Community Colleges. A Performance Measures Committee and a Performance Funding Committee quickly began work to provide incentive-based funding essential to the Completion by Design model.
SuccessNC guides the student experience through four levels:

1) Connection

Today’s community colleges offer multiple enrollment pathways to students wishing to pursue technical education and college transfer. Initiatives fostered through SuccessNC were designed to increase access to post-secondary education by college-ready students.

• Students may begin their college careers through **Basic Skills Plus**, a program that combines GED or Adult High School classes with developmental education and technical courses to accelerate students’ entry into the skilled workforce or continued education.

• **Career and College Promise** provides seamless enrollment opportunities for North Carolina’s high school students who want to begin college prior to high school graduation. CCP pathways align with K-12 curriculum, industry standards and/or university articulation requirements to make sure students enroll only in courses appropriate to their approved pathway of study.

• The **Common Core Alignment Initiative**, organized around a communications framework known as NC Ready for Success, is working to align standards and expectations across K-12 schools, community colleges and universities to facilitate a more structured and consistent system of postsecondary enrollment across the state. NCCCS is leading this effort with a State Director hired to work across the UNC system, the NC Department of Public Instruction and NCCCS.

• **Career and Technical Education High School to College Articulation** allows high school students to earn community college credit for completing approved high school courses and demonstrating proficiency in the subject.

2) Entry

NCCCS is refining processes that affect students as they first enroll in the state’s community colleges.

• The **Developmental Education Initiative** is reinventing the state’s developmental education curriculum to accelerate student completion. In 2011, 69 percent of recent high school graduates placed into at least one developmental course when they enrolled in a North Carolina community college. Some students took up to four semesters of remedial work before they could enroll in college classes. Too often, students who placed into long sequences of developmental education simply dropped out. The Developmental Education Initiative was led by faculty teams from across the state and produced one modular curriculum for math and a second modular curriculum combining English and reading, which were previously taught separately. The new developmental modules incorporate concepts and information applicable to a student’s intended program of study. Utilizing faculty-defined competencies, the **NC Diagnostic and Placement Test (NC DAP)** has been designed for North Carolina community colleges to use in identifying specific gaps in the academic skills of each student. Colleges use the test results to place students in modular developmental education classes covering the material prescribed by the test. A student needing all levels of remediation should be able to complete the modular program in one year, half the time required by traditional developmental education. Many recent high school graduates no longer take placement tests since the **Multiple Measures for Placement** were developed through this initiative based on research showing that high school academic performance may be the strongest indicator of aptitude for college success.

• **Financial Aid Simplification** is helping college staff to expedite student financial aid awards while improving accuracy through contracting for some document processing. Financial Aid staff found themselves inundated with application processing duties when enrollment surges began in 2008 following massive job layoffs across North Carolina. They saw little or no relief in subsequent years. Along with off-site processing, on-site consulting is improving other operational efficiencies. Together, the new approach is freeing up college staff to focus on important student services vital to student success. This response includes an increased emphasis on financial literacy counseling to ensure that students do not make risky financial decisions that may be detrimental to their futures.

• The **Math Curriculum Improvement Project (CIP)** grew out of the Developmental Education Initiative at the urging of college faculty. The CIP looked at the relevance and rigor of mathematics instruction in North Carolina’s community colleges and redefined appropriate mathematics pathways for both technical and college transfer programs to facilitate graduation. The Math CIP Steering Committee found major math avoidance issues among community college students.
along with tremendous duplication of math courses in the NCCCS Combined Course Library. The CIP reduced the number of math courses in the Combined Course Library, and introduced two new classes utilizing research that showed that many students would be better served through courses in quantitative literacy and statistics instead of the traditional algebra-to-calculus route. The CIP created student learning outcomes for community college math courses to ensure uniformity in course content across the state. Revised math pathways were also incorporated into the new university articulation agreement.

3) Progress

Progress covers the time from entry into a program of study to 75 percent of completion of requirements for graduation.

- Begun in 2003, the Minority Male Mentoring Program (3MP) has been incorporated into SuccessNC as a student coaching program designed to help minority male community college students stay in college, graduate and transfer to four-year colleges and universities at higher rates. As part of the SuccessNC strategic focus, special emphasis was placed on mentoring, coaching, intrusive counseling and service learning.

- The Code Green Super Curriculum Improvement Project (CIP) has revamped and realigned entire sectors of the technical education curriculum of NC Community Colleges to create a system of stackable credentials. A list of specific, technical core courses that provide foundational knowledge are now utilized across the related technical programs. Student learning outcomes are attached to these technical core courses. The streamlined approach to general education requirements facilitates students earning certificates, diplomas or degrees in multiple technical programs to increase their value in the skilled workforce. Student learning outcomes also facilitate the articulation of course credits. The project addresses five technology areas that are critical to the growth of North Carolina’s new energy economy: building, energy, environment, transportation and engineering. In 2012, the Code Green Super CIP engaged more than 200 faculty members, as well as industry advisors, to review and revise or create courses and curriculum standards for statewide use. The initiative placed emphasis on teaching employability skills, and recognized the important role employers play in defining workplace competencies by building in skillsets such as those endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers. The Code Green Super CIP was the largest curriculum improvement project ever undertaken by NCCCS.

- The Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway is proposed to be an Internet-based platform that consolidates teaching, learning and professional development resources for college-credit and continuing education programs into a single searchable platform for use by community college faculty and staff and education partners.

- The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision is restructuring the transfer agreement between NCCCS and the University of North Carolina to create a Universal General Education Transfer Component, which is a minimum of 30 semester hours that can be applied to the degree requirements for any major at any of the 16 universities within the UNC system. The Universal General Education Transfer Component is comprised of courses typically taken during the freshman year to build a firm foundation for college success. The remaining 30 semester hours of the Associate in Arts or Associate in Science degrees will be made up of transfer courses relevant to students’ intended major at the university.

- The Reverse Transfer Credit allows students who leave a community college prior to graduation to utilize credits earned at a university to earn an associate degree from the community college where they studied previously. Research suggests that students who earn both an associate degree and a bachelor’s degree find more success in the workplace and future educational endeavors.
4) Completion

Completion covers the last 25 percent of coursework leading to graduation and completion of requirements for professional licensing or certification.

- **The Data Initiative** is creating a robust institutional performance and student outcome system for NC Community Colleges to meet the need for accurate, timely and accessible data beyond the scope now available. Representatives of the System Office and colleges across the state are working together to effectively modify systems from data entry to advanced data analytics. NCCCS and SAS, a North Carolina-based company and national leader in data analytics, have partnered to develop a software solution and training to enhance data collection and analysis for all of the state’s community colleges.

- Beginning with the 2013-2014 fiscal year, revised **Performance Measures** related directly to student success were used to allocate **Performance Funding** to the state’s community colleges. The performance measures and funding formulas were revised as part of SuccessNC to recognize the continuum of success and provide a range of funding based on performance.

- North Carolina was one of three states funded in 2011 to participate in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s **Completion by Design** initiative, and this work has created the foundational plank for the SuccessNC Framework. Completion by Design work groups in North Carolina identified 15 policy changes needed to improve community college completion rates. Resulting changes include revised placement standards with Multiple Measures for Placement and revised NCCCS curriculum standards to create highly structured programs of study to direct students through programs without unnecessary detours. The work that began at the cadre of five Completion by Design colleges has been scaled to four additional colleges. Key administrators from 26 colleges enrolled in the 2013-2014 Student Success Learning Institute, a year-long program designed to scale Completion by Design across the state. A second institute is planned to make Completion by Design training and planning assistance available to every community college in North Carolina.

**Conclusion**

SuccessNC has changed not only structures and policies to advance student success, but also created a culture shift where student success is foremost in consideration throughout the system of North Carolina community colleges.

The North Carolina Community College Presidents Association has developed a series of professional development sessions to help its members increase student success at the community colleges they serve.

Local community college trustees will attend one-day training sessions offered at 19 locations across the state to learn about how college trustees can facilitate student success. These training programs are designed to complement the work done through the Completion by Design Initiative, and are funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and conducted by the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees.

The Community College Research Center at Columbia University will analyze college data over a three-year period to provide a detailed picture of how the SuccessNC initiatives are affecting student success. Researchers will also visit five colleges to interview students and faculty to provide an experiential perspective on SuccessNC. The study results will be used to make adjustments to facilitate success for even more community college students.
Message From The President

Fifty years ago, North Carolina was one of the poorest states in the nation. Our state leaders attempted to significantly increase and diversify statewide economic prosperity by dramatically increasing educational opportunities beyond high school. Their audacious goals led to the creation of the North Carolina Community College System, the most accessible and comprehensive system of community colleges in the United States. Today, ours is a system of 58 community colleges with campuses located within 30 miles of almost every North Carolinian, offering comprehensive non-degree and degree opportunities at one of the lowest student tuition and fee rates in the nation.

Nearly 50 years after our birth and facing very different economic circumstances, North Carolina community college leaders boldly declared broad post-secondary access, while still vital, was alone not a sufficient remedy for economic woes in a globally competitive economic environment. Reflecting on a half-century of accomplishments as well as challenges, they noted that potentially one of our greatest current shortcomings was in having too few students crossing the finish lines of student success, particularly in a new economic climate that was punishing for those North Carolinians not succeeding beyond high school.

Thus began SuccessNC, our four-year system-wide strategic focus on student success and a dynamic planning process that began with a nine-month listening tour to each of our 58 colleges. The goal of the tour was to listen to the experts, our faculty, staff and students at the front lines, to determine the key challenges and innovations to increasing student success attainment. The culmination was a framework of 15 statewide initiatives that today are being implemented across the state at our community colleges.

The report outlines our SuccessNC planning process, and the current implementation status of our statewide student success initiatives that have resulted from this strategic focus. SuccessNC is by no means finished, however, only our planning process is complete. Innovations at statewide scale will continue to require years of implementation that will include extensive data collection and close monitoring to determine the validity of our strategies.

While our strategies may be tweaked and changed over the years, I am convinced that our focus on student success will continue to grow. No longer will success be reflected in how many students make it through our registration lines, but more importantly, by how many students walk across our graduation stages and attain meaningful credentials of value. And with this focus, I am confident that North Carolina’s community colleges will be as vital to the economic prosperity of our state in the next 50 years, as they have been to the economic growth of the past fifty.

Dr. Scott Ralls
President
North Carolina Community College System

President Scott Ralls testifies in 2013 hearing before the U.S Senate Committee on Higher Education, Labor, And Pensions. SuccessNC was one of four higher education innovations profiled at the hearing entitled, Attaining a Quality Degree: Innovations to Improve Student Success.
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR,

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The North Carolina Community College System is 50 years old, and we should celebrate! Our system enjoys a strong reputation as one of the most comprehensive community college systems in the world, and our work is often emulated. Our open-door admissions policy makes us the gateway to a better life for so many.

As a system, we spent the first 25 years establishing campuses and creating a framework. We spent the second 25 years filling out that frame with programs and services. Today, we don’t need to build so much as we need to align what we do with the ever-changing world in which we live. As we establish this alignment, we need to do it with the understanding that it won’t last. Our strategic planning must be dynamic and capable of changing as quickly as our communities’ needs change.

We’ve challenged our community colleges to maintain open-door access while focusing on program excellence and student success. And, we’ve asked for this commitment during some of the toughest economic times our state has ever known.

When Dr. Scott Ralls asked our blessings to conduct a statewide listening tour of every college in the state, we quickly embraced the idea. Learning about the great things happening at our colleges, as well as getting a deeper understanding of problems facing the colleges would be very helpful in planning effectively for the future. The Listening Tours launched SuccessNC, a dynamic strategic planning process to help us work purposefully and ensure success for years to come.

SuccessNC covers the community college experience from first connection through graduation with a series of focused initiatives designed to help colleges meet today’s students where they are and help them reach their educational goals. We exist to help North Carolinians realize personal success and success in the workforce. We invite you to read on and learn more about SuccessNC.
Fifty years ago, North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford made the case for Senate Bill 72 that provided the foundation for today’s North Carolina Community College System:

You will hear some whisperings abroad saying that we have done enough, have moved well and far and rapidly, and so it is time now to slow down, rest, and catch our breath. These whispers come from the fearful and those who have always opposed the accomplishments from which they now would rest. This cannot be and is not the spirit of North Carolina. Much remains to be done, to provide better educational opportunities for the competition our children will surely face, to encourage broader economic development so everybody will have a better chance to make a better living. Now is the time to move forward. Now is not time to loaf along.

As NC Community Colleges approached the 50-year mark, system administrators and members of the State Board of Community Colleges knew the charge of Governor Sanford was still relevant. In fact, the 50-year-old speech could be written today!

Even though the NCCCS is today the most comprehensive community college system in the nation, times have been tough in North Carolina. Between 2000 and 2010 the median household income dropped 10 percent with some counties seeing a drop of more than 25 percent, the U.S. Census Bureau reports. As the recession of 2008 roared through the state, community college enrollments soared to record numbers placing extraordinary strains on college budgets, as well as faculty and staff. Even though an “open door” philosophy was embraced by community colleges across the state, the reality was that students were sometimes turned away because resources had been exhausted. By the time the SuccessNC Listening Tour rolled through the state’s community colleges, the mantra “Do more with less” had become so ingrained, it was the new mandate.

Despite all the dismal news created by the recession, there were some bright spots on the higher education horizon.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had begun influencing college operations through its Postsecondary Success program that aims to dramatically increase the number of young people who obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate that has value in the labor market.

The basic model of how students enter college was changing, too. The Community College Research Center had discovered that traditional placement testing and developmental education requirements at community colleges were contributing to low graduation rates. The Lumina Foundation for Education, which has funded much of the CCRC work on the community college student experience, has been driving a movement to employ data in all aspects of decision-making through its Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative.

All the while, citizens across the nation have been talking about the steadily-rising cost of higher education and the cumbersome process for qualifying for financial aid. Students and their advocates alike had begun calling for more financial aid options and questioning the value of borrowing to pay for college.

While working to maintain an open-door admissions policy and meeting students where they are with high-quality programs, the state’s community colleges have been coping with tremendous changes in the state they serve. Rapidly shifting demographics, a stubbornly high unemployment rate, industry-reported shortages of skilled workers and a perpetually low rate of college completion have led NCCCS leaders to embrace the need for a strategic thinking process to drive planning for upcoming decades. Enter SuccessNC, a dynamic planning process designed to change quickly in response to ever-changing needs in one of the nation’s fastest growing states.
STRATEGIC VISION

The State Board of Community Colleges endorsed the SuccessNC planning initiative in fall 2009 to foster the development of guiding goals to improve student success across the state. The initiative was modeled in association with leaders from the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents and the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees.

SuccessNC was begun to:

- facilitate the sharing of best practices.
- initiate statewide policies to foster student success.
- remove policies that inhibit student success.
- develop new performance-based student success measures between fall 2010 and 2013, the year of the North Carolina Community College System’s 50th anniversary.

While SuccessNC began as a three-year project, the principles and policies that came from the initiative are expected to guide the work of North Carolina community colleges for many years to come.

GUIDING GOALS

SuccessNC’s guiding goals are focused on bringing more college-ready students into high-quality educational and workforce training programs that will allow them to be well prepared for the post-recession economy as either an employee or entrepreneur. These goals were developed as part of the System Office’s strategic planning initiative with input from State Board members, community college presidents, trustees, faculty, staff and system office leadership.

- Improve Student Success: Increase the number of students leaving with a job-ready credential that can lead to becoming a successful employee or employer in a global economy and provide for better skills, better jobs, better pay, and continued educational attainment.
- Increase Student Access: Develop policies and practices that provide increased opportunities for students to enter into and proceed successfully through post-secondary education and training programs.
- Ensure Program Excellence: Examine and continually improve rigor, relevance and quality in all academic and training opportunities to ensure that successful completion equates to a competitive position in the workforce or in the attainment of higher educational goals.

STUDENT SUCCESS TARGET

Increase the percentage of students who transfer, complete credentials or remain continuously enrolled from a six-year baseline of 41 percent for the Fall 2004 cohort to a six-year success rate of 59 percent for the Fall 2014 cohort. Doing so will double the number of credential completers by 2020.
When the State Board of Community Colleges held their annual fall retreat in 2009, members were looking to focus the work of the North Carolina Community College System to ensure that changing needs were recognized and met across the state. They talked with NCCCS President Scott Ralls and other community college leaders, including college trustees and presidents, about issues facing the state and the nation and charged the system with focusing on program excellence and student access simultaneously. The dual focus of the charge was seen as a way to increase the number of students successfully entering the workplace or continuing their education to reach additional goals.

The State Board’s charge came at the same time that costs for higher education were steadily rising, and colleges and universities faced growing financial pressures from the fallout of the 2008 economic crisis. The demand for financial aid had never been greater, the public student financial aid systems had seemingly reached their limit, and North Carolina colleges and universities were being hampered in their ability to raise new scholarship money. Meanwhile, the education gap between those of lower-income backgrounds and those with higher incomes was growing.

Employers had begun sounding the alarm that North Carolina and the nation had too few skilled workers for existing high-tech manufacturing jobs, and they warned that this shortage would stymie future economic development efforts. With a strong emphasis on banking, financial services, research and other industries that require large numbers of college-educated workers, state leaders had long been concerned about the state’s need to produce more college-educated workers to meet future needs.

During that 2009 retreat, President Ralls proposed that System Office administrators start the conversation about how the system would respond to North Carolina’s higher-education needs of today and the future by listening to local experts on community college operations to discover innovations to promote student success. The state board endorsed a statewide Listening Tour, and charged the administrators with reporting their findings at the next retreat.

Representatives of the North Carolina Community College Presidents Association participated in the State Board Planning Meeting in October 2009, where the SuccessNC strategic initiative was launched. President Ralls presented the plan for the Listening Tours at Association’s January 2010 meeting, noting that “The vision for NCCCS lies in the 58 community colleges.” The Presidents endorsed the plan and collaborated with System Office staff to coordinate the visits.

The Statewide Tour

In February 2010, two groups of administrators from NCCCS and a consultant set out to visit all 58 community colleges in North Carolina. Between February and October 2010, the teams traveled 13,820 miles and met with 1,355 people seeking best practices already in place in individual community colleges and looking for barriers that could be eliminated through System Office intervention.

The tours concluded at Blue Ridge Community College to coincide with the 2010 fall retreat of the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges. When that final listening session was completed, the teams had collected 202 best practices to promote student success and 75 barriers to student success. This information on student success facilitators and inhibitors has been used to drive SuccessNC, a long-range strategic thinking and planning process to set priorities for the North Carolina Community Colleges to respond to changing needs.
College System. The initial phase continues through 2013, when the system celebrates its 50th anniversary.

As President Ralls told the state board, “We are now a system that is 50 years old. The first 20-25 years were about creating the framework, the foundation, creating the structure for what is now the most comprehensive community college system in the nation and reaches one out of eight adults. The next 25 years were about filling out the frame, about programs and adding the places within that framework…. Moving forward, we didn’t feel a great need to spend a lot of time reviewing our mission. We feel like our mission is pretty well on target. “We also realized we’re moving in a context where it isn’t about doing more as much as aligning what we’re already doing. Moving forward, we feel like our strategic planning is more about a focus, a focus on student success…. Today we must focus on creating greater alignments between programs, both college and continuing education programs, between student services and instructional programs, between public schools and community colleges, and between community colleges and universities.”

The Lessons of the SuccessNC Listening Tour

When the presentations from the 58 Listening Tour stops were analyzed, they showed three broad challenges for NCCCS that were often intertwined:

1) Colleges must be innovative and work purposefully and collaboratively to increase access to higher education across the state.

2) Colleges must improve student success.

3) Colleges must not have policy barriers and concerns that impede operations.

Key Lessons

Delivery methods for developmental education and basic skills must be improved to increase students’ momentum and move them more quickly into college classes. Policy barriers that hinder progress towards entering a program have to be eliminated. The listening tours so clearly illustrated the enrollment leakage originating in developmental education placement that NCCCS President Ralls declared developmental education “the Bermuda Triangle of community colleges.” The tours also revealed barriers to basic skills students moving into college classes and persisting to graduation.

Colleges are creating clear pathways of study with multiple entry and completion points and blurring the lines between college-credit and continuing-education programs. Industry credentials and short-term skills training are folded in to create a system of stackable credentials aimed at allowing students to systematically increase their value to business and industry while continuing to work.

Colleges are creating stronger connections with K-12 systems to recruit students and help them continue to four-year colleges and universities or enter the workforce with skills that qualify them for middle-class wages.

Colleges are adopting student engagement strategies to improve student retention. Efforts include assigning mentors to students, developing early alert systems and “intrusive counseling” strategies and requiring orientation...
for first-year students. Many colleges are requiring college success courses, creating cohorts or learning communities and creating online and on-campus tutoring labs.

Financial aid limitations and the pitfalls of student loans are prompting community colleges to place heavier emphasis on teaching financial literacy. The complexity of the FAFSA, the application for federal financial aid, has caused colleges to look for ways to facilitate the financial aid application process for students, along with the approval and notification processes for colleges.

As colleges institute data-driven decision making, they report seeing a shift in institutional culture that includes a large increase in requests for data. Comprehensive reviews of all college programs must be conducted routinely to ensure a continuing focus on quality, successful outcomes and effective planning.

Some colleges are experimenting with blurring the lines between college-credit and continuing education divisions and grouping programs into schools by subject instead of credit-granting status.

Colleges often cite a lack of equipment funding as a barrier to program quality. College leaders asked for weighted funding for technology-intensive programs to promote the development of these programs across the state with special emphasis on supporting advanced manufacturing.

It is difficult for colleges to respond to new needs because college funding is based on the previous year’s enrollment and does not provide program start-up funds. Rural colleges, typically operating with smaller budgets, report that they find it particularly difficult to launch new programs.

Coding high school students in the current record keeping system with multiple enrollment routes is burdensome, and colleges recommend a single code for any high school student.

Advanced training to enhance the ability to run analytics packages that are part of the NCCCS data system to provide data on student success would be helpful, as would the formation of user groups to identify and prioritize data needs. Sharing scripts and specialized programming between colleges to facilitate effective use of the system would benefit colleges.

A streamlined core of curriculum programs and completion points across the state with options for localized specialty tracks and certificates might make instruction more efficient for the system and help employers understand graduates’ core competencies.

Small rural colleges have unique needs. Administrators often struggle to hire qualified faculty, especially nursing instructors. These colleges are challenged in the distance education arena by the combination of limited broadband access and too few computers in their students’ homes. A lack of public transportation in rural areas makes access to college more challenging for many of the state’s residents. Some colleges suggest that the state should support unique, niche programs in rural counties because these programs may serve as economic development catalysts. Training to produce employers is needed in areas where many traditional employers are no longer in operation.

Comprehensive Listening Tour results may be accessed in the Appendix.
As the SuccessNC Listening Tour crisscrossed the state in 2010 to stop at all 58 community colleges, NCCCS administrators and members of the State Board of Community Colleges collected more than 200 college-selected best practices or innovations. Trends in best practices and barriers began to emerge.

To guide the next step in the process, the Innovative Ideas Committee was appointed by NCCCS President Scott Ralls. Working between August 2010 and October 2011, this group of college and NCCCS administrators along with a State Board representative analyzed the compilation of best practices and barriers to find a systematic approach to planning for new levels of student success. The committee was specifically tasked with determining the feasibility and implications of implementing system-wide innovations while recommending a strategic approach to removing barriers. The group was also asked to recommend facilitative processes and policies to foster success.

The Innovative Ideas Committee reviewed best practices gleaned through the Listening Tours, the SuccessNC Strategic Vision, and the SuccessNC Student Success Framework. They received briefings from the NCCCS Commission on Learning Technologies, NCCCS Developmental Education Initiative, and NCCCS Code Green Super CIP Initiative. The group examined the Completion by Design Momentum/Loss Framework, a Gates Foundation initiative. They explored the Kentucky Community and Technical College System’s KCTCS Online:

### Innovative Ideas Committee

- **Dr. Mary Rittling**, President, Davidson County Community College, Committee Co-Chair
- **Dr. Bill Ingram**, President, Durham Technical Community College, Committee Co-Chair
- **Dr. Phyllis Broughton**, Dean, Academics & Student Services-Curriculum Studies, Martin Community College
- **Dr. Susanne Adams**, Vice President of Student Services & Academic Support, Sandhills Community College
- **Ms. Carol Cullum**, Vice President of Student Development, Cape Fear Community College
- **Ms. Dawn Dixon**, Dean of Arts, Sciences & Academic Enrichment, Johnston Community College
- **Dr. Garrett Hinshaw**, President, Catawba Valley Community College
- **Dr. Candace Holder**, Director of Distance Education, Surry Community College
- **Dr. Myra Johnson**, President, Isothermal Community College
- **Dr. Brenda Kays**, Vice President of Student Learning & Success, Guilford Technical Community College
- **Dr. Mark Kinlaw**, Vice President for Instruction Support Services, Robeson Community College
- **Dr. Mary Kirk**, President, Montgomery Community College
- **Dr. Laura Leatherwood**, Executive Director of Continuing & Adult Education, Haywood Community College
- **Dr. Sharon Morrissey**, Senior Vice President & Chief Academic Officer, NC Community College System
- **Dr. Dina Pitt**, Instructor of Math & Science, Nash Community College
- **Dr. Sam Powell**, Member of State Board of Community Colleges
- **Dr. Bob Shackelford**, President, Randolph Community College
- **Dr. Ralph Soney**, President, Roanoke-Chowan Community College
- **Dr. Alexis Welch**, Dean of Health Sciences, Lenoir Community College
- **Dr. Stelanie Williams**, Vice President, Economic & Community Development, Central Carolina Community College
- **Mr. Richard Zollinger**, Vice President for Learning, Central Piedmont Community College
The exploration led the Innovative Ideas Committee to make the following observations:

1) Innovations are taking place across the state.  
2) Not all innovations are feasible for all campuses; however, some innovations can lead to systemic change.  
3) Rigor, relevance and relationships are important to student success.  
4) Student demographics are changing, and the mean age of our student population is lower today than five years ago.  
5) Technology will be paramount to 21st century student success.  
6) Change should be data-informed.  
7) The 21st century curriculum must be competency-based and unbundled.  
8) Performance measures will provide a context to focus innovation.  
9) Educators need to be courageous and challenge the current model.  
10) New paradigms require critical learning, creative learning, social learning and courageous learning.

The Innovative Ideas Committee chairs appointed three subcommittees to explore and develop recommendations for system-wide scalable innovations to foster student success. The 21st Century Student Services Subcommittee looked at orientation, admissions, registration, financial aid, business services, counseling, advising, career services, tutoring and skills labs. The 21st Century Learning Subcommittee studied distance learning infrastructure and innovative learning technologies. The 21st Century Teaching Subcommittee explored critical thinking, problem solving, the challenge of delivering content to influence student success, knowing how to teach and utilizing expertise beyond the teacher’s knowledge base.

The three subcommittees identified several broad emerging themes:

1) The resources and capabilities of individual colleges are different. Colleges have different priorities that direct the allocation of resources, and this leads to different levels of capability and expertise at each college.  
2) Communications about innovations and interventions that lead to student success needs to be consistent, accurate and credible.  
3) Scaling innovations to the system-wide level is challenging.  
4) There are vast differences in the ways colleges use technology to deliver instruction and to support student learning.  
5) Data should drive decision making.

The committee stressed the importance of recognizing that all recommendations are interrelated and interdependent. Members advised that the use of technology must be appropriate to teaching, learning and student support objectives, and the collection of data must be appropriate for supporting and evaluating objectives.

See all the innovations collected during the SuccessNC Listening Tour at successnc.org.
The North Carolina Community College System’s SuccessNC initiative began with the SuccessNC Listening Tour of the state’s 58 community colleges. As the tour progressed, clear patterns began to emerge. The state’s open door policy at its community colleges had made access to higher education available to all, but success, defined by earning a degree or a workforce credential, was clearly much more elusive. There were many reasons students stumbled in their quest for a better life through higher education, and it became clear that NCCCS would need to institute an intentional approach to removing some of the common barriers that affected large numbers of students. SuccessNC was developed to provide a dynamic strategic planning process for NCCCS to increase the percentage of students graduating at each college while ensuring access and quality.

Soon after NCCCS conducted the listening tours, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began launching its Completion by Design initiative. The Gates initiative was designed to raise community college completion rates for large numbers of students while containing college costs, maintaining open access and ensuring the quality of college programs and credentials. The Gates goals were remarkably similar to the goals suggested by the results of the Listening Tours, and NCCCS joined forces with the
Gates Foundation to develop “momentum strategies,” programs to increase graduation rates while maintaining access and quality.

The basic principles of Completion by Design form the foundation for SuccessNC. Upon that foundation are four pillars representing phases in the community college experience. These pillars with their supporting SuccessNC initiatives are:

1) **Connection**—The time between when a student develops an interest in college and applies.
   - Basic Skills Plus Initiative
   - Career and College Promise Initiative
   - Common Core Alignment Initiative
   - Career & Technical Education High School to College Alignment Initiative

2) **Entry**—The time from first enrollment through completion of “gatekeeper courses.”
   - Developmental Education Initiative
   - Financial Aid Simplification Initiative
   - Math Pathways Curriculum Improvement Project

3) **Progress**—The time a student enters a program of study to the time he completes 75 percent of required courses.
   - Minority Male Mentoring Initiative
   - Code Green Super Curriculum Improvement Project
   - Integrated Teaching & Learning Gateway Initiative
   - Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision & Reverse Transfer Credit Initiative

4) **Completion**—A student completes a program of study to earn a credential with labor market value.
   - Data Initiative
   - Performance Measures & Funding Initiative
   - Initiative to Identify and Mitigate Barriers to Student Success
   - Completion by Design Initiative

SuccessNC is expected to influence the culture of North Carolina community colleges by directing an unwavering focus on student success. From trustees, faculty and administrators at the individual colleges to the System Office personnel and the State Board, SuccessNC is anticipated to permanently weave its major tenets into the fabric of NCCCS and each college. Increasing student engagement through counseling, tutoring, college activities, campus government and other programs that provide social connections will be a key factor for improving graduation rates at North Carolina’s community colleges.

To bring about lasting change, administrators across the system will have to be vigilant about collecting and analyzing a broad range of data that can help them to find out what works and what does not. Decisions will have to be guided by the numbers rather than anecdotes and intuition.

SuccessNC is the plan for facilitating more meaningful opportunities for North Carolina residents through NC Community Colleges. The four pillars of connection, entry, progress and completion support the NCCCS strategic vision of access, excellence and completion.

As the North Carolina Community College System has celebrated 50 years of service to the state’s citizens, it has provided an opportunity to look back on humble beginnings underpinned by a clear vision of providing access to higher education to all. With reflection has come a reaffirmation of the original goals for the system that included open-door access regardless of preparation and high quality educational programs designed to equip people to join the workforce. Along with the traditional goals, NCCCS has added a goal of doubling the number of students who earn a college degree or a credential with value in the workplace by 2020.

“At a time when completion of a college credential is more important than ever to middle class opportunity, at a time when almost two-thirds of the jobs in our state will soon require education beyond high school, the doors to opportunity are closing to too many,” declares NC Community Colleges President Scott Ralls. “Our challenge is to ask, ‘Do we have the innovation and courage to make total education a reality?’”
Connection is the first of four phases of a student’s college experience and covers the time from first interest until an application for admission is submitted.

Connection includes **opportunities to lose momentum** through:

- Failure to apply to college.
- Delaying college entry.
- Poor counseling that leads to inappropriate class schedules and failure to access financial aid.

Connection includes **opportunities to gain momentum** through:

- Consistent college-readiness standards.
- Peer and adult support.
- A clear understanding of college requirements.
- Concurrent enrollment in high school and college.
- Taking college placement tests in high school.
- Going directly from high school to college.

**SuccessNC** initiatives addressing momentum strategies critical to the **Connection Phase**:

- **Basic Skills Plus**
- **Career and College Promise**
- **Common Core Alignment**
- **Career & Technical Education High School to College Alignment**

Today’s community colleges offer multiple enrollment pathways to students wishing to pursue technical education and college transfer. Initiatives fostered through SuccessNC were designed to increase access to post-secondary education by college-ready students.

The SuccessNC framework borrows from the Completion by Design Loss/Momentum Framework. Completion by Design is an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
THE SPARK:

Less educated workers are more likely to be out of work, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 2009, adults without a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED°) credential were twice as likely to be out of work as adults with some college education (14.6 percent v. 7.5 percent). Adults who had completed high school fared much better than dropouts, but these workers had unemployment rates nearly a third higher than adults with some college and twice as high as those with a bachelor’s degree (9.7 percent v. 4.5 percent).

NCCCS administrators were concerned about the small number of GED graduates who completed a college or career training program. Of 14,808 GED graduates during the 2008-09 academic year, 25 percent enrolled by Summer 2010 and 39 percent had enrolled by Summer 2013. Only 5 percent of these GED graduates received a postsecondary credential (certificate, diploma, associate degree) by Summer 2013 from a North Carolina community college. Thirteen percent of those who enrolled in a college-credit class by Summer 2013 received a postsecondary credential.

A study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce found that the demand for college-educated workers would rise by 16 percent between 2008 and 2018, and by the end of that decade, nearly two thirds of the nation’s jobs would require some postsecondary education or training.

Over the same decade, the nation’s number of high school graduates is not expected to grow, according to the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Recent high school graduates have traditionally been the source of enrollment growth, but between 2009 and 2019, college enrollment of adults age 25 and older is expected to increase by twice as much as the traditional-age students (22.6 percent v. 9.7 percent). Increasing the number of adults completing college credentials will be critical to reaching national goals for international competitiveness and meeting employers’ workforce needs.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:

Administrators and faculty in North Carolina community colleges saw a need to help adult students quickly gain work skills and get jobs while they were still enrolled in

SUCCESS: BASIC SKILLS PLUS

Zach Earles is studying at Davidson County Community College with plans to complete his associate degree in Welding Technology. As a 2012 GED graduate, he was one of the first at DCCC to take classes in Basic Skills Plus and to experience a team-taught course. Earles has completed coursework for certificates in Basic and Intermediate Fundamental Welding and is on track to complete the AAS degree in 2014.

When asked what he likes about welding, Earles said, “There are so many things to do that welding never gets boring.”

He hopes to be the first in his immediate family to graduate from college and he is clearly on track to meet his goal.

BASIC SKILLS PLUS

initiative: BASIC SKILLS PLUS
high school completion programs through the Basic Skills Department at their local community college. These new skills would help reduce local unemployment numbers and improve the standard of living for GED® and Adult High School (AHS) students and their families, even before they finished their Basic Skills program.

Traditionally, very low numbers of GED® and AHS graduates had continued their educations by enrolling in college classes. College administrators recognized the need to build a bridge from Adult High School and GED® programs to college-credit programs and continuing-education programs. Their goal was to increase the number of Basic Skills graduates who earned an entry-level workforce credential with an added goal of having the student complete a secondary diploma or its equivalent.

**WHAT WE DID:**

NC Community Colleges launched Basic Skills Plus to meet the needs of Basic Skills students. The value-added program follows a national trend of moving Basic Skills from a traditional high school completion program to being a program that helps at-risk students make the transition from high school dropout to college student.

Basic Skills Plus is a four-pronged approach to entering college and the workplace. The program provides classes for students to earn a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. At the same time they are working towards high school completion, students enter a pathway to earn a workforce credential that can lead to a job in a field with a documented need for workers. To ensure success in the workplace, Basic Skills Plus students take employability courses through Human Resources Development, and most students earn a WorkKeys® Career Readiness Certificate, a nationally recognized credential certifying skills in math, reading and finding information. Basic Skills Plus students also take Developmental Education courses required for any course within their pathway to eliminate academic barriers to their success in college programs.

Basic Skills Plus was built on the foundation of the NCCCS Pathways to Employment program launched in 1996 to focus on moving single parents who were dependent on government aid to self-sufficiency. A student who meets eligibility requirements and enroll in Basic Skills Plus may enroll in an approved program of study with fees waived. The North Carolina General Assembly approved the fee waivers in the 2010 budget bill because students are not eligible for federal financial aid until they have earned their high school credential. Today, colleges are authorized to use up to 20 percent of the State-Appropriated Literacy Funds allocated to them to provide employability skills, job-specific occupational or technical skills or developmental education instruction to Basic Skills students. The focus is always on getting the student into the workforce as quickly as possible while ensuring that he or she earns a GED® or Adult High School diploma essential for career advancement and college enrollment.

When Basic Skills Plus was first launched in 2010, students primarily enrolled in occupational training through continuing education, but the focus has shifted to enrolling students in continuing education and then moving them into college-credit courses. The participating colleges have facilitated the shift by adding many new pathways, some made up of only college-credit courses and others made up of a combination of college-credit and continuing-education courses.

Basic Skills Plus students must demonstrate at least ninth-grade academic proficiency to begin coursework outside the Basic Skills curriculum. Students are limited to 12 hours of fee-waived study in college courses, and are counseled to complete their high school credential prior to reaching this benchmark so that federal financial aid, if necessary, is an option that will allow them to continue their studies.

While Basic Skills Plus does not require team teaching within pathways, a significant number of the state’s community colleges have begun using this approach. At these colleges, students are grouped into cohorts by program of study and Basic Skills and college instructors teach as a team for at least 25 percent of class time so that program-specific language, concepts and expectations can be woven into Basic Skills lessons. This contextualized learning specific to a program gives students a sense of progress.

Students who once had to complete a GED® or AHS program prior to taking developmental courses can now cover both areas at one time and expedite their completion of a credential. Basic Skills students often earn stackable credentials to accommodate the common practice of enrolling for a semester and stopping out for a time to work before enrolling for another semester. Each time a credential is added to the stack, a student’s job opportunities are expected to increase.

Basic Skills has expanded its scope to help another large group of at-risk students, those who have a high school diploma but fail to test into the lowest level developmental math class at community colleges. These students may enroll in Math Sense, a program developed at Davidson County and Central Piedmont community colleges, and now used at colleges across the state. The program replaces MAT 050, previously the lowest level developmental math course taught at community colleges, and is taught without charge to the student since Math Sense is a Basic Skills course. This approach reduces students’ initial dependence on federal financial aid, making it more likely that Pell grants will be sufficient for students to complete a college certificate, diploma or degree and get a family-sustaining job in their chosen fields.
RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
Basic Skills Plus has expanded from two to 46 colleges across the state since November 2010 when Cape Fear and Wilkes community colleges were approved by the State Board of Community Colleges to offer the new program. Applications to become Basic Skills Plus colleges continue to go to the State Board for approval, and the goal is for all 58 of the state’s community colleges to offer Basic Skills Plus.

By Summer 2013, the State Board had approved 147 Basic Skills Plus pathways in 12 career clusters developed to meet local labor market demand. Every semester, new colleges and new pathways are being added. Among the most popular pathways are Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Technology; Nursing Assistant; Automotive Systems Technology; Welding Technology; Office Administration; Medical Office Administration; Early Childhood Education; Culinary Technology; Pharmacy Technician; and Computer-Integrated Machining.

The 2010 legislation that enabled the establishment of Basic Skills Plus allows students to earn up to 12 hours of college credit while they are completing their GED® or AHS requirement. Basic Skills Plus allows students who dropped out of high school prepared to pass the college placement test to accelerate their college completion. Because colleges are required to research local employment options and guide Basic Skills Plus students into college courses that will lead to local employment, Basic Skills Plus students are much more likely to have new job opportunities when they complete the college certificate.

Colleges are placing special emphasis on giving Basic Skills Plus students a clear picture of how progressing through the world of higher education will increase earnings. Students are encouraged to map pathways for academic and employment success after they gain a clear understanding of the world of work, a world that many grew up without ever seeing modeled.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
After seeing Basic Skills as a separate continuing education program for many years, community colleges are steadily relocating their Basic Skills programs to campus locations that put GED® and Adult High School students in close proximity to college students and their classes. The changes are meant to help students make a smooth transition into college classes, and Basic Skills Plus helps students enroll in college while they are completing their GED® or Adult High School program. Students who see themselves as part of the college world are thought to be more likely to continue their educations once they complete their Adult High School diploma or GED®.

Basic Skills administrators are now focused on improving their data collection and program evaluation system to make it compliant with the National Reporting System of the United States Department of Education. Colleges must submit quarterly reports detailing required metrics, such as number of students served, number of hours of attendance, number of academic program completions and number of credentials earned. Colleges are also tracked for Basic Skills Plus enrollment persistence, momentum and milestones. Improved data tracking should facilitate more informed administrative decisions and policy development.

Special emphasis is being placed on building a comprehensive student support system for Basic Skills Plus students because surveys show many of these students have overwhelming needs that must be addressed if they are to have successful academic careers that will lead to family-sustaining employment. This focus on meeting needs, such as funds for books and childcare, is expected to increase the number of students who earn a workplace credential after beginning in Basic Skills.

Because North Carolina’s Basic Skills Plus program is considered to be an innovative approach to improving the lives of adults who did not finish high school, colleges across the country are eager to learn more. A paper on Basic Skills Plus was published in the August 2013 edition of the national journal “Learning Abstracts.” A presentation on the state’s Basic Skills Plus program was made at the October 2013 National Career Pathways Network conference in San Antonio, Texas.
The Spark:
High school students in North Carolina had been able to take college-credit courses free of charge since the 1980s through community colleges via the Huskins Bill and Dual Enrollment programs. Later the Learn and Earn program was added. In 2008, legislators facing budget challenges curtailed enrollment options to limit high school students to taking primarily technical program and science and math courses. After the changes took place, colleges experienced a decline in enrollment of high school students and full-time equivalent (FTE) earnings dropped in proportion. High school administrators had to reassign students registered for college classes to high school classes. The option for many high school students to accelerate college completion through dual enrollment was severely diminished.

Issue Addressed by Initiative:
As leaders were voicing concerns that the state did not have enough college-educated workers and workers with advanced technical skills to meet the needs of business and industry, parents and students were saying the cost of college was rising so rapidly that it would soon be out of reach for many.

Some of the state’s public school systems had eliminated technical education programs because comparable training was available through community colleges.

While high school students had been earning college credits for years under previous dual enrollment rules, they were often unfocused when they selected their courses, and later found they could not apply the credits towards earning a college diploma or other credential.

What We Did:
Community college administrators, K-12 administrators and the Governor’s Office began looking for solutions. In January 2010, Governor Beverly Perdue announced a Career and College Promise initiative. She described a focused enrollment plan that would allow high school students to complete one year of higher education through NC Community Colleges prior to their high school graduation at no cost to them or their parents. Students would have the option of enrolling in a college transfer pathway and earning at least 30 hours of college credit or enrolling in a technical program of study providing an entry-level, industry-standard credential. The Appropriations Act of 2011 authorized the State Board of Education and the State Board of Community Colleges to establish the Career and College Promise program beginning Jan. 1, 2012, rejuvenating dual enrollment opportunities in North Carolina.

To be eligible to participate in Career and College Promise, students had to be residents of North Carolina, have a cumulative unweighted grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 weighted scale, be a high school junior or senior and perform satisfactorily on placement tests or qualify for a waiver. Students also had to enroll in structured pathways, making the random course taking prevalent in earlier dual enrollment programs much less likely to occur.

Results and Progress to Date:
Career and College Promise provides seamless dual enrollment educational opportunities for North Carolina’s high school students because the CCP pathways align with the K-12 curriculum, industry standards and/or university articulation requirements. CCP helps students focus their enrollment plans to ensure that they are working purposefully on a credential with value in the workplace.
or at a senior institution. Students who enroll today are better prepared to excel in college because of the new program’s admission requirements that include a GPA benchmark.

When they enroll in CCP, high schools students who want to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a university, choose a College Transfer Pathway with a goal of completing at least 30 hours prior to high school graduation. The College Transfer Pathway works in concert with the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between NCCCS and the University of North Carolina System and satisfies requirements for a first-year general education transfer component. Students may use these credits to accelerate graduation from any of North Carolina’s community colleges or public universities.

Eligible students who want to earn a Career Technical Education credential, may enroll in an approved technical program at the community college with a goal of earning at least a certificate requiring 12-18 hours of credit. This certificate provides entry-level skills for employment and allows students to continue their studies at the community college following high school graduation to earn a diploma or degree building on the foundation they laid while still in high school.

In July 2013, the State Board of Community Colleges approved a change in CCP Operating Procedures to allow exceptional students to enroll in two Career Technical Education Pathway programs of study. The change will allow students to study simultaneously in complementary programs and complete two credentials in CTE disciplines. Additional credentials may result in more job options and higher pay for students who enter the workforce right away. Students who wish to continue their education at a community college will be able to accelerate graduation using CCP credits. Students who go straight to a university following high school will have a headstart in numerous science, technology, engineering and math-related fields.

In November 2013, the State Board approved opening academic transitions pathways in industrial and engineering technologies to qualified freshman and sophomore high school students to allow them to earn a CTE certificate or diploma. The Appropriations

SUCCESS: CAREER AND COLLEGE PROMISE

Central Carolina Community College enrolls high school students in the Career and College Promise Welding Technology Pathway to facilitate the Caterpillar (CAT) Youth Apprenticeship Program. These students earn a 12-hour Welding Apprenticeship Certificate tuition-free from Central Carolina and have preferred employment opportunities at the Caterpillar facility in Sanford.

Through the apprenticeship program, the students work part-time for CAT for two years and complete the 80-hour CAT proprietary training in welding. During the summer, these students work up to 32 hours at CAT. Throughout the program, students earn hours toward their journeyman card. The first class will graduate in Spring 2014, and if hired by CAT, will start work earning about $17 per hour with full benefits, including educational reimbursement. Some members of the first class plan to seek employment with CAT while others plan to attend four-year colleges or join the military.

The apprenticeship program is a collaborative effort between CCCC, CAT, the NC Department of Labor and Lee County Schools. The program is part of a growing North Carolina trend of career and technical apprenticeship training for high school students enrolled in Career and College Promise pathways at community colleges prior to finishing their secondary educations.
SUCCESS

SUCCESS: CAREER AND COLLEGE PROMISE

Catawba Valley Community College student Joseph Houston earned 14 hours of college credit with a 4.0 grade point average while he was attending Bunker Hill High School in Claremont. Through Career and College Promise, Houston was able to study tuition-free in the Computer Integrated Machining pathway.

Houston’s early success in machining at CVCC led to his selection for a two-year apprenticeship program at Poppelmann Plastics in Claremont. As an apprentice, Houston has college expenses paid for him to earn an associate degree in Computer Integrated Machining Technology while he works part-time at Poppelmann. He also has overseas training opportunities. Best of all, Houston is looking forward to earning around $34,000 as a full-time tool and die technician at Poppelmann, when he completes his degree and apprenticeship.

This will make him part of North Carolina’s growing “middle-skills” workforce whose members complete technical education beyond high school, typically earning an associate degree, diploma or certificate before taking a relatively high-paying skilled, entry-level job.

Act of 2013, S.B. 402 amended NC General Statutes 115D-20(4) a.2 to make this new option available to high school students.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:

Under the Program Accountability Plan, colleges will assign student codes provided by the North Carolina Community College System Office. Each year, the NCCCS and the N.C. Department of Instruction will report to the State Board of Community Colleges and the State Board of Education on:

(A) The impact of dual enrollment on high school completion
(B) The academic achievement and performance of dual-enrollment high school students
(C) The number of students who successfully complete college pathways or certificates through dual enrollment
(D) The persistence, completion rates and academic achievement of students who continue into college programs after high school graduation.

Career and College Promise students are being tracked for success while they are enrolled in the program. Those who enroll in four-year colleges and universities will have their success analyzed throughout their enrollment at those institutions. Because Career and College Promise did not begin until 2012, data is not yet available to see clear trends in student success. In coming years, the percentage of university students who began college as CCP students at community colleges is expected to grow steadily.
THE SPARK:

Leaders of public and private educational institutions in North Carolina, along with much of the nation, had been grappling with defining career and college readiness for years. Questions were often raised about exactly what reading, writing, and math skills high school students would need to be successful in college and the workplace. Tremendous differences in state standards for K-12 student performance were often cited as a problem, and there was no denying the assertion that too few students were receiving the academic preparation necessary to be successful in college. This could be seen in the data that showed that two-thirds of recent high school graduates in North Carolina needed developmental education prior to enrolling in college-level courses.

The discussions and studies would eventually inform the development of a growing movement to significantly improve college graduation rates and better prepare workers for a global economy with ever-increasing competition.

This desire to further a more comprehensive “completion agenda” sparked leaders from across educational sectors, the business community, as well as the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to craft a set of new learning standards for what students should know and be able to do in the 21st century. In June 2010, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted these new rigorous and internationally benchmarked standards, referred to as the Common Core State Standards. The state began full implementation of these new learning expectations for all students by the summer of 2012 for K-12 Mathematics and K-12 English Language Arts. This made North Carolina one of the first states to embrace clear and consistent benchmarks for the knowledge and skills that students need and provides a common definition of what it means to be college and career ready.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:

A study by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University found that students who enter college underprepared and requiring remediation are much less likely to graduate than those who test at college-ready levels. These researchers found that students who test into developmental courses frequently don’t enroll in classes of any kind.

In recent years, more than 65 percent of students entering North Carolina community colleges must take remedial courses, learning at their expense what they should have already learned in high school. This effort to bridge K-12 standards to coursework in postsecondary institutions provides consistent benchmarks for the knowledge and skills that students need and provides a common definition of what it means to be college and career ready.

Reducing the need for developmental education reduces the impact that being underprepared has on students who are dependent on financial aid, such as federal Pell grants. Pell grant recipients are limited in the number of hours of coursework they may attempt utilizing financial aid, and many have cited spending years in developmental classes and assessments that reflect the new Common Core State Standards. While the initiative represents a full-scale, cross-sector effort between the NCCCS, UNC System, NC DPI, as well as the NC Independent Colleges and Universities, NCCCS was named the fiscal agent for the “Core to College: Preparing Students for College Readiness and Success” grant. Leaders will join together to build a framework to provide a greater sense of what skills are covered in high school and what skills are required for success in the first courses required at the postsecondary level.

North Carolina was one of 10 states originally chosen to receive a Core to College grant funded by the Lumina Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Other states were Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington. The original states were joined by Tennessee and Maine during 2013.
COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

as a barrier to completing their college program.

As a popular relocation destination, North Carolina can find real benefit in the adoption of more rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards that should level math and language arts learning expectations across the nation. Students should be able to enter or exit a state without finding themselves dramatically behind or ahead of their peers. These new standards were designed to:

1) Align with college and work expectations
2) Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order skills
3) Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards
4) Reflect expectations of top-performing countries so that all U.S. students are prepared to succeed in the global economy
5) Be evidence and/or research-based.

This approach should help to close the zip code gap in education that has long been a problem. The initiative is meant to provide better coordination in K-12 school systems across the state and it fosters collaboration between North Carolina’s public schools and the community college and university systems.

WHAT WE ARE DOING:
Successful implementation of these new standards will require a shift in the mindset of K-12 educators and administrators as they move from simply promoting high school graduation to promoting college and career readiness for all students. Higher education entities are expected to facilitate this critical change, and the NCCCS Office is providing this leadership in North Carolina.

The Office of K-12 and Postsecondary Alignment Initiatives began directing this statewide policy engagement strategy in 2012. A State Director has been hired to work within the offices of NCCCS, the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to assist the three systems in communicating and coordinating areas for greater alignment.

This initiative to promote greater alignment between K-12 and NC colleges and universities is being guided by a steering committee comprised of the Chief Academic Officers of NCCCS, UNC, DPI and other key leaders in the three systems. They are joined by a representative of NC Independent Colleges and Universities.

Over 2013 and 2014, a series of “Imagining Conversations” will convene representatives of all the sectors to explore career and college readiness in North Carolina using the communications framework, “NC Ready for Success.” Alignment teams
of cross-sector faculty are being developed to support the implementation of North Carolina’s Career and College Readiness Standards across the sectors. Participants in each Imagining Conversation are polled at the end to determine their understanding of the Common Core State Standards, as well as to provide feedback on a proposed set of definitions for statewide career and college readiness.

Supporting Alignment for Student Success (SASS) mini-grant recipients were selected August 2013. SASS grants are being awarded to encourage greater partnership alignment between higher education and secondary stakeholders. The SASS grants are meant to increase higher education faculty knowledge of North Carolina’s newly revised Standard Course of Study, which includes the Common Core and Essential Standards. Mini-grants are also meant to promote collaboration between secondary and postsecondary faculty and produce demonstration materials for use in educating peers on the state’s career and college readiness standards and the instructional shifts required to support their full implementation. Throughout this work, the Steering Committee has been developing a set of recommendations for a statewide definition of career and college readiness. This definition, along with a series of policy recommendations for further curricular alignment across the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, will be a major focus of work in the 2013-2014 academic year.

**RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:**

Imagining Conversations spanning the state began in February 2012, and more are planned. Locations to date have been East Carolina University, Wayne Community College, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Appalachian State University, Davidson Community College, Fayetteville State University, Pfeiffer University, North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

In addition to the awarding of close to $80,000 in SASS mini-grants, NC Ready for Success has developed an extensive outreach and engagement network with more than 700 educators from across the state. Teams of educators from across each of the sectors continue to work to find resources and opportunities for collaboration.

**FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:**

The initiative will be working across sectors throughout the 2013-2014 academic year. In addition to Alignment Teams who will continue their efforts to craft and identify resources to support high quality instruction in writing and quantitative literacy, a regional group of NC Ready for Success Alignment Fellows will be examining the contexts and issues of “what it’s like to teach math or English” from another sector’s perspective. This work will culminate in a number of Alignment Conversations where faculty will come together to make recommendations for improved collaboration and alignment across the sectors.

The University School Teacher Education Partnership Networks will be involved in further conversations about how to enrich the full array of educational collaboration opportunities beyond the current practice of placing college and university education majors in field experiences and student teaching positions in local school districts.

The initiative will host a series of Statewide K-12 and Higher Education Summits in 2014. Two will focus on math and English standards and a third, larger summit will highlight the key areas of progress in cross-sector work in North Carolina.
The Spark:
In North Carolina, the Perkins Act of 2006 was interpreted as a mandate to enhance postsecondary career and technical education while creating smooth pathways from high school to community college for students who elect to enroll in secondary career and technical educational pathways. The Career and Technical Education High School to College Articulation Initiative is dedicated to creating smooth career pathways for students.

Issue Addressed by Initiative:
By 2020, two out of three jobs will require some postsecondary education or training. This shift in training requirements for jobs that pay middle class wages has made career and technical education (CTE) the gateway to the middle class, and has given birth to a class of jobs known as “middle jobs.” Middle jobs require some postsecondary education and training with an industry certification but not a bachelor’s degree and have average earnings of between $35,000 and $95,000.

Articulating Success

Haywood Community College provides high school students career and technical pathways for dual credit in criminal justice technology, automotive systems technology, collision repair, computer-integrated machining, early childhood education, forest management technology, manicuring nail technology, and electronics engineering technology. In Fall 2013, 68 students from Haywood County Schools enrolled in career technical education pathways at HCC.

HCC was recently awarded an NSF grant to help grow dual enrollment pathway certificates with the Haywood County Schools in electronics engineering and computer-integrated machining.

In Spring 2013, HCC awarded 57 certificates to more than 40 Haywood County students in criminal justice technology, computer integrated machining, automotive systems technology, and collision repair and refinishing technology.

Computer-Integrated Machining
Daniel Carr and Sam Hayes began college by taking dual enrollment classes at HCC through Tuscola High School. They are now completing their AAS in computer-integrated machining while employed at Linamar Corporation. Hayes graduated from high school with credits in computer-integrated machining. Carr graduated from high school with a certificate earned through Career and College Promise.

Collision Repair and Refinishing
Tyler Allison, who received a certificate in Collision Repair and Refinishing from HCC by taking dual enrollment classes, is now a production painter at Con-Met in Canton. The knowledge and certificate he received through his dual enrollment classes got him the job.

Daniel Carr and Sam Hayes
Students who pursue a CTE pathway in high school invest up to 720 hours (4 courses) in their field of concentration. Upon graduation from high school, these students who have met established proficiency levels in the subject area as demonstrated through final grades and exit exams can earn community college credit. Articulation agreements between high schools and community colleges provide a means for high school students to earn college credit for high school courses upon enrollment in the community college. This also allows newly enrolled college students an opportunity to take advanced coursework earlier in their college careers and helps them earn additional postsecondary credentials. These rigorous pathways with postsecondary credentials increase the graduates' opportunities for success in today's workplace.

With high standards for articulated credit, a grade of “B” in the course and a 93 on the end of course assessment, about 50 percent of high school students earning college credit elect to enroll directly in a university. Yet, as CTE increases emphasis on articulated high school to community college career pathways with industry credentials, graduating seniors are beginning to take a second look at community colleges as the first option in preparing for work.

**WHAT WE DID:**

Under the direction of North Carolina community college chief academic officers and high school career and technical education directors, secondary and postsecondary faculty met to review college course descriptions and high school course blueprints as they considered additional courses for articulation. After careful evaluation, courses with an 80 percent match in learning objectives and outcomes were recommended for final review by college chief academic officers. Following this review, courses were recommended for inclusion in the statewide articulation agreement.

A North Carolina High School to Community College Articulation Agreement between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and NC Community Colleges has been in place since 1999. The agreement was updated in 2005 and again in 2011. The latest agreement became effective for high school courses beginning on or after July 1, 2012. In addition, to meet specific regional needs, colleges may set up local articulation agreements with public school systems serving their area.

The CTE High School to College Articulation Agreement spells out the criteria to award college credit, the identification and alignment of courses to be articulated and the process to document, evaluate and award credit. For credit to be awarded in any individual course, all criteria of the Commission on College, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) must be met.

The CTE High School to College Articulation initiative currently utilizes 16 career pathways:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Architecture and Construction
- Arts, A/V Technology and Communications
- Business Management and Administration
- Education and Training
- Finance
- Government and Public Administration
- Health Science
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

Within the pathways, industry and workplace knowledge and skills are taught and reinforced at all levels. High schools offer some or all pathways to students and teach pathway-specific knowledge and skills. Specific career specialty skills are taught at the postsecondary level via college courses, apprenticeships and other training venues.

**RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:**

A webinar was held on March 6, 2013, to go over the course review process and begin the year’s update of the CTE articulation agreement. Chief academic officers of the state’s 58 community colleges were asked to work with CTE directors for each of the state’s 115 school districts to review 21 new courses with potential for becoming articulated courses. Community college administrators were asked to oversee the local review process for their respective colleges and enter required information and comments on the College Tech Prep website, www.ctpnc.org.
The focus of Career and Technical Education in the high schools is moving towards encouraging students to begin a career pathway in high school with plans to enroll in a community college to complete a postsecondary credential. The growing focus on articulation is facilitating this evolution.

**FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:**

An annual review process, such as the one held in March 2013, will be utilized to add new courses and retire obsolete courses. The focus will remain on ensuring that CTE high school educational pathways prepare students for success in college and their postsecondary education results in a degree or other credential that increases job opportunities and wages.

Traditionally, articulation has been focused on the transferability of course credits. In the future, the focus will be on articulating pathways to include articulated college credit for selected high school CTE courses, Career and College Promise credit for post-secondary courses taken at the secondary level, and industry credentials earned at the secondary level. The shift will be especially useful in accelerating the progress of students who wish to earn several industry credentials and graduate job-ready with an AAS degree. Increased focus on work-based learning opportunities for all CTE students in pathways is anticipated. This pathway enhancement will provide increased experiential learning opportunities for students to hone their skills on the job and understand all aspects of an industry while meeting the needs of host industries.

**Promoting CTE, sustainability and renewable energy from an early age**

Middle and high school students explore a range of career and technical education possibilities at Wayne Community College during Camp Kilowatt. Wayne is one of a number of colleges holding specialized summer camps to introduce students to college programs of study that transfer credit through the CTE High School to College Articulation Agreement. Wayne’s camp is sponsored by Progress/Duke Energy and promotes CTE pathways that emphasize sustainability and renewable energy, such as wind and solar.
Entry is the second of four phases of a student’s college experience and covers the time from enrollment to completion of gatekeeper courses, generally defined as entry-level math and English.

The Entry Phase includes opportunities to lose momentum through:

- Poor academic preparation.
- Failure to enroll in developmental coursework after placement testing prescribes it.
- Failure to enroll in and pass gatekeeper courses.

The Entry Phase includes opportunities to gain momentum through:

- Diagnostic assessment and placement tools.
- Mandatory intrusive advising, attendance, life skills courses, declared courses of study linked to career pathways.
- Improved academic catch-up services.
- Aggressive financial aid application support.
- Course redesign to acceleration completion while limiting cost.

SuccessNC initiatives addressing momentum strategies critical to the Entry Phase:

- Developmental Education Initiative
- Financial Aid Simplification
- Math Curriculum Improvement Project

NCCCS is refining processes that affect students as they first enroll in the state's community colleges.

The SuccessNC framework borrows from the Completion by Design Loss/Momentum Framework. Completion by Design is an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
The Spark:

As the SuccessNC Listening Tours progressed, a range of barriers to success related to Developmental Education began to emerge. College personnel spoke of the need for better alignment between high school and college competencies to reduce the need for Developmental Education in community colleges. They talked about the impact that recently enacted federal financial aid limits were having on students who used too much of their aid package on developmental education courses and were unable to complete a program of study. Some questioned the validity of college placement scores saying they saw students placed in developmental classes above or below their capabilities. Still more asked for targeted coursework to ensure that students covered only the developmental competences they really needed. One speaker declared Developmental Education the Bermuda Triangle of community colleges.

As the tour concluded, NCCCS President Scott Ralls declared developmental education the system's “ground zero.” Remedial coursework taking up to two years to complete and chewing up financial aid packages was a clear barrier to earning a college credential, achieving the American dream and joining the middle class.

Thomas Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, told members of the State Board of Community Colleges in October 2010 that only 8 percent of students who placed three levels or more below college readiness in math went on to complete the first college-level math class at the four North Carolina community colleges whose data was analyzed. A startling 23 percent of students who placed three levels or more below college readiness in math and facing up to two years in developmental education never even enrolled in a first developmental math course. Large numbers of students who did enroll slipped off college rosters at each level of developmental math placement, even when they had completed courses successfully.

In the mid-2000s, North Carolina had already set the stage to tackle developmental education as a participant in Achieving the Dream (AtD), a national effort to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success. AtD data analyses unearthed concerns that developmental education was a serious barrier to student success, and the state was selected in 2009 to continue its work as one of six states in the Developmental Education Initiative. Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, the effort encouraged using an evidence-based state policy framework to guide innovation with technical assistance from Jobs for the Future.

The American Association of Community College’s 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges called on the nation’s community colleges to analyze and innovate as necessary to help today’s students successfully complete a college program. In “Reclaiming the American Dream, Community Colleges and the Nation’s Future,” colleges were charged by the AACC commission with doubling by 2020 the number of students completing developmental education programs and progressing to successful completion of related freshman-level courses.

Issue Addressed by Initiative:

In 2011, 69 percent of recent high school graduates placed into at least one developmental course when they enrolled in a North Carolina community college. In recent years, developmental education has consumed
Developmental education is expensive for students, too. They must pay college tuition for these classes that do not count towards graduation yet must be completed before they can enter a program of study. Students dependent on federal financial aid have routinely hit the 30-credit-hour maximum for developmental education without completing their remediation requirements, leaving them less likely to continue into a college program of study. Others have reached the 150-percent ceiling on total credit hours attempted in a program of study. Both of these caps have forced students to leave college prior to graduation. The relatively new federal financial aid limit is forcing colleges to rethink student placement.

Students facing up to two years of remedial coursework before they can enroll in college often lose motivation. Other students are willing to put in the time, but they encounter challenges outside college. Both groups simply leave school. Research suggests that many of these students would have succeeded in entry-level college classes had they been allowed to enroll earlier in their college careers.

Research published by the National Center for Postsecondary Research raised questions about whether traditional placement tests used by colleges could accurately predict college success. Two 2012 CCRC analyses indicated that common placement tests misplace students at high rates and more accurate results could be obtained by using more than one measure, such as a high school GPA for recent graduates. There was evidence that the tests were more likely to “underplace” students into developmental education courses they did not need than to “overplace” them into college-level courses for which they were not prepared.
WHAT WE DID:
NCCCS set out to redesign developmental curricula that could be completed in one year or less and, in the case of math, with multiple exit points depending on a student’s program of study.

A Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) State Policy Steering Team of more than 30 members appointed by the NCCCS president worked together to launch the DEI. Early in the process, committee members discovered that the community college system in Virginia was going through a redesign of developmental education, and a group traveled there to learn more. They concluded that students needed to move into college courses more quickly and that those who needed developmental work needed to have targeted courses without the repetition of material that existed in the old developmental education courses.

Curricular Redesign

Policy team members split into working groups to develop plans and strategies. The Innovation and Redesign team crafted guiding design principles for math, English and reading and a process for selecting faculty teams to create the new curriculum, and took those back to the DEI State Policy Steering Team for approval in November 2010.

In January 2011, the Math Faculty Task Force, a representative group from all parts of the state, began meeting to create eight math modules that would replace the traditional developmental math courses. By improving alignment and reducing redundancy, the team shortened developmental math by one-third and created modules that emphasize conceptual understanding of math similar to the Common Core State Standards adopted by K-12. In October 2011, the new modules were approved for testing at pilot schools, and colleges began adopting them more widely in Fall 2012. By Fall Semester 2013, all colleges switched to the modules and the old courses were retired.

During the first half of 2012, a Reading and English Task Force was working on creating a new accelerated curriculum that would combine the two subjects. Reading and English had traditionally been taught as separate developmental courses at most colleges, but the faculty team combined the subjects into three intensive, eight-week, 56-contact-hour courses. The combined English and Reading courses were first taught at a limited number of colleges in Fall Semester 2013. The courses must be implemented at every community college by Fall Semester 2014.

New Placement Tools & Policies

In addition to the new accelerated curricula, a critical part of the DEI was the development of a new means of assessing entering students to determine if they needed remediation prior to entering college courses. A request for proposals to develop a new placement test went out, and the contract was awarded to College Board. The new assessment, the NC Diagnostic Assessment and Placement
Test (NC DAP), is tailored to measure students’ proficiency around North Carolina’s curricula, an improvement from the national “off-the-shelf” tests previously used.

The College Board facilitated a four-day February 2013 meeting with 54 math faculty from across the state to determine math cut scores for use with NC DAP testing. Math scores continue to be analyzed to ensure that student placements are appropriate. Meanwhile, a team of English and reading faculty has been working with College Board on the English/reading part of the NC DAP that will be introduced in Spring 2014.

Recognizing that other measures for placement should be considered aside from snapshot assessments, the DEI State Policy Team’s Assessment and Placement team recommended that NCCCS contract with the CCRC to begin looking at North Carolina high school and community college transcript data to see if predictors of success could be identified. A subsequent visit from Clive Belfield of the CCRC provided data from a study he and Peter Crosta conducted that showed ACCUPLACER and COMPASS placement tests are not strong predictors of how students will perform in college, but a student’s cumulative high school GPA is. The study showed three out of every 10 students were misplaced by English tests with somewhat lower, but significant, error levels for math tests and resulting placements. The GPA analysis showed that students’ college GPAs are approximately 0.6 units below their high school GPAs, and a high school GPA is also a strong predictor of college credit accumulation. The committee members were curious to learn more about the impact of moving more people directly into college courses without forcing them to enroll in semester-long or multiple-semester developmental studies first.

The group decided that the high school GPA, which is a cumulative measure earned while taking multiple subjects over multiple years, is a strong indicator of students’ motivation, study habits and persistence. They recommended that students who had graduated from high school within the previous five years after taking four math classes, including Algebra 2, and earning an overall unweighted GPA of 2.6 should be exempted from placement testing. The NC Community College Presidents Association endorsed the Multiple Measures for Placement policy at their December 2012 meeting and the State Board of Community Colleges approved the policy in February 2013.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
NCCCS has partnered with the CCRC to evaluate the DEI over multiple years. CCRC began visiting colleges in Spring 2013 as part of the evaluation, and the site visits will continue over several years. Chief academic officers are regularly surveyed by CCRC to learn more about the implementation of the new developmental curriculum and multiple measures for placement. Quantitative data is also being collected, and will be analyzed by CCRC.

System Office researchers will be monitoring students’ outcomes in the new developmental modules and courses. They will also look at how students fare under the new placement policies to steer any future changes.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
Helping faculty to embrace the instructional shifts within the new developmental courses and enabling college-to-college sharing of curricular resources will strengthen impact from the redesign.

Colleges are developing strategies to determine if some students who are placed in college-level courses under multiple measures may need additional support to be successful. It will be important to learn from their work and share effective interventions across the state. All colleges will implement the policy by 2015.
SUCCESS NC Final Report • 2013

The Spark:
As the Great Recession of 2008 swept across the nation, millions of families found themselves facing unexpected economic challenges. Massive layoffs sent workers scurrying to community colleges to retrain in hopes of successfully reentering the workforce. Parents who had once planned for their children to go to a traditional four-year college or university, found that their college and retirement funds had lost most, if not all, of their value. Community colleges suddenly looked like the best option, often the only option, because the low cost could be covered by financial aid supplemented by student loans.

To access financial aid and loans, students are required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a complex document that was becoming increasingly burdensome for students and college personnel alike. Results of the H&R Block FAFSA experiment published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) showed that students typically spent about 13 hours completing the traditional FAFSA, and often sought help from college personnel. Students, particularly first-generation and nontraditional, were often so stymied by the financial aid process that they withdrew or avoided enrolling in college. Still others did not understand the rules and exhausted their financial aid options without completing a program and getting the credential they needed to succeed in the workplace.

As enrollments rose, colleges faced unprecedented numbers of students needing assistance with the FAFSA. In addition to needing help with the FAFSA, students seeking loans needed one-on-one financial literacy counseling to help them avoid excessive debt and keep colleges from being penalized for high default rates on the loans. Community college administrators saw they needed to find alternatives to processing financial aid requests to get relief from the crushing workload and expensive staffing issues.

In 2009, President Barrack Obama and his Council of Economic Advisers called for financial aid improvements as a way to increase college graduation rates, lift families out of poverty and prepare a globally-competitive workforce. “Simplifying Student Aid: The Case for an Easier, Faster, and More Accurate FAFSA” said the form was needlessly complicated and asked intrusive questions that produced unverifiable answers. The Obama Administration called for a streamlined online federal financial aid application that would retrieve tax information from the Internal Revenue Service and utilize a simplified eligibility formula.

Issue Addressed by Initiative:
Community college financial aid personnel were bogged down in time-consuming processing and policing activities associated with the FAFSA process. They also saw their advising workload growing as more first-generation and nontraditional students sought financial assistance to attend college. Contracting for document processing and verification services was determined to be a viable way to free financial aid personnel for more student-friendly activities, such as advising and financial literacy counseling.

Analysis of results by the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment suggested that individuals who receive help completing a simplified FAFSA are substantially more likely to submit the aid application, to enroll in college the following fall, and to be awarded more financial aid. The study results suggest that FAFSA simplification alone is of little help without human assistance in completing the application process.

Expediting financial aid awards is important to colleges’ bottom lines, too. When students don’t get financial aid by the deadline, colleges are left with empty seats because students generally withdraw or defer enrollment. If they choose to self-pay, students frequently enroll in fewer hours because of financial limitations.

“I really like CFI verification and I think that it helps tremendously in processing and feel like it will allow us to spend more time in counseling students and performing other assigned duties.”

Hope Dale, VA Coordinator
Johnston Community College
WHAT WE DID:
In April 2012, college financial aid staff and chief financial officers, along with other college personnel, met with experts from the U.S. Department of Education, State Educational Assistance Authority, Financial Aid Services, College Foundation, Inc. (CFI) and volunteer pilot colleges to discuss financial aid simplification. Special emphasis was placed on processes, including records verification and error resolution. The new electronic financial aid processing system provides colleges with “Ready to Package and Ready to Award” financial aid packages.

Four North Carolina community colleges (Davidson County, Edgecombe, Gaston and Wake Tech) participated in the financial aid simplification pilot project along with the State Education Assistance Authority and CFI. To expedite financial aid awards, a totally electronic process was utilized by CFI. Services included application data verification, electronic messages requesting missing documents, document storage with college access for retrieval, online verification interview and electronic signatures with authentication password/PIN. Colleges received lists of verified files that were cleared for financial aid awards.

The pilot was found to expedite student financial aid processes and free financial aid staff from paper processing duties, thus improving interaction between students and staff. The pilot improved office efficiency and accuracy, too. CFI School Services provides verification in 5–7 days while the nationwide average is 18-20 days. Pilot colleges reported 50 percent more aid, including Pell grants, processed and available by the fall registration/fee payment deadline. Financial aid administrators reported they had more time to work with students most likely to withdraw or defer enrollment. They also noted a reduction in office visits and phone traffic during the verification cycle and fall registration along with increases in student satisfaction with the financial aid process.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
The System Office recommended scaling the CFI School Services pilot program to as many as 20 colleges on a voluntary basis in 2013-2014. Community colleges participating are Brunswick, Caldwell, Cape Fear, Craven, Davidson County, Edgecombe, Gaston, Guilford, Johnston, Southwestern and Wake. The community colleges are joined by two University of North Carolina institutions, Elizabeth City State and Winston-Salem State, as well as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania.

In May 2013, CFI School Services changed its name to School Servicing Center.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
Some colleges plan to expand the number of files they send to School Servicing Center for verification to capitalize on the increased satisfaction they have seen among financial aid recipients. Administrators say the cost of $21 per file is easily justified by improved student enrollment and satisfaction levels.

To more fully automate the financial aid processing system, the System Office is working with Ellucian to develop an interface with Colleague, the data system used by community colleges.

Some colleges have begun contracting with a vendor to administer the distribution of financial aid balances to students. More are expected to join the movement to eliminate checks from the financial aid process.

NCCCS conducted a webinar on Nov. 18, 2013, to share information with college administrators who may be interested in participating in the Financial Aid Simplification Project beginning with the 2014-2015 academic year. Colleges will sign on to join the initiative during January 2014.
INITIATIVE: Math Curriculum Improvement Project

THE SPARK:
Through SuccessNC, North Carolina community colleges initiated a new developmental education program that sparked faculty and administrators to recommend that math courses at the college level needed to be reviewed and reworked to maximize students’ opportunities for success in math.

A revision of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the University of North Carolina and the NCCCS is underway with completion expected later in the year. With a push to get more students through four-year degrees within six years, it is critical that community college and university courses and programs align properly for transfer.

The North Carolina Department of Instruction is putting the Common Core State Standards into practice, and this is driving updates to course content at the community college and university levels to allow for more seamless movement between the three.

With major curriculum and operational changes already underway, administrators across the state agreed that the time to analyze each math course offered within NCCCS institutions had arrived. The math curriculum in NC Community Colleges had remained relatively unchanged since the system converted from an academic quarter system to a semester system nearly two decades ago.

While a curriculum improvement project (CIP) is typically undertaken to revise programs of study and not courses on a single subject, a CIP was determined to be appropriate for a subject in almost every program offered in the system. As the emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) has increased in K-12, community colleges and universities, the need for effective math instruction is greater than ever.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:
The NCCCS Combined Course Library (CCL) had 83 math courses, but seven math courses represented 32 percent of all math enrollment. There was duplication and redundancy in course content within individual colleges, and some courses showed no standardization of content across colleges. In fact, the CCL had 12 entry-level math courses, four different sets of courses dealing with or called “Algebra/Trigonometry,” four entry-level math courses just for associate in science students and an entry-level math course for diploma-only students. Enrollment in some courses was very low, often because there was a very similar course.

More than half of the students in a large, multi-year sample group of North Carolina community college students across the state had not taken a college math class four years after first enrolling. Clearly math avoidance was standing between many students and graduation, and improving math programming was essential to improving graduation rates at the state’s community colleges.

Students at some large community colleges had a wide variety of math classes with similar names and content available to them, but this was found to frequently hinder progress towards graduation. With self-service registration and little advising, students frequently took classes that did not advance them towards their goals. The Math CIP Steering Committee determined that these students could be better served if each school offered fewer courses but ones specifically tailored to meeting program requirements.

Students at smaller colleges sometimes had difficulty getting into the math classes they needed to complete a program. The Math CIP Steering Committee determined that these students could be better served if their school offered limited courses tailored to meeting program requirements on a predictable schedule.

WHAT WE DID:
A Request for Proposals for the Math CIP was issued by the System Office, and two Central Piedmont Community College faculty members were selected to co-lead the process. Working with the System Office, the CIP leaders developed guiding principles for the project. A 14-member steering committee of math faculty was assembled with special emphasis placed on having diversity in geography and college size. Each community college was asked to provide a math faculty liaison to the Math CIP to ensure input from all institutions within the NCCCS.
The Steering Committee requested four years of enrollment data from the System Office on a 2005-2007 cohort and analyzed it to begin tracking student progress and find barriers to success within the system. The group found that 60 percent of all students enrolled in associate degree programs had either no math credit at all or only developmental math credit through their first four years. To address the issues, the committee proposed streamlining the math experience for all students and making course content more uniform at each school. They also looked for ways to cut students’ confusion about math enrollment while making more math credits transferable to the UNC system.

The CIP has resulted in four math pathways with a pathway appropriate to each program of study. Each pathway has been developed with input from math faculty, program faculty and business and industry leaders, where appropriate. A statewide survey of program faculty brought more than 320 responses from instructors eager to add their input to the process. There is one general education math entry course per pathway and recommended points for seeking advisement. Pathways leading to college transfer degrees will be articulated to UNC institutions and aligned with the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement revision that is in progress.

Math CIP Steering Committee members concurred with researchers across the nation who have begun calling for college math requirements to be more appropriate to students’ intended programs of study. Traditionally, college-transfer students have been required to take algebra in preparation for calculus, even if their intended major did not require it. Technical programs have required students to complete the equivalent of Algebra 2, if they placed into developmental classes, even though working professionals in their chosen career paths said they did not use algebra on the job. The Math CIP Steering Committee saw that a statistics course would better serve some community college students’ needs. Others needed an entry-level math class relevant to a career but also rich in consumer skills. Two new classes resulted.

MAT 152, Statistical Methods I, is a new college-transfer course that may be an appropriate first course for some students in AAS and college transfer pathways, and could be considered a fifth entry point to college math.

One major change in the math curriculum is a shift to Quantitative Literacy, MAT 143 in the CCL. The new class is the entry-level math for the associate in arts and some associate in applied science degrees. Conversations with math faculty from the 16 UNC institutions have indicated that it will be an acceptable general education core math for transfer students. The course replaced MAT 161, 140 and 115 and incorporates skills identified in a statewide survey of faculty on critical competencies for AAS and AA graduates.

Prior to the Math CIP, some colleges had an optional lab section attached to many of their math courses. As part of streamlining the CCL and establishing a more consistent curriculum, the CIP standardized credit and contact hours associated with pathway entry courses and built lab time into each, if deemed appropriate. The CIP also assigned student learning outcomes to each math course.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
The Math CIP Steering Committee made its recommendations and colleges voted in August to adopt the new curriculum. The proposal went to the Curriculum Review Committee in October and was approved for implementation.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
With a new emphasis on hands-on learning of material relevant to specific programs of study, professional development opportunities must be provided to faculty. The Math CIP Steering Committee has begun work developing professional development programs to meet these needs.
Progress is the third of four phases of a student’s college experience and covers the time from entry into a course of study to 75 percent of completion of requirements for graduation.

The Progress Phase includes opportunities to lose momentum through:

- Students working more than 20 hours per week and juggling schedule changes (Seventy-five percent of low income students need to work while attending school.).
- Part-time enrollment slows progress towards completion.
- Students deciding they need to stop out or drop out of school because of new circumstances in their lives.

The Progress Phase includes opportunities to gain momentum through:

- Innovative programs to encourage optimal attendance.
- Leveraging technology to make student-centered learning more available through real-time feedback, intensive advising, flexible scheduling and accelerated classes.
- Accelerated, competency-based programs of study leading to credentials in high-demand fields like healthcare and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).
- Providing emergency aid to deal with unexpected life events.

SuccessNC initiatives addressing momentum strategies critical to the Progress Phase:

- Minority Male Mentoring
- Code Green Super Curriculum Improvement Project
- Integrated Teaching & Learning Gateway
- Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision & Reverse Transfer Credit

NCCCS is working to provide effective academic pathways and student support services to guide students to successful completion of a program of study.

The SuccessNC framework borrows from the Completion by Design Loss/Momentum Framework. Completion by Design is an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
THE SPARK:
As the new millennium began, administrators in NC Community Colleges started to examine retention and graduation rates among the system’s students. They discovered that the rates for minority males had consistently been among the lowest of any demographic group at community colleges in North Carolina, and there was no indication the rate would rise without intervention.

In 2003, grant funding from the Governor’s Crime Commission was made available to the North Carolina Community College System for projects that would improve the college success rate of minority males. NCCCS asked college administrators for proposals for innovative and challenging projects to begin that fall in support of the Minority Male Mentoring Initiative.

Initially, the Minority Male Mentoring Program focused on first-generation students with low grade point averages or a history of substance abuse. As the years passed, college personnel recognized a need to support all men of color through coaching and mentoring because low persistence, graduation and transfer rates were consistently a problem for minority males, even for those without obvious markers for being “at risk.”

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:
Since the program began, the NC Community Colleges Minority Male Mentoring Program (3MP) has provided a lifeline to young men who showed great potential but lacked a support system for navigating a college environment. The program has guided these men through personal, professional and academic growth by consistently focusing on the completion of developmental and college-credit courses, persistence from semester to semester and graduation. Minority males are encouraged to transfer to University of North Carolina campuses, where they may find continuing support services geared to their needs.

Prior to SuccessNC, the 3MP was not assured of year-to-year funding. The initiative has raised awareness of the needs addressed by Minority Male programs and helped to ensure continued support from the state legislature and federal grants.

During the 2013-14 academic year, colleges operating Minority Male Mentoring programs are required to focus on faculty and counselor support, student development activities and providing peer tutors and study ambassadors.

WHAT WE DID:
The Minority Male Mentoring project was begun in fall 2003 at six pilot schools with the idea that the programs developed could be scaled to serve minority male students across North Carolina. The following year, the programs were funded for a second year through the Governor’s Crime Commission. In 2007, the NC General Assembly appropriated funds to expand the program, and 15 colleges added 3MP to their campuses. Additional colleges have been added with each successive year.

During the 2012-2013 fiscal year, 46 of the state’s community colleges had funding for programs unique to their institutions and the demographics of their service areas. Funding was allocated from a $900,000 legislative appropriation to 3MP and a $300,000 federal North Carolina College Access Challenge Grant. The federal grant came from collaboration between NCCCS and the University of North Carolina General Administration, a partnership that grew out of the community college’s SuccessNC initiative and the university system’s UNC Tomorrow initiative.

The UNC System is implementing programs on each of its 16 campuses to provide support and continuity for transfer students who found success with the support of 3MP on community college campuses.

In addition to building collaboration between NC Community Colleges and the UNC System, the North Carolina College Access Challenge Grant has allowed increased collaboration with North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority.

When 3MP was in the pilot phase, the target population was first-generation students with a GPA below 2.5 or a history of substance abuse. The program has been expanded to recognize that there are many more barriers to retention and graduation. Most recently, the focus has been on students’ academic, personal and professional growth coupled with issues surrounding cultural differences and student experiences.

Under SuccessNC guidelines, each program is required to:
1) Provide at least one leadership position, often known as a coach, to coordinate the program.
2) Identify a cohort of students.
3) Provide a structured relationship between each participant and a member of the campus community.
4) Provide college transfer transition workshops and visits to campuses of four-year colleges and universities.
5) Require a study skills class during the first semester.
6) Provide career counseling and academic advising.
7) Recommend that students enroll in at least 12 credit hours per semester with a focus on core courses.
8) Provide a written academic plan for each participant.
9) Provide service learning opportunities each semester.

Each program seeks to:

**STUDENT SUCCESS STORY: ANDRE WIGGINS**

André Wiggins was once a prison inmate. Today he is a successful business owner and a graduate of Edgecombe Community College with a certificate in business administration/business leadership. He’s nearly completed an associate degree in business administration.

He attributes his success to the college. “ECC has been feeding me the drive and motivation to keep going,” says Wiggins. “I didn’t graduate high school; I received my GED in prison. This is my first graduation, and I can’t tell you how much it means to me.”

Wiggins runs his own janitorial maintenance company, Clean Sweep, which serves clients in three states.

**CELEBRATING MMM SUCCESS**

Recognition of accomplishments, mentoring, peer tutoring intrusive counseling and service learning are all critical elements of the Minority Male Mentoring programs operated by most of North Carolina’s community colleges through SuccessNC.

1) Form partnerships with local community-based programs serving the targeted population and collaborate with local, state and community-based organizations.
2) Recruit faculty, staff and peer mentors and provide training and workshops for them.
3) Coordinate personal and professional development seminars for participants.
4) Implement special programs to prevent drug and substance abuse among minority males and promote a healthy college experience.
5) Promote student satisfaction with the college experience, retention and graduation.
6) Monitor the progress of participating students.
7) Report the status of goals and objectives established by the programs.

**RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:**

Audits of the 3MP operations of 12 colleges were performed over summer 2013. Utilizing completed forms and standardized budget reports, an analysis of individual college programs was done. Randomly selected student files from participating colleges were examined to determine if the colleges had been adhering to the hallmarks of the program.

Since 3MP became a SuccessNC initiative, data on student GPA, withdrawals with point of exit noted, student
Future Plans and Goals:

Forty-one colleges were each awarded $20,500 for their 3MP programs during 2013-2014 based on detailed proposals to increase the retention and graduation of minority male students through improved coaching. Funded 3MP programs must expend their awards in four areas: faculty and counselor support, general operating costs, student development activities, and student support wages for peer tutors and study ambassadors.

The funded mentoring programs will be analyzed for effectiveness and to determine if a program model can be identified for implementation on more college campuses. Anticipated outcomes for strong programs include higher persistence, graduation, and transfer rates from semester to semester and year to year for mentoring participants compared to students who did not participate in a mentoring program.

Success measures for 3MP show the initiative is generating results. The number of participants increased from 844 in Fall 2011 to 1,547 in Fall 2012. More than 75 percent of Fall 2011 participants were still enrolled in Spring 2013, and 67 percent persisted to Fall 2013.

During the 2011-12 academic year, the fall to spring retention rate for 3MP participants was 78 percent compared to 68 percent for men of color not in the program, 71 percent for white males, and 71 percent for all students.

In Fall 2012, 3MP participants at 46 colleges were 82 percent black, 5 percent Latino, 2 percent American Indian, 4 percent white, 2 percent multiple races, and 4 percent unknown. Asian and Hawaiian participation was less than 1 percent.

Persistence and student graduation is collected and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of individual college programs. Success is determined by comparing the performance of minority males in 3MP to the performance of minority males not in 3MP. Performance is also compared to that of white males.

Overall, the initiative is generating results. The number of participants increased from 844 in Fall 2011 to 1,547 in Fall 2012. More than 75 percent of Fall 2011 participants were still enrolled in Spring 2013, and 67 percent persisted to Fall 2013.

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THE SPARK:
As the recession of 2008 lingered and North Carolina’s economy continued to evolve to meet 21st century economic needs, NCCCS leaders recognized that the community college system had to rejuvenate existing curriculum programs. In January 2010, the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents requested a Curriculum Improvement Project (CIP) to review existing curriculum programs and integrate new and emerging skills into the colleges’ technical education pathways. These leaders saw a need to blur the lines between training offered through college-credit and continuing-education classes and place an emphasis on providing students specialized credentials with value in the workplace. The presidents recommended that the CIP integrate energy-efficiency skills as appropriate into the technical education pathways to increase the number of students skilled in sustainability technologies.

Leaders of the state’s community colleges also saw a need to simplify and standardize the curriculum for more than 80 technical programs at community colleges across the state. Simplification would cut redundancy in course offerings at individual colleges, save students’ time and money and provide the basis for “stackable credentials.” The presidents recognized that allowing students to earn short-term certificates that could be stacked until the requirements for a degree had been met would help lower the number of students who didn’t persist to earn a diploma or degree. Stackable credits would allow students to get an entry-level job in their chosen field while still in college. This new approach to earning college credits in a technical field could be particularly beneficial to students who “stopped out” of college one or more times to go to work.

The presidents recognized that coursework taken on a non-credit basis could provide the same competencies as college-credit work. They asked that competency-based courses be designed to facilitate awarding credit for continuing education courses when students decide to pursue an academic degree. This concept was fully supported by industry experts including the Manufacturing Institute, the leading research, education and workforce group supporting U.S. manufacturers.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:
The Code Green Super CIP, as the project has come to be known, has revamped and realigned entire sectors of the technical education curriculum of NC Community Colleges. The project addresses five technology areas that are critical to the growth of North Carolina’s new energy economy: building, energy, environment, transportation and engineering.

In 2012, the Code Green Super CIP engaged more than 200 faculty members to review and revise or create courses and curriculum standards for statewide use. The initiative placed emphasis on teaching employability skills, and these faculty members identified eight competencies for integration across the curriculum. The soft skills selected were interpersonal skills and teamwork, communication, integrity and professionalism, problem solving and decision making, initiative and dependability, information processing, adaptability and lifelong learning, and entrepreneurship.

Beginning with the Code Green Super CIP, student learning outcomes have been built into many core courses at the state level. Code Green marked the beginning of student learning outcomes being added to the Combined Course Library. This more uniform approach to learning outcomes ensures that each college will equip students with comparable competencies in each course. The statewide
learning outcomes will facilitate the implementation of articulated credits.

The Code Green Super CIP coincided with the implementation of Colleague’s POS functionality to manage program-of-study information. The enhanced data system has enabled colleges and NCCCS to more effectively monitor the success of new and existing courses and academic programs. The overall effectiveness of the Super CIP will be determined as a function of empirical evidence rather than by subjective anecdotal methodologies. The massive volume of data-entry work required to efficiently implement the Code Green Super CIP made the 2012-2013 system-wide data-system enhancement critical to efficient operations.

WHAT WE DID:

A request for proposals from the state’s community colleges led to the selection of a college to lead the project with five additional colleges chosen to address individual program sectors.

Lead: Wake Technical Community College
Building: Wilson Community College
Energy: Central Carolina Community College
Engineering Technology: Central Piedmont Community College

Program structures have been streamlined to reduce the number of curriculum titles. The CIP consolidated more than 80 curriculum standards into only 32 standards. Standardizing the curriculum models allowed similar program majors to be grouped together under a curriculum with a common general academic and technical education core.

The Code Green Super CIP changed the traditional business model of NC Community Colleges by developing a range of competency-based technical core courses with specific learning outcomes to facilitate awarding academic credit for equivalent course work on a non-credit basis.

The CIP also emphasized the important role employers play in defining workplace competencies, and courses and programs were revised to include skill sets, such as those endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). As Code Green standards are implemented at the individual colleges, students will have the opportunity to earn multiple, nationally-recognized industry credentials while working toward an associate degree in a related field.
The Code Green Super CIP created 47 new courses and revised 219 additional courses on the way to integrating employability competencies, energy-efficiency skills and learning outcomes. Student Learning Outcomes were added to all the technical education core courses after each course was scrutinized to be sure that current and emerging energy efficiency skills had been incorporated into course objectives.

To help launch the Code Green Super CIP, professional development activities were provided to faculty. Over the second half of the project, 46 professional development events trained 683 faculty members on energy, new technology and new industrial processes that students and graduates can expect to encounter in the workplace. Particular emphasis was placed on skills to serve the state’s growing energy sector. Faculty were awarded 442 industry credentials or provided training toward industry certification.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
The Curriculum Review Committee approved 358 course recommendations from the Code Green Super CIP. Student Learning Outcomes recommended by the CIP were approved for inclusion in the Combined Course Library.

The State Board of Community Colleges approved the Code Green Super CIP curriculum standards at its August 2012 meeting. Colleges were given the option of implementing Code Green in Fall 2013 with mandatory implementation in Fall 2014. Implementation has begun at many colleges.

NCCCS was recognized as an honored finalist for the prestigious Bellwether Award for the Code Green Super CIP. The award recognizes outstanding and innovative programs and practices that are successfully leading community colleges into the future.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
The Center for Occupational Research and Development (CORD) worked with the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association and the NCCCS Office to develop an Employability Skills Resource Toolkit (available on NC-NET.info) for use by college faculty.

STACKABLE CREDITS
"The Code Green Super CIP allowed us to develop courses through Continuing Education and then offer them for credit through curriculum programs. Now we can give students college credit for the continuing education courses they take through these programs. Students can make the connection, enroll for a semester, find their path, and then work on completing a program without losing any time because our credits are totally stackable."

Chris English
Dean for Applied Technology
Blue Ridge Community College
The success of the Code Green Super CIP will be measured in part by asking:

How effectively and to what extent has the CIP consolidated related programs?

What number of continuing education courses or industry certificates convert to curriculum credit and which industry certificates coincide with the completion of curriculum courses?

**SUCCESS:**

**CODE GREEN SUPER CIP CREATES SIGNATURE PROGRAM**

The Code Green Super CIP is bringing a signature program to Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute. A certificate focusing on Edible/Sustainable Landscape Management will be implemented during the 2014-2015 academic year. To facilitate the new Code Green program, Caldwell is building a permanent installation for organic kitchen gardens to grow herbs, edible flowers and vegetables.

Debbie Mitchell, who heads the Caldwell program, has become an Accredited Organic Land Manager through Oregon Tilth, as a result of her work with Code Green. Graduates of her program will be able to study and earn the industry credential, too. She says there is value in the designation for her students. “This makes our students more employable and gives them an edge in the international arena,” Mitchell says.
THE SPARK:

The Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway was conceived after NCCCS administrators traveled across North Carolina during the Listening Tours and saw a wide range of instructional programs, databases and tools in use at the state's community colleges. The array of tools used by faculty and students was impressive, but the duplication of effort and the added expense were inefficient. A single searchable platform providing easy access to all the teaching and learning resources was clearly needed.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:

NCCCS has already made significant investments in building teaching and learning resources, but they have not been shared effectively. A sharing platform was needed.

The Virtual Learning Community (vlc.nccommunitycolleges.edu) has the longest history of sharing resources among the community colleges, and hosts more than 350 courses for both college-credit and continuing education programs. The VLC resources include tools for teaching and learning, research, best practices, technology tools and professional development materials. The VLC was created during 1998-1999 when all 58 community college presidents signed an agreement to share resources and online courses across the state to reduce duplication of effort for online education.

The North Carolina Learning Object Repository (NCLOR) is a digital library of more than 30,000 items primarily for faculty. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently joined the NCLOR, making it one of the first state repositories that crosses educational agencies. The NCLOR is typically accessed through a learning management system, such as Blackboard or Moodle, but can also be accessed at http://explorethelor.org.

Some of the other resources that may be integrated into the Teaching and Learning Gateway include:

- NC-NET (nc-net.info) is a site filled with materials useful for career and technical education faculty.
- The Bio-Network (www.ncbionetwork.org) provides a range of resources for colleges to use in teaching life sciences to support the state's growing biotech industry.
- The Small Business Center Network (www.ncsbc.net) provides resources helpful to Small Business Centers at each of the state's community colleges.
- NC LIVE (www.nclive.org) is a consortium of 201 North Carolina libraries that provides digital content and services to public and academic libraries statewide.
- NC-ACCESS (www.nc-access.info) provides professional development programs for student development personnel.
- CCLINC (www.cclinc.nccommunitycolleges.edu) is a shared library catalog of 49 North Carolina community colleges that provides patrons access to more than a million learning resources.

The Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway will provide a common site for accessing these NCCCS resources, as well as others, and it provides opportunities to expand the availability of teaching and learning tools in future years.

WHAT WE DID:

A steering committee was formed with careful attention given to pulling representatives from a wide range of specialties at both the System Office and small, medium and large community colleges across the state. Members set goals and established milestones for the project after surveying the 58 colleges about existing teaching and learning resources and projected needs.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:

A survey of the 58 colleges will be repeated during the 2013-2014 academic year to identify additional teaching and learning resources available for sharing.

A soft launch of the Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway is anticipated once NCCCS senior leaders establish a plan for ensuring future updates and improvements. In November, leaders approved NC3Atlas as the name for the Gateway.
FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:

The vision for the Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway is to produce an integrated system with a search engine that searches databases simultaneously to pull all available information on a specific subject. The vision also calls for registered users to be provided a single log-in for full access to resources available through the gateway. Expanded capabilities, such as site analytics and a single platform for all media types, are also in the future.

One of the considerations for the Gateway is the Learning Resource Metadata Initiative (LRMI), a project dedicated to developing a common metadata framework for tagging learning resources on the web. The framework will provide an easier means to parse and filter content on many sites to open up new search and delivery options for users. The LRMI grew out of an announcement from Schema.org, a project by Bing, Google and Yahoo! to create a standard way of tagging online content. Schema.org is encouraging specialized communities and industries to use the standardized content tagging system for consistency.

Cost and the ability to allocate funds to the initiative will determine the timetable for completing the Integrated Teaching and Learning Gateway. Distance Learning funds will provide the financial means for completing the initiative.
The Spark:
The North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) between the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and the University of North Carolina General Administration (UNC) has facilitated the transfer of many students from the state’s community colleges to UNC campuses. However, since the CAA was put into place in 1997, the state’s public universities have made changes to general education requirements, and NCCCS and UNC administrators agreed it was time to review, revise and modernize the agreement.

Early in the development of the SuccessNC initiatives, NCCCS President Scott Ralls and Erskine Bowles, then president of the University of North Carolina, began meeting regularly and facilitating meetings of their leadership teams to see how the two systems could align common objectives within the strategic initiatives that would form SuccessNC, the NCCCS long-range plan, and UNC Tomorrow, the UNC long-range plan. The two groups determined that a revision of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement to assist more students with successful-ly transferring from a North Carolina community college to one of the 16 campuses of the UNC System to earn a bachelor’s degree should be a high priority collaborative effort. At the heart of the discussions was this question, “Is the 44-hour transfer core still relevant?” The number of hours required for a bachelor’s degree from UNC institutions had changed, and the two systems began to look at the best way to facilitate the journey of a growing num-ber of students beginning their postsecondary studies at a community college with plans to transfer to a UNC campus. Revisions to the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement coupled with a Reverse Transfer Credit would come to be important components of SuccessNC and UNC Tomorrow.

North Carolina legislators have been increasingly interested in helping the state’s students reduce the cost of a college education. Community colleges have been a viable option for many students with low tuition set by the legislature and transparent transfer options. This legislative interest has coincided with a 24 percent increase in transfers from community colleges to UNC institutions over a five-year period. The majority of today’s community college students transfer prior to completing an associate degree. The “Credit Where It’s Due Initiative” is driving the development of the Reverse Transfer Credit program. The joint effort between 15 community colleges and eight universities will develop a process to award associate degrees to students who fulfill community college graduation requirements while pursuing a baccalaureate degree through a UNC campus.

The revision of the CAA is driven in part by the Completion by Design initiative, the foundation of SuccessNC that calls for the establishment of clear pathways to college graduation to dramatically increase the number of students completing degrees over the next three years. National research shows that students who are given too many course choices tend to choose courses that do not
Since the original CAA was signed in 1997, UNC institutions have restructured some general education courses offered on their campuses. Sometimes the revised courses have been so different from the original that universities no longer recognized community college courses as meeting the requirements to count as part of the general education requirements. As a result, students sometimes received elective credit for courses that they had expected to fulfill general core course requirements. This gap has the potential to delay, even prevent graduation from the four-year school, and the revised CAA should correct this issue.

The traditional Associate in Arts (AA) and Associate in Science (AS) degrees at community colleges have required completion of 64 credit hours. Today’s UNC baccalaureate degree requirements are typically 120 hours, down from the traditional 128. To get in step with the UNC system, the revised CAA will feature transfer degrees that require 60-61 credit hours. The AA and AS degrees will require:

1) a 30-credit-hour Universal General Education Transfer Component that is appropriate to the degree sought.
2) 15 additional credit hours in general education courses.
3) 15 credit hours of general education, pre-major and elective courses based upon the intended major and transfer institution.

The Reverse Transfer Program will provide three distinct fulfillment transfer or graduation requirements.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:

A June 2013 report from UNC says the majority of students transferring into one of their 16 institutions come from a North Carolina community college. In Fall 2012, 54 percent or 7,893 newly-enrolled transfer students at UNC institutions came from an NCCCS institution. Over a decade ending in 2012, UNC enrollment of transfers from the state’s community colleges rose 59 percent. UNC General Administration says transfer students will be of critical importance to achieving goals within their five-year strategic plan, Our Time Our Future, The UNC Compact with North Carolina, Strategic Directions, 2013-2018. The UNC plan anticipates that the number of students transferring into UNC schools from other post-secondary institutions will continue to rise.

Transfer students who declare majors upon entering the UNC system have a higher graduation rate from baccalaureate degree programs than undecided transfer students. NCCCS transfers who hold an associate in arts or associate in science degree have a four-year graduation rate of 76 percent, a rate that is comparable to students transferring from one UNC institution to another. Providing seamless transfer through articulation ensures that NCCCS students have the ability to enroll in a major when they enter UNC, a strategy proven to increase graduation rates.

The original CAA was based on a 64-credit-hour transfer degree which included a 44-hour general education core that would satisfy the general education requirements of all 16 UNC institutions, if completed prior to transfer. Analysis of students who had transferred under the CAA showed that only 13 percent had utilized the guarantee of transfer for the general education core. Without completing the general education core, students had their transcripts evaluated by the destination institution on a course-by-course basis and often complained they had “lost credits” because courses transferred as electives and did not count toward meeting general education requirements.

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benefits:

1) The number of degree completers in North Carolina will increase.
2) Upon awarding the credential, the community college will be able to count the early transfer student as a graduate.
3) The student receives a credential he or she would not otherwise have received.

WHAT WE DID:
The NCCCS and UNC chief academic officers appointed an eight-member CAA Review Steering Committee to make recommendations on the 44-hour core, the effectiveness of pre-majors and the relevancy of other CAA components. The goals identified were:

1) Associate in Arts and Associate in Science programs of study will be comprised of 60-61 hours of transferable credit.
2) The AA and AS programs of study will be restructured to include two components. Both degrees will include a Universal General Education Transfer Component comprised of 30 semester hours of credit. The second 30 semester hours will prepare students for successful transfer into selected university majors.
3) Universities will transfer all courses in the Universal General Education Transfer Component for general education course credit.
4) A student who completes the Associate in Arts or the Associate in Science degree will satisfy UNC’s minimum admission requirements and minimum course requirements.
5) Community colleges and partnering universities will provide career counseling and pre-major advising for transfer students.
6) Online tools will be developed to assist students and advisors in mapping appropriate second-year, pre-major courses, depending on students’ intended transfer institution.
7) Students who complete the AA/AS with a grade of C or better in all transfer classes will be guaranteed admission to one UNC institution.
8) College transfer performance reports will segment early transfers, Universal General Education Transfer Component completers and AA/AS degree completers.

The "Credit Where It's Due Initiative" (Reverse Transfer Program) sponsored by Lumina Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, USA Funds, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has identified Central Piedmont Community College as the lead college. Other participating community colleges are Asheville-Buncombe Technical, Cape Fear, Coastal Carolina, Davidson County, Durham Technical, Fayetteville Technical, Forsyth Technical, Gaston, Guilford Technical, Martin, Pitt, Rowan-Cabarrus, Stanly and Wake Technical. Participating UNC institutions are Appalachian State, UNC-Charlotte, East Carolina, Fayetteville State, UNC-Greensboro, North Carolina State, UNC-Wilmington and Western Carolina. These institutions will pilot the program with all of the two system’s institutions expected to move towards offering reverse transfer options soon after completion of the test phase.

NCCCS is working with UNC and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities through the federally-funded North Carolina Higher Education Research Consortium (NC-HERC). The project is designed to analyze policies and research practices to identify those that most facilitate student success. NC-HERC is placing special emphasis on transfer student performance across all colleges and universities.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
In 2013, NCCCS hired a transfer articulation manager and UNC hired a director of transfer articulation to facilitate the transfer process between the two systems. General education common courses to include in the agreement were established during Summer 2013.

For the "Credit When It's Due Initiative," UNC hired a director of reverse transfer.

Regional meetings of the participating Reverse Transfer Credit teams have been held for discussions to develop a consensus on policies and procedures to award as many degrees as possible.

A web site for student questions about Reverse Transfer Credit options and requirements has been developed and is to launch in December 2013.

Best practices for technology have been developed and shared to ensure a seamless process for the Reverse Transfer Program.

FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS:
Both AA and AS degree options and requirements should be finalized by the end of 2013. This will allow the State Board of Community Colleges and the UNC Board of Governors to approve the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision in February 2014 for implementation in fall 2014.

Once implemented, the revised CAA will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis with bi-annual reports to the Education Oversight Committee on transfer students' credit articulation, performance and graduation.

Recruitment of students to participate in the Reverse Transfer Credit program will begin in January 2014 with the first degrees awarded in Summer 2014.
Completion is the last of four phases of a student’s college experience and covers the last 25 percent of coursework leading to graduation and completion of requirements for professional licensing or certification.

The Completion Phase includes **opportunities to lose momentum** through:

- Limited advising that may add student debt but not credits that apply towards a degree.
- Never completing the college-level math required for a degree.
- Transferring prior to earning a credential.
- Earning a credential that won’t lead to family-sustaining wages and isn’t stackable to allow for earning a credential that will provide for families.

The Completion Phase includes **opportunities to gain momentum** through:

- Mandatory intrusive advising.
- Incentives for transferring with incentives.
- Removing barriers to graduation, such as fees and forms.
- Credentials earned in combination with work experience opportunities in the field of study leading to a career pathway.

**SuccessNC** initiatives addressing momentum strategies critical to the **Completion Phase:**

- Data Initiative
- Performance Measures and Funding
- Identify and Mitigate Barriers to Student Success
- Completion by Design

The SuccessNC target is to increase the percentage of students who transfer, complete credentials or remain continuously enrolled from a six-year baseline of 41 percent for the Fall 2004 cohort to a six-year success rate of 59 percent for the Fall 2014 cohort. Doing so will double the number of completers by 2020.

The SuccessNC framework borrows from the **Completion by Design Loss/Momentum Framework.** Completion by Design is an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
THE SPARK:
The North Carolina Community College System has historically been a national leader in collecting expansive amounts of college data. However, during the Listening Tours, college representatives shared their concerns that access to the data was limited to a small number of individuals statewide and the centrally warehoused data did not match their local systems. In addition, colleges expressed interest in real-time reporting capabilities to improve operating efficiency.

Although a lot of data is collected, databases have increasingly been impaired by many factors including: 1) inconsistent data entry and timing of data entry. 2) a number of data points not being collected centrally. 3) deficiencies in making significant updates to NCCCS’s data warehouse since its inception more than a decade earlier.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:
“We can’t get better at what we’re not willing to look at,” says Dr. Kay McClennen, co-chair of the American Association of Community College’s 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. This need for a culture of inquisitiveness and curiosity has been recognized by NCCCS, and the work to make the shift is the Data Initiative.

Today’s world is data driven, and NCCCS is taking steps to meet the demand for high-quality data at the college and state level. Colleges and the System Office must meet increasing demands for data from federal and state agencies, as well as organizations that provide funding through grants. Data is also the key to finding loss and momentum points in student progress, and is a critical element for facilitating student success and mitigating barriers. Accrediting bodies are exerting pressure on colleges to demonstrate that they have a structure in place to guide informed decision making at all levels.

The Data Initiative is creating a robust institutional performance and student outcome system for NCCCS to meet the need for accurate, timely and accessible data beyond the scope now available. Representatives of the System Office and colleges across the state are working together to enhance our data systems and processes to ensure there is an end-to-end solution from data entry to data analytics. NCCCS and SAS have partnered to develop a software solution and training to enhance data collection and analysis for all of the state’s colleges.

The Data Initiative complements the SuccessNC Completion by Design initiative and other statewide initiatives by producing accessible data with local reporting capabilities to assist in the analysis needed to drive operational and instructional changes designed to boost graduation rates and institutional effectiveness.

The Data Initiative is expected to give community college personnel increased confidence in System Office numbers and provide them with queries and tools to compare their performance with peer colleges and set benchmarks. A data review process complete with standardized terms and definitions will ensure validation of data prior to submission to the NCCCS data warehouse.
WHAT WE DID:

In May 2012, the Data Initiative Coordinating Team established the Data Structure and Entry Steering Committee and the Data Access Advisory and Training Team. With the Data Initiative Coordinating Team providing guidance and meeting policy needs, the other two teams are designing and building data marts, reports and customized queries accessible through a user-friendly system and local college dashboards.

The Data Structure and Entry Steering Committee oversees nine focus area teams tasked with identifying essential elements for research and reporting that will create a centralized data dictionary. The focus area teams are Basic Skills, Student Characteristics, Student Support, Student Progression, Student Course Success and Learning Outcomes, Course Sections, Faculty/Staff, Finances/Facilities and External Data Sources.

The focus area teams are identifying statewide research and reporting needs and defining related data elements to be incorporated into a comprehensive data dictionary. Their work is being informed through surveys and outreach across the state’s community colleges. This work has assisted the Data Initiative's efforts to foster a culture of curiosity and data-driven decision making.

The Data Access Advisory and Training Team is tasked with developing tools to make information available to the end users. They will make recommendations for data extraction, data access and reporting tools that include advanced analytical capabilities for researchers focusing on specific topics and initiatives. This team is charged with educating data users about data marts, predefined reports, web-based dashboards, statistical software and training.

The data marts will provide colleges with easy access to a range of reports and institutional effectiveness metrics. The initial battery of reports will focus on providing information that can facilitate student success and improve operating efficiencies at the colleges and the System Office.

RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:

The Basic Skills Focus Area Team served as a pilot, beginning its work a year before the other teams. Members defined the data needs of Basic Skills administrators at local colleges and the System Office. They prioritized their needs and the elements that would be required. The team defined what information colleges across the state must collect, and specified how it would be entered uniformly in the system to meet federal reporting requirements. The team worked to identify potential problems in programming, eliminate non-essential data and focus on reports the colleges need for program improvement.

The initiative is being assisted by an in-kind gift from business analytics software developer SAS in an effort to enhance data collection and reporting at all 58 community colleges and the System Office. SAS is providing new software tools, as well as consulting and professional development services. The new technologies will position NCCCS to address many data challenges within the current system. Utilizing the SAS technology, NCCCS will be better able to create system-wide reporting and dashboards that will allow the colleges to compare high level metrics. New reporting tools developed through the Data Initiative will focus on bringing data to users in a format that allows drill-down capabilities to address their research needs without
Data Initiative routinely involving a campus researcher. In addition, a statewide data dictionary tool will provide a necessary reference to assist accurate data entry and provide data element clarity to data users.

Along with the rollout of the software that can be installed at individual colleges, there will be training that college staff can participate in to help them better utilize the software. The execution of the development process will include a collaborative effort between the System Office, SAS and colleges. NCCCS is working with SAS to start the process that will allow colleges to use the SAS Education Analytical Suite software along with additional software components.

Finetuning of details and adjustments to this significant cost-saving grant from SAS is nearly complete and opens the door to the next phase of the multi-year project. The long-term impact and the way colleges and the System Office look at and use data will be changed for decades to come. The unprecedented access to some of the most advanced software in higher education will allow college personnel and the System Office to analyze data at a deeper level than ever before. This new chapter in the business intelligence life cycle for North Carolina will position NC Community Colleges to be a national leader in the analytics and capabilities surrounding data and the methodology utilized to make informed decisions on how to guide the organization forward.

Future Plans and Goals:

The mission of the North Carolina Community College System is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals. In order for NCCCS personnel to accurately assess the effectiveness of this mission, it is essential that they have a robust informational system and efficient collection process that results in valid, timely and accessible data beyond the limitations and scope of systems and processes.

Through the work of various teams and the engagement of faculty and staff at our colleges, it is expected that the initiative will result in:
• Expanded individual and collective inquisitiveness of stakeholders within the NCCCCS to ask research questions that inform decisions and policies.

• Uniform data definitions based on research needs and reporting requirements.

• Confidence in data quality and consistency through appropriate and uniform entering and collecting of information across the System so data extracted are valid and reliable.

• An incorporated data review process that ensures accountability through the validation of submitted data.

• Developed focused topic-based data marts that will serve a wide variety of analytical research needs including, but not limited to, strategic initiatives, grants, and business and student centric needs.

• Expanded information accessibility by making all data users aware of the availability of predefined reports, web-based dashboards, statistical software and training.

• Enhanced advanced analytical capabilities to empower researchers focusing on specific topics and initiatives.

• The use of research findings and reports to educate policy makers on the extent to which various factors impact outcomes, including student enrollment, student learning, student completion, faculty and staff development, budget allocation, etc.

TRAINING PREPARES TEAMS TO WORK ON DATA INITIATIVE

College and System Office staff gathered for Data Initiative focus area team training in April 2013. Pictured (top left) are members of the Student Characteristics Focus Area Team and (bottom left) members of the Student Course Success & Learning Outcomes Focus Area Team. Below, Bill Schneider, who co-facilitates the Data Initiative with Chris Cline, addresses a focus area team.
DATA INITIATIVE

SUCCESS: DATA INITIATIVE, BASIC SKILLS FOCUS AREA

While the Basic Skills Focus Area Team continues its diligent work on literacy data, their efforts thus far have already resulted in significant benefits to local colleges.

(1) Efficiency. As a result of the simplified Literacy Education Information System (LEIS) form, time and money have been saved because the form:
   a. has been reduced to two required pages,
   b. requires less time for faculty/staff to complete, and
   c. is better aligned with the Colleague screens thus resulting in increased efficiency for data entry staff.

(2) Data Validity: As a result of the new quarterly data reports, colleges now have an opportunity to identify and correct errors before submission of the final report. Through the detailed reports, college can isolate students with no placement test scores, no post-test scores, and/or invalid test ranges and determine the causes of those errors. Previously, colleges were faced with manually tracking this information through a variety of spreadsheets and double entry of pre- and post-test scores. Now, faculty and staff can concentrate more fully on instructional quality versus data entry. In addition, colleges now have a better and deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of the data changes as a result of the joint training that was conducted by the subject area experts and the Basic Skills state staff. This combination of technical application with policy implications helped to demonstrate both the how and the why for the data changes.

(3) Student Success: One of the most important impacts, however, of the data team’s work has been the ability that colleges now have to use data to guide program improvement and student success. For the first time, colleges have quarterly data reports that allow them to view valid and reliable data on student learning gains. Obviously, by tracking student outcomes colleges are better able to identify potential problems and isolate root causes early on. They are able to track their status in relation to both state and federal performance measures and make necessary instructional and programmatic changes as necessary. The end result, as the reports continue to expand, will be improved student success!

Kathi McLendon
Dean, College and Career Readiness
Central Piedmont Community College

DATA MAKES US MORE EFFECTIVE!

When I first saw the reports that were sent out after the June data was collected, I was overjoyed. This is the kind of report that we need in order to run an effective literacy program.

The fact that you grouped the data by instructor is very helpful. This goes to the point Dr. Whitfield has made for years: The instructors should be responsible for their classes and their data. This report makes it very easy to identify performance measures in individual classes in addition to the program as a whole.

Thanks for your hard work,
Candy Putnam
Director of Basic Skills
Mitchell Community College
THE SPARK:
The North Carolina Community College System has had a system for collecting and publishing performance data on a routine basis since the late 1980s. Over the years, the “Critical Success Factors Report” detailed the performance of the system and individual colleges on as few as eight and as many as 12 performance measures. Beginning in 2001, the reward for success was the authorization for top-rated colleges to carry forward some funds from the prior fiscal year, provided funds were available. Colleges with lower ratings received no recognition.

As part of SuccessNC, NCCCS leaders saw a need to study and revise the performance measurement system. Collectively, the State Board of Community Colleges, the NC Association of Community College Presidents and the NC Association of Community College Trustees realized there was a strong need to utilize performance data to inform the development of student success standards and goals. They also worked with a goal of building a set of performance measures that would lead to consistent year-to-year funding for colleges.

To ensure there were college-level incentives to improve student success and funding tied to incentives, the North Carolina General Assembly in 2011 asked the State Board of Community Colleges to report on a revised set of accountability measures and performance standards. Legislators wanted a modified model for funding the state’s community colleges that rewarded meeting or exceeding performance goals and no incentive to continue improving once a benchmark had been reached. In addition, carry-forward funds associated with colleges that did not meet established benchmarks were pooled to reward exceptional colleges. This pool of funds was divided equally among exceptional colleges with the remaining institutions receiving nothing.

The traditional performance funding model was based on carry-forward funds, money left over from the previous fiscal year’s operations and approved for carry-over into the next year. At best, receipt of funds under this model was uncertain. The traditional model was also an “all-or-nothing” system that provided no recognition of the continuum of performance and no incentive to continue improving once a benchmark had been reached. In addition, carry-forward funds associated with colleges that did not meet established benchmarks were pooled to reward exceptional colleges. This pool of funds was divided equally among exceptional colleges with the remaining institutions receiving nothing.

The new model would allocate a portion of the colleges’ recurring funds based on performance. The System has requested that the General Assembly appropriate additional recurring funds to support this model. General Fund expenditures per full-time-equivalent (FTE) student at community colleges in North Carolina have decreased 20 percent in constant dollars since 2007-2008. The cuts have undermined community colleges’ ability to provide student support, such as counseling and tutoring, to improve performance and raise graduation rates. By requesting that new funds be used for performance-based funding, NCCCS is aiming to restore some of the lost funding.

ISSUE ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE:
The original performance measures and performance funding model did not place the heavy emphasis on student progress and completion that many thought critical to improving performance across the system. The new performance measures provide major support for these pillars, and the performance-based funding model uses a two-part formula designed to reward quality and impact. Quality is defined as the percentage of students who succeeded on the performance standards in the previous year, and this component is funded first. Impact is defined as the number of students who succeeded on the performance measures. The funding models anticipate that initially about two-thirds of funding will be awarded for quality with the remaining third awarded for impact.

The new model would allocate a portion of the colleges’ recurring funds based on performance. The System has requested that the General Assembly appropriate additional recurring funds to support this model. General Fund expenditures per full-time-equivalent (FTE) student at community colleges in North Carolina have decreased 20 percent in constant dollars since 2007-2008. The cuts have undermined community colleges’ ability to provide student support, such as counseling and tutoring, to improve performance and raise graduation rates. By requesting that new funds be used for performance-based funding, NCCCS is aiming to restore some of the lost funding.

WHAT WE DID:
A Performance Measures Committee was launched in October 2010 to develop new measures. Made up of experts on academics, finance, research and student
services and chaired by two community college presidents, the committee worked for a year examining national initiatives and developing credible measures of institutional effectiveness for the state's community colleges. By April 2011, the group had seven potential performance measures, and an eighth would come in June at the request of NCCCS President Scott Ralls. In subsequent months, community college presidents, vice presidents and deans, student services staff, continuing education faculty and staff, curriculum faculty and institutional researchers would be surveyed for input. Members of statewide stakeholder associations were also asked to assess the new performance measures.

The Performance Measures developed through the process were:

1) **Progress of Basic Skills students.** This standard is designed to ensure that adults with low literacy skills are progressing academically towards basic skills attainment necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. The system will track the percentage of students who show a higher functioning level after 60 or more contact hours of basic skills education. Entry and post test results will determine progress.

2) **Passing rates for General Educational Development (GED) diploma examinations.** To ensure quality GED preparation and high levels of GED attainment, the percentage of students with an entering Educational Functioning Level of Adult Secondary Education Low or Adult Secondary Education High taking one GED test during a program year will be measured against the number who receive a GED diploma during the program year.

3) **Developmental student success rate in college-level English courses.** To ensure that remedial English and reading coursework prepares students to succeed in credit-bearing English courses, the percentage of previous developmental English and/or reading students who successfully complete a credit English course with a grade of C or better upon the first attempt will be tracked. Only students who completed developmental coursework during the same or previous academic year at the same college are to be included in the calculation.

4) **Developmental student success rate in college-level math courses.** To ensure that remedial math coursework prepares students to succeed in credit-bearing math courses, the percentage of previous developmental math students who successfully complete a credit math course with a grade of C or better upon the first attempt will be tracked. Only students who completed developmental coursework during the same or previous academic year at the same college are to be included in the calculation.

5) **Progress of first-year college curriculum students.** To ensure first-year students reach an academic momentum point that helps predict future credential completion, the system will track the percentage of first-time, fall credential-seeking students attempting at least 12 hours within their first academic year and completing 12 or more hours with a grade of C or better.

6) **College curriculum student retention and graduation.** To ensure student completion and persistence toward a post-secondary credential, the percentage of first-time, fall credential-seeking students who graduate, transfer or are still enrolled with 36 or more hours of credit after six years will be used to determine success on this measure. The figure includes students who were dual enrolled at the same institution and excludes students who were previously enrolled in another college.

7) **Passing rate for licensure and certification examinations.** To ensure that program-specific coursework prepares students to competently practice in their chosen professions, the aggregate institutional passing rate of first-time test-takers of licensure and certification exams will be tracked. The passing rate will be made up of all licensure and certification exams taken for the first time during the licensing agency’s most recent reporting year, and will only include state-mandated exams that...
candidates must pass before becoming active practitioners.

8) Performance of students who transfer to four-year institutions. To ensure the academic success of community college students at four-year colleges and universities, students with an associate degree or at least 30 articulated transfer credits will be followed to see what percentage earns a GPA of 2.00 or better during their first year. Students to be included in the measure are those who enroll during the fall and spring semesters at a four-year institution after being enrolled at a community college during the previous academic year. Only North Carolina based four-year institutions and out-of-state institutions with articulation agreements with individual North Carolina community colleges will be included in calculating transfer success rates.

In October 2011, the package of measures and descriptions of each was presented to the State Board of Community Colleges for formal approval. Institutional researchers from across the state joined System Office staff and some members of the Performance Measures Committee in drafting methodologies for use with the measures.

NCCCS submitted the required report on the revised performance measures to the General Assembly, and in June 2012, the General Assembly adopted the revised performance measures for use the following year. The annual report on college performance would be based on data collected during the previous academic year with system-wide baselines and goals for each measure based on the prior three years of historical data. The baseline and goals would be reset every three years.

Once the performance measures had been established, it was necessary to develop a funding model for use with the measures. The Performance Funding Committee was launched in April 2012 with a community college presidents and a State Board member serving as co-leaders. Over the next six months, the committee reviewed a range of funding models with their work informed by a set of guiding principles.

Performance-Based Funding: Guiding Principles

Reward both student progress and completion. Research suggests that rewarding progress, in addition to completion, creates incentives for identifying what kinds of supports, interventions and new strategies can help students persist, move faster and increase their odds of completing.

Provide opportunities for all colleges to benefit. Since the objective is to embed performance into colleges’ regular formula budget allocations, the system needs to be inclusive of all colleges. A “winner take all” system diminishes buy-in to performance funding at the college level.

Value progress and improvement in college performance. The performance funding model traditionally rewarded colleges that met benchmarks while giving nothing to those who didn’t meet the standards. The new funding model takes a graduated approach that rewards continuous improvement.

Accommodate the fact that colleges are different. Colleges across the state have the same core mission, but their program offerings are often very different and reflect the needs and demands of the communities they serve. Performance-based funding should allow for differences.
**Reward both quality and impact.** Performance funding should take into account both the percentage of a college’s students who succeed at meeting performance benchmarks and the actual number of students who succeed in meeting those benchmarks.

**Be implemented predictably, gradually, transparently and as simplistically as possible.** Performance goals need to be clearly defined so that the performance funding system is easy to understand and explain.

**Be supported with new, recurring funds.** The traditional performance-funding model used carry-forward funds that might be unavailable some years or not be authorized other years. In other words, colleges could never count on performance funding.

In October 2012, presidents approved the concept of the funding model, and the following January, the NC Association of Community College Presidents recommended the proposed performance-based funding model. The State Board approved a report to the General Assembly in February 2013 that included a plan for incorporating the revised performance measures into regular formula funding. The plan called for $30 million to support performance-based funding for six of the eight measures in the first budget year with 3 percent of total funding allocated to rewarding strong performance in subsequent budget cycles. The two Basic Skills measures are not included because of currently existing performance-based funding for the number of GEDs and adult high school diplomas awarded each year. Once Basic Skills data is validated, up to $10 million of performance funding may be repurposed to support these initiatives in coming years.

The performance-based funding model has provisions for colleges to earn quality funding based on how they compare to both a baseline and a goal for each of the performance measures. If a college does not meet the baseline, it receives no funds for quality. If a college exceeds the baseline, but does not meet the goal, it receives a portion of the performance-based funding for which the college is eligible. If a college meets the goal, it receives 100 percent of its performance-based funding amount. If a college exceeds the goal, it receives more than 100 percent of this amount. Performance-based funding amounts are based on dividing available funds by the number of students whose performance was part of the measure.

The model has a second component for funding that recognizes the impact of each college within each performance measure. Colleges receive a set amount of money for each student successfully meeting the benchmark measured by the measure.

**Results and progress to date:**
Legislators approved $9 million in performance-based funding for the 2013-2014 fiscal year and $24 million for 2014-2015. The $9 million in the 2013-2014 budget repurposes existing funds. For 2014-2015, half of the $24 million is from existing funds and half is from new recurring funding. While funding for each of the first two years falls short of the requested $30 million, it represents an embrace of the NCCCS performance funding model by the legislature and it lays the groundwork for meeting the goal in future budget cycles.

A quality improvement process for colleges not excelling on performance measures has been developed. Known as the Performance Partnership, this college-driven, statewide program will facilitate collaboration among colleges to improve performance measure success rates. Colleges with higher success rates on individual measures will voluntarily mentor colleges seeking to improve their success rates on those measures. Plans also include an annual statewide summit open to all 58 community colleges and showcasing best practices.

**Future plans and goals:**
A measure tied to employment following program completion is anticipated to be developed and added to the eight existing Performance Measures.

Performance measures will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure they are adequately assessing college performance. Changes may be implemented every three years.
INITIATIVE: IDENTIFY & MITIGATE BARRIERS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

During the Listening Tours of 2010, NCCCS administrators learned of many successful programs at North Carolina's community colleges, but they also identified a range of barriers to student success. System Office personnel saw many opportunities for smoothing the way for students to graduate and join the state's workforce or go on to additional studies.

They began their work by categorizing barriers' importance to one of the three SuccessNC guiding goals of improving access, enhancing quality and increasing success. Next, they determined the sphere of influence for each barrier because mitigation or elimination of some barriers would require action by the North Carolina General Assembly, the federal government or other policy owners, such as the NC Department of Public Instruction or the University of North Carolina General Administration. Finally, each barrier was assigned to an NCCCS administrator to eliminate or mitigate, as appropriate.

Some barriers, often referred to as the “low-hanging fruit,” required only clarification of policy or a small revision in policy by the State Board of Community Colleges. These issues were quickly addressed with the colleges experiencing them. Others represented deep-reaching systemic needs that would be addressed through one or more SuccessNC initiatives. Highlights of NCCCS efforts to eliminate barriers identified through the Listening Tours of 2010 are detailed below.

IMPROVING ACCESS

Barrier: Colleges are concerned about students taking on too much debt. Some suggest that ACA courses teach financial literacy or develop other requirements for helping students understand the consequences of student debt.

Mitigation: NCCCS partnered with the Department of the State Treasurer and other educational agencies to provide an online financial literacy tool for students. “Advanced Money Management for Community College Students” was designed to ensure that individuals who are continuing their education have the information and tools they need to make good financial decisions. Colleges have been encouraged to incorporate the tool in student success skill courses.

Barrier: Unprecedented demand from students for assistance in FAFSA preparation to access the federal Pell Grant coupled with requests for assistance in accessing the William D. Ford Federal Loan Program has created tremendous workloads for financial staff. With these requests come overwhelming case loads of one-on-one student financial literacy counseling in times of rapidly and ever-changing federal regulation. The process of obtaining financial aid can be so confusing and discouraging that students sometimes withdraw from college or run out of funding eligibility prior to completing a credential.

Mitigation: The Financial Aid Simplification Initiative is providing ways to assist college administrators and staff, students and their families by the freeing college personnel from “policing and processing” responsibilities by contracting out all or a portion of document processing and verification to obtain “ready to package” records. The processing and verification service is coupled with on-site consulting to improve operational efficiencies and customer service levels in college financial aid offices.

Barrier: Colleges report frustration with the legislature’s propensity for changing rules regarding what courses high school students will be allowed to take on a tuition-waived basis through dual enrollment, Huskins and Learn and Earn programs. After working with local high schools to schedule courses, the Legislature has changed the rules and forced colleges to cancel classes after students have registered. This erodes trust and hurts relationships between the public school systems and their local community colleges.

Mitigation: Section 7.1 A(a) S.L. 2011-145 (HB 200) established the Career and College Promise program. This legislation collapsed all concurrent high school programs into one program. This program should provide a simpler and more consistent framework for colleges and school systems to provide college courses to high school students. The Career and College Promise Initiative utilizes House Bill 200.

Barrier: A college suggested it is time to revisit the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) between NC Community Colleges and the University of North Carolina system because UNC has changed their requirements. In particular, there needs to be a general education core that transfers as a block to any UNC institution.
Mitigation: Several factors indicate that a review of the 1997 CAA is in order: 1) Recent legislative interest in reducing post-secondary educational costs, 2) changes to general education requirements at the state’s public universities, 3) community college to UNC transfers have increased 21 percent over the past five years and 4) the majority of students transfer before they complete an associate degree or the 44-hour general education core guaranteed to fulfill graduation requirements.

The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision and Reverse Transfer Credit Initiative is revising the CAA to help most students earn both associate and bachelor’s degrees in four years. Particular attention is being paid to taking the guesswork out of the process by building a “Universal 30,” a uniform schedule of courses that all students will take to complete the first half of the requirements to earn a college transfer degree.

In 2013, the General Assembly enacted G.S. 116-11(10c) which requires all UNC institutions to fully adhere to the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement as well as ensure the agreement is applied consistently throughout constituent institutions and provide reports to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee.

Barrier: 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.

Mitigation: While Basic Skills federal funds may not be used to pay any costs for curriculum or continuing education programs, colleges that have Basic Skills Plus programs approved by the State Board of Community Colleges may use up to 20 percent of Basic Skills state funds to pay instructional costs for Basic Skills students to take curriculum courses. The majority of the state’s community colleges now utilize the Basic Skills Plus model that provides workforce skills training in tandem with GED and Adult High School instruction.

Barrier: 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.

Mitigation: A request for $15.8 million in funding for summer programs was submitted in 2013. The appropriation would have funded instruction in technical education, healthcare, developmental education and STEM-related programs. While the funds were not appropriated in the State budget, the General Assembly did enact Section 10.4(b) of S.L. 2013-360 (SB 402) which allows colleges to earn budget FTE for instruction in Tier 1 and developmental education courses during the summer.

The United States Department of Education allows adult education programs to serve students who are performing on the 12.9 grade level and below (or its equivalent); therefore, it is possible for Basic Skills programs to serve high school graduates who would otherwise be served in developmental education. If colleges are not offering developmental courses in the summer, Basic Skills funds may be used for summer bridge programs.

Barrier: Career-focused skills courses are typically continuing education and therefore are not covered by financial aid, hindering access.

Mitigation: Students enrolled in continuing education career-focused skills courses do not qualify for state and federal financial aid (Title IV) programs. However, other financial resources such as Golden LEAF scholarships and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) grants may be available to students enrolled in non-credit programs.

Since the Listening Tours, Back-to-Work programs providing technical skills and employability skills to match the hiring needs of local employers have been offered as continuing education programs. Unemployed or underemployed students may study through Back-to-Work programs with a state grant picking up charges for registration fees, certification fees and books. In six-months or less, Back-to-Work students complete the program with a third-party certification of their skills.
**Barrier to Success**

**Barrier:** The state needs 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 the data.

**Mitigation:** The State Board of Community Colleges formally approved revised Performance Measures and their descriptions in October 2011 and Performance Funding was instituted in the 2013-2014 academic year with funds allocated by the NC General Assembly (Section 10.5 of S.L. 2013-360 (SB 402). The changes came as a result of the Performance Measures and Funding Initiative that aligned measures and funding methodologies with key initiatives while focusing on student success. The performance measures are more objective than those used before and they are uniform across the colleges.

**Barrier:** NC community colleges are held accountable for the success of transfer students to UNC campuses regardless of what courses the students took at the community college. Community colleges believe they should only be held accountable for students who complete the transfer degree.

**Mitigation:** A revised transfer performance measure has been approved for 2013 that focuses on students completing an associate degree or 30 or more transferrable credit hours. With this revision through the Performance Measures and Funding Initiative, there will no longer be a moving target based on native university student performance.

**Barrier:** Simplify data reporting by leveraging the purchasing power of the community college system to purchase data dashboards and business intelligence tools for data analysis and reporting system wide.

**Mitigation:** The Data Initiative will expand the range of tools available for accessing and analyzing data at the 58 colleges and the System Office to improve operating efficiencies and student performance. SAS, a business analytics software developer based in North Carolina, is providing at no charge to NC Community Colleges a full set of user-friendly dashboards and reports. This will make data available to personnel throughout the system and eliminate the need for college employees to go to their institutional researcher every time they need data or reports.

**Barrier:** Align state requirements more closely with federal ones so that colleges only have to submit data in one way when its content is the same.

**Mitigation:** Teams within the Data Initiative will review state and federal data requirements to determine business requirements that will drive data collection. Where there is a close match, recommendations will be made to better align state requirements with federal.

**Barrier:** A common statewide system for the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) needs to be implemented so that the data can be collected and shared easily.

**Mitigation:** The Data Initiative is expected to centralize the collection and reporting of IPEDS data. This should improve the consistency of IPEDS data and lessen the burden on colleges.

**Barrier:** Regularly review the reporting calendar to avoid “reporting creep.” Ad hoc data requests seem to eventually become annual ones.

**Mitigation:** Traditionally, a review of the Annual Reporting Plan is completed each year to determine if the reports are necessary for the next reporting year. A planned outcome of the Data Initiative is to evaluate and correlate all data elements to required reports. An analysis of frequency and timeframes for required reports and data from each college will also be performed as part of the initiative. These new practices should alleviate unnecessary data being collected and provide a more timely approach to reporting data.

**Barrier:** Program audit procedures are too cumbersome and outdated.

**Mitigation:** The State Board of Community Colleges approved a re-write of the Program Audit Procedures in August 2011. The procedures were simplified to put the
focus on student attendance records, which serve as the basis for reporting full-time equivalencies (FTE) for budget purposes. The 53-step process was revised with 20 steps eliminated.

In 2013, the General Assembly repealed the statutory program audit requirement effective July 1, 2015, and in the interim, directed the Community College System, along with representatives from the State Board, college presidents and college trustees to study the program audit function, including ways to streamline the process and minimize the administrative burden on colleges. The committee is required to report to the General Assembly by January 1, 2015.

Barrier: National accrediting associations and state regulators are requiring higher credential levels for nursing instructors which stresses community college programs, especially in rural areas. There are some long-standing instructors who will no longer be qualified to teach based on new standards and regulations set to be enacted in 2015. Mitigation: NCCCS began talks with the NC Board of Nursing staff in October 2010, and the discussions continued through May 2011 when the Board of Nursing approved the proposed change to 21 NCAC 26.0303 that would make the requirement for national program accreditation by a nursing accreditation body a recommendation. They also approved the proposed change to 21 NCAC 36.0318 to read “50 percent or more of the nursing faculty will hold a master’s degree.” The suggested revisions were forwarded to the NC Rules Review Commission, which approved them to be effective Aug. 1, 2011. A status report updating college presidents, chief academic officers and directors of nursing was issued on Aug. 9, 2011.

Barrier: Clinical sites for allied health student training and preceptors are difficult to find in rural communities. Mitigation: The System Office contacted an education consultant with the NC Board of Nursing regarding simulation activities. Currently, the Board of Nursing rules do not indicate a minimum or maximum number of simulation hours. The consultant indicated that 25 percent of clinical time utilized as simulation activities would be acceptable for short-term planning because a paper to clarify the issue would be coming from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. NCCCS has issued guidelines concerning the use of simulation activities to meet required clinical hours.

Barrier: Providing more faculty development funds and establishing additional faculty recognition opportunities would recognize the passion of more faculty across the state.

Mitigation: The 2009 General Assembly eliminated the categorical state appropriated funding for Faculty and Staff Development. However, within the Customized Training Program (G.S. 115D—5.1 f2) and Carl D. Perkins funds, there are funds available to support skill-specific training and development for community college faculty.

Barrier: There needs to be better alignment with high schools to reduce the need for developmental education in community colleges.

Mitigation: The Common Core Alignment Initiative is addressing the valley between standards in the K-12 arena, community colleges and the UNC system. Standardization of learning expectations at each level coupled with the development of a new placement test as part of the Developmental Education Initiative should reduce the number of students beginning college in remedial courses. Multiple measures for placement developed as part of the Completion by Design Initiative should further reduce developmental placement by using high school transcripts in the placement process.

To accelerate progress through developmental education, students now take developmental modules covering only the math or reading/writing material in which they have demonstrated weaknesses. Students placing in the highest developmental level are now allowed to complete their remedial courses as co-requisites to the first college-level course in the subject. Both changes came out of the Developmental Education Initiative.

During the 2013 General Assembly, legislation was passed
requiring the NC State Board of Education to create career and college endorsements for NC high school diplomas. These endorsements, designed around a particular area of focused study, are optional additions to the traditional HS diploma. The goal of these endorsements is to help support a student’s knowledge of what is expected for a successful pathway into credit bearing courses in community colleges. These endorsements will be available to students who graduate during the 2014-2015 academic calendar.

**Barrier:** Developmental courses qualify for financial aid; however, students frequently use up much of their aid allocation from Pell grants before getting to curriculum level coursework, leaving them unable to complete a program of study.

**Mitigation:** The Developmental Education Initiative redesigned reading, English and math developmental programs to create targeted modules to address weaknesses identified through a new placement test and significantly reduce the time and cost incurred by a student who must take remedial coursework.

Students who score below the baseline for developmental math are sent to Math Sense, a Basic Skills program that covers basic math competencies required to be successful in Developmental Math. Because the course is offered through Basic Skills, students do not pay tuition. This saves financial aid and helps to keep students from exhausting their eligibility prior to completing their program of study.

The redesign of developmental coursework was coupled with Multiple Measures for Placement, a new approach for setting entry levels for recent high school graduates to further reduce the number of students beginning their college careers in remedial courses.

**Barrier:** Colleges questioned the validity of college placement exams and said that they are a barrier to student success. One college pointed out that they are high stakes tests for students, but not for colleges or high schools, which means there has not been an incentive to focus on their results.

**Mitigation:** As part of the Developmental Education Initiative, a task force studied assessment and placement policies. A new placement test, the North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment and Placement Test (NC DAP) grew out of this. Multiple Measures for Placement were adopted in February 2013 to allow recent high school graduates who have an unweighted GPA of 2.6 and four math credits, including Algebra 2, to exempt college placement testing and enroll in college level work.

**Barrier:** Some colleges would like to allow students who score just below “cut scores” on placement tests to enroll in the higher level course and compare how they do compared to those just above the cut score.

**Mitigation:** As part of the Developmental Education Initiative, the courses referenced in this 2010 barrier have been eliminated and replaced with modular courses that target skill gaps identified through placement testing. The modules are intensive, short courses and can be completed much more quickly than the old remedial courses. Students showing very minimal deficiencies may enroll, with advisor approval, in the first college course in the subject area while they complete remediation.

**Barrier:** One college suggested revisiting whether some college programs, particularly vocational programs, need the math that is currently required based on current placement testing.

**Mitigation:** SACS, the regional accrediting agency serving North Carolina, requires that each degree program contain a component of math or science. The Math Curriculum Improvement Project (CIP) has investigated and revised math courses to align to the new core math standards and to determine appropriate math pathways for various occupational programs.

**Barrier:** Colleges say they need more student support staff (tutors, advisors, financial aid staff and counselors) to adequately carry out the intrusive engagement strategies they would like to have. Because they are not classified as instruction, these positions can be harder to fund.

**Mitigation:** The 2010 NC General Assembly authorized the
realignment of approximately $50 million from instruction to student services. The 2011 General Assembly provided colleges further local budget flexibility by removing the 2 percent transfer restriction between instruction and non-instructional purposes.

**Barrier:** It was difficult for one college and its local school district to establish an innovative joint dropout recovery program because both entities had to wade through many regulations to ensure they were not violating any rules. Easing the regulatory pathway for such programs could encourage the development of similar programs in other places.

**Mitigation:** The NC General Assembly adopted legislation in 2011 that authorized boards of education to jointly establish with one or more boards of trustees cooperative innovative programs in high schools and colleges or universities that will expand students’ opportunities for educational success. High school dropout prevention is among approved programs.

**Barrier:** NCCCS may want to make student orientation mandatory so that students are prepared to be better students.

**Mitigation:** Requiring all students to participate in new student orientation is a local college decision; however, Completion by Design institutions are recommending a statewide policy on orientation.

**Barrier:** There is no advising for continuing education students and therefore they often have not developed a set of goals or a pathway toward educational success.

**Mitigation:** Colleges need to develop processes in order to provide continuing education students support services, such as counseling, tutoring and career planning. While some of these services are provided through Human Resources Development departments at the colleges, provisions for providing services need to be incorporated into the overall strategic plans for colleges at the local level.

Since the Listening Tours, community colleges have instituted Back-to-Work programs that pair technical training with employability assessments and soft skills training to help unemployed and underemployed students get and keep skilled jobs available in their area. These students also earn third-party certifications of their new skills.

**Barrier:** The three-year limit for the Umstead Act, which bars state entities from competing with private companies, is too short because companies in incubators need longer to succeed. This impacts colleges that operate business incubators.

**Mitigation:** NC General Assembly Session Law 2011-331, s. 1 addressed this issue by increasing the time private businesses are protected by the Umstead Act from three years to four years.
THE SPARK:
North Carolina was one of six states participating in the Lumina Foundation’s Achieving the Dream initiative to help more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Achieving the Dream places a heavy emphasis on data-driven institutional improvement, engaging the public and influencing public policy.

Rather than developing new programs right away, the North Carolina Community College System began by gathering and analyzing data. The results led NCCCS President Scott Ralls to establish the Developmental Education State Policy Steering Team of community college leaders from across the state to begin reworking the remediation program to facilitate greater success through program completion.

Ralls also saw a need to explore best practices and issues from the local perspective at each of the state’s 58 community colleges. He formulated the Listening Tours, and with the State Board’s endorsement, the college visits began in February 2010. Along with showcasing many successes, the Listening Tours provided a clear picture of the barriers that students often encountered on the way to completing a program of study. Major barriers to completion included:

1) long periods spent in developmental coursework.
2) college placement tests that didn’t align with high school standards and placed the majority of students in at least one developmental course.
3) students’ lack of understanding of program requirements resulting in useless credits.
4) a financial aid process that could thwart even the most diligent.

Soon the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced their Completion by Design initiative aimed at raising community college completion rates. The organization announced an investment of $35-$40 million over five years to advance the idea that colleges need to develop structured pathways to credentials that have value in the workplace. Following a competitive application process,
North Carolina was selected in 2011 along with Ohio and Florida to participate in the Gates Completion by Design initiative. This initiative was highlighted at the first-ever White House Summit on Community Colleges through a major announcement by Melinda Gates with President Barack Obama. The Gates Momentum/Loss Framework for Completion by Design became the model for SuccessNC.

ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE INITIATIVE:
Sixty-two percent of jobs in this country now require a college degree, but only 19 percent of community college students attending full time get an associate degree in four years. The United States, once first in the world in the number of college graduates, has dropped to tenth and the decline in rank will continue without a quick, somewhat drastic response.

Students have too often taken courses that “look interesting,” but do not apply to their program of study, and therefore do not get them closer to completion of a program and graduation. Completion by Design helps move students towards their goals with carefully prescribed pathways to graduation. This structure is particularly important to first-generation college students who need extra guidance to navigate college effectively.

Students dependent on federal financial aid have strict limits on the number of hours of credit they may attempt. Taking large amounts of developmental coursework or courses that do not count towards graduation can exhaust their financial aid package prior to completion of a credential. When financial aid ends, many of these students will be forced to leave college without meeting their goals.

With more than half of entering students testing into developmental coursework, even though they were high school graduates, the placement tests were clearly not testing the same standards high schools had for students. This led the Developmental Education State Policy Steering Team to question if the placement tests currently in use were appropriate and to analyze what knowledge was essential to being prepared to succeed in college classes.

WHAT WE DID:
The State Board pledged its support to Completion by Design to address the need for more community college students to complete programs in an orderly progression within a reasonable timeframe. This included a promise to address policy issues at the state level that might impede student success.

Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) was chosen to lead a cadre of five North Carolina community colleges in the national Completion by Design effort to devise and share new approaches to help increase the number of young people earning an associate degree, diploma, certificate or credential for the workplace. The state’s largest community colleges, Central Piedmont and Wake Tech, joined the cadre. Davidson County Community College joined as a representative medium-sized college. Martin Community College represented the state’s smallest colleges.

Completion by Design has three phases. The planning phase took place May 2011-July 2012, and required the cadre to examine their own data to identify when and why they were losing students. Using the results, the cadre designed strategies to keep students enrolled and moving toward completion. Implementation began in August 2012 and will continue through July 2014. The following two years will be spent addressing policy implications discovered during the first two phases and scaling the program across the state as additional colleges learn from the Completion by Design state approaches. The third phase will also focus on ways successful strategies can be scaled to colleges and universities across the nation.

When the Developmental Education State Policy Steering Team began looking at data to direct their work, they gathered student files from NCCCS and DPI and asked the Community College Research Center at Columbia University to look at how students progressed through the system. They compared high school GPA to predict student outcomes in college vs. placement test scores and found that GPA was a much better predictor. When they began work, many expected to use a combination of placement test scores and GPA to make placements, but decided to use just GPA. Analysis showed that an equation utilizing test scores would be no better than GPA alone. The development of multiple measures for placement through the Developmental Education Initiative was key to meeting the goals of Completion by Design.
RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE:
The Completion by Design cadre work teams identified 15 policy changes needed to advance completion. They grouped the changes into four categories: Legislative, K-12 and Higher Education Alignment, State Board of Community Colleges and College Policy. Three of the policies were given top priority since they were seen as keys to gaining momentum for the completion initiative. These policy changes were:

1) Revise the State Board’s student placement and developmental prerequisite policies.

2) Revise the NCCCS curriculum standards to facilitate highly structured programs of study at the college level.

3) Revise the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina’s 16 constituent institutions to develop structured pathways to majors and reduce elective options.
Revision of student placement policies has led to the adoption of multiple measures for placement. A new diagnostic placement test, the NC Diagnostic and Placement (NC DAP) test, specific to North Carolina, has been developed by the College Board. The new placement test allows colleges to diagnose students' math, reading and writing deficiencies and place them into appropriate modules to accelerate their progression into college courses. In addition, the multiple measures for placement policy allows recent high school graduates with an unweighted GPA of 2.6 who have completed four math courses, including Algebra 2, to go directly into college classes without taking the placement test. Students who place in the top developmental level may be allowed to take that developmental course as a co-requisite while they are enrolled in the first college course.

The development of structured pathways has been assisted by a statewide curriculum improvement project that grouped similar technical programs into a common framework and utilized common cores of general education courses. This facilitates students completing multiple programs and earning stackable credentials, which gives them more career opportunities.

Developmental Education courses have not been funded during the summer in the past. The 2013 legislative session provided funding for these courses.

To help North Carolina community college presidents facilitate student success at the institutions they lead, the North Carolina Community College Presidents Association has developed a series of professional development sessions. The training sessions began in 2013 and are continuing into 2014.

Future plans and goals:
The original cadre of five colleges is now leading implementation of Completion by Design at four additional colleges, AB Tech, Durham, Gaston and Stanly. The second group is known as CbD 2.0.

Two statewide institutes for colleges not yet involved with Completion by Design will be offered with CbD colleges leading the effort. The Student Success Learning Institutes will be about completion, with a syllabus detailing a year’s worth of activities that include face-to-face meetings, online and blended activities. Each college participating in an institute will be expected to enroll a team of four consisting of the chief academic officer, chief student development administrator, institutional researcher and a lead faculty member. At the conclusion of the year, each college will have a localized plan for implementing holistic CbD-type practices on their campuses. The System Office led the first institute in Fall 2013 with assistance from Guilford Tech.

During 2014, the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees will provide its members one-day training sessions across the state on facilitating student success from the boardroom.
While the strategic planning of SuccessNC has been focused on structural reforms, perhaps the biggest untold story of SuccessNC has been a shift in culture.

Kay McClenny, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement and a faculty member in the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin puts that idea into perspective. “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” she says. It’s a quote she uses often and attributes to the late Peter Drucker, an influential management consultant and educator.

As president of NC Community Colleges, Dr. Scott Ralls is keenly aware of how culture shapes progress and success. “When we began with SuccessNC, the plan wasn’t to develop a plan but to fulfill a broad approach to collective planning,” says Ralls. “Our biggest accomplishment was that, perhaps, there has been a change in culture in the community college system,” Ralls says. “We always had a goal of student success, but now as we go to colleges, we see emphasis on student success in counseling and classrooms and other areas. We want to accelerate this.”

Ralls says the culture shift will be the key to SuccessNC having long-term impact in North Carolina. Groups of community college leaders at every level are doing their part to help with this culture shift.

The North Carolina Community College Presidents Association has developed a series of professional development sessions to help its members increase student success at the community colleges they lead. The quarterly training sessions began in 2013 and cover a range of topics from campus safety to the use of data by college presidents to drive student success. The professional development program is expected to continue for at least two years.

With two waves of community colleges showing promising results since they became Completion by Design institutions, a Student Success Leadership Institute was launched in Fall 2013 to scale the initiative to more colleges. Twenty-six colleges signed up to participate in the first institute designed to facilitate the development of customized plans for implementation on their campuses. A second Student Success Leadership Institute is planned for 2014-2015 to help the remaining colleges adopt the Completion by Design model.

Each community college is governed by a board of trustees that sets policy while providing oversight and accountability. Members of the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees recognize the important role that trustees play in setting the culture on college campuses. Beginning in January 2014, the association will provide one-day training sessions on how trustees can facilitate student success. The sessions will be held at 19 locations across the state to provide convenient access to trustees from all 58 colleges.

“This closes the circle for student success with the whole community college family getting the student success picture,” says Linda Weiner, vice president for Engagement and Strategic Innovation at NCCCS.

While efforts are being made to facilitate a shift in culture across NC Community Colleges, research will be conducted to see how the SuccessNC initiatives are changing student outcomes. The Community College Research Center has signed on to analyze college data over a three-year period and provide a detailed picture of how the initiatives are affecting student success. The researchers will also travel to five colleges to interview students and faculty to provide an experiential perspective on the effects of SuccessNC. The primary focus will be on the effects of the Developmental Education Initiative as it relates to Completion by Design, but researchers will also be looking at the Multiple Measures for Placement that grew out of that initiative.

Dr. Sharon Morrissey, NCCCS executive vice president and chief academic officer, says it is important to study the results of major initiatives, such as the Developmental Education Initiative, because changes may be needed to facilitate success for more students.

“A very deliberate approach to putting student success first is a key component of SuccessNC and Completion by Design,” says Morrissey. “As we scale initiatives across the system, we want to give colleges the tools they need to facilitate success for students. We know this will lead to a culture change.”

THE FUTURE

While the SuccessNC planning initiative officially concludes in December 2013, the work prescribed by many of its initiatives is just beginning. Keep up with the progress by visiting successnc.org regularly.
Sources


