



**pennsylvania**

GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Pathways to College Success

**Stepping It Up:  
Building Pathways to College Success  
In Pennsylvania and Nationwide**

**Findings from the  
Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education  
March 16-18, 2009**

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**  
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- 2009 -

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## Abstract

This paper addresses how higher education might assume responsibility for the uplift of the many Americans whose futures are uncertain: the unemployed, returning veterans, low-income populations, and current and future generations of college bound Americans. Framed around policy recommendations and institutional practices that were presented by national and state higher education leaders at the first *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, held March 16-18, 2009, a four-step agenda for increasing access to higher education and successful degree completion for all college-goers is detailed: identifying the challenges to increased college success, creating an action plan, putting the plan into action, and working together to increase colleges success in Pennsylvania. The paper culminates in a call to action for steady and intentional progress at the state level—both within and between institutions to increase student success and restore the public's faith in higher education.

## Executive Summary

Higher education in the United States is facing multiple challenges. Rising costs coupled with reduced financial resources threaten access to college at exactly the point at which our country needs to expand access most. To continue expanding access and to increase student success, states and institutions must actively reevaluate how they operate and how they serve students. Moreover, higher education leaders, faculty, and policy makers must work together in a creative, deliberate, and collaborative fashion to address affordability, access, and success.

To stimulate this needed collaboration and open dialogue among national, state, and institutional postsecondary leaders around the key issues of college access and success, Governor Edward G. Rendell and the Pennsylvania Department of Education convened a statewide higher education conference, *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, held March 16-18, 2009. The conference was intended to rouse state and institutional higher education leaders to confront and address current economic and political challenges to ensure that a college education remains a realistic goal for students across Pennsylvania.

Over 300 people representing various sectors of higher education participated in the 3-day conference. College and university presidents, faculty, and administrators from across Pennsylvania were joined by invited guests:

- Robert Shireman, U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for Education
- Hilary Pennington, Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Molly Corbett Broad, President, American Council on Education
- Patrick Callan, President, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
- Jamie Merisotis, President, Lumina Foundation for Higher Education
- Patrick Terenzini, Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior Scientist, Center for the Study of Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University
- Judith Eaton, President, Council on Higher Education Accreditation

In addition, major educational for-profit and non-profit companies that are interconnected with postsecondary students achieving access and success (including ACT, Inc., Educational

Testing Services, Pearson, and The College Board) sent representatives to attend the keynote speeches and breakout sessions.

Further information on the first annual *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, including the full conference program and copies of many presentations, can be accessed at the conference website: <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/programs/governors/>

This paper charts a four-step course to increasing degree success within institutions and statewide. Four-steps are outlined, not to oversimplify what is clearly a complex agenda, but to stimulate action. The four steps were derived from careful content analysis of the many keynote speeches and presentations that were given at the 2009 conference.

The following are the four steps to increase college success:

- **Step 1:** Identifying the Challenges to Increased College Success,
- **Step 2:** Creating an Action Plan: Defining a Policy Agenda for College Success
- **Step 3:** Putting the Plan into Action—Enacting policies and creating programs for the nation, for Pennsylvania, and within individual institutions;
- **Step 4:** Working Together to Increase Colleges Success in Pennsylvania—Inter-college collaboration for a statewide solution.

**Step 1** defines challenges faced by higher education systems and institutions across the nation. The challenges discussed in this section are those identified by keynote speakers who represent some of the most prominent figures in higher education today. Each challenge is introduced with a quote or quotes drawn directly from the keynote speeches. The purpose of this section is to identify some of the major obstacles that must be addressed at the national, state, and institutional level to increase college success. In essence, the first step identifies the features of the existing U.S. higher education system that impede postsecondary degree success, especially for low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult student populations.

**Step 2** offers strategies for surmounting the challenges outlined in Step 1 by identifying specific national, state, and institutional policies that promote increased pathways to the postsecondary degree for all students, and especially for traditionally under-served populations. The purpose of Step 2 is to move the conversation about increasing postsecondary success from issues to actions—just as the conference included both presentations that highlighted higher education issues and presentations that explained current higher education legislation. The policy directives included in Step 2 represent a compilation of the many policy recommendations made within keynote speeches and breakout presentations throughout the *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*.

**Step 3** continues to advance the paper's intended progress from information to action as it catalogs the many exemplary college success policies and programs already at work at the national level, in the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and in many Pennsylvania colleges and universities. Beginning with a summary of current national efforts as defined by Robert Shireman (U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for Education), Hilary Pennington (Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), and Molly Corbett Broad (President of the American Council on Education), the discussion focuses predominantly on Pennsylvania's progress toward implementing pathways to college success for low-income,

Black, Hispanic, and adult student populations. This discussion highlights the various approaches being implemented across Pennsylvania, at both state and institutional levels, with the shared goal of increasing degree success.

The driving goal of the *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education* was to facilitate collaboration for increasing degree success by gathering an informed cadre of educational leaders across the nation and state. Likewise, **Step 4** emphasizes the importance of extensive collaboration for increasing college success. Isolated efforts within single institutions will not be enough to close the gap in degree completions between the traditional college student demographic and low income, Black, Hispanic, and adult students. As Patrick Callan noted at the *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education*, "one of the challenges and great strengths of U.S. higher education is its immense diversity, but if we don't find a way to work together, we won't have a way to rise to those challenges." Thus, the fourth step includes several examples of collaborative efforts between Pennsylvania colleges and universities illustrating how collaborations across diverse institutions increase students' pathways to degree success. The fourth step also defines a common ground from which future collaboration and statewide higher education conferences might progress.

The need is urgent and the time is now for all of higher education to answer its call to duty and come to the service of the nation by targeting college success, especially for historically underserved populations of low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult students. Although the Governor's Conference was convened in Pennsylvania, the presentations and dialogue made it clear that Pennsylvania's challenges regarding postsecondary access and success have nationwide implications. Using inter-institutional diversity to develop a more responsive higher education system focusing on the success of all students will increase the percentage of U.S. workers who can participate in the new knowledge-based economy.

Summing up the rich content and conversations of a 3-day conference into four steps is not meant to diminish the complexities and challenges that increasing degree success poses for Pennsylvania's colleges and universities but to emphasize that steps must be taken for progress to be realized. There is no simple solution. Steady and intentional progress at the state level, within institutions and between institutions, will increase student success and will restore the public's faith in higher education as the keystone to economic success in the Keystone state.

## Introduction

The Obama Administration has called upon higher education to pull the U.S. out of its worst economic crisis in over 70 years. In the current economic downturn, the college degree has proven to be a keystone to solvency. National unemployment data reveal that a worker whose highest credential is a high school diploma is twice as likely to be unemployed as a worker with a college degree.<sup>1</sup> Thus, our nation's economic recovery depends on whether or not current and future generations of college-goers and displaced workers successfully obtain the college credentials required for participation in the post-recession workforce.

This paper addresses how higher education might assume responsibility for the uplift of the many Americans whose futures are uncertain: the unemployed, returning veterans, low-income populations, and current and future generations of college bound Americans. Using the progressive policy recommendations and institutional practices that were presented by national and state higher education leaders at the *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, held March 16-18, 2009, this paper details a four-step agenda for increasing access to higher education and successful degree completion for all college-goers. The information and strategies described here have relevance for higher education leaders, policy makers, researchers, and faculty who work at the national level, state level, or in one of over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Moreover, this paper serves as a call for further collaboration among Pennsylvania colleges and universities to identify strengths and pool resources so that all of Pennsylvania's college and university students have access to the support they need to attain their degree despite shrinking endowments and deep budget cuts.

Clearly, U.S. colleges and universities are meant to play an integral role in the recovery of our national economy. Yet in order to meet the nation's call to educate more Americans, especially those groups who have been traditionally under-served, U.S. colleges and universities must address public concerns regarding affordability, accessibility, and performance. Our once highly revered system of higher education is under great scrutiny for being unaffordable and under-performing in degree completion. "Seven in 10 Americans believe that qualified motivated students do not get to go to college because of affordability."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, despite significant increases in college access rates in the last decades, degree completion rates across U.S. colleges and universities have not kept pace; rather, the high proportion of college dropouts and college non-attendees in the U.S. signify a system of higher education "hemorrhaging student talent."<sup>3</sup>

Addressing public demands for both affordability and success poses a weighty challenge for U.S. colleges and universities that have not escaped the stranglehold of this severe recession and are enduring tremendous budget shortfalls. Many states, challenged by multi-billion dollar deficits, are making significant cuts in their support of colleges and universities. Institutional endowments are shrinking—events which in turn precipitate sharp increases in tuition and

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, summarizing findings from the National Report Card during his keynote address at the Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Callan, Keynote Address, PA Governor's Conference on Higher Education.

fees and a reduction in critical services such as academic support. Higher education in the U.S. is facing a crisis of sorts: rising costs coupled with reduced financial resources threaten access to college at exactly the point at which our country needs to expand access most.

To continue to expand access and increase student success, states and institutions must actively reevaluate how they operate and serve students. Moreover, higher education leaders, faculty, and policy makers must work together in a deliberate and collaborative fashion to address affordability, access, and success.

### ***The First Annual Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success***

To stimulate this needed collaboration and open dialogue between national, state, and institutional postsecondary leaders around the key issues of college access and success, Governor Edward G. Rendell and the Pennsylvania Department of Education convened a statewide higher education conference, *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, held March 16-18, 2009. The conference was intended to provoke state and institutional higher education leaders to confront and address current economic and political challenges to ensure that a college education remains a realistic goal for students across Pennsylvania.

Over 300 people representing various sectors of higher education participated in the 3-day conference. College and university presidents, faculty, and administrators from across Pennsylvania were joined by invited guests including:

- **Robert Shireman**, U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for Education
- **Hilary Pennington**, Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- **Molly Corbett Broad**, President, American Council on Education
- **Patrick Callan**, President, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
- **Jamie Merisotis**, President, Lumina Foundation for Higher Education
- **Patrick Terenzini**, Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior Scientist, Center for the Study of Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University
- **Judith Eaton**, President, Council on Higher Education Accreditation

In addition, major educational for-profit and non-profit companies interconnected with postsecondary students achieving access and success (including ACT, Inc., Educational Testing Services, Pearson, and The College Board) sent representatives to attend the keynote speeches and breakout sessions.

Further information on the first annual *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*, including the full conference program and copies of many presentations, can be accessed at the conference website:

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The first ever *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education* created a great deal of enthusiasm around issues of access and success among its attendees; its focus on policy filled a critical gap left by other higher education conferences. Moreover, conference attendees agreed that having policy-focused dialogue with national and state education leaders and policymakers empowered them to take the next steps towards increasing access and success in their own institutions. In sum, the conference generated momentum among higher education leaders to increase access and success in the state and within institutions.

This paper is meant to further propel this momentum by detailing a four-step framework to increasing degree success within institutions and across the state. Derived from careful content analysis of the many keynote speeches and presentations that were given at the 2009 conference, four steps are outlined that address pathways to college success from multiple perspectives.

### *The Four-Step Framework*

- Step 1: Identifying the Challenges to Increased College Success**
- Step 2: Creating an Action Plan for College Success—A policy agenda for success**
- Step 3: Putting the Plan into Action—Enacting policies and creating programs for the nation, for Pennsylvania, and within individual institutions**
- Step 4: Working Together to Increase Colleges Success in Pennsylvania—Inter-college collaboration for a statewide solution**

**Step 1** requires a definition of the challenges faced by higher education systems and institutions across the nation. The challenges, identified by conference keynote speakers, reflect impediments to post-secondary success in U.S. higher education systems – especially for low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult student populations. Each challenge is introduced with a quote or quotes drawn directly from keynote speeches.

**Step 2** offers strategies for surmounting the challenges outlined in Step 1 by identifying specific national, state, and institutional policies that promote increased pathways to the postsecondary degree for all students, especially the traditionally under-served populations. The purpose of Step 2 is to move the conversation about increasing postsecondary success from issues to actions. The policy directives represent a compilation of the many policy recommendations made within keynote speeches and breakout presentations throughout the *Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education: Pathways to College Success*.

**Step 3** moves from information to action as it catalogs the many exemplary college success policies and programs already at work at the national level, in the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and in many Pennsylvania colleges and universities. Beginning with a summary of current national efforts as defined by Robert Shireman (U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for

Education), Hilary Pennington (Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), and Molly Corbett Broad (President of the American Council on Education), the discussion focuses predominantly on Pennsylvania's progress toward implementing pathways to college success for low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult- student populations. This discussion highlights the various approaches to increase degree success implemented across Pennsylvania, at both state and institutional levels.

**Step 4** emphasizes the importance of extensive collaboration for increasing college success. Isolated efforts within single institutions are inadequate in closing the gap in degree completions between the traditional college student and low income, Black, Hispanic, and adult students. As Patrick Callan noted at the PA Governor's Conference on Higher Education: "One of the challenges and great strengths of U.S. higher education is its immense diversity, but if we don't find a way to work together, we won't have a way to rise to those challenges." Thus, the fourth step includes several examples of collaborative efforts between Pennsylvania colleges and universities that illustrate how collaborations across diverse institutions increase students' pathways to degree success and define a common ground from which future collaboration and statewide higher education conferences might progress.

## STEP 1: Identifying the Challenges to Increased College Success

The federal government, the Pennsylvania state government, private businesses, major philanthropic organizations, and the American people are calling upon higher education institutions to deliver increased equality and success in degree attainment so that all citizens will be able to realize their potential in the new knowledge-based economy. However, in the context of a global economy, that requires a significant increase in college attainment; yet, our capacity to achieve this goal is stymied by a severe economic downturn. Challenges to access and success include the following: affordability, student debt, students who drop-out, a rising adult student demographic, a K-12 pipeline that does not prepare students for college, and a heightened need for quality control standards.

### *Affordability*

***"It is not about what college is worth;  
it is whether the people in your state can afford it."***

—Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

College cost data support the public perception that college is becoming more expensive. Tuition and fees at public four-year institutions have increased more than 4 % each year over the last decade (Gates Foundation Website). In percentage terms, college costs have increased at more than twice the rate of inflation since 1998. Making college affordable is a linchpin for increasing college degree completions among low-income, African American, and Hispanic students. Research has shown that cost weighs heavily on students' decisions to pursue a college degree.

Derek Price presented the results of a 2008 report prepared by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, *Promise Lost: College Students Who Don't Enroll in College*. According to this report, 70% of high school counselors who were surveyed pointed to not having enough aid and tuition being too expensive as “almost always” or “frequently” important in non-college-goers’ decision making about whether or not to attend. Over 80 % of non-college-goers who were surveyed said that the availability of grant aid was extremely or very important to their decision, and 63% said the price of college was extremely or very important in their determination of whether or not to enroll.

The rising cost of college is not a recent phenomenon; however, the current economic crisis has complicated the challenge of affordability pushing the college degree even further out of reach for many current and potential college-goers. Families who have been diligently saving for their children’s college educations have seen their savings evaporate. In addition, with greater oversight of U.S. banks, there is a tightening of student loan availability from private lenders. Colleges themselves are faced with severe budget constraints, from diminished endowments to halted building projects (Judith Eaton, President of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, Keynote Address at the PA Governor’s Conference on Higher Education). Many states, challenged by shrinking endowments and multi-billion dollar deficits, are making significant cuts in their support of colleges and universities. These events in turn can result in even greater increases in tuition and fees and a reduction in critical services.

Affordable college is an investment in the labor force. “High college tuition sends the signal to low-income students that they cannot afford the degree, especially for those who cannot figure out the financial aid system. Tuition speaks volumes and keeps us from closing the diploma gap between high-income and low-income students” (Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Keynote Address at the 2009 Pennsylvania Governor’s Conference on Higher Education).

***“Institutions need to stop throwing financial aid away on students who don’t need it just to compete. It is ethically and morally disgraceful.”***

–Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

The responsibility for increased affordability does not end at the state level. Postsecondary institutions also need to get available financial aid out to students who need it most. The popular college-rankings systems published in national magazines and inter-institutional competition have focused many colleges’ admissions strategies on enrolling students who have scored the highest on national college entrance exams. As competition for these top students increases, many institutions have poured institutional aid into merit scholarships and grants to reward top students for enrolling at their institutions, regardless of their financial need.

There is a need to re-evaluate our reward systems in higher education as far as it rewards high performance with institutional financial aid. Colleges and universities should consider enticing high performing students who can afford to attend college with promises to nurture their special talents through privileged access to upper-level courses, undergraduate research opportunities, and faculty mentorship—not with free tuition dollars. Highly motivated and high achieving students will be better served and will likely find greater satisfaction with increased postsecondary opportunities for further achievement than with tuition monies.

## *Student Debt*

***“Debt for diplomas is not good public policy.”***

—Judith Eaton, President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation

***“With nearly two out of every three college graduates having borrowed money to pay for their higher education, the multi-billion dollar student-loan industry plays a ubiquitous role in students’ college participation and success.”***

—Nick Hillman, Research Associate for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities

While tuitions have increased, grant aid and scholarships have not kept pace; thus, more college students are borrowing more money and accumulating unmanageable debt loads by graduation. The veritable necessity of borrowing for college in the U.S. negatively affects college enrollments, college completions, and post-college success. In addition, the greatest debt levels are being accrued by the least affluent students who are forced to borrow outside of interest-controlled federal loan programs, thus taking on loans with higher interest rates. Traditionally underserved students (low income and minorities) graduating with heavy debt undermines the promise of socioeconomic advancement via the college degree. Moreover, it reinforces the socioeconomic gap between the one-third of college students who do not need to borrow for college and their less affluent peers.

Education debt is of particular concern in Pennsylvania. The state is a major center for higher education in the U.S., with one of the largest systems of higher education and the fourth largest student enrollment in the nation. Despite its high student enrollments, Pennsylvania’s public colleges and universities have struggled with affordability. In fact, it has the dubious distinction of being the sixth most expensive state in the nation for higher education. Likewise, Pennsylvania students graduate with the sixth highest debt load in the nation.

A recent PBS documentary, *The Student Loan Sinkhole*, reported that 70 million Americans owe a collective \$700 billion in student loan debt. The report suggests that the increasing reality of Americans defaulting on education debt will further complicate U.S. economic recovery. At the Pennsylvania Governor’s Conference, Robert Shireman, U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for Education, described President Obama’s renewal and expansion of federal grants, loans, and tax credit programs available to college students. In addition, the Obama Administration has introduced legislation to provide more oversight to private student-loan lenders, as private student loans are often subject to much higher variable interest rates compared to federal loans. Robert Shireman encouraged states and institutional leaders attending the Governor’s Conference on Higher Education to make similar commitments to reduce student debt by educating student borrowers and their parents about the risks of over-borrowing, by offering private loan options only after all federal loan options have been exhausted, and by closely monitoring the debt loads of students who must take private loans.

## **Completions**

***“We have a college completion problem in this country. “***

–Hilary Pennington, Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

***“Completion rates are the Achilles heel of American higher education.”***

–Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

***“Internationally, the United States was once the leader in the production of college graduates, but currently we rank at the bottom of the top ten.”***

–Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education,

Approximately half of all freshman entering baccalaureate programs fail to complete an undergraduate degree within six years.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the gaps that exist in college enrollment between affluent and low-income students are mirrored in completion rates; once enrolled, affluent students are more likely to graduate from college than low-income and minority students. Ensuring that more students achieve the college degree is critical to future economic growth, increased innovation, and the production of leaders. At the Governor’s Conference, Hilary Pennington, Director of U.S. Operations, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, identified cost, poor high school preparation, and time to degree as factors that negatively influence students’ persistence to graduation.

Recognizing the importance of having a college-educated population to our international standing and competitiveness, President Obama issued a challenge earlier this year to colleges and universities to improve their graduation rates and pledged to the nation “By 2020 America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.” In addition, major philanthropic organizations have made commitments to increasing college success. In fact, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has set a measurable goal to increase credential attainment by 2025, and to double the number of low-income young adults who earn a postsecondary credential by 26 years of age.<sup>5</sup> The Gates Foundation has designated over \$6.4 million in grants to fund research and the development of policies and programs to increase degree completion among low-income, African American, and Hispanic students.

With considerable policy and research attention, college access rates have increased significantly in the last decades, but completion rates have not kept pace. Because true access to college means access to the degree, success in college is necessary for the goal of equal access to be realized. Access as a stand-alone goal needs to be re-envisioned as a component of a broader policy of college success for all. Higher education admission can not be viewed as a gateway; rather, the college degree is the gateway.

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<sup>4</sup> American Enterprise Institute, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Pennington, Keynote Address.

In addition, “[t]here are a lot of [degree] programs that work as weeding-out mechanisms rather than bringing-in mechanisms. How do we transform them to be more inclusive about attracting students to those degrees? We are not going to meet STEM workforce needs in the future if our faculty see them as weeding-out programs.”<sup>6</sup> To achieve a goal of success, colleges need to begin concentrating on completions and identifying the ingredients to degree completion for all potential college-goers.

### *Expanding Demographics in a System Designed for the Traditional-Aged Student*

***“The lens has been too narrow focusing on traditional aged students in all of our plans for access and support. We have 40 million adult Americans without a high school credential and that number is growing.”***

–Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education

Most of the focus in typical conversations about higher education is on the traditional college-age student who enters college soon after high school; however, there has been a decline in college graduation rates among traditional-age cohorts. During the Pennsylvania Governor’s Conference on Higher Education, Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education (ACE), stated that to re-stabilize the economy “...we are going to have to depend on existing workers, and for the many unemployed adult workers, if their jobs do not come back, we have to provide opportunities for them to get jobs.” Higher education credentials are instrumental for individuals to find jobs offering economic stability. In the U.S., our high school drop out problem persists and it underscores why high school seniors are no longer the only source of college undergraduates. In this economy especially, older adults will need to access higher education for the retraining and additional credentials they need both to secure their existing jobs—jobs that may have not required a college degree before—and to find new jobs. Moreover, there are 23 million veterans across the nation, and the new GI Bill provides funding to these veterans, their spouses, and their children for the pursuit of undergraduate and graduate education.<sup>7</sup>

The influx of adult students stands as a challenge to many institutions because most four-year colleges and universities are structured to meet the needs of a young adult student demographic. From summer camp-like college orientation programs and residential programs to course schedules dominated by day classes and campus-based services, traditionally colleges have designed their academic programs and support structures with a younger and predominantly residential cohort in mind.

Adult students have a unique set of needs and requirements that colleges need to engage.<sup>8</sup> For example, adult students have requirements, ranging from child care and access to evening, weekend, and online courses. Meeting the needs of adults may mean revamping the tuition-fee schedule and financial aid availability so that full-time status is not based on a two-semester schedule and students are able to take classes year-round. Recognizing that new demographics of students are not being served by the “old best system” and creating new structures and

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<sup>6</sup> Pennington, speaking on what needs to be done to change the nature of higher education at the conference.

<sup>7</sup> Broad.

<sup>8</sup> Broad.

programming to support non-traditional students will be integral for institutions that are interested in expanding college enrollments and increasing degree completions.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Problems with the Pipeline: High School Seniors Are Not College-Ready***

***“The thing that determines economic strength and viability is access to knowledge workers at every point on the economic spectrum. It is also the quality of the completer, highly and well-trained degree holders, high schools, colleges, and graduate schools must produce the most creative and best innovators.”***

–Edward G. Rendell, Governor of Pennsylvania

***“One-third of students in our public colleges have to re-take high school subject matter.”***

–Gerald Zahorchak, Secretary of Education for Pennsylvania

***“We need a fairly radical restructuring of the pipeline. We need to be more inventive with how we think about time and progress to degree in order to improve the performance of postsecondary institutions.”***

–Hilary Pennington, Director of U.S. Special Initiatives, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Developing pathways to college and degree success for low-income Black, Hispanic, and adult students should not include lower standards or lower quality in degree preparation. “Today, only about 22% of low income African American and Hispanic students graduate from high school ready to earn college credit in a community college or four year institution.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, a recent report from *Jobs for the Future* found that nearly 60 % of students enrolling in the nation’s community colleges must take remedial classes to build their basic academic skills. Students who require developmental coursework after high school are less likely to persist to degree than those who are college-ready. Thus, we need to address the under-preparation of our college-bound population.

The growing need for remediation at the college level has caused many to question the quality of K-12 education. At The Governor’s Conference, Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Gerald Zahorchak identified issues in K-12 preparation that threaten college access and success - including a lack of common college-ready standards and corresponding curriculum frameworks, a need for better teacher preparation and professional development for in-service teachers, and a need for longitudinal data collection so that K-12 schools become informed about how their students perform in college.

In reviewing statewide remediation data and the school districts where developmental students are coming from, the Pennsylvania Department of Education concluded that the vast majority of school districts lack familiarity with the skill levels and content knowledge that colleges and career-training programs expect from graduating high school seniors, especially in regard to mathematics preparation.<sup>11</sup> Aptitude tests like the SAT and the ACT have become the

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<sup>9</sup> Callan, Keynote Address.

<sup>10</sup> Pennington, Keynote Address.

<sup>11</sup> Zahorchak, comments at the Presidents’ Breakfast.

drivers of students' college preparation, but postsecondary institutions use their own placement tests to gauge college readiness. High school educators need to know the content and skills inventoried on college placement exams and revise their curricula accordingly. While students will pursue different pathways after high school, all students need to have received the same college-ready preparation for the 13th year so as not to limit their post-high school aspirations.<sup>12</sup>

College degree success cannot increase without the development of high quality high school programs. However, until all students are graduating from high school with college ready skills, the effectiveness of existing college remediation programs also need reexamination. "Despite an increasing number of public and private providers entering the postsecondary education system, there has been very little change in how these institutions design programs to meet the needs of their students, many of whom enter college without the necessary skills to take college level work."<sup>13</sup> Two-year and four-year colleges and universities have the ability to dramatically increase completion rates by redesigning their academic programs to be more student-friendly with regard to time and how remedial and developmental courses contribute towards positive degree progress.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Pennington identified early college intervention and data collection and disbursement as two additional areas for postsecondary improvement regarding remedial students. She also emphasized the need for more early college intervention programs to provide the additional academic supports that under-prepared students need to succeed in their courses. Higher education leaders were also encouraged to extend data collection systems through college and make these data available to students to increase degree success: "Give students more access to completion rates so students can make informed decisions and choose schools that do better with students needing developmental and remedial coursework."<sup>15</sup>

## STEP 2: Creating an Action Plan for College Success

***"If we use the relief we get from the federal stimulus just to get back and not towards productivity and improvement, if we don't think of ourselves as coming out stronger and keep the conversation about improvement going, we will put the country in a deep hole when we eventually come out of this. It is critical that every state has a plan that is to protect the most vulnerable and the institutions that serve them."***

–Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Identifying the challenges that must be overcome to accomplish success is only the first step. To move forward and realize the national goal of increased college degree attainment, specific policies are needed to ensure that all students, including low-income and historically underserved students, have access to the postsecondary training to fully participate in the changing global economy and are provided with the right supports to succeed once they begin that training. Therefore, the second step involves the formation of national, state, and institution-level policies to address these challenges. All institutions must work together on these goals, but also recognizing that they will be applied differently across diverse institutions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Zahorchak.

<sup>13</sup> Pennington, Keynote Address.

<sup>14</sup> Pennington, Keynote Address.

<sup>15</sup> Pennington, Keynote Address.

<sup>16</sup> Terenzini.



**Step 2: Creating an Action Plan for College Success** provides a compilation of forward-looking policy directives proposed by both national and Pennsylvania higher education leaders during the conference. These policies focus on creating pathways to success for non-attendees, non-completers, and adult college-goers (including returned veterans) on national, state, and institutional levels.

The many policy recommendations given throughout the conference are grouped under four policy areas: increasing affordability, streamlining time to degree, easing transitions, and rewarding effective college teaching. In addition, some brief examples of specific policies-in-action presented during the conference are provided in this step as context for clarifying each policy area.

### **Increasing Affordability**

- Increasing levels of grant aid and the reallocating of existing grant aid to those students who need it to afford college.
- Lowering tuition
- Lowering debt and decreasing amounts of private student loans
- Increasing financial aid awareness and coaching

### **Policies that Streamline the Path from College Enrollment to Degree Completion**

- Award college credits for applicable work experience
- Offering affordable accelerated degree programs
- Implementing a 3-year baccalaureate degree option (already used in other countries)
- Increasing mentoring and advising to help students graduate on time

### **Policies that Promote Successful Transitions from High School to College and Transfers between Colleges**

- Better alignment of high school standards to college readiness via subject exit exams, etc.
- Enhanced pre-service teacher preparation
- Development of a GED with honors that signifies college readiness
- Transfer and articulation agreements between two-year colleges and the four-year sector
- Expanded in-college support networks including mentoring, summer bridge, and advisement
- Better unit-record data collection and analysis

### **Policies that Support and Reward Effective College Teaching**

- Reducing class sizes
- Revamping courses or re-ordering courses meant to attract and expose students (rather than discourage) to the nature of the discipline especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields
- Increasing professional development programs and support for college teaching and course development

## STEP 3: Putting the Plan Into Action

### *The National Response*

The federal government, philanthropic, and national higher education policy organizations have already begun enacting policies for success:

#### **Federal Policies for College Success**

The Obama Administration's *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* includes over \$30 billion to address college affordability and improve access to higher education. During the conference, Robert Shireman, the U.S. Deputy Undersecretary for Education, detailed how the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* specifically targets affordability by expanding tax credits for higher education, making them larger and available to more families, and allowing them to cover more types of expenses. Also, the Act provides support to states to limit funding cuts and tuition increases at public universities. Moreover, the Act provides funding to pay for increasing Pell Grant costs and a \$500 increase in the maximum grant for students from lower-income families. Combined with regular appropriations, the maximum grant will increase from \$4,731 to \$5,350 for the 2009-2010 award year.

President Obama has chosen to partner with states to sustain college access efforts and to intensify the focus on college completion. Understanding that the productivity of the nation is tied to improving college retention and completion—for both traditional-age students and returning adults—the Obama administration has allocated \$2.5 billion to be awarded to states for programs aimed at college completion.

Most recently, the Obama Administration has announced plans to streamline the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by reducing the number of questions and by allowing applicants to enter information from IRS forms rather than having to supply additional documentation. The intent is to reduce debt loads by increasing the number of students who apply for federal loans with lower interest rates and lessen students' needs for private loans with much higher interest rates.

#### **Other National Efforts**

In line with the Obama Administration, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is focused on the economic and civic imperative to help historically underrepresented populations achieve college degrees. The Gates Foundation has made increasing degree completions its primary goal for postsecondary education, pledging to double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary credential by the age of 26. The Foundation intends to accomplish this goal through a tri-fold strategy: improving the performance of the postsecondary education system;

supporting young adult success; and encouraging U.S. leaders, employers, and communities to focus on degree success for under-served student populations.

In June 2008, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (in partnership with MDC, Inc.) awarded \$16.5 million in grants to 15 community colleges and five states to expand innovative remedial education programs that have shown promise in increasing college success for low-income students and students of color. These developmental programs have found that colleges can make a difference in degree completion through programs tailored to students' needs. The path to college success for under-prepared students includes practices such as streamlining high school and college standards, using technology to improve basic skills, and providing effective mentoring.

Molly Corbett Broad, the President of the American Council on Education (ACE) announced at the conference that ACE plans to increase college degree completion among low-income students and adults with no degree by revamping the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). According to Broad, there are 40 million adult Americans without a high school credential. The GED is part of ACE, and the GED exam program will be revamped to increase the likelihood that those who take it will pass.

Currently, 700,000 Americans take the GED each year, but the percentage going onto postsecondary education after completing the GED is very modest; only a very small fraction of those who earn the GED go on to college. ACE intends to create a GED with honors designation to verify college-readiness. Broad also pointed out that effective counseling, once the GED has been awarded, is essential to increase the numbers of GED recipients who enroll in college.

### ***A Focus on Pathways to College Success in Pennsylvania***

Many of components of the college success policy agenda have already been put to practice in Pennsylvania at the state level and by Pennsylvania colleges and universities.

### **Background on Higher Education in Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania is a major center for higher education in the United States, with one of the largest systems of higher education and the fourth largest student enrollment of all of the states. Ironically, while Pennsylvania educates a large percent of the nation's college students, the "lost promise" of non-college-goers is a humbling reality. Pennsylvania ranks 46th out of 50 states in the percent of workers with more than a high school diploma. Thus, encouraging high school seniors and GED recipients to pursue postsecondary degrees and providing pathways to higher education success for the large numbers of non-degree holders already in its workforce are policy imperatives for Pennsylvania.

## Pennsylvania's State-Level Success Policies

Under the leadership of Governor Rendell, Pennsylvania has advanced a number of innovative policies that are designed to address issues of both access and success:

- Expansion of Pennsylvania's longitudinal data system to include all public postsecondary institutions (Pennsylvania Information Management Systems/ PIMS)
- Creation of a statewide transfer and articulation agreement and system (Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center/TRAC)
- Enhanced support and advocacy for adult students without postsecondary degrees (Prior Learning Assessment Initiative and the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education)
- Development of quality school leadership and enhanced preparation and continuing education for K-12 educators to increase the number of qualified college applicants (PA Inspired Leadership Program & the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality)
- Increasing college affordability for working families by greatly reducing or eliminating reliance on student loans for students attending state institutions (proposed Tuition Relief Act)

These state initiated programs and projects were the topics of both roundtable discussions and breakout presentations at the conference. The following brief descriptions of these programs highlight how Pennsylvania's existing higher education programming and policy goals dovetail with the national agenda as detailed by national higher education leaders and the federal government under President Obama.

### **Creation of a Statewide Transfer and Articulation Agreement and System**

Pathways to success for non-completers and adult college-goers require policies that streamline the path from college enrollment to degree completion. One method is to ensure students that the path to the four-year sector is direct, unobstructed and cost effective. Through PA TRAC, the new statewide transfer and articulation agreement and system instituted in May 2008, students can transfer at least 30 credits of foundation courses to any of the 19 participating PA four-year institutions—including all 14 state universities, two state-related institutions, and three private institutions. In addition, PA TRAC features an interactive online interface that provides the information students and student advisors need to assist in course selection.

PA TRAC offers a multi-level approach to streamlining the path to degree completion for PA college students. It simplifies the system of transfer and articulation on statewide and institutional levels and provides information resources on a personal level to students and their advisors. PA TRAC protects students from becoming derailed by hidden requirements and from wasting time and money obtaining credits that are unnecessary or non-transferable. Moreover, since the same student populations being targeted nationally for college success (specifically low income and under-represented minority students), they are more likely to enroll in community colleges. PA TRAC fulfills a need by clearing the pathways to the 4-year degree.

### **Enhanced Support and Advocacy for Adult Students Without Postsecondary Degrees**

While PA TRAC supports pathways to success for students already enrolled in postsecondary institutions, the Pennsylvania Department of Education is reaching out to adults who have not applied to college and may not be prepared for college. In 2007, the department

formed the Pennsylvania Statewide Task Force on Prior Learning Assessment to address access to postsecondary education for the large percentage of workers in the Commonwealth without a postsecondary degree. The task force included more than 30 representatives from public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Pennsylvania, the PA Workforce Investment Board, various school associations, the Department of Education and the Department of Labor and Industry. In September 2008, the task force generated Prior Learning Assessment policies and standards for Pennsylvania. These policies and standards to comply with Middle States Association Commission on Credit (MSACHE) accrediting standards and follow the “Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit” developed by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). The standards and policies were adopted and sent to all institutions in the Commonwealth with an invitation to join the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Consortium. Having a well-integrated PLA system will encourage workers without degrees to pursue postsecondary credentials at participating institutions. Time to degree can be shortened by college credits received for the work experience and acquired knowledge. Currently 54 institutions have joined the consortium; future plans include the launching of the PLA website and operational webinars to teach PLA assessment tools to institutions.

The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) is also working to transition adult basic education students to postsecondary education. One ABLE-sponsored program is the Career Gateway. The Career Gateway program aims to prepare adult students to test out of developmental courses. Many Career Gateway students are older adults who are dislocated workers and are seeking to enter a postsecondary program for the first time. To address a lack of preparedness for introductory college courses, the Career Gateway program offers transitioning classes conducted in a format modeling the postsecondary classroom: lecture, large group discussion, assignments, and a final project. The transitioning topics are those pertinent to adult students’ success: study skills, test taking strategies, stress management, time management, organizational skills, and career exploration. In addition, guest speakers provide information on high priority occupations, financial aid, and CareerLink services.<sup>17</sup>

### **Development of Quality School Leadership and Continuing Education for K-12 Educators**

A major component of the national action plan for promoting postsecondary degree attainment among non-attendees is addressing the disconnect between K-12 academic preparation and college readiness. Policies are needed to enable successful transitions from high school to college. Through the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Program and the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality, Pennsylvania has focused specifically on producing high-quality school administrators and teachers who are trained to cultivate and nurture college readiness. The PIL Program is a statewide, standards-based, continuing professional education program for school and system leaders. PIL seeks to develop the capacity of leaders to improve student achievement and focuses on administration.

The Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality has teacher quality initiatives underway to ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the demands of today’s classrooms. In fact, the state’s commitment to improving teacher quality is apparent in Pennsylvania’s new

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<sup>17</sup> Sue Conrady, et al. presentation entitled “Preparing ABLE Students for Post-Secondary Success.”

certification requirements (Chapter 49-2 of PA's regulations for certification of professional personnel) that demand strong content knowledge, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies for diverse learners, and mastery of the use of data to inform practice. Moreover, Pennsylvania's initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of in-service teachers include a network of Professional Development Schools, state-funded professional development (e.g. Governor's Institute on Data Driven Decision Making), and statewide resources for instructional coaching.

### **Increasing College Affordability**

A central national policy goal for generating college success among low-income, Black, and Latino students involves making college more affordable and reducing student debt. Despite high student enrollments, Pennsylvania's public colleges and universities have struggled with affordability. Pennsylvania has the dubious distinction of being the sixth most expensive state in the nation for higher education. Likewise, Commonwealth students graduate with the sixth highest debt load in the nation. A recent study conducted by the PA Department of Education revealed that the high costs of college tuition have created a formidable barrier to postsecondary education. Despite the wide array of existing state programs to support student success and degree attainment, the cost of a college degree in Pennsylvania impedes PA's full realization of access and success goals.

As a response to the looming barrier that high college tuitions pose to the realization of PA's success mission, Governor Rendell introduced the Pennsylvania Tuition Relief Act for consideration by the legislature. The Tuition Relief Act is the proposed bill designed to make college affordable for working families by greatly reducing or eliminating reliance on student loans. Families that make \$100,000 per year or less would be eligible to receive a grant to attend a state system university or community college, paying as little as \$1,000 annually. If fully implemented, the plan will cover an estimated 170,000 + undergraduate students at Pennsylvania's 28 state universities and community colleges.

The Tuition Relief Act directly responds to the financial concerns of non-college-goers. The "lost promise" of non-college-goers is a hard reality in Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania ranks 46th out of 50 states in the percent of workers with more than a high school diploma. This is particularly alarming considering that PA is the fourth largest provider of higher education in the nation.

The Tuition Relief Act is one of the most ambitious and far-reaching expansions of student grant aid in the country, undertaken at precisely the time when most other states are cutting funding for higher education. During the conference, the Tuition Relief Act was described in detail by Governor Rendell in his conference address and was a topic for roundtable discussions so that conference participants could analyze and discuss the Tuition Relief Act and its underlying principles.

### **Expansion of PA's Longitudinal Data System to Include All Public Postsecondary Institutions**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is actively targeting many of the pathways for college success that have been identified; however, there are many pathways yet to be uncovered. Higher education researchers have emphasized the importance of continued research into non-completers and non-attendees to expose additional factors hindering degree attainment for these populations.<sup>18</sup> Pennsylvania is well positioned to participate in research

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<sup>18</sup> Derek V. Price, et al. presentation entitled "Promise Lost—College-Qualified Students Who Don't Enroll."

to identify pathways to success through its award-winning unit-record data management system, the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS). To better understand the transitions of both students who decide not to enroll in college and those who enroll but do not successfully complete a postsecondary degree, Pennsylvania has expanded PIMS to track its students from kindergarten through their enrollment in PA postsecondary institutions. This data warehouse will allow for the longitudinal analysis of student populations and will promote better research to pinpoint the factors and academic trajectories that deter students from graduating from college.

### ***Success Policies in Action At the School- Level in Pennsylvania:***

***“We need to align what we do with what we know.”***

–Patrick Terenzini, Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior Scientist, the Center for the Study of Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University

While federal and state-level postsecondary policies and programs establish a foundation for institutional changes in higher education, determining how to increase degree success at the institutional and program levels is the key to increasing degree attainment for the large proportion of Americans who do not attend college or fail to complete their degrees. Institutional practices and success strategies were spotlighted throughout the conference. Identifying institution-level success strategies were the focal point of Patrick Terenzini’s keynote address and over 30 breakout presentations. Addressing all conference participants, Terenzini shared the findings of decades of research on how students experience college. In addition, in a complementary breakout session entitled “What Works”, researchers from the Higher Education Program at the Pennsylvania State University, Robert Reason, Wil Del Pilar, and Joan Pecht, defined the attributes of successful programs and interventions for the college success of under-prepared and low-income students.

A synthesis of these presentations provides a toolkit of successful practices for institutions aiming to increase pathways to postsecondary success for low-income and minority students. The most effective programs or interventions for promoting degree success were those that included one or more of the following:

- Good teaching—effective teaching practices and student-faculty interactions
- Responsive curricula—better alignment of K-12 curricula and developmental courses with college-level curricula *and* college curricula with career readiness and success
- Academic support structures—supplemental instruction/ tutoring/ writing centers/ intensive monitoring of student performance/ participation
- Positive significant other influences<sup>19</sup>—mentoring by peers & faculty/ advisement/ collaboration with peers and faculty
- Summer preparatory component—summer bridge/ college exposure program
- Financial assistance—both financial resources and education resources to advise students how to afford college
- Going beyond academics—emphasis on real-world activities/ cultural activities/ career development/ community service
- Pre-college focus—pathways to college success begin before college

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<sup>19</sup> The concept of “significant other influences” was first suggested by Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) who believed significant others influence a youth’s educational and occupation aspirations. Reason et al. (2009) forward this theory in their research on effective practices for the college success of low-income students.

Many Pennsylvania colleges and universities (both public and private) and higher education non-profit organizations are already incorporating these success strategies in programs targeted to postsecondary success and successful degree completion for low-income, minority, and adult students. The Governor's conference provided an opportunity for these postsecondary institutions and non-profit organizations to share their proven practices for student success.

Thirteen four-year institutions (9 private and 4 public) and five community colleges delivered presentations. In addition, representatives from GRADUATE Philadelphia, Project GRAD Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), the Life Science Career Alliance, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the School District of Philadelphia, the Chambersburg Area School District, and local business partners shared their research-based strategies for postsecondary success.

The conference divided the presentations by colleges and universities and education-based organizations into three distinct tracks: Foundations for Institutional Success, Preparing for Success in Higher Education, and Succeeding in Higher Education. Programs tracked under Foundations for Institutional Success focus on administrative-level actions to support student success. Presentations in the Preparing for Success in Higher Education and Succeeding in Higher Education tracks both featured student-level interventions; the former track featured programs targeting postsecondary success for pre-college students while the latter track consisted of presentations on programs/ practices designed for students already enrolled in college.

## **Foundations for Institutional Success**

The administrative-level efforts across Pennsylvania are varied. One area where college and school administrators are making a big impact on student success is in the development of partnerships. Several presentations in this track described successful partnerships between non-profit educational organizations (GRADUATE Philadelphia and PHEAA) and colleges, school-business partnerships (the Chambersburg Area School District and Summit Health Partnership), and a successful collaboration between a community college and representatives from the biotechnical industry (the Burlington County College Partnership with the Life Science Career Alliance and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning). In each case, educational institutions employ partnerships to accomplish different goals related to increasing postsecondary success.

GRADUATE Philadelphia partners with colleges in the Philadelphia region to help adult students who dropped out of college to re-enroll and complete their degrees. Partner colleges commit to helping students identified by GRADUATE Philadelphia by waiving application fees and making other efforts to reach out to this former student population. For example, Widener University has created three-credit transitional education courses to help transition students back into college coursework and degree tracks.

Another important administrative-level partnership discussed was the collaboration between the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) and Pennsylvania Colleges and Universities. Research has shown that financing college is a major factor for



students' determination of whether or not to stay in college.<sup>20</sup> The need for collaboration to increase student financial aid literacy was emphasized in a joint presentation made by representatives from PHEAA and the financial aid office from Millersville University. Partnering with PHEAA to obtain resources for students and their families assists institutional financial aid offices to help their students persist to degree without unmanageable debt.

Like GRADUATE Philadelphia and PHEAA's partnerships with Pennsylvania colleges and universities, the school-business and college-industry partnerships pool resources to benefit students. Partnerships with business and industry, however, have focused more on the goals of career exploration and preparation for high school and college students. The Chambersburg Area School District's partnership with Summit Health was developed to increase pre-college students' awareness of careers in the health care sector. The partnership provides the opportunity for real-life career exploration and reaches out to high school students who are college-bound as well as those who may have lost track of their educational and career goals.

Similarly, Burlington County College's collaboration with the biotechnical industry through the Life Science Career Alliance (LSCA) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning aims to better prepare college students for the careers in the biotechnical field through a certificate program jointly designed by industry-leaders and the college. Partnering with industry has many mutual benefits for higher education and industry. Through this partnership, Burlington County College received funds to develop a new cutting-edge program and improve the academic preparedness and job readiness of its students pursuing biotechnical certificates. Moreover, partnering with industry keeps the college informed of the current workforce needs in the biotech sector while the partnership has empowered the LSCA to shape and standardize the training of its incumbent workers

## **Preparing for Success in Higher Education**

The range of programs in this track includes a comprehensive multi-year program targeting low-income students, a recovery program for recent high school drop-outs, a math and science summer enrichment and preparation program for high school students of color interested in pursuing careers in engineering, a college mentoring program for Hispanic high school students, and a summer bridge program for under-prepared freshman students. In his conference presentation, Patrick Terenzini emphasized, "Pathways to success begin far earlier than entering college." While all of the programs/ interventions discussed in the preparing for success in higher education track have unique features, they each ascribe to this early action principle of college success.

### **A Pathway to College that Begins in Kindergarten**

Project GRAD views forging pathways to college for low-income students as a 13+ year process. It identifies cohorts of students in kindergarten and begins working with their teachers and schools to foster a strong academic preparation with a focus on high expectations, not only from their teachers but from their parents and communities as well. After students complete seventh grade, Project GRAD begins working with their cohorts on college access using multiple pathways such as college preparatory summer programs, forming relationships with colleges

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<sup>20</sup> Price.

and universities, support for transitioning to and through high school, and early exposure to college-level coursework and expectations. Currently, the program serves over 133,000 students in 213 schools across 12 cities and nine states, including students and schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

### **A Pathway to College Degrees in Engineering, Math and Science**

Addressing the low percentages of Black and Latino students who pursue degrees in engineering and sciences, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) has instituted a summer program for high school students. The Summer Academy for Minority Scholars (SAMS) is a six-week intensive academic experience designed to strengthen students' aptitude in math and science thus tracking them towards college success and potentially careers in engineering. Through the SAMS program, Carnegie Mellon is also aiming to increase the pool of talented African American, Hispanic, and Native American students who attend highly selective universities. CMU has closely monitored the 700-plus students who have enrolled in the SAMS program and has tracked performance on SAT tests, performance in college, and the decision to major in science or engineering. Data support that SAMS students tend to increase their SAT scores and choose majors in engineering or sciences over 75% of the time. The engineering pipeline problem is well documented, and Carnegie Mellon has addressed this problem by designing a program that has strengthened the academic profile of many ethnic minority students.

### **A Pathway to College Success for Hispanic Students**

Kings College started the McGowan Hispanic Outreach Program as a mentoring program for Hispanic high school students. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in Luzerne County and also the population with the highest dropout rates. The McGowan Hispanic Outreach Program is an intervention program designed to ensure students graduate, experience academic success in high school, and go on to get a college degree. Kings College students partner with Hispanic high school students in the community. The partners have weekly meetings with structured activities. In addition, family and community involvement and a three-week summer program with academic coaching and college preparatory courses are also built into the program.

### **A Pathway to College Success for High School Drop-outs**

Gateway to College targets youth between the ages of 16 and 21 years old who are behind in high school credits and who have been out of high school for at least six months. Students take placement tests through the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP); once admitted, courses through CCP can be used to replace remaining high school diploma requirements and to apply towards college credits in some cases. A central component of the program is personalized mentoring through the learning community. Students are admitted in cohorts of 20 and are assigned an academic coordinator who serves as a mentor and advocate and stays with them through their diploma completion.

### **A Summer Pathway to College Success for Under-prepared Students**

Aiming to support a target group of incoming first-year students who were college qualified but under-prepared and needed developmental coursework, Rosemont College initiated

a voluntary Bridge to Success Program in August 2008. The Bridge to Success program provides under-prepared students with a week of intensive academic support in reading, writing, and study skills, combined with an enriched orientation to college life that included student mentors. Preliminary data suggest that students who opted to participate in the Bridge program earned higher GPAs and were more likely to persist to the second semester than their peers who qualified for the Bridge program but chose not to participate.

## **Succeeding in Higher Education**

### **Success for Students Needing Developmental Coursework in Community Colleges**

Pennsylvania's community colleges are making great strides to restructure developmental education through course structure, classroom practices, and individualized attention. Seven of Pennsylvania's community colleges (Allegheny, Beaver, Delaware, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, and Westmoreland) are taking advantage of Achieving the Dream (AtD) funds to increase college success. AtD's national goals are to increase the numbers of community college students who successfully complete the courses they take, advance students from remedial to credit-bearing courses, have them successfully complete gatekeeper courses, enroll them continuously from one semester to the next, and ultimately earn certificates or degrees. In Pennsylvania, each participating community college has generated a unique plan to accomplish these goals.

At the conference, five of the participating community colleges described the institution-level strategies implemented at their institutions. Delaware County Community College (DCCC) has made the AtD goals central to their mission and has used institution-wide data analysis to guide the creation of new support structures and the modification of existing structures. For example, AtD at DCCC has resulted in the creation of a Director of First Year Experiences as well as an expansion of its existing Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

The Community College of Philadelphia's (CCP) approach to Achieving the Dream focuses on keeping students informed and increasing the quality of classroom experiences. In addition, CCP has adopted an elaborate early alert system to identify struggling students, notify them as soon as they begin to slip academically, and link them with the academic support they need to successfully complete their courses. Moreover, CCP has made an investment in faculty professional development, making a college-wide commitment to the notion that effective educational practices generate improved students outcomes.

Montgomery County, Northampton, and Westmoreland community colleges have addressed the AtD goals by revamping their developmental and gatekeeper courses to increase student success and lessen the time it takes for students to complete developmental credits. Specific strategies for Developmental Math success have included using a more accurate placement test; lowering class size; offering supplemental instruction; instituting common course syllabi, outcomes, and exams; and instituting intensive summer courses to help students place out of at least one developmental course. Lastly, the creation of four-credit courses blends review material with college-level content and awards college credit.

## **Success for Students Needing Developmental Coursework at the Four-Year University**

Shippensburg University created an alternative admission program for students who do not meet the minimum requirements for admission but who show promise for achieving academic success and making a contribution to the Shippensburg community. To support these provisionally admitted students and increase their retention and graduation rates, Shippensburg has implemented a comprehensive academic year support program. Their support program model “incorporates research-based best practices in developmental education and moves the university’s conditional admission program from an admission tool to a retention strategy.”

## **Increasing College Success Through Meaningful Coursework**

Researchers from the doctoral program in communications at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) have identified a deficit in critical thinking and research skills in many first-year college students. The presenters from IUP reported that students often require remediation in critical thinking and research skills just as they do in math and writing. IUP advocates intentional development of the latent critical thinking skills at the college level to better ensure student success. Incorporating a cross-curricular extended-writing exercise into first-year curricula or pre-first year bridge programs leads to greater academic success and the acquisition of college-level analytical and writing skills.

Cabrini College has made a campus wide effort to implement more service learning courses. When students learn through service learning, they often return to the classroom setting and serve as a teacher. Based on their experience implementing service learning into existing courses, Cabrini College and Northampton Community College (NCC) identified two strategies for successful implementation of service learning throughout a college/ university. The first recommendation is to have upper-level administrative support; NCC has a full-time service-learning director who coordinates service-learning courses and site placements. The second recommendation is to set up key relationships between faculty and community individuals and draw connections between community work and faculty work. This leads to faculty interest in service learning.

Washington and Jefferson College has made meaningful college experiences a central component of their strategy for increasing student success. Recognizing that enriching learning experiences often occur outside of the classroom, Washington and Jefferson encourages all students to participate in internships and study abroad experiences. The Magellan Project, a donor funded grant program, provides low-income and first-generation college students equal access to these life-changing but cost prohibitive learning opportunities.

To receive a Magellan grant, students identify how they will put their education to work. Students are encouraged to research and propose their travel experiences independently, but are provided with needed support throughout the application process. As a result, students from working class backgrounds are given an opportunity to “test their professional aspirations, gain self confidence and lifelong learning skills, and create the kind of life that helps them stand out in graduate and professional school applications and in employment situations.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Tori Haring-Smith, President of Washington and Jefferson College.

## **Increasing College Success Through Supportive Relationships**

Several programs utilize mentoring as a means for increased persistence and success for divergent groups of college students. Both Neumann and Millersville Universities have experienced the power of mentoring to small target audiences, at-risk athletes, and students of color interested in pursuing teaching careers. Neumann University has helped at-risk student athletes achieve success through the implementation of a peer-mentoring program. On a daily basis mentors provided the academically struggling student athletes with essential questions to guide their thinking and focus their studying; additionally, students met with a professor every week. Data revealed that students who participated in the mentoring program achieved higher GPAs and more completed credits when compared to at-risk students who did not participate.

Millersville University's The Color of Teaching program uses mentoring to attract high school students of color to the field of education and ensure their academic success once enrolled in college. With this program, Millersville is fostering the development of teachers. Mentoring helps the students understand the field, the need for more teachers of color, and career expectations. The program not only addresses degree success for college students but also targets the retention of students of color in the K-16 pipeline by helping to produce more teachers of color. Thus, this program shows the power of mentoring to smaller target audiences.

Bloomsburg University (BU) has acknowledged the need for effective student-faculty interactions and the positive gains students experience from meaningful interactions with faculty and peers through the creation of living and learning communities. Each of BU's ten communities consists of a group of students who share common academic interests, live together in a residence hall, participate in activities together, and enroll in a cluster of related courses. According to BU faculty members, "The program has become a forum for the exchange of ideas and information between students and faculty. The living and learning communities foster a collaborative atmosphere for faculty and students." They are an effective means for increasing persistence to degree, as learning communities have a second year persistence rate of 75.58% - 76.65%.

## **College Success for Every Institution = A Focus on Effective Learning Strategies Rather than Best Practices**

***"What an institution does is less important to student learning and development than that whatever it does has one or more of the characteristics of effective learning experiences."***

–Patrick Terenzini, Distinguished Professor of Higher Education, the Pennsylvania State University

The search for best practices is difficult because institutions differ. A program working one way in one place may work differently in another place, and there are different institutional priorities across Pennsylvania's varied colleges and universities. The menu of programs and interventions at work in Pennsylvania shows that college success programs

can be incorporated in every institutional context. Each of the educational organizations that shared their college success programs has a unique agenda for increasing student success among traditionally under-served populations. Programs differ in regard to whom they target, what supports they offer, when in the K-16 pipeline they are provided, and how they cultivate success. However, despite obvious differences, every program described has implemented research-based strategies described in the conference presentations by Patrick Terenzini and Reason et al. that have been proven to have a positive impact on postsecondary success. Providing pathways to college success is not about forcing best practices upon an existing institutional structure and culture; rather, incorporating effective learning strategies into existing programs and into the creation of new programs that meet a demonstrated need in the context of specific colleges and universities creates post-secondary success.

## **STEP 4: Working Together to Increase College Success in Pennsylvania**

***“We have tended to tilt toward a culture that is less respectful across institutions... We need a sense of common purpose. How do you define the issues facing the state so that they are everybody’s problems? We need to use every educational resource. It is not a matter of governance type. Can you make this [inter-institutional] diversity work and not let it become something that is destructive and undermining? We have gone so far into this competitive model with the virtue of pursuing your own ranking. It helps when leadership can come together and when faculty can get together and define problems that are mutual.”***

–Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

College success programs are varied and look differently at different types of institutions. When fashioning institutional responses to college success it is important to appreciate and accentuate the many different strengths across Pennsylvania’s colleges and universities. However, increasing degree success in Pennsylvania will not be fully realized if individual institutions are acting alone. The solution to increasing access and success lies in a statewide effort to offer multiple pathways to success. Thus, the fourth step to college success is cross-institutional collaboration and inter-institutional efforts to increase student success.

### ***Collaboration for Success in Pennsylvania: A Public and Private Matter***

Private colleges and universities are integral to any statewide solution to increase college success. Pennsylvania has 94 private colleges and universities, the second largest number of private colleges and private college students in the nation. In Pennsylvania, 41 % of college students are enrolled in private colleges and universities; private colleges and universities award 50 % of all bachelor’s degrees and over 60 % of all graduate degrees. Thus, the percentages of students served by private institutions in Pennsylvania are considerably larger than the national percentages where private institutions account for 36 % of degrees and public institutions grant 64%.

Preparing students for success in higher education are the shared goals of every postsecondary institution in Pennsylvania. Traditionally there has been a divide between public and private institutions, most likely because of funding and governance differences. However, allowing sector designations to obscure the many similarities among our public and private institutions will only derail efforts to achieve statewide goals of access and success.

Even the most highly selective private institutions in Pennsylvania are motivated to increase low-income and minority enrollments among qualified students and need to have effective structures in place to support these students to degree completion. Just as low income and minority students are under-represented in colleges and universities as a whole, highly talented low-income and minority students are under-represented in our most-selective private institutions. Thus, the call for increased degree success for under-served student populations applies to both public and private colleges and universities.

We have the potential to access a wealth of information and experience by tapping into the operations of private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has 25 institutions with 6-year graduation rates of 70 percent or higher, and all 25 of these institutions are private colleges or universities. While some of these completion rates can be explained by highly selective admissions policies, inputs are not the whole story. In fact, private colleges and universities are known for having more elaborate programming and academic support systems to scaffold their students' pathways to college success.

Moreover, many private colleges and universities have long-standing institutional missions to actively diversify their student populations. Successfully integrating minority student populations including low-income students, students of color, or international students - into predominantly wealthy and white campuses has required deliberate action by these private institutions. Private institutions have a collection of support programs already in place for promoting student success among diverse student populations that can serve as models for similar programs now needed across all Pennsylvania postsecondary institutions.

Additional cross-sector collaboration to uncover the effective programming at high performing private institutions is necessary to help less selective institutions increase degree success. Some private institutions presented their innovative programs at the conference;<sup>22</sup> even greater participation from private institutions in future can serve to break down existing barriers between public and private higher education in Pennsylvania.

### ***More than Inter-Library Loan—The Need for New Collaborations***

Some mixed collaborations between Pennsylvania K-12 school districts and business, community colleges and industry, four-year colleges and educational non-profit organizations were described in Step Three. Just as these partnerships have enhanced and improved the programs offered by K-12 schools, colleges, and universities, collaborations between colleges

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<sup>22</sup> For example, the Magellan Scholars program at Washington and Jefferson College; the Summer Academy for Minority Student at Carnegie Mellon University; Bridge for Success at Rosemont College; and The McGowan Hispanic Outreach Program at Kings College were highlighted as successful college success programs at the Governor's Conference.

and universities promise additional success through the pooling of resources and eliminating any unnecessary replication of services across institutions. Traditionally, postsecondary institutions have some experience with resource collaboration, but in the current economic downturn we need to be more innovative.

Articulation agreements provide one example of how collaboration between community colleges and four-year institutions can increase student success: streamlining time to degree, lowering students' overall tuition costs, and paving a more direct pathway to the four-year degree. Pennsylvania recently mandated and improved transfer and articulation agreements between community colleges and state universities. Encouraging the expansion of these types of programs is critical as the absence of articulation agreements limits the postsecondary choices and aspirations of students who begin in the two-year sector, who are disproportionately from low-income backgrounds; and who are and of color.

Another mutually beneficial type of collaboration across institutions is a partnership for curriculum enhancement and expansion. Several Pennsylvania postsecondary institutions are already taking advantage of these types of partnerships. Millersville University and Franklin and Marshall College have a partnership whereby Franklin and Marshall students are able to pursue secondary teacher certification through Millersville University's College of Education.

One of the most comprehensive inter-college collaborations is the tri-college consortium jointly established by Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges. Through the tri-college consortium Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore have capitalized on their geographical proximity to expand the range of courses, resources, student services, and extra-curricular activities they can offer to their students. This well developed and finely tuned consortium creates a veritable postsecondary utopia, where resources among the three institutions can satisfy every student need. Moreover, through the consortium these peer institutions have prioritized the educational success of students above the pursuit of a higher ranking by US News and World Report.

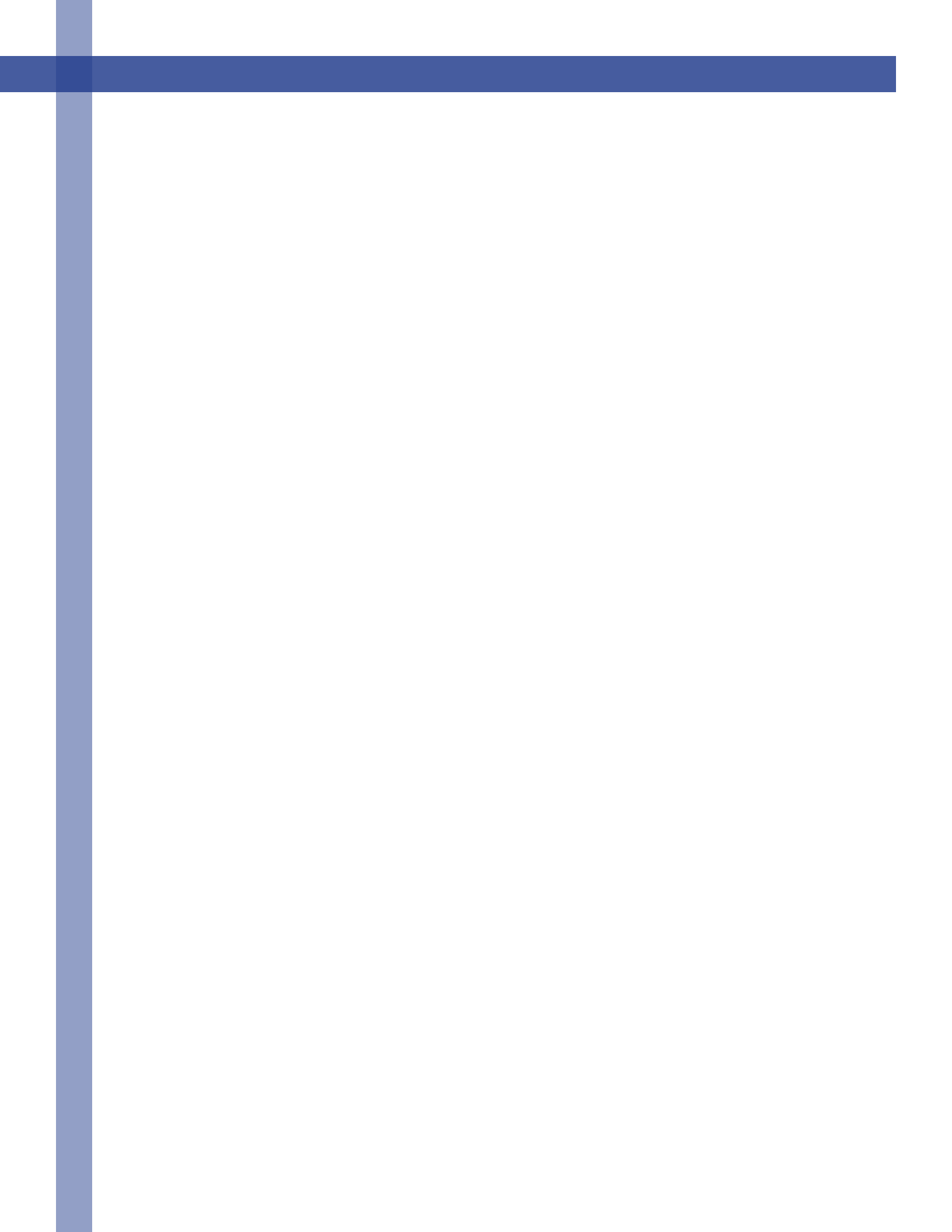
Increased collaboration among Pennsylvania colleges and universities must continue. Pooling resources will help keep costs down amidst tightening budgets. There is no limit to the ways that Pennsylvania's 130 colleges and universities might collaborate for student success. Collaborations to provide programs that low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult populations need (academic supports, financial counseling, mentoring, remediation, and childcare) will lessen the expenditures of financial and personnel resources that an individual institution would need to invest if working alone. Moreover, if the provision of these resources is a statewide effort, we can build partnerships to ensure postsecondary degree success for students across the state.

## **A Call to Action**

The need is urgent and the time is now for all of higher education to answer its call to duty and come to the service of the nation by targeting college success, especially for historically underserved populations of low-income, Black, Hispanic, and adult students. Although the



Governor's Conference was convened in Pennsylvania, the presentations and dialogue made it clear that Pennsylvania's challenges regarding postsecondary access and success have nationwide implications. Using inter-institutional diversity to develop a more responsive higher education system focusing on the success of all students will increase the percentage of U.S. workers who can participate in the new knowledge-based economy. Summing up the rich content and conversations of a three-day conference into four steps is not meant to diminish the complexities and challenges that increasing degree success poses for Pennsylvania's colleges and universities but to emphasize that steps must be taken for progress to be realized. There is no simple solution. Steady and intentional progress at the state level, within institutions and between institutions, will increase student success and will restore the public's faith in higher education as the keystone to economic success in the Keystone state.



The production of this white paper was made possible  
by a generous grant from the  
**Carnegie Corporation of New York.**

*The Pennsylvania Governor's Conference on Higher Education*  
was made possible by the generosity of the following organizations:



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