



**EMBARGOED**  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **High Expectations Plus High Support Essential for Student Success**

What's a college to do? Pressured by rising enrollments and falling budgets, community colleges also are hearing the calls for dramatic improvement in student outcomes. The calls come from federal and state governments, accreditors, business leaders and philanthropic organizations. But increasingly the rallying cries originate within the ranks of community colleges themselves.

A national report released today highlights key findings from the 2008 cohort of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (known as *CCSSE*). The report, *High Expectations and High Support*, offers data about the quality of community college students' educational experiences and describes how a number of colleges across the country are responding to the challenges.

"No one rises to low expectations," asserts Vincent Tinto of Syracuse University, a well-known expert on student retention in college. The *CCSSE* report reinforces the need for faculty members and student services staff to hold high expectations for students, while at the same time providing an array of wrap-around support services that will help to ensure that students succeed.

Community colleges typically serve an exceptionally diverse student population, and the report offers data depicting the multiple challenges confronted by many students. For example, almost two-thirds attend college part-time, 56% work more than 20 hours per week, 30% have children living with them, well over a third are first-generation college students; further, almost 30% come from families with incomes under \$20,000 annually. Still, the report insists, "These characteristics are not excuses for low performance on the part of colleges or their students. They simply reflect a reality of community colleges."

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*), which is grounded in research about effective educational practice, assesses the degree of students' engagement in education through questions about the effort students invest in their studies, the ways they interact with faculty and other students, the degree of academic challenge they experience, and the kinds of support they receive from their colleges. The 2008 Cohort comprises more than 343,000 students from 585 colleges in 48 states. The survey research project is part of the Community College Leadership Program in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.

The 2008 survey included a special focus on student financial aid, using items jointly developed with the Congressionally-appointed Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. Perhaps surprisingly, only 56% of survey respondents completed the standard application for federal financial aid. Forty-six percent of part-time students and 31% of full-time students reported receiving no financial aid of any kind. Sixteen percent were unaware of the financial aid process.

Other key findings include the following:

**Student Effort:**

- Seventy-one percent of students surveyed indicate that their college encourages them to spend significant amounts of time studying, either “quite a bit” or “very much;” however, 67% of full-time students spend 10 or fewer hours preparing for class in an average week.
- Twenty-four percent report that they always came to class prepared.

**Academic Challenge:**

- About half (49%) of survey respondents report that they often or very often worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards; 11% said they never did so.
- Twenty-nine percent of full-time students report that they have written four or fewer papers or reports of any length during the current school year.
- Sixty-eight percent indicate that their exams are relatively to extremely challenging, while 9% find them relatively to extremely easy.

**Support for Learners**

- Fewer than half (45%) of community college students report that the college provides the financial support they need to afford their education. Further, when asked about factors that would be most likely to contribute to their dropping out of classes or leaving college, the same percentage (45%) cite “lack of finances.”

**Challenges and Opportunities**

While shining a light on innovative approaches at colleges that are producing evidence of improvement in student success, the report also acknowledges critical challenges for all community colleges:

- Significant improvement requires an institution-wide commitment to a focus on data about student progress and success.
- Colleges must engineer programs for scale; the critical choices are about how to make a significant impact on the success of large numbers of students.
- Given significant resource constraints, colleges have to make tough decisions about reallocation and convincing cases about the return on investments in student success.



## CONTACTS

### *High Expectations and High Support: Essential Elements of Engagement*

#### *2008 Findings*

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