Acknowledgments

At the top of CCSSE’s list of acknowledgments are the 66,300 community college students who responded to the 2003 Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Because they took the time to tell us, we — along with their colleges — now are equipped with a greater understanding of the challenges these students bring to college with them, the ways community colleges serve them well, and the opportunities that exist to strengthen the quality of their learning experience.

Our obligation — and the expressed commitment of many of CCSSE’s member colleges — is to reciprocate by seizing those opportunities for improvement, continuously reaching for excellence in learning, teaching, and student success.

Kay M. McClennen
Director
Community College Survey of Student Engagement
Foreword
A Commitment to Improvement — Even in Challenging Times

With this report, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) presents the results of its first national administration, enabling community college leaders and members of the wider public to examine the performance of America’s largest — but probably least well-understood — higher education sector.

Critical timing. These findings come at a critical moment. With tax support for higher education slipping in all states, the central mission of the community college — full access to quality education — is in jeopardy. Under such circumstances, it is tempting for some policymakers to cut access and pass rising higher-education costs on to those remaining students who are willing and able to pay. Others may believe the inevitable, albeit equally regrettable, solution is to cut corners on quality to accommodate higher numbers of students. For community colleges — and for the nation they serve — these are unacceptable options. If we are to maintain world leadership, we need both broad participation and a first-class educational system.

Invaluable information. Access is easy to quantify. Quality is tough. Like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), created for four-year colleges and universities, CCSSE’s contents are based on the best research available about the institutional practices and student behaviors that lead to persistence and meaningful learning. This report provides the first national benchmarks of community college performance on these critical dimensions. Using these benchmarks of effective educational practice,

Unprecedented accountability. CCSSE represents an unprecedented public commitment by the nation’s community colleges to hold themselves accountable for high quality, despite burgeoning enrollments and constrained resources. CCSSE findings for individual participating institutions are accessible to the public through published reports and online interactive data-reporting tools.

Informed policymaking. CCSSE data paint a portrait of the many faces of the nation’s two-year college students and the multiple ways they choose to enact their education. This is not a simple picture, and it is easily misunderstood by those who seek easy fixes, such as minimal graduation rates or improved test scores, for postsecondary education. But the nation’s leaders must fully understand this complex picture if we are to maintain the high rates of educational attainment on which our economy and polity now depend.

Community colleges are doing the heavy lifting in keeping U.S. educational attainment rates the highest in the world. CCSSE results help keep these colleges honest through a public commitment to high standards and best practice. At the same time, they remind us all that there are many effective ways to go to college in a diverse and productive society. Both kinds of information will be needed to chart the challenging course ahead.

Peter Ewell
Chair
CCSSE National Advisory Board

A Growing Demand for Higher Education, A Growing Need for Quality

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provides a resource for assessing quality in community college education — and a tool that helps colleges improve their performance.

Some might ask, “Why bother?” For those who look at education as a commodity, community colleges do not lack customers. In fact, in recent years, we’ve seen increased enrollment, in many cases record enrollment, at our nation’s community colleges. Demand is increasing for a number of reasons.

• Access to higher education is more critical for everyone; postsecondary education has become the minimum educational requirement for holding a job that supports at least a middle-class standard of living — and for meeting the increasingly complex demands of citizenship.

• Employers responding to the changing requirements of their jobs — and their employers — turn to community colleges for ongoing training.

• Workers responding to the variable national economy rely on community colleges to prepare for career changes.

• Large numbers of traditional college-age students — the so-called “baby boom echo” — are beginning their college experience at community colleges because these institutions are accessible and affordable.

In a paradox of difficult times, the faltering economy intensifies the demand, even as it leads to reduced resources. During the economic downturn, community colleges attract students affected by recession, such as displaced workers who want to develop more marketable skills and students who can’t afford elevated tuitions at four-year public colleges.

So, why are community colleges picking this particular time to focus on assessment and improvement? Because they don’t view education as a commodity. Rather, they know that quality higher education — and lifelong learning — are necessary for individual, regional, and national economic success; for preserving families’ and our nation’s quality of life; and for ensuring the vitality of democracy in our society.

In trying to meet increased demand with reduced resources — without compromising on quality — community colleges need tools that can help them better assess their students’ needs and strengthen institutional efforts to promote retention and learning.

In addition, community colleges are accountable to the public they serve. Economic health — both regional economic viability and national economic competitiveness — depends on increasing every individual’s educational attainment. That means keeping the doors to quality higher education open to everyone — and making sure all students have the support they need to achieve their academic goals.

Community colleges endeavor to provide access and quality. CCSSE is a tool that can help them succeed.

“The Bush administration likely will make accountability a centerpiece of its plans for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act this year. It is important that educators help guide the accountability debate by focusing it on student learning. CCSSE is the one instrument that measures the learning environment and how engaged our students are.”

— George Boggs
President and CEO
American Association of Community Colleges

For more information about CCSSE and the 2003 survey, visit www.ccsse.org.
Why Student Engagement?
Community colleges have the complicated task of providing broad access to ensure that everyone has an entry point to quality higher education — and then designing effective educational experiences for a highly diverse population of students with varying goals and competing demands on their time.

Colleges adopt a variety of strategies to meet these wide-ranging needs and, like all organizations trying to accomplish complex missions, benefit from evaluating the progress toward their objectives. For community colleges, the overriding aims are to help students learn and achieve their own academic goals. Student engagement is a valuable yardstick for assessing whether — and to what extent — an institution is employing educational practices likely to produce the desired results.

Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter — the more likely they are to learn and to achieve academic goals.

Measuring student engagement provides insight into the challenges facing community colleges and their students — the great variety in students’ goals, the many demands on their time, and economics — visit www.ccsse.org.

The 2003 CCSSE Report
CCSSE’s survey, The Community College Student Report, focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors that demonstrate student engagement — and that correlate highly with student learning and retention.

CCSSE works with participating colleges to administer the survey, using quantitative and qualitative items to measure students’ level of engagement in a variety of areas. The colleges then receive their survey results, along with analysis they can use to improve their programs and services for students. All CCSSE work is grounded in research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence.

CCSSE also makes its results public. The organization’s Web site, www.ccsse.org, provides information about student engagement and community colleges as well as detailed survey results. The site provides results for the full CCSSE population, various subgroups within the population, and individual colleges. Users can create customized data searches, choosing to view data by variables including the type of institution (e.g., institutional size or location); by student characteristic (e.g., full-time or part-time students, gender, or credential/noncredential-seeking students); and by combinations of these variables.

Understanding and Using Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice
What Are Benchmark Scores?
Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related items that address key areas of student engagement. CCSSE’s five benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important in quality educational practice, and they provide useful ways to look at each college’s performance in these areas.

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

The most valuable use of benchmarks is to see an individual college’s deviation from the mean, and the standardized score provides an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark. The standardized scores make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges.

CCSSE Opposes Ranking
CCSSE opposes using its data to rank colleges. There is no single number that can adequately — or accurately — describe a college’s performance; most colleges will perform relatively well on some benchmarks and need improvement on others. Each community college’s performance should be considered in terms of its mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics. Because of differences in these areas — and variations in college resources — comparing survey results between individual institutions serves little constructive purpose and likely will be misleading. Moreover, improvement over time may provide the best gauge of a college’s efforts to enhance student learning and persistence.
How Good Is Good Enough?
The purpose of “benchmarking” is to compare performance of like institutions — and through that process, to identify opportunities for improvement and potential models of “best practice.” But CCSSE and its member colleges must not shy away from the question of whether the performance reflected in survey results is good enough, either for individual institutions or for community colleges nationally. Answering that question often requires looking at data (means and frequencies) for individual survey items associated with the benchmarks.

Thus, CCSSE presents information in two ways: (1) each benchmark, described with a standardized mean of 50, provides an overview of a particular performance area, a way to compare performance on various benchmarks within an institution, and a way to compare performance among groups of similar institutions; and (2) results for individual survey items, presented in absolute terms, are the place to see exactly what is happening and to ask the difficult question, how good is good enough?

The 2003 Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice
For each benchmark, this section provides: (1) a brief description of the benchmark, (2) the list of survey items associated with the benchmark, and (3) key findings from the 2003 survey for items related to that benchmark. In addition, we offer examples of engagement in action — relevant practices from colleges that are among the high performers on the benchmark among institutions of similar size.

Active and Collaborative Learning
Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives. The following seven survey items contribute to this benchmark.

During the current school year, how often have you:

● Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
● Made a class presentation
● Worked with other students on projects during class
● Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
● Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
● Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course
● Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Key Findings:
Active and Collaborative Learning

- 64% of respondents report that they asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions either often or very often. This leaves 36% who have engaged in these activities less frequently or not at all.
- Only 27% have often or very often made a class presentation. Nearly a third (31%) have never done so.
- Close to half (48%) often or very often worked with other students on projects during class, while 12% report never having that experience.
- Only 21% worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.

- A small percentage (7%) have tutored or taught other students.
- Just 20% have at least occasionally participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course.
- 52% often or very often discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Engagement in Action
The Houston (TX) Community College System’s (HCSS) popular service learning program engages students academically and socially. Through partnerships that two HCSS-Southwest instructors developed with local nonprofit agencies, students have clocked more than 20,000 hours of service with more than 125 programs over the past five years. Service learning helps students hone intellectual and social skills, gain experience in real work environments, and develop a commitment to addressing social problems facing the community.

The Math Express to Success (MES) program at Phoenix College (AZ) compresses three algebra courses into a single semester. Cohorts of 15 to 20 students attend class for three hours a day and engage in three- to four-person teams for practice, tutoring, and peer teaching.

For more information about CCSSE and the 2003 survey, visit www.ccsse.org.
### Student Effort

Students’ behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will attain their educational goals. “Time on task” is a key variable, and there are a variety of settings and means through which students may apply themselves to the learning process. Eight survey items that indicate how frequently students engage in a number of activities important to their learning and success are associated with this benchmark. They are:

- During the current school year, how often have you:
  - Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in (61% of respondents indicate that they often or very often prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, though almost a fifth (19%) report that they never did so)
  - Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources, while 11% never did so.
  - Just 12% of full-time students estimate spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class.
  - Sixty-seven percent of full-time students spend 10 or fewer hours preparing for class. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents indicate that they come to class unprepared at least some of the time, while just over one-quarter (27%) indicate that they never do so.
  - Less than one-quarter (23%) of surveyed students participate sometimes or often in tutoring, while 45% do so rarely or never. Use of skill labs by 38% of students may be an encouraging result, and the use is more common among students who are academically underprepared.

### Engagement in Action

Faculty and students at Pierce College (WA) jointly developed ED 110: Student Success, an innovative first-year seminar. The three-credit-hour course explores learning strategies and identifies learning styles. It also connects students early in their academic experience to critical college resources — writing and math centers, peer tutoring, disability support services, and others — that foster student success.

E.H. LaGuardia Community College (NY) engages students in collaborative projects — such as student-led seminars, role-playing activities, problem-based learning assignments, and interdisciplinary research — that promote shared responsibility for learning. The college also has an electronic portfolio project in which students select examples of their academic work to present, reflect upon, and self-assess on their own Web sites.

### Key Findings: Student Effort

- More than half (51%) of respondents indicate that they often or very often prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, though almost a fifth (19%) report that they never did so.
- 60% of respondents report that they often or very often worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources, while 11% never did so.
- Just 12% of full-time students estimate spending 21 or more hours per week preparing for class.
- Sixty-seven percent of full-time students spend 10 or fewer hours preparing for class. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents indicate that they come to class unprepared at least some of the time, while just over one-quarter (27%) indicate that they never do so.
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### Key Findings: Academic Challenge

- During the current school year, how often have you:
  - Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations.
  - Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory.
  - Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways.
  - Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods.
  - Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.
  - Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill.

### Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Ten survey items address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. They are:

- During the current school year, how often have you:
  - Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations.
  - Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory.
  - Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways.
  - Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods.
  - Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.
  - Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill.

### Engagement in Action

Cuyahoga Community College (OH) has identified core competencies all students are expected to meet prior to graduation. The college also has developed an inventory of how each course contributes to these competencies.

Northwest Vista College (TX) faculty developed core student-learning outcomes called ASK (Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge). These outcomes guide curriculum development in areas such as critical and creative thinking, writing and speaking, and working with others.

The history faculty team, for example, uses primary source analysis, writing assignments, and multiple modes of assessment to engage students in critical thinking.
Students' Views of Academic and Support Services

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Students' Views of Academic and Support Services

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  - Academic advising/planning

- **Most Satisfied With**
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  - Financial aid
  - Academic advising/planning

**Engagement in Action**

To improve discussion between students and their assigned faculty advisors, Tallahassee Community College (FL) developed an interactive online advising system that combines resources for planning and record-keeping with an online tool to input and modify every student's individual plan each semester. E.H. LaGuardia Community College (NY) has an "eTransfer" program through which online groups of students, peer mentors, faculty, and counselors explore career development and the transfer process.

**Support for Learners**

- Students report that the college helps them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Students who received academic advising/planning services report a positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus.
- Students feel more satisfied with the college's financial aid.
- Students engaged in academic advising and career planning feel more satisfied with the college's financial aid.
- Students who received academic advising/planning services report a higher level of satisfaction with the college's financial aid.

**Key Findings: Support for Learners**

- While 25% of students have often or very often talked with an advisor or instructor about career plans, 31% say they have never done so.
- Only 15% of students report having often or very often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class, and 47% have never engaged with faculty in that way.
- Only 8% of students say that they have often or very often worked with instructors on activities outside of class.
- 57% state that they often or very often received prompt feedback from instructors on their performance, which is known as an important factor in student learning and retention. And these community college students generally give faculty members quite positive ratings regarding their availability and helpfulness.

**Financial Aid**

- Only 15% of students report having often or very often worked with instructors on activities outside of class.
- 57% often or very often discussed ideas from their readings or classes with instructors outside of class.
- 57% state that they often or very often received prompt feedback from instructors on their performance, which is known as an important factor in student learning and retention.

**Key Findings: Student-Faculty Interaction**

- A third of students (33%) say they have never used e-mail to communicate with an instructor.
- Close to one-third (31%), however, have used e-mail for that purpose either often or very often.

**Key Findings: Support for Learners**

- While students attribute relatively high importance to academic advising and career counseling, one-third to one-half of students rarely or never take advantage of those services.
- Highest levels of dissatisfaction are expressed with (1) career counseling, (2) job placement assistance, (3) financial aid advising, and (4) transfer credit assistance.
- While 70% of students indicate that their college provides the support they need to succeed at the college either “quite a bit” or “very much,” a smaller percentage — 42% — report that the college provides the financial support they need to afford their education.
- Less than one-quarter (23%) report that the college helps them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)

**2003 Benchmarks**

**Students Who Discussed Ideas with Instructors Outside of Class**

- 15% often or very often
- 47% never

**Students Who Received Prompt Feedback from Instructors**

- 57% often or very often
- 47% never

Engaging Community Colleges: National Benchmarks of Quality

For more information about CCSSE and the 2003 survey, visit www.ccsse.org.
Benchmarking Progress: High-Performing Colleges

Affirming the spirit of benchmarking, throughout this report CCSSE offers examples of promising educational practices at colleges that demonstrate outstanding performance on particular benchmarks. These examples demonstrate creative thinking and a commitment to intentionally engaging strategies that colleges of all sizes can use to improve student success and persistence on their campuses.

Additional strategies for engagement, often cutting across more than one benchmark area, are reflected in the following examples:

Palo Alto College (TX) is a writing-intensive campus where papers are required in most classes. To promote success with the college’s rigorous curriculum, many professors schedule appointments with each student to allow one-on-one interaction. Students who have missed several classes also are referred to appropriate student services through an Early Alert program. Palo Alto College also has a “mastery of learning” program in reading, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and math, in which students navigate courses at their own pace. Results show improved course completion and progression using this approach.

Skagit Valley College (WA) has learning communities — thematic, integrative courses — that encourage students to engage in subjects more fully and to see educational practices at colleges that demonstrate outstanding performance on particular benchmarks. These examples demonstrate creative thinking and a commitment to intentionally engaging strategies that colleges of all sizes can use to improve student success and persistence on their campuses.

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The National Picture: Key Issues and Challenges

Just as no single number can adequately — or accurately — describe a single college’s performance, no single view of overall results can describe the performance of community colleges across the country. Understanding the national picture requires viewing it from a variety of angles; in this section, therefore, we offer several perspectives on survey results and the challenges facing community colleges.

With a close look at the data, interesting trends and patterns emerge. While the survey results confirm some long-held beliefs, they also reveal unexpected information: similarities where we expected differences, challenges that are greater than anticipated, and happily, some pleasant surprises. The findings also highlight several issues that warrant further study and monitoring.

For specific findings, including means and frequencies for individual survey items, sorted by student-level or institution-level variables, visit www.ccsse.org.

Capture Time Is Critical

“Capture time” — the time colleges have to engage students — is limited because students have multiple demands on their time and spend limited time on campus. CCSSE 2003 data show that overall, students’ engagement in out-of-class activities is low; 87% of students do not participate in college-sponsored extracurricular activities, and students’ interactions with faculty and with one another outside the structured classroom experience are scant.

Variables that magnify the importance of focusing on available capture time are enrollment status (part-time versus full-time enrollment) and the time of day students attend classes.

Enrollment Status

Across all benchmarks, differences between full-time and part-time students indicate that part-time students are significantly less engaged in their educational experience. There are many potential explanations for this finding, most obviously the multiple commitments to work and family generally observed among part-time students. Even if colleges can identify the cause, however, the problem merits attention: Part-time students represent about 47% of the student body but are significantly less engaged in their educational experience.

Promising Findings

Despite results that show relatively low levels of engagement of part-time students, those individuals still provide quite favorable ratings of instructors’ availability and helpfulness. They indicate that they receive prompt feedback from instructors — a key factor in student retention and success — just as often as do full-time students. They also are less likely to come to class unprepared than are full-time students.

Potential Challenges

The 2003 survey results suggest that part-time students miss out on some of the benefits of interaction with other students:

- 14% of part-time students (versus 7% of full-time students) never worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- 47% of part-time students (versus 31% of full-time students) never worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- Only 36% of part-time students (versus 47% of full-time students) often or very often have conversations with students of a different race/ethnicity.

Top Performers

The following colleges, presented in alphabetical order within their size categories, were among the top performers on three or more benchmarks in 2003.

Extra-Large Colleges (15,000 or more students)

Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute (NM)

Cuyahoga Community College (OH)

Houston Community College System (TX)

Mt. San Antonio College (CA)

North Harris Montgomery Community College District (TX)

Large Colleges (8,000–14,999 students)

Douglas College (BC, CAN)

F.H. LaGuardia Community College (NY)

Oakland Community College (IL)

Medium Colleges (4,500–7,999 students)

Mountain View College (TX)

Northwest Vista College (TX)

Palo Alto College (TX)

Pierce College (WA)

Skagit Valley College (WA)

Small Colleges (4,499 or fewer students)

Cascadia Community College (WA)

Louisiana Delta Community College (LA)

New Hampshire Community and Technical College – Berlin (NH)
Part-time students also use technology less often to interact with others. More than four in 10 part-time students (43%, versus 35% of full-time students) never used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment.

Finally, part-time students report significantly less interaction with instructors and advisors than do their full-time counterparts. Only 42% of part-time students (versus 52% of full-time students) report discussing grades or assignments often or very often with an instructor. More than half (51%) of part-time students (versus 39% of full-time students) never discussed ideas from readings or classes with an instructor outside of class.

Time of Day Classes Are Attended — and Taught
The challenges community colleges confront are further reflected in comparisons analyzing engagement of students who attend day versus evening classes. Evening classes often are populated predominantly by part-time students, but they also are taught more frequently by adjunct faculty. For most colleges, the proportion of course sections taught by adjunct faculty is both large and increasing. So as colleges review these survey results, they may consider the possibility that they face challenges engaging part-time faculty as well as part-time students.

Student Persistence Remains a Challenge
For community colleges nationally, three benchmarks address practices that are critically important in student retention: the extent to which students are engaged in active and collaborative learning, the degree of student-faculty interaction, and the college’s support for learners. In addition to findings previously discussed, the following results suggest key opportunities for improvement.

Challenging Findings
- Only 23% of students surveyed indicate that they have taken an orientation or college success course or program.
- 34% of students report that they rarely or never use academic advising/planning services.
- Apart from transfer to a four-year college or university, a lack of finances is by far the most often-cited issue when students are asked to identify issues that would cause them to withdraw from class or from the college (46% indicate money problems as a very likely or likely cause).
- 5% have no current plans to return to the college (a response that is different from saying that they will not accomplish their goals and not return for that reason). Seven percent indicate that they have accomplished their goals and will not be returning, and 9% are “uncertain.”

Reflections on Results
Many of these findings may be attributed, of course, to the obvious fact that part-time students spend less time on campus than their counterparts, thus decreasing the college’s opportunity to engage them. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to promote student-faculty interaction with a group that essentially disappears from campus when class is over, but problems with engaging part-time students extend beyond this phenomenon. Why, for example, do part-time students report significantly less experience with active and collaborative learning than their full-time peers?

Because vital capture time is in short supply, engaging community college students happens by design, not by accident. Thus, community colleges might gain significant ground in retention and student learning by escalating their efforts to create intentional, engaging experiences — classroom activities, course requirements and assignments, and assessments — that get students actively involved in the learning process. In the same way, colleges can design the educational experience so that student and academic services are provided at times and places amenable to students’ schedules — even integrated with classroom activities so participation is virtually inescapable.
developmental education, study skills courses, and college orientation; to frequently use an array of services they use. Finally, the credential-seeking students identify stronger educational outcomes as a result of their experience in the college.

Female students indicate generally lower aspirations than male students — a finding that stands in contrast to other results. For example, female students report earning better grades than male students (71% report a B or better grade average, compared to 66% of men). Women come to class unprepared significantly less often than men (13% of women report coming to class unprepared often or very often, compared to 20% of men). And 53% of women, compared to 42% of men, report that they often or very often work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards.

Goals for first-generation students generally are more job- and career-related and less focused on academic attainment. These students are more likely to identify completion of a certificate program as a primary educational goal. They are significantly less likely than non-first-generation students to set a goal of transferring to a four-year college or university. (Only 38% of first-generation students aspire to transfer, compared with 52% of their non-first-generation peers.)

High-risk students are significantly less likely than low-risk students to set a goal of transferring to a four-year college or university: (40% of high-risk students aspire to transfer, compared to 60% of their low-risk peers.)

Promising Findings

As a group, African American, Hispanic, and Native American students state higher aspirations than their white classmates do in regard to both attainment of an associate degree (60% of students of color versus 58% of their white classmates) and transfer to a four-year institution (57% of students of color versus 43% of their white classmates). Clearly, the task at hand is to convert these aspirations into reality for much larger numbers of students of color.

Promising Results for Students of Color

The benchmark scores show a promising pattern for students of color. Taken as a group, African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are more engaged than their fellow students who are white. Though the differences are fairly small, they are consistent, and they suggest that students of color are exerting relatively more effort while experiencing greater academic challenge. They also are reporting higher levels of support for learners at their colleges.

Promising Findings

In a comparison of white/non-Hispanic students with non-Asian minorities (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans), the data show encouraging patterns:

- Overall, the students of color report slightly higher levels of engagement in the classroom, in interaction with faculty members, and in serious conversations with students of a difference race or ethnicity than their own.

- Students of color give their colleges significantly higher ratings for providing academic, social, and financial support to help them succeed. They also give similarly high ratings for relationships with students, instructors, and administrators on campus.

- In general, more minority students report using key academic and student services (e.g., academic advising/planning, career counseling, financial aid advising, tutoring, skill labs) than do white students. They also rate the whole range of support services as significantly more important than do white students; and finally, students of color report generally higher levels of satisfaction with the services they use.

- Minority students also recognize the challenges that they often bring to college with them, indicating a higher likelihood that full-time jobs, caring for children at home; being financially independent (i.e., students who have not earned a high school diploma and/or have participated or plan to participate in developmental/remedial education); being a single parent; being financially independent (i.e., students who rely on their own income or savings as a major source for college costs and indicate that parents and spouses/significant others are not sources of income for that purpose); caring for children at home; working more than 30 hours per week; being a first-generation college student,

Closing the Gaps: A Look at High-Risk Students

CCSSE is committed to helping colleges use data in their efforts to close critical gaps in educational attainment. Toward that end, CCSSE has identified, and is tracking data for, high-risk students. These students are disproportionately African American, Hispanic, and female. Students are considered high risk if they exhibit several factors that are shown to jeopardize undergraduates’ attainment of their educational goals. Community college students generally are three to four times more likely to reflect those factors than are their counterparts in four-year colleges and universities.*

The following risk factors are reflected in the CCSSE survey:

- being academically underprepared (i.e., students who have not earned a high school diploma and/or have participated or plan to participate in developmental/remedial education);
- being a single parent;
- being financially independent (i.e., students who rely on their own income or savings as a major source for college costs and indicate that parents and spouses/significant others are not sources of income for that purpose);
- caring for children at home;
- working more than 30 hours per week;
- being a first-generation college student;

"The CCSSE Web site is a formidable resource, and with it, we are well on our way to creating a ‘culture of evidence’ about the effectiveness of teaching and learning that can guide instructors, administrators, and researchers who want to make a difference."

— Terry O’Bannon
Director, Community College Leadership Program, Walden University
President Emeritus, League for Innovation in the Community College

*Educational Testing Service,
The American Community College Forum 100, 2000.

Reflections on Results

Aspirations precede success, so for many community college students, academic goal-setting and planning are important undertakings — tasks so important that they can determine whether particular students persist until they reach their academic goals.

Community college students juggle work, family, and budgets; so they have multiple competing priorities for spending their time and money. It is critical that community colleges help them chart a visible course, establish meaningful mile-markers, and outline their processes. That process will equip students with compelling reasons to persist — to return to class next Monday, next January, next school year.

Clearly, community college students have multiple goals — a fact that exacerbates the challenge of creating appropriate accountability for these diverse institutions. On the other hand, we must acknowledge the substantial and unacceptable gaps that limit student success: the gap between the goals students state for themselves (as indicated through CCSSE data and other research) and the educational missions they actually attain; the gap between the goals they may initially set and the higher achievements of which they often are capable; and the attainment gaps between white and Hispanic and their classmates — students of color and the less affluent.
being a part-time student; and
identifying the cost of attending college as a significant issue.

Each year, CCSSE analyzes student responses on the risk factors and creates three groups of student survey respondents: low-risk students, who exhibit zero or one of the risk factors; moderate-risk students, who exhibit two to four risk factors; and high-risk students, who exhibit five or more risk factors. In 2003, 17% of CCSSE respondents were high-risk students, about two-thirds (66%) were moderate-risk students, and only 17% fell into the low-risk category. Findings for high-risk students in 2003 are consistent with 2002 results. They show that community colleges are offering services designed to address issues related to risk and that students are using and benefiting from these services. Continuing support for high-risk students is essential for community and technical colleges, as success with these students is among the most significant contributions they can make to their communities and states.

Findings for High-Risk Students

Educational goals. High-risk students are less likely to set transferring to a four-year institution as a primary goal — 48% of high-risk students versus 60% of low-risk students have that goal. High-risk students are more likely to aim for completion of an associate degree (65% of high-risk students versus 54% of low-risk students).

Effort. High-risk students appear to be exerting significant effort to succeed. This finding is not surprising because they are overcoming significant challenges to attend college. High-risk students are much less likely to come to class unprepared (one-third say they never come unprepared as opposed to 20% of low-risk students). They also are more likely to ask questions and participate in class discussions and are more likely to prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in. They devote as much time to studying as do their lower-risk classmates, despite more demanding commitments outside of school (78% of the high-risk group work more than 30 hours per week compared to 7% of the low-risk group; 60% spend more than 20 hours per week caring for dependents compared to 8% of low-risk students).

Campus services. High-risk students also are taking advantage of services offered by their colleges. They are more likely to give high ratings to the importance of tutoring, skill labs, financial aid advising, academic advising/planning, and career counseling. Moreover, the more risk factors students face, the more likely they are to participate in study-skills classes, college orientation courses, and success courses. However, high-risk students’ satisfaction with these services, in absolute terms, is lukewarm. It is possible that high-risk students, who are predominantly part-time students, may find it difficult to take advantage of services offered primarily during traditional business hours.

Overview of 2003 Survey Respondents

In spring 2003, 65,300 students responded to the CCSSE survey, which is administered during class sessions at CCSSE member colleges. An overview of the participating colleges and their students is provided below. Details about the member colleges, student respondents, and the survey sampling and administration process are available at www.ccsse.org.

CCSSE’s more than 65,000 respondents in 2003 comprise about 1.2% of the 5.6 million credit students in U.S. public community colleges. These students are from 93 community and technical colleges — nearly 8% of all public community colleges in the United States — in 31 states. (One participating college is in Canada.)

Of the 93 participating colleges, 46 are classified as small (4,499 or fewer students), 21 as medium (4,500−7,999 students), 13 as large (8,000−14,999 students), and 13 as extra large (15,000 or more students).

Colleges reported their locations as 47% urban, 27% suburban, and 26% rural. IPEDS 2002 data indicate that among all U.S. community colleges, 40% are urban, 24% are suburban, and 36% are rural.

Students who responded to the survey generally reflect the underlying student population of the participating colleges in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Part-time students, however, were underrepresented in the CCSSE sample because of the survey’s sampling technique and in-class administration process. To address this discrepancy, results are weighted by part-time and full-time status to reflect institutions’ actual proportions of part- and full-time students.

Nearly 60% of survey respondents were female, and about 40% were male. These figures are similar to the national community college student ratio, which is 57% female and 43% male. (NCES, 2002)

With respect to race/ethnicity, 2003 CCSSE respondents and the national community college population may be compared as follows: (NCES, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>CCSSE Respondents*</th>
<th>National Percentages*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latin</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages do not add to 100% because of respondents indicating “other.”

Reflections on Results

These promising findings for students of color and students at risk stand in marked contrast to other facts of life in American higher education. National statistics document disturbing and stubborn realities: African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, along with low-income students, still are underrepresented in terms of college participation, and they are less likely to persist, graduate, and transfer than are their white peers. As promising as the CCSSE results appear to be, these gaps tell a critical story.

In the CCSSE results, we are seeing, in part, the significant additional effort that is the mark of minority students and “high-risk” students who are successful in community colleges. But CCSSE also is surveying a sample of students who already have cleared a range of often-daunting obstacles, such as financial aid applications and decisions, the registration process, and in most cases, their first semester of college. Colleges that do careful cohort tracking generally note that when community colleges lose students, they lose them early. All of these findings together illustrate the critical importance of connecting with students from the moment of their earliest encounter with the college. In other words: Engage early. Engage often.