

MCCS STRATEGIC PLAN



2021-2022

Overview

The mission of the Maine Community College System (MCCS) is to create an educated, skilled and adaptable labor force that is responsive to the changing needs of the Maine economy. The need for Maine’s community colleges to carry out this critical mission has never been greater as the state’s economy and workforce face unprecedented challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The state’s seven community colleges are uniquely positioned to address these challenges. Over the past two decades, their technical and occupation programs, low cost, and statewide reach have made it possible for many more Maine people to access higher education and gain the skills they and our state need to build a more prosperous future. As Maine looks to emerge from the pandemic, the colleges will—out of both necessity and ability--play a central role in reviving Maine industries and relaunching the economy. They will do so by continuing their intense focus on the workforce needs of Maine employers and by expanding educational and training opportunities to individuals across Maine. The need is clear:

- College going and completion rates lag those in the rest of New England. This is especially true for those from low-income and marginalized groups who have for too long faced barriers to higher education and skills training. As a result, not enough Maine people have the credentials and skills the state’s economy needs to grow and sustain good jobs at good wages.
- The state’s population, like so much of the Northeast’s, is aging, making it more important than ever that young people are prepared to take their place in an economy that continues to undergo rapid technological change.

Faced with these realities, Maine’s community colleges continue to be focused on three fundamental priorities:

- 1. Get them in: access and attraction**
- 2. Get them through: student success**
- 3. Keep them connected: workforce development and lifelong learning**

To achieve meaningful progress in each of these areas, MCCS commits to identifying and reducing barriers to access, engagement, and completion for all learners and to fostering inclusive environments that respect and value diversity of thought, perspective, and experience. This focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion is central to the MCCS mission of addressing both the education, career, and technical needs of all Maine citizens and the workforce needs of the state’s employers and to the critical role our colleges play in supporting a just, equitable, and civil society.

1 Get them in: access and attraction

As Maine's population ages, the state faces a lack of skilled workers to fuel the state's economy.

- While the number of Maine high school graduates continues to decline (down 18% in the last 12 years)¹, only 62% of Maine students enroll directly in college after graduating from high school²;
- Approximately 130,000 Mainers have earned some college credit but have not completed a certificate or degree;³ and
- Thousands of adult workers remain out of the labor force because they lack the personal qualities and technical skills to qualify for high-demand jobs.⁴

Maine's community colleges are uniquely positioned to help many more Maine people gain the skills and education they need.

- The seven colleges and their off-campus centers are within 25 miles of 94% of Maine's population;
- The colleges offer the lowest tuition and fees in New England, and nearly half of all degree-seeking students (both full- and part-time) receive grant aid that covers the cost of tuition and fees;
- Over 75% of the programs offered by Maine's community colleges are the only ones of their kind in the state; and
- As the COVID pandemic has made clear, the colleges have the capacity to be innovative and flexible in their programming, scheduling, and delivery models in order to meet the immediate and long-term needs of both students and employers.

¹ <https://knocking.wiche.edu/state-profiles/>

² <https://mitchellinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014MaineCollegeGoing.pdf>

³ Lumina Foundation, A Stronger Nation: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#nation> and [Kaiser Family Foundation, State Indicator, Population Distribution by Age](#) 2019

⁴ <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/07/01/commentary-retooling-maines-displaced-workers/>

#1 Get them in: Access and Attraction	
Goal: Increase the number of individuals served by Maine’s community colleges	
Objective	Strategies
Increase the percent of recent Maine high school graduates who enroll in a Maine community college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain the statewide public awareness campaign and further develop messaging and attraction efforts targeted to recent Maine high school graduates and their influencers. • Strengthen pathways and partnerships with Career and Technical Education Centers (CTEs). • Strengthen <i>Embark: Support for the College Journey</i>. • Align secondary and post-secondary programs of study through guided pathways. • Increase strategic outreach to and recruitment of dual and concurrent students with a focus on those least likely to pursue a post-secondary credential.
Increase the number of adults served by MCCA through both certificate and degree programs and shorter-term workforce training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support & incentivize new delivery models to meet needs of adult learners. • Support & incentivize pathways from and between non-credit to credit offerings. • Support & incentivize badging/micro-credentialing. • Support expanded implementation and use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). • Further develop public awareness messaging and attraction efforts targeted to adults. • Strengthen partnerships between MCCA and Adult Education, MDOL, MDOE, and employers.
Identify and attract in greater number individuals from underrepresented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support & incentivize college initiatives to expand educational access to targeted groups within their local communities

Access and Attraction Foundational Supports			
Finance	Information Technology	Data & Institutional Research	Professional Development
<p>Secure funding for operational costs and needed capital investments so that programs and facilities meet both existing and emerging needs of students and employers</p> <p>Keep MCCS affordable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tuition and fees remain lowest in New England - At least half of full-time MCCS students continue to receive grant aid that covers tuition/fees. 	<p>Through the work of the systemwide Security Advisory Group, implement a framework to support continuous improvement of information systems and data security.</p> <p>Continue to identify, implement and support solutions for the standardization and integration of college and system information systems that enhance the quality of service delivery, leverage economies of scale, standardize data and workflow, improve the ease and accuracy of data reporting, and enhance training in the operation and management of these systems. In 2021, the focus of this work will be on master data management and full implementation of BrightSpace (LMS), CourseMerchant, and Canusia.</p>	<p>Establish baseline data in order to track progress of college initiatives to expand educational access.</p> <p>Establish system for tracking and reporting dual and concurrent enrollment outcomes and ROI.</p> <p>Track outcomes of Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduates (enrollment of CTE students; alignment of CTE program and college major; success of CTE students).</p> <p>Determine key characteristics of 38% of Maine high school graduates who do not currently enroll immediately in college and the barriers they face in accessing higher education.</p>	<p>Support systemwide efforts to advance innovative approaches to attraction and retention, student success, equity and diversity, and lifelong learning through the Innovation Fund, professional development opportunities, and other means.</p>

#2 Get them through: student success

In order to address more fully the state's workforce challenges and help more Mainers attain a credential of value, efforts to increase access (to "get them in") must be supported by a sustained focus on student success ("get them through").

Our colleges' partnerships with the national Achieving the Dream network, Complete College America, the Lumina Foundation, and the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin have supported faculty and staff across the System in developing effective pedagogy and implementing and sharing evidence-based, student centered strategies that are designed to assist more of our students in persisting toward their educational goals.

The need for continued innovation is great:

- In fall 2014, 43% of first-time MCCS students enrolled in a remedial math course. Research tells us that these students face significant challenges. Nationwide, only a third of those who take remedial math pass, and less than 25% of remedial students at community colleges earn a certificate or degree within eight years of enrollment.⁵ The work our colleges have done over the past several years to align the math curriculum with students' programs of study offers an impressive example of how effective evidence-based practices can be in improving student outcomes. With the introduction of math pathways, the percentage of MCCS students who complete a college math course by the end of their first year has risen from 39% for the fall cohort of 2014 to 47% for the cohort entering in 2019. At SMCC, the first college to fully implement math pathways, the results are even more striking, rising from 34% for the fall 2014 cohort to 53% for the 2019 fall cohort.
- After modest gains in fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates beginning with the fall 2012 cohort and continuing through the fall 2015 cohort, the retention rate for the three most recent cohorts (fall 2017 through fall 2019) have declined several percentage points, from 76% to 73% (fall-to-spring) and from 57% to 54% (fall-to-fall). This can be partly attributed to low unemployment rates, causing more students to step away from education in favor of employment, but it is a decline that requires continued attention and strategies that are targeted to the specific needs of various student populations, among them adult learners, part-time students, and under-represented groups.

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/opinion/sunday/cuny-ending-the-curse-of-remedial-math.html>

**#2 Get them through:
Student Success**

Goal: Increase student success rate to 57% for fall 2018 cohort and 59% for fall 2019 cohort

Student success rate: percent of students in an entering fall cohort who graduate, are still enrolled, or have transferred at 150% time to completion. Includes degree-/certificate-seeking students who entered the college as first-time or transfer in students, enrolled full- or part-time.

Objectives	Strategies
Increase MCCS fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce reliance on remediation; increase percent of students who are placed in college math and college English upon enrollment in a program of study. • Collaborate with secondary schools on the expansion of math pathways. • Support and incentivize initiatives that focus on the specific needs and challenges facing learners in targeted underrepresented groups • Foster and sustain a Systemwide culture that respects and values diversity of thought, perspective, and experience and where each individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion.
Increase MCCS credential completion rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support colleges in the implementation of their strategic work plans. • Support colleges in the implementation of a holistic student support infrastructure. • Fully implement math pathways systemwide. • Pilot guided pathways. • Develop a targeted response to address the specific challenges that adults with some credit but no degree face in completing a credential of value.
Increase the number of MCCS students who transfer on to 4-year programs of study, mindful that receiving institutions determine access and affordability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen existing pathways and develop new ones between MCCS and UMS that decrease cost of attendance and time to completion (block transfer, reverse transfer, meta-majors, connected pathways). • Strengthen tracking and reporting of transfer activity between MCCS and UMS.

Student Success Foundational Supports			
Finance	IT	Data & Institutional Research	Professional Development
<p>Secure funding for operational costs and needed capital investments so that programs and facilities meet both existing and emerging needs of students and employers</p> <p>Keep MCCS affordable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MCCS tuition and fees remain lowest in New England At least half of full-time MCCS students continue to receive grant aid that covers tuition and fees. <p>Give special consideration to college Innovation Grants and Bring College to ME projects that focus on serving underrepresented groups of learners.</p>	<p>Support IR in strengthening Systemwide capacity to track and analyze progress of a diverse population of learners and to present, communicate and make data more widely available.</p> <p>Continue to identify, implement and support solutions for the standardization and integration of college and system information systems that enhance the quality of service delivery, leverage economies of scale, standardize data and workflow, improve the ease and accuracy of data reporting, and enhance training in the operation and management of these systems. In 2021, the focus of this work will be on master data management and full implementation of BrightSpace (LMS), CourseMerchant, and Canvas.</p>	<p>Strengthen Systemwide capacity to track and analyze progress of a diverse population of learners and to present, communicate, and make data more widely available.</p> <p>Support colleges in conducting the Community College Survey of Student Engagement in spring 2022 and implementing their plans to address any identified weaknesses (CCSSE to be conducted every 3 years).</p> <p>Develop a data-sharing agreement with UMS to support transfer</p> <p>Assist IT in master data management initiative</p>	<p>Support high-impact practices in teaching, learning, and advising that incorporate, whenever possible, a focus on equity.</p>

#3 Keep them connected: lifelong learning and workforce development

Reviving Maine industries and relaunching the economy in a post-pandemic world, will require the expansion of education and training opportunities that only the state's community colleges can provide.

Even before the pandemic, large numbers of Maine adults had left the labor force or been left behind in low-wage employment. In fact, only 63% of the state's population 16 and over was in the labor force in 2018,⁶ and tens of thousands of unskilled workers were trapped in minimum wage jobs. Too many Maine adults, lacking a credential of value, have been clustered at the bottom of the wage scale and are significantly more likely to be unemployed.

At the same time, those Mainers who are currently employed in mid-level and skilled jobs are not immune from the workplace challenges posed by rapid innovations in technology, changes in consumer demand, foreign competition, and the dramatic, long-term economic upheaval brought about by COVID. These forces will continue to result in rapidly changing workforce needs across the state, and will require a realignment of skills and additional training for many already in the workforce. By one pre-COVID estimate, as many as a third of American workers will need to switch occupations by 2023 because of rapid automation,⁷ and the pandemic is likely to accelerate this trend.

In response to these challenges, MCCS is building a new model of workforce training that will serve individuals along the employment continuum and offer a variety of educational pathways that lead in a logical, step-wise fashion from short-term training to post-secondary credentials. The result: an innovative, demand driven workforce development system that partners with and is responsive to Maine's established and evolving industry sectors and that provides Maine people with ready access to training and education.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ McKinsey and Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce>, August 2019

#3 Keep them connected: Lifelong learning & workforce development	
Goal: Strengthen alignment of MCCA programs and services with the needs of Maine employers and workers to enhance the employability and career development of adults served by MCCA and to better address the state's workforce challenges.	
Objectives	Strategies
Strengthen and continue to expand MCCA workforce training programs and services to ensure their relevance and responsiveness to employers and adult learners statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to assess and build out short- and long-term responses to statewide and industry-sector workforce training needs • Track, assess, and report on new programs and initiatives on an ongoing basis • Expand marketing, outreach, and partnership development with employers • Assess and track employer satisfaction with MCCA training programs • Strengthen capacity to assess graduate and trainee outcomes in the workforce • Develop capacity to reconnect with and market to those who participate in MCCA training programs • Continue to strengthen partnerships with the state's trade associations, the Maine Office of Innovation, and the Maine Departments of Economic and Community Development, Education, Labor, and Corrections
Increase types of credentials of value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to build and expand pathways that lead from short-term workforce training to credit courses and degree programs • Support continued development of digital badging (micro-credentialing) and other industry recognized certifications • Continue development and expansion of new delivery models and employer partnerships that are highly responsive to the needs of industry, incumbent workers, and other adult learners
Increase the number of adults served by MCCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Priority #1 for list of strategies

Lifelong Learning Foundational Supports			
Finance	Information Technology	Data & Institutional Research	Professional Development
Secure funding for operational costs and needed capital investments so that programs and facilities meet both existing and emerging needs of students and employers	Complete implementation of CourseMerchant, the technology solution for payment, enrollment, and tracking of short-term training	Increase capacity to analyze and share key labor market data in order to inform program development and delivery	Support faculty and staff in their efforts to redesign curriculum, test and introduce new pedagogies, and develop new pathways and delivery models for adult learners.
Secure funding to expand and strengthen the capacity of the Workforce Development Division	Assist the workforce division in developing a more standardized employer feedback loop	Strengthen partnership with MDOL to access wage and outcomes data on a regular, reliable basis	
		Update capacity to count and report on individuals and employers served	